**Institution:** Fazenda Monte Cristo Agroflorestal

**Authors:** Nina Celli Ramos, Yan Gabriel Celli Ramos e Guilherme Stutz Erthal

**Presenter:** Nina Celli Ramos

Our Agroforest Farm

One of the greatest challenges nowadays is to reconcile food production with conservation of the environment and biodiversity. In this context, agroecology reveals itself as a science and movement in search of sustainable agriculture. Successional agroforests are highly diverse and productive systems resulting from the management of trees together with agricultural crops. Working as a natural environment, agroforestry supports food security while contributes significantly to biodiversity conservation.

Located on the slopes of Serra do Mar (Rio de Janeiro state, Brazil), the Fazenda Monte Cristo was a coffee farm in the 18th century and is in the family for four generations. Recently, it is undergoing agricultural transformations: after study Agronomy and Ecology at the Federal University of Viçosa, we moved to the farm seeking to apply the agroecological knowledge on the practice of dealing with the land and restore the valley landscape with agroforestry.

Firstly, we put effort on improving the existing constructions, such as houses and sheds. Then, we began to convert old areas of pasture into areas of agroforestry. In order to complete this task, we adopt the ecological principles of syntropic agriculture and organic management of the soil, experimenting multi-stratified and biodiverse consortia and using techniques adapted to the mountain environment. To close the energy cycle of the property, we integrated the animal element, which consumes the leftovers from the harvest and produces manure for the agroforestry.

After 5 years, the changes are already visible. We are expanding these plantations, occupying previously degraded areas that are gradually becoming forests of food production. Currently, we harvest more than 54 agroforestry products, including fruits, vegetables, roots and grains. From the diverse harvests, we elaborate other products like dry fruits, pickles, breads and desserts.

These results evidence the productivity and diversity of the agroforestry, making possible to reach the food sovereignty and to generate income for our family. We sell the production in public markets and also deliver them directly at people’s homes, strengthening the bond between producers and consumers and making the economic sustainability of the agroforestry truly effective. In addition, we believe that agroforestry is making the way for the restoration of the landscape, since it works as a habitat for pollinators and seed dispersers, functioning as a matrix of quality and allowing greater connectivity between fragments of native forest. Moreover, the farm has showed itself as a great environment to the diffusion of techniques and knowledge regarding agroforestry and agroecology. We have the opportunity not only to raise our children in permanent contact with nature, but also to share our experiences with other adults and children who come to the farm to participate in courses, ¨mutirões¨ and school visits.

Finally, we see our experience with agroecology and agroforestry not only as a way to obtain healthy food, but also as an ecological and social movement, expanding the bond between people and theirs with the land, allowing community development, food sovereignty and the restoration of environments in a sustainable and economically feasible way.

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