

Sustainable Development...

Agriculture in the Forest

To me, sustainable development means doing those things that nurture mankind's aspirations and provide society's needs while ensuring a safe and viable environment – the resource base we all live on...and in.

Progressive agriculture is basic to sustainable development. The aim of this issue of *Better Crops International* is to explain the oil palm cropping system that safeguards major areas of land throughout the tropics, by securing the soil, water, and air resources we all depend on and making them productive for its inhabitants.

Oil palm planters and other agroforesters around the world (growing rubber, citrus, coffee, cacao, etc.) continue to develop efficient tree-based agricultural production systems to provide food, fibre and wood to meet the escalating needs of our growing world population. These endeavors contribute tremendously to agricultural development and the needs of mankind. What about the environment's needs? Efficient agroforestry cleans up the air by fixing large amounts of carbon dioxide (CO₂), improves hydrological cycles through the 'rainforest effect', stabilises soil through protective and robust rooting systems, an ample supply of leaf litter, and a closed canopy, and becomes a bio-diverse habitat for many plant and animal species.

The advanced oil palm system is a sustainable one. It produces biomass at a rate comparable to tropical rainforests and, due to natural groundcover and the application of integrated pest management practices, allows much more bio-diversity than might be expected from a mono-cropping system.

Sustainable development doesn't just happen. It's planned, implemented and managed. Agroforesters and planters know that the best systems require inputs...improved genetics, appropriate soil fertility, and crop protection...all based on good science and documented evidence. In return for this, the world's environment...and its people...benefit greatly.

Our Institute thanks the farmers, planters and agroforesters of the world – stewards of our Earth's resources – for their significant and appreciated contribution to a safe and viable environment.

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