

VETIVER FARM: SOIL MANAGEMENT FROM A SMALLFARMER

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Mr. Gomez is a smallfarmer dedicated to organic production for more than 10 years. He and his family produces vegetables and medicinal and aromatic plants for local market.

Summary

The experience is centralized to explain the lessons learned by the Gomez Salamanca family about the soil management using the terrace techniques and other things (i.e. biological machine) during more than 15 years.

Background

The Gómez Salamanca family began organic farming family in the early 90s after a crisis caused by the green revolution on the lands of the region (landslides, loss of fertility, etc.). The first terraces were built with stones and bamboo but failed due to the cost and durability, respectively. Then, Mr. Jesus Gomez tests the use of plants like citronella and King grass. Of these, chose to work with vetiver grass (*Chrysopogon zizanioides*) because this would form the terraces in a natural way and, moreover, could take their leaves to produce organic fertilizers, among other advantages. After more than 10 years of continuous work with vetiver grass, Salamanca Gómez family were part of the founding of an association of producers who thanks to a project known the Vetiver farm's experience and implemented it in other farms. With this experience in ecological management of soil, Salamanca Gomez family maintains a steady production of vegetables and fruits sold in the organic local market in the city, its main source of income

Main Chapter

Vetiver farm, Salamanca Gómez family, is an organic farm located 30 minutes from the city of Cali (Colombia) that has a total area of 11.5 hectares under cultivation of vegetables, medicinal plants, aromatic plants and fruits such as lettuce (several varieties), spinach, celery, parsley, cilantro, strawberry, mint, cidron, thyme and basil. All grown on terraces to reduce erosion risks, maintain and improve soil fertility naturally and keep plants strong and resistant to pests and diseases (trofobiosis theory). This has been the basis for ecological management of the property in the last 15 years that has been socialized by Jesus Gomez and his family to other producers, students, professionals and public sector representatives. However, the family income coming from the sales of organic products in the local organic market in the city. This experience is a model being shown that organic farming can be social, productive and economically sustainable.

Core Message and Conclusions

Vetiver farm has 67 terraces, each one with 70 mt (long) by 1.5 mt (wide). The vetiver grass forms the depth of the terrace naturally. On each terrace, is planted between 2 and 3 commercial crops (like lettuce) together with medicinal and aromatic plants to reduce the incidence of pests. In addition to the natural fertility accumulated on the terrace, compost is used and produced with chicken manure, crop residues and rock minerals, among others. However, currently, Jesus Gomez is promoting a technique named "biological machine" that consists is in situ decomposition of crop residues, sugarcane, poultry manure and green manure (i.e. beans).

Today, the Vetiver farm is totally restored and preserved with respect to soils which have allowed a diverse organic food production and permanent for the family and the local market. The Vetiver farm always thinks how to continue improvement the soil after 15 years like organic farm.

Finally, all organic products from Gomez Salamanca family farm are sold under PGS inside. Incomes' family coming from organic local market exclusively.