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Marketing Local Biodiversity in Thailand: Identification of a Possible Good Practice for On-farm Biodiversity Management of Tropical Fruit Trees

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Abstract

In Asia a rich diversity of approximately 500 species of tropical fruits are important in people's lives by providing a range of livelihood options and contributing to the stability of ecosystems. This diversity is threatened by increased deforestation, indiscriminate harvesting practices and land use conversion. Increasing attention is being given to conserving agro-biodiversity at farm level and in the wild, by creating forward market linkages by processing a range of products of different varieties. Monitoring of sustainable use and management of diversity has been insufficient, especially among perennials. It is therefore necessary to identify a set of good practices that support conservation and sustainable utilisation of diverse tropical fruit species, to understand the situation in which these practices are successful, and to identify their role in terms of responding to pressures urging farmers to switch to modern plant varieties. It is especially important to identify good practices that benefit farmers. Market-based approaches to biodiversity management are considered to have large potential in this area. This paper presents the experience in Thailand, where four farmer or women groups are successfully processing and marketing products derived from native tropical fruit tree varieties. These products are providing income to groups of less than 50 members by procuring their fruits, paying wages for their labour, and distributing profits, and are giving them an incentive to maintain or expand local fruit tree varieties in their homegardens and fields. Groups were established because of unmarketable fruits, due to oversupply or damage caused by storms, have specialised in locally important products, and have received training and financial support from the government. These similarities indicate the factors playing a role in bringing together and empowering these groups, and facilitating the successful marketing of their products. Also some obstacles are identified such as difficulties faced to obtain food safety certificates and lack of attractive packaging and promotion. Although more in-depth research is necessary, important lessons can be learned and tools can be identified that can be tested and implemented for the benefit of farmer income and biodiversity.

Keywords: Biodiversity, good practices, markets, tropical fruits, value addition