

# Almanac of the Future

A STORY OF SUCCESS

Motivational experience No. 6



**Beyond the  
Market**

## BEYOND THE MARKET

*Families in the commune of San Gabriel del Baba are now convinced about agro-ecological production and now they are enthusiastic promoters of the cause. Their farms became completely agroecological and, so far, their biggest challenge has been to find alternative markets and conscious consumers, but these set back have not changed their conviction, because, for them, the market and the economic part are not the most important goals.*

### An afternoon at the farm

**F**abiola Erazo and Mónica Beltrán have made an invitation to visit their farms this afternoon. It is warm-hearted; we are at 600 meters altitude in the rural municipality of San Gabriel del Baba, almost on the outskirts of Santo Domingo de los Tsachila, located on the main road from the Ecuadorian capital Quito to the Pacific coast. San Gabriel is a cluster of settlements, where many peasant families over the years have converted to agroecological agriculture.

Much of their training has been exchanges and group visits, comparing, analyzing and sharing experiences; people collaborate with observations, give and receive advice. But this does not stop there. Usually, in addition to new ideas, visitors take some plants, or seeds with them. The host is happy then this is the basis of reciprocity. "These visits motivate us greatly", the group says.



*For the afternoon visit, it was formed a small group of agroecological pioneers: Alva Quiroga, Fabiola Erazo and Roosevelt Campozaño. When there is this type of visits, dialogue and exchange of experiences begin quickly*

## Seeing is believing, practical examples

Mrs. Fabiola gives us a tour around the farm and recalls: "At first, my husband was not convinced of the agroecological approach, where no chemicals are used. But now he has changed his mind and uses the organic fertilizer that I am producing at the farm" The rearing and fattening of pigs is based on a diet of bananas and chopped sugar cane, all produced at the farm. The feeding of animals on the farm: Chickens, pigs, guinea pigs, ducks, cows and horses is based on balanced-food. Plantain crops occupy part of the farm and show a good development.



Don Francisco fills the containers with organic fertilizer



Fabiola shows us her Cacao plants, ready for the harvest

On the other side of the boundary, the neighbor also grows plantains. Until recently, the neighbor applied chemical fertilizer but, seeing that the crops of Doña Fabiola, with an agroecological management, have a better performance, is now imitating the example of its neighbor. The ravines and streams are protected by bamboo trees and the soil throughout the farm is covered with biomass, protecting it from erosion. There is a diversified production: Plantains and bananas, sugarcane and cassava, many fruits (including passion fruit, lemons and others), cocoa and various vegetable gardens.

At Fabiola's Farm, the group is expected by her husband, Francisco Gaviria, and her son. The boy, like his older sister, likes to grow ecologically, without chemicals. Francisco is very happy about it: "The kids normally leave to the city because they do not see any future in the country."

## Reorganize the farm

Mrs. Mónica explains to us, with a drawing of a map, how the family has gradually rearranged their farm according to agroecological aspects.

The pigsty now has a septic tank and the new coffee plantations have good development, thanks to the organic fertilizer based on “boil” and “bocaschi”. The fruit trees make living barriers. There is vermiculture and the leachate of the compost serves as a cover for the soil, helping in the retention of moisture and the development of microorganisms on the floor.

The family shares the conviction of managing their land with an agroecological approach. The training process, organized by the “Fundacion Vertiente de vida” and supported by “Bread for the World” began 8 years ago. Several people have been trained but, seeing the low success in the market with agroecological production, some became discouraged and have returned to conventional agriculture, with fertilizers, fungicides and chemical insecticides.

## The challenge of the market

Calixto Briceño is was one of the firsts to apply an agroecological approach. In his opinion, there is still a lot to be done to convince consumers of the importance of a healthy and non-chemical diet. Mónica remembers: "Previously, we sold to intermediaries who came directly to our place with their truck; but we had to sell at low prices. Now our revenues have increased, as we are now selling directly on the weekly market in the city ". The group achieved that the city administration in Santo Domingo gives permission to organize an ecological weekly market on a public square on Saturday to sell their products. On Fridays, they sell in a mixed fair, where conventional and ecological are sold alongside.



