

Press Release

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Contact in English and Spanish

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Coffee: Too much of a good thing?



Potential for positive change in coffee growing communities

We all love coffee but what does mass distribution, consumption and cultivation mean for our environment and ecology.

The impact of coffee cultivation on biodiversity is disproportionate to land dedicated to cultivation. Coffee is often relied on by developing nations as a cash crop, referred to as the second most valuable commodity exported from developing nations, the first is oil. It is an industry that can easily prioritize yield over ecological protection and when managed ineffectively can have significant environmental impacts. The coffee belt divide which sees coffee cultivated in developing countries, and consumed in emerging and developed economies provides a context of distance which promotes a particular power dynamic and assists to hide the ecological impacts our morning, midday and afternoon coffee may have.

Coffee has a long and beautiful history, rich historically, culturally, socially and economically. It unifies through cultivation and consumption in quite a significant manner. A movement away from coffee's expansive reach as a preferred cash crop and popular beverage will require a compromise and probably a substitution Vogt M 2015

Where new markets and reliable demand emerges for diversified products grown in the same region as coffee both locally and internationally at a comparative or even improved price, countries will more likely consider diversifying within existing coffee farms as a national strategy and establishing farms of diversified profiles in rested areas intended for renewed agricultural activity, particularly relevant for countries in transition.

The rich biodiversity of coffee growing regions combined with already existing international supply chains present an opportunity for positive change related to farm design systems that encourage the right biodiversity for farms, a design that works for the farmer and considers the valuable knowledge from experience the farmers already holds, and diversification of produce which can move through existing or complementary supply chains. Vogt M (2015)

Ecologically and environmentally sound coffee farms look different around the world. Farm design systems and concepts that inform best practice on coffee farms are important to consider and can provide guidance. A coffee farm with shade trees appears as simple however has multiple meanings, considerations, one size does not fit all. Detailed agro-ecological, permaculture, analog forestry and agro-forestry knowledge and interactive studies, which are complementary to and consider local farmer knowledge and practices can assist. Such designs can complement moves to diversify farm profiles for cultivation and production for market where desired, and protect against climate change impacts such as natural disasters commonly experienced in tropical regions.

The demand and the value of coffee as with many other things is a human construct, can we build something else without causing damage? Vogt M 2015

It may be time to consider what our morning, midday and/or afternoon coffee means for our world's ecology, can we make coffee a treat rather than a staple or would shifting to a cup of tea or even an immersion of spices to give us that buzz required through our daily routines, and lives be possible and perhaps assist our health. A horrifying idea for many, can we move away from such a dependence on coffee?

ICCB-ECCB 2015. Montpellier

Thematic Poster Exhibition: Concepts of Farm Design: searching for 'the right' biodiversity for conservation biology in existing and expanding farming areas, and 'rested' areas intended for renewed agricultural activities

Poster 234, Tuesday August 4