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The Rebirth of Natural Fibers? Analysis of Market Potential for Fique (*Furcraea andina*) Production in Santander, Colombia

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Abstract

Natural fibers extracted from the leaves of the fique plant (*Furcraea andina*) are currently used by the Colombian market mainly for the manufacture of coffee sacks and crafts. However, the economy associated with the cultivation of fique in the department of Santander is weak and optimal production practices have greatly been abandoned by farmers because of poor market demand in the last two decades. However, new market demand for natural, eco-friendly fibers to replace plastic opens up better opportunities for fique producers. The objective of this study was to provide a macro view of the current fique market in Colombia and its potential in modern markets. The study of production aspects, economic situation and market potential was conducted with 25 producing families where relevant information to characterise the current situation was obtained. Data on production practices, market access and economic situation was collected. The results revealed that fique production can help improve the economic situation of rural families in Santander, but that the production system can be improved and optimised to generate a higher income. Currently, there is a market potential in natural fibers, but more investments need to be made to train farmers in sustainable production practices and compliance with new standards and certifications. Additionally, local artisans need to improve the products they produce with the fiber to meet the new demands in the eco-friendly, natural fiber market. A set of strategies and recommendations for improved market access for small-scale producers and artisans using both modern and traditional techniques was drawn.

Keywords: Colombia, fibers, fique, value chain