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Sustainable and organic approaches to meet human needs”

Land Use Management in Rural Areas of the Brazilian Atlantic Forest

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Abstract

The remaining areas of the Brazilian Atlantic rainforest are mostly located in small scale farms. The protection and restoration of the existing fragments of this unique biome is relying on the commitment of private landowners.

In the present research the author could identify that tobacco cultivation is the source of income of most families in rural communities located in the municipality of Atalanta, Federal State of Santa Catarina. Tobacco cultivation causes environmental impacts and human degradation. Fire wood exploitation, erosion and the contamination of soil and water have been disturbing the landscape drastically. Furthermore, it was

recognised that families who are involved in tobacco cultivation have difficulties to organise their own farms and therefore securing their own sustenance. Farmers are predominantly frustrated with their current living conditions. The main reason given was the illness caused by the high amounts of pesticides used on the tobacco fields and the poverty originated from the production contracts and loans. Farmers are trapped on a cycle of dependence, associated with the tobacco companies through debts. The need to plant tobacco for paying the debts hinders the enthusiasm of farmers in embracing the environmental cause and in developing new forms of local cooperation.

In this context, since 2005, the project Planning Farmland and Landscapes has been supporting families in the reorganisation and restoration of their farms, the protection of the environment and the socio-economic development of rural communities. This was done together with the families, through the introduction of native trees and the improvement of income and life quality of farmers.

Reforestation combined with the distribution of fruit tree species was a strategy used to diversify tobacco monoculture, supply families with a free source of food as well as a new source of income. Furthermore, the author supported farmers in introducing organic agriculture for own consumption. Since then, the improvement of living conditions is being reached through a greater variety and quality of food. The next step is to support farmers for gradually developing a cooperative of organic producers and leaving the tobacco fields.

Keywords: Atlantic rainforest, environmental degradation, land use management, organic agriculture, quality of life, reforestation, tobacco cultivation