

Almanac of the Future

A STORY OF SUCCESS

Motivational Experience No. 49



**INCIDENCE FROM
THE CHACRA**



What began in the 1990s in Peru, with the struggle against the indiscriminate use of pesticides, has not ended, but the Alternative Agriculture Action Network (RAAA) has combined protest with proposals in its actions, favoring dialogic debate with irrefutable arguments resulting from ongoing participatory research. Working in a network, articulating and bringing together many initiatives, Luis Gomero and the RAAA practice a fruitful alternation between impact, denunciation and protest on the one hand and dialogue, proposal and alternative actions on the other. The prohibition of the so-called "dirty dozen" in the 1990s, the moratorium and its renewal to prevent the entry of GMOs into Peru, the prohibition of highly dangerous pesticides and stopping the export of chemical precursors from some European countries to Peru, the foundation of the association of ecological producers of the Chillón Valley (APEVCH), one of the epicenters of the use of agro-toxics in the country, with its weekly bio-fair in Carabayllo and the organic point in Qatuna Markets are some of the defeats achieved.

WITHOUT A FARM IT IS WORTHLESS

More or less with these words the adversaries criticized Luís Gomero, post-graduate agronomist, teacher, researcher, influencer and, above all, transformer by conviction, when he questioned the indiscriminate use of pesticides: "remedies that kill", as this character affirms. All this began more than 30 years ago, and it is not over yet. More than 20 years ago, Luis, born in Ancash in

northern Peru, land of the mountain ranges Cordillera Negra and Cordillera Blanca, bought 4 hectares of land in the Chillón Valley, north of the metropolis of Lima, on the Lima - Canta highway. His chacra (from Quechua: chakra) , as Luis calls his farm, and named as HECOSAN, a word game between Helen and Sandy, his two daughters and ecology; in addition to a wide variety of vegetable crops, purple corn, breeding of small animals such as guinea pigs, it has technologies such as a biodigester, composting,

vermiculture and much more to manage the farm. The farm serves several purposes: it produces healthy food that is sold at a point of sale in an urban market, receives visits from individuals and entire groups in order to bring visitors closer to the world of agro-ecological agriculture and livestock. At the same time, it is the place where research and experimentation, production and transformation take place. HECOSAN is in a way also home of the Alternative Agriculture Action Network (RAAA). This network was initially dedicated to the fight against pesticides and later expanded its focus to alternative agriculture. In the early years, the network operated as an NGO, but for more than ten years, its members, who are distributed in the regions of the country and a core team composed besides Luis of Francisco Quispe, Hector Velasquez, Roger Flores and recently, in the context of generational change, Judith Vargas, began to generate its own resources, providing education and training services, research and more recently with its own lines of development of productive enterprises.



ON PESTICIDES, GOOD PRACTICES AND NEIGHBORS

During my stay at the farm, I accompanied Luis on a visit to a neighbor. "On the way we can check that there are no toxic agro-chemical containers lying in the irrigation canal that carries the water during the weekly shift to

HECOSAN. At a minimum, good practices require that empty containers of poisons be rinsed three times before being returned to the points of sale. But in Peru, these good practices are not mandatory as they are in neighboring Ecuador". While Luis explains all this, he lifts up one of the empty containers thrown away: "Thanks to many campaigns we have managed to get the agricultural authorities to ban the

import of the pesticide chlorpyrifos, whose use has been banned for years in the USA and the European Union because of its unacceptable risks to people and the environment. But there are other pesticides such as neurotoxic insecticides that contain neonicotinoids; these are pesticides designed to kill insects by attacking their nerve cells and, incidentally, affect the sense of orientation of pollinating insects such as bees".

