

## Identifying and Classifying Areas Suitable for Growing Oil Palm



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### Summary



The aim of the project is to identify and classify, using an integrated approach, areas which are either suitable for, or, for which there are constraints on the growing of oil palm in Colombia. The project's goal is to contribute to the ecological, environmental, socio-economic and cultural sustainability of the oil palm regions. The project will last one year, during which time it is expected that a methodological framework to zone such areas on scales of 1:500.000 and 1:100.000 will be developed and we will provide maps of land which is suitable for growing oilseed.



### Introduction

There are three key ideas which are important to clarify. The first is related to the notion that there are limits to growth. Kenneth Boulding, an eminent economist, stated that if anyone believed in the unlimited growth of an activity, one could call him or her crazy, or, an economist.

This is related to what the Club of Rome put forward in the 1960s which concerns the impossibility of subjecting the earth or the biosphere to an excessive strain due to the limits on its cybernetic self-regulation processes.

The second idea –which of course was also laid out in the United Nations conference on the environment– is the Brundtland Commission's idea, according

to which any activity that is carried out must conserve for future generations the quantity and quality of the assets and environmental inventory or the assets and environmental resources.

Such a definition is capable of explaining transgenerational equity which entails the responsibility to hand down resources in the same or better conditions than which they were inherited.

The third key idea is that by identifying and classifying the areas suitable for growing oil palm the project is essentially seeking to contribute to the territorial and productive regulations as well as environmental, social, cultural and business regulations.

It is a question of ensuring sustainable conditions for the oil palm industry in a way which represents an inter-institutional and industry effort led by the Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development and the Ministry of the Environment, Housing and Territorial Development -with the support of the security forces-, the *Agustín Codazzi* Geographical Institute, the Von Humboldt Institute and with the technical support and the dedicated and committed participation of Fedepalma and Cenepalma.

## The Project

The design and functioning of the project is framed within various public policies, particularly the energy policy and those related to rural development as well as the agricultural export policies and of course those designed to protect the environment and the development of these sectors, which are particularly important and modernizing.

The ordinance and land use policies and the document Conpes 3477 form the rules and regulations guaranteeing the competitiveness and sustainability of the Colombian oil palm sector.

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Amongst the specific objectives are:

- To define a conceptual and methodological framework which identifies and classifies the areas

suitable for the growing of oil palm in Colombia on a national scale (1:500.000). The design of this framework is fairly advanced and will certainly be applied to other agricultural and agro-industrial sectors or sub-sectors in the country and will set a useful precedent for other activities.

- To identify and classify regions on a scale of 1:100.000 in oil-palm-growing priority areas in Colombia with different degrees of constraints, as well as including opportunities and the conceptual and methodological elements that underpin the development of the project.
- Generate a map of suitability for the growing of oil palm in Colombia at a scale of 1:500.000.

There are a series of guidelines and sectorial and environmental agreements on which the work is based. Of note are the industry environmental program; the sectorial environmental guide; the convention on cleaner production between Fedepalma and the Ministry of the Environment, Housing, and Territorial Development - which has been in place for ten years; the insightful and thoughtful analysis that the industry made on the environmental performance of the oil palm sector in Colombia; the strategic environmental assessment that recently brought to a conclusion a very interesting process of adjustments and revision led by the Ministry of the Environment and carried out by the Alexander von Humboldt Institute and finally the alliance between the WWF, the Alexander von Humboldt Institute, Cenipalma and Fedepalma who will work along two distinct lines: the RSPO Principals and Criteria and the high conservation value areas.

This project is fundamentally based on the study carried out by Corpoica and Cenipalma in 1999, which attempted to identify alternative areas suitable for the palm oil crop using edafoclimatic criteria, i.e. agrological criteria. For consistency and coherence with new explanatory and integrated trends concerning competitiveness and sustainability in general and the palm sector in particular, this study will expand on the their findings.

In fact, the study will develop an integral methodology to identify and classify areas which are suitable for, or have limitations and constraints for the growth of oil palm in Colombia. It will incorporate physical, environ-



mental, economic and socio-cultural criteria taking into account the following approaches and initiatives.

- An eco-systemic focus and the precautionary principle (CBD – Law 99/93) which is based on the convention on biological diversity that implies that it is not necessary to have all the scientific information to foresee possible negative impacts on the biosphere and its component parts.
- The RSPO Principles and Criteria. Specifically, number two, five and especially number seven will serve as guidelines. At the same time the results of this work will obviously contribute to the design of future guidelines.
- Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA). With this we aim to identify the possible impacts that may follow the implementation of policies, plans and projects. This exercise was carried out by the Alexander von Humboldt Institute.
- Land survey (FAO 1976, 2007). This will be the methodological center to bring together different components of the project.
- Analysis of the High Conservation Value Areas (HCVC).

## Expected Benefits

In terms of the spirit, the political and the philosophical vision that guides this initiative we expect to produce a tool which will assist, in an eco-systemic manner, the decision making process related to environmental ordinance and productive planning.

Another benefit will be the creation of a methodology that allows us to treat the productive zoning of the territory integrally and which will also be applicable to other sectors. It is hoped that this will favor a combination of competitiveness and sustainability in the oil palm sector and that it becomes the ideal basis of information for making decisions on sustainable investment.

At the same time, there will be greater transparency in decision making because the project will imply opportunities and limitations on the land use and will highlight the national system of protected areas, areas

for restoration and the conservation of ethnic groups' collective territories, particularly the indigenous and black communities (Law 70).

Equally, it will make explicit the environmental, social and economic commitment from the oil palm sector and will provide a vision for the future of the geography of Colombian oil palm and provide the road map for the crop expansion process.

## Expected Results

A methodological framework for the zoning of areas for the oil palm crop at scales of 1:500.000 and 1:100.000 based on their suitability, limitations and constraints. It will be useful in other situations and will serve as a baseline for follow ups and trend monitoring, development and expansion of the oil palm industry.

- A 1:500,000-scale map which shows land suitability for oil palm crop growth in both a digital and analogue format. Ten years have passed since the Corpoica study and new technology will allow us to improve upon and adjust their study.
- Suitability maps at a 1:100.000 scale of the main zones for palm growth expansion in both analogous and digital format.
- A book which will contain the technical record of the project and the final results.
- An integral model of zoning applied to the oil palm agro-industry in the country.
- The project will take approximately one year. We expect that by the next meeting we can present maps, papers and practical elements which will provide the oil palm sector with sufficient information make informed decisions.

By the end of the first phase -around three to four months -we will have finished the 1:500.000- scale map. Whilst by the end of the second phase the 1:100.000 scale will be ready, however this will take a little more time. We trust that once the project is completed we will be able to provide the road map and territorial vision for the future of the Colombian oil palm industry.