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Modernizing Cashew Culture in Northeast Brazil

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Abstract

The cashew tree, *Anacardium occidentale* L., is a typical tropical, perennial tree belonging to the family of the Anacardiaceae. In Brazil, there are two types of cashewtree: the common one and the *anão precoce* or early fruit setting. This system is of considerable value in the environmental, agricultural and socio-economic conditions of Northeast Brazil. Northeast Brazil is the main producer with 95 % of the total production spread over 680 thousand hectares of cultivated area. The production is concentrated mainly in the states of Piauí, Ceará and Rio Grande do Norte. According to MEILWES (2006), 70 % of the cultivated area is formed by small producers that possess orchards of 10 ha on average. Currently, 90 % of the total cultivated area of the cashewtree is characterised by the occurrence of the common cultivation type, considered by some experts as the reason of the low productivity of the sector. There are several suggestions to increase the productivity of the orchards, among them, the substitution of the common orchard type with the early fruit setting type (*anão precoce*). The common type grows up to 12 m, is cultivated in dry conditions at wide spaces of 10×10 m or even 15×15 m and its productivity averages 220 kg/ha of cashewnuts. The “*anão precoce*”, clone CP 76, grows up to 6 m height and produces 1250 kg/ha in dry conditions, and 2500 kg/ha in irrigated areas. This type is cultivated at a spacing of 7×7 m, 7×4 m or 8×6 m. In spite of the better productivity of the “*anão precoce*”, side effects of high density populations are overlooked. It is important to observe that the modernisation of orchards can be, in the short or medium term, an excellent economic decision to provide income to the farmers. But in the long term, several ecological problems could cause decreased productivity in the cashew orchards. The present research emphasises the need to verify some factors, like: soil fertility, salt accumulation in the soil and harvest management. It further points out what is the ecological impact of modernizing cashew orchards in Northeast Brazil.

Keywords: *Anacardium occidentale* L., cashew culture, modernisation, North-East Brazil