For many farmers in the Chillón Valley it is a problem to produce with less or even no pesticides, since their plots are directly adjacent to the plots of others, who apply the full conventional chemical cocktail. Grey Vargas, a neighbor of Luís explains: "When you produce in open fields, you can apply organic fertilizers and work on soil fertility, but you are not spared from the chemical spraying; this is taken care of by your neighbors". Because of its proximity to Lima with its more than twelve million inhabitants, the Chillón Valley, which has fertile soils and water availability, is an area with very intensive production of a variety of vegeta-

bles. Of every ten producers, seven use a lot of agro-toxics, two and a half do not produce but rent their plots, with the result that the swallow producers - as they are called - who always rent for a single year, seek to maximize their profits with intensive applications of agro-toxics. So far there is only a small group of thirty to forty producers who produce or are moving towards agroecological and healthy production. Luis and Judith, who rents from Luis small piece of land on his farm, are part of the Association of Ecological Producers of the Chillón Valley - APEVCH. Hector and Roger, both members of the RAAA accompany and support this association. Together, Roger with Bertha Cruz, an official of the municipality of Carabayllo, visit producers in the Chillón Valley to awaken their interest in participating in the association. Bertha managed to get the municipality to assign the association a fixed place to organize its bio-fair every Saturday. Several of the association's members, such as Yanina Loayza, a total agroecology believer, sell their agrochemical-free products at this fair. Héctor accompanies the

approximately 15 producers of the association, who have applied for a certification process for organic production; Héctor explains: "People are used to growing very few crops; producing in diversity, as is usually done in alternative agriculture, is therefore a challenge".

SENIOR INFLUENCER

The threshold of influence that Luis and the RAAA has is considerable. More than 130,000 followers on Facebook and 22,000 on Tic Tok and a permanent activity on social networks. "Generally, we do not replicate information, but rather we gather our own information and disseminate it, always accompanied by comments from us," explains Luís, the strategy. "It is a public with an interest in clean agriculture and that does not shy away from controversial issues around conventional agriculture." There are comments from the user community, some opposing and many supporting; most just read



without commenting but do share the information with others. The yellow trap, a simple, organic and quite effective method to control vegetable pests, after being posted by Luis was shared in a very short time more than 50 thousand times. Thanks to the presence of the RAAA on social networks, a Belgian journalistic film crew came to document the constant contradictions in the international trade of pesticides, whose use in agricultural production in Europe is strictly prohibited, but whose production and sale continues in the global south. Thanks to the report, co-directed by the RAAA and the Con-

sorcio Agroecológico Peruano (CAP) and sponsored by the NGO Humandi, the Belgian government banned the export of several pesticides overseas; Belgium along with some other member countries of the European Union are now pressuring the community to imitate this policy.

In 2021, the ban on GM crops in Peru ended, but in time, the Peruvian Agroecological Consortium (Consortio Agroecológico Peruano), a national organization that brings together agrarian initiatives from different currents, including the RAAA, managed to obtain a new moratorium for another 15 years.

MIND AND CHACRA

HECOSAN is an integral farm, has many components and applies the principles of agroecology (crop and production diversification, recycling, resilience, food security, biodiversity, among others) and as the site of RAAA it offers services (courses, guided, internships,

consulting, research, positions for thesis students, pilot production and entrepreneurship). Plans are well underway to create an agro-ecology technology institute on the farm to meet the interest and demand of a public ranging from small producers to officials from ministries, universities, international cooperation agencies and the local agribusiness that exists in the Chillón River basin.



The infrastructure for production trials and management of the production system already exists. Classrooms, restrooms and housing will be built very soon in order to inaugurate the institute. Luis and Héctor are both university professors and agree. *"The trend and the demand for training are increasingly moving towards short courses with*

intervals between theory and practice, research and experimentation". Thanks to arguments from the farm, the RAAA was able to introduce agroecological issues to the political agenda at the Peruvian Agricultural Convention (CONVEAGRO), the country's most representative national agricultural forum, and on more than one occasion has pressured SENASA, Peru's national agricultural

health service, to promote good agricultural practices and to support family farming in its transition to clean production. The latest result of this kind of pressure: SENASA is now training small farmers in the Chillón Valley in biological pest control. Luis summarizes: "What we are doing in HECOSAN, in terms of practices, production, experimentation and research, construction of alternatives,

often opens doors for us to socialize our contributions and arouse curiosity and generate debate. We achieve incidence with arguments, with profitability, with dialogue of knowledge, from economic inclusion, from good practices, from healthy production and direct sales and, above all, through the different channels of influence that are carried out".



