

# Restoration Cases Flagship Collection

## Case #8: Scaling up Silvopastoral Systems in La Vieja river basin, Colombia



*Leucaena intensive silvopastoral system in El Hatico Natural Reserve, Valle del Cauca, Colombia. Photo credit: Chará et al., 2019*

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## In brief

### Overview

In La Vieja river basin, a small NGO began experimenting in the 1990s with silvopastoral systems on a handful of farms, growing and managing trees and shrubs in pastures. They worked closely with farmers, experimented with different techniques, and learned from the results. After several increasingly larger waves of implementation, implementers found that individualized planning and sustained technical assistance were indispensable even at large scales. Using this approach, the Center for Research on Sustainable Agriculture Production Systems (CIPAV) helped farmers implement silvopastoral systems on thousands of farms in La Vieja and across Colombia, while bringing international funders and national governments on board. CIPAV's silvopastoral systems produce more milk and meat from healthier animals on less land than conventional systems. Farmers began to see benefits after only a few months. Silvopastoral systems also have higher plant diversity, sequester more carbon, and provide a more hospitable environment for cattle and native biodiversity. Using less land allows other areas of the farm to be dedicated to environmentally beneficial goals, such as allowing forest to regrow along waterways and marginal areas to prevent erosion and improve water resources.

### Exemplary practices

At all scales, three key components led to successful outcomes: farm-to-farm visits and demonstration sites; a customized farm plan; and ongoing technical support from trained extension agents. These components helped to create a personal connection with farmers, and were essential to adapt project goals and methods to the local context. When scaling up, CIPAV dedicated additional resources to ensure each was still provided. As CIPAV's Zoraida Calle put it: "In many ways you end up being psychologists. It means understanding the history of the person, their family, their relationship with their land."

### Key lessons learned

- ◇ *Personalized planning and technical support are essential at any scale.*
- ◇ *Promote processes of collective learning between local and scientific knowledge to tailor methods to local conditions.*
- ◇ *Always be open to the input of farmers – listen and respond with “how can we make it better?”*
- ◇ *High quality, sustained technical assistance is vital and should be provided at no cost.*
- ◇ *Seeing is believing: Use peer-to-peer learning and connect similar farms.*
- ◇ *Demonstration farmers should be exceptional communicators and leaders.*