



Deutscher Tropentag, October 9-11, 2002, Witzenhausen
“Challenges to Organic Farming and Sustainable Land Use
in the Tropics and Subtropics”

Challenges towards the Sustainable Use of Farm Resources

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Abstract

In a world where news on decline significantly outranges positive news on the quality and quantity of farm resources, approaches for a sustainable management is an imperative in particular for people whose living standard depends immediately on the continuous and, if possible, improved performance of these resources. Problems in sustainability of farm resources are not restricted to natural resources only, but include man-made resources like infrastructure, education, gender-related competences, informal and formal institutions, too.

The necessity to satisfy essential needs in the short run may engender decisions and practices on the level of farming families that contradict the requirements of the long-term sustainable preservation and development of resources. This holds the more in cases where families live close to the minimum of existence and is the more tragic since these families are the first whose quality of life suffers from resource degradation. Farmer's knowledge and its consideration in participatory decision and implementation processes has the potential to provide solutions in a substantial number of cases, but faces limits when new situations do not correspond to the rudiments of traditional, indigenous experience. This type of situation constitutes the interface where researchers with their expert approach are demanded to provide alternative concepts and methodologies for decision makers on all levels. Coping with the challenge of a sustainable use of farm resources can thus originate only from combining both, farmer's knowledge and achievements from the expert approach, via participatory mechanisms.

The numerous contributions to this workshop, which are second in number only to the intimately related workshop 1c₂ (page ??) on resource management concerning land and crops, give an idea about the multiplicity of fields where researchers try to add knowledge to the vast field of resource use on the farm level. This multiplicity holds for the resources under research as well as for the applied methodological toolbox, which ranges from field trials and laboratory work up to social and socio-economic analyses and policy development. About half of the contributions deal with aspects of natural resources, whereby research results related to soil dominate with three oral presentations and six poster contributions. Water and forests are the subject of one poster each. The other half treats a wide array of research topics on different man-made resources, which may be roughly summarized under the key words human resources, system analysis, policies and technology.

This diversity of topics, which found their place under the umbrella of the workshop's title emphasizes once again that farm resource use is simultaneously a part and a result of a system. Consequently, sustainability cannot be achieved by partial approaches alone, but calls for the interdisciplinary co-operation between researchers from all fields. Success

in this regard is a pre-condition for the operational co-operation between farmers and researchers and might nourish the hope that we may be able to avoid a situation where the priority of sustainable resource management will have to be replaced by the priority of reconstructing resources.