THREATS AND NEW BETS

The authorities of Metropolitan Lima and Carabayllo, competent to regulate land use in a large part of the Chillón Valley, turn a blind eye. Francisco Quispe, another member of the RAAA: "Politicians do not take a stand and thus a clandestine but massive urban invasion is taking place, taking over more and more of the arable land in the area." And Luís adds: "There is a need for land use planning with ecological and economic zoning criteria".

Recently, Judith and Francisco have been sharing a fish waste hydrolyzing



pilot plant on the farm. The idea is to use microorganisms and enzymes to break down the waste into a list of amino acids needed to stimulate plant growth. This is the RAAA's first entrepreneurial venture. The product obtained is the amino acid, an organic liquid fertilizer that is highly valued and sells for a good price. In parallel to the pilot plant on the farm, the RAAA has provided technical assistance to three women's associative enterprises in different parts of the country to venture into the same field. In an initial phase, Roger, another member of the network, is supporting these enterprises with commercial management. The new research milestone is now to reuse the bones and spines, leftover residues from the hydrolyzing process.

There is no waste as long as there are good ideas, experiments and research... this is one of the mottos of the collective with Luis at the head.



MESSAGES TO THE FUTURE

- Luis Gomero, with his group of accomplices, including Hector, Francisco, Judith, Roger and other allies in the region, acting as a network, have achieved for 30 years a fruitful alternation between incidence, denunciation and proposals. What has been achieved in both areas, both in public policy advocacy and in action towards alternatives, declares the validity, vacillating between dialogic debate and clear positions towards the necessary transitions for food production.
- Innovation from a circular economy and waste management logic, added

to constant participatory research, nourishes RAAA's attitude, seeking encounters, dialogue and debate with everyone, and achieving changes where no one expected them. These paths, at the beginning very rocky, are the maneuvering ground of this collective; awakening in one of the epicenters of the use of pesticides the interest in producers to migrate step by step to an alternative agriculture that puts into practice the agroecological principles.

- Social Networks can help the cause, as long as there is a clear, sustained and transparent communication strategy. Luis, undoubtedly one of the most relevant influencers on Peruvian agricultural issues, is proof of this.

Almanac of the Future

The text was elaborated, based on conversations at Luis Gomero's HECOSAN farm and in different localities of the Chillón Valley, municipality of Carabayllo, Cono Norte of Metropolitan Lima, located on the Lima-Canta highway, by Jorge Krekeler (coordinator of the Almanac of the Future - facilitator of Misereor on behalf of Agiamondo). A big thank you to Luis, also to Hector Velasquez, Francisco Quispe, Judith Vargas and Roger Flores of the Alternative Agriculture Action Network - RAAA and to the community of the Association of Ecological Producers of the Chillón Valley - APEVCH for their time and openness to the curiosity of the visit of the Almanac of the Future.

Authors: **Jorge Krekeler**
jorge.krekeler@posteo.de

Design: **Ida Peñaranda - Gabriela Avendaño** Photographs: **Luís Gomero - Alternative Agriculture Action Network - Jorge Krekeler**
Translation: **Ida Peñaranda - Olaf Niemtschik**

Contact information regarding the documented experience:

Eng. Luis Gomero and Alternative Agriculture Action Network - RAAA

www.raaa.org.pe
facebook + Tiktok: luisgomero
facebook: Alternative Agriculture Action Network
Instagram: Raaa
Instagram: luisgomero
Twitter: luisgomero
lgomero910@hotmail.com

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