

Agroforestry: a truly sustainable agriculture!

Backgrounds of Agroforestry

Agroforestry is a kind of agriculture in which the growing of woody crops, trees and shrubs serving a broad spectrum of products and uses is combined with growing annual crops, mushrooms or animal husbandry.

The possibilities of combinations within Agroforestry and Forestgarden Systems are endless, and as a result these systems belong to the most productive agricultural systems in the world. Agroforestry offers optimal protection against erosion and other forms of soil degradation. Due to the broad spectrum of products, Agroforestry is able to minimize risks of bad harvests, adverse weather conditions, as well as changes within the market.

Benefits of Agroforestry

- Decreased pressure on forests;
- Accessible to the poor;
- Fitting in with local conditions and traditions;
- Growing of fuel wood within the Agroforestry systems;
- Avoidance of soil erosion;
- Water conservation and protection of river basins;
- Avoidance of loss of nutrients;
- Low input of capital, energy and raw materials;
- Absorbing of carbon dioxide;
- Broader range of subsistence crops leading to better public health;
- Possibility to incorporate market crops;
- Levelling of risks of bad harvest and fluctuating market prizes;
- Use of beneficial interactions between organisms;
- Protection and use of biodiversity.

Agroforestry today

In the past, Agroforestry-systems were found all over the world.

Moreover, this was probably the first means of agriculture after the hunter-gatherer way of living was abandoned. It was also combined with hunting and gathering.

Mainly in the tropics, a lot of well-established Agroforestry-systems can still be found.

Research on Agroforestry is carried out at the **World Agroforestry Centre (ICRAF)** in Nairobi, Kenya.

Yet Agroforestry is under pressure of the passing of land into new crops and land utilisation systems, based on annual or plantation crops.

A vast amount of land is cleared and even undergoes regular burning in order to get more or fresh grazing lands for cattle.

In the temperate climate zones, Agroforestry has almost completely been abandoned and replaced by a nowhere near sustainable form of agriculture based on annual crops, foreign capital and fossil energy.

The problems emerging from these practices are well-known.

In the last few years, the possibilities of Agroforestry in the temperate climate have received renewed attention.