The map explains everything

## Agroecological certification and guarantee system

In the meantime, they have also begun to sell their ecological products on other ecological markets, some of which are far away, as in Cayambe, in the Andean province of Imbabura. The ecological weekly markets are beneficial for both parties: the consumers buy "clean" food and the producers meet with conscious consumers. The group has participated in a process which certifies their ecological farming. In addition to this, once a year, consultants visit the farm of each family and check the fulfillment with the standard for the agroecological guaranty seal. In order to avoid the delicate costs, associated with certification by a commercial certifier, the group has found a different path along with other small producer associations. A community guarantee, which, in addition to inspection visits, is based on social control, provides consumers with sufficient certainty that they are, in fact, chemically free and sustainable cultivated products.



Alva Quiroga shows her agroecological certification

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The sale, directly on the markets, is attractive: oranges sold there generate three times more income than the sale to a middleman. In order to compensate for the transport costs of their products to more distant markets, several families work together to make the best use of the rented transport space. And what cannot be sold at the end of the day does not return home, since the exchange products with producers of the area is common. The joint sale on markets, where producers from different climatic zones - which are quite close to each other in the Andes – sell their products alongside, has an advantage for the consumers as they find a bigger offer.

The group, motivated by the regional section of the Ministry of Agriculture, began also with the delivery and sale of agro-ecological baskets. Don Roosevelt thinks: "For the baskets we deliver there is better price as the consumer at the fairs is less conscious than the customers for baskets, wanting to bargain the price".

## From the saying to the fact there is a stretch

In terms of cultivation and marketing, people are satisfied with what they have achieved. On the other hand, the contradictory nature of the state agricultural policy, towards the small producers, is criticized; the conditions are constantly increasing to apply for sanitary seals and other permits for the sale of the products. "At the moment, we are on the water, but it is almost impossible for small producers to make a bigger purchase, for example, to build a bigger shed or buy some land," says Mónica's husband.

The government's official speech about the Pachamama (Mother Earth), healthy food and preference for the small producer, enters often into open contradiction with state policies, which seem to be more responsive to the reality of agribusiness, supermarket chains and transnational enterprises, who sell their seeds and agrochemicals in the country. It is urgent to correct these incongruities, denounced by small producers everywhere.

## Beyond the market

In response to the question of why the group has stood to the agro-ecological approach, while other individuals and families abandoned this course, mainly for not getting better prices for their healthy products, the group comments:

Our families eat healthy and we offer healthy products.

Families and different generations are more integrated around the agro-ecological farm.

The land continues to produce, we maintain our lands healthy and it is sustainable.

The agro-ecological conviction is stronger than the desire for accumulation of money.

It is not all economic, we care for Mother Earth, we live with nature, forming part of her.

Life is priceless and we must take care of it.

Our ancestors lived longer and with less medical attention, since they ate healthy.

## The process continues

The group of families that produce in an agro-ecological way was organized by the “Fundacion Vertiente de Vida” and currently has 25 active producers. There is awareness of its members about the importance of raising consumer awareness and opening up more markets. There are also new ideas: there is the project to build an ecological plantain flour processing plant. For such goal “Asociacion Vida Sana”, an association of agro-ecological producers, has been formed. The idea of venturing into agro-eco-tourism is not ruled out either.



# Messages to the future

- We can change our minds: from a process that we elaborate ourselves and share with others reaching associativity.
- There is no system that cannot be challenged or changed. It depends on our ability to go in other ways. One example of this is the agroecological certification in combination with the guarantee system.
- The conviction of producing, eating and selling healthy, free of chemical food, is based on values and principles which do not crumble in front of the market and consumers.
- The agroecological approach can be transcendental for family integration, reciprocity, solidarity and a more holistic relationship where the person is perceived as part of nature.

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The text, which is based on visits and discussions in situ, was created by Jorge Krekeler (advisor Misereor), but initially made consensual with the people visited. Special thanks to Mónica Beltrán and his family, Alva Quiroga, Fabiola Erazo and Roosevelt Campozano.



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