Roger Gietzen on the topic of syntropic farming

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After reading the review of *Syntropic Farming Guide* (http://edn.link/6m73ae) in *EDN* 145, Roger Gietzen had some further thoughts to share on the topic of syntropic farming.

He began by sharing more about what he hopes to achieve with his design in Haiti. He commented, "One important advantage of the design I'm using in Haiti, is that it will produce an abundance of small pieces of wood that can be used for making charcoal or for building. And since it's coming from trees that can be pollarded, the yield will return every year without killing the trees. I got this idea from the Inga Foundation and integrated their alley cropping method into the design, [allowing for] more varieties of trees. I think this will be one of the most popular aspects of the design in Haiti and other tropical developing countries where wood is greatly needed. It is my biggest selling point to the farmers."

Gietzen also told us about some literature that expands on what was presented in *EDN* 145. First, he mentioned a book from World Agroforestry, *Agroforestry Systems for Ecological Restoration*, which was just recently translated from Portuguese (available online in English (http://old.worldagroforestry.org/downloads/Publications/PDFS/B19034.pdf?fbclid=IwAR0ODbo-xmD9EzwYX9vozyrI_5ZG5SpwOtVU2rIRls9JsWo1n4c3X-mAu7U) and in Portuguese (http://old.worldagroforestry.org/downloads/Publications/PDFS/MN17387.pdf?fbclid=IwAR0EqplJufeZlKiMHUA_XdUEg43pbn9XK28gpbjWreoHYw2M2duqjvL9jNs)). He wrote, "[This book] talks about the challenges of bringing the technology of agroforestry to developing countries." Gietzen highlighted a table in the book with a portion on page 38 (of the PDF file) that presents encouraging economic returns for successional agroforestry systems.

He added, "You might enjoy reading this article (https://agendagotsch.com/en/large-scale-syntropic-farming-results-and-challenges/), too, written by one of Ernst's long-term students who has been doing research." The article explains experiments underway to grow grain crops between tree lines in a syntropic agriculture system. When asked for further perspective, Gietzen commented, "To continually grow cash crops or market garden crops is important to a lot of farmers. The people I first consulted with on syntropic systems [told me] that they need to evolve into forest systems to really get into that strong, self-sustaining abundant phase. That means the farm eventually becomes shaded and is not fitting for growing many annuals or market garden crops. You only get about four years of good sun exposure in the food forest and then it's shaded. That

has bothered me from the beginning, because I know the annuals are the favorite crops for the farmers to grow in Haiti. I have been really wishing I can find some sort of compromise where I can use trees for soil regeneration, but prune them all so the farm stays sunny. That way the farmers can grow corn, beans, wheat, rice or whatever. I know it's possible, because I'm familiar with the inga alley cropping system. In fact, I started a couple inga systems this year in Haiti." The syntropic agriculture model offers an advantage to the inga alley cropping system in the sense that it incorporates many different kinds of trees rather than just one.

Syntropic agriculture is often advertised as needing no outside inputs. The article referred to above (and referenced below) mentioned some inputs. Gietzen commented, "I noticed that they do sometimes use manure or rock dust or other inputs. So depending on the soil condition, it may make sense to amend the soil, so you don't have to wait years for the fertility to improve. I may emphasize that when I revise my guidebook. It's great you can grow a system without inputs, but each case is different and farmers shouldn't limit themselves when they are capable of using organic fertilizers to give the system a boost."

Gietzen also responded to questions from our network about syntropic agriculture. That forum conversation can be found here (https://conversations.echocommunity.org/t/syntropic-farming/2123).

References

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