



VIII Scientific Wallace Conference

Proceedings



**Review
and
editing**


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ISBN: 978-9977-57-795-1

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C397

VIII Scientific Wallace Conference Proceedings/ CATIE- Centro Agronómico Tropical de Investigación y Enseñanza
– 1ª ed. – Turrialba, Costa Rica : CATIE, 2024.
120 p. : il. – (Serie divulgativa / CATIE ; no. 24)

ISBN 978-9977-57-795-1

1. agricultural research 2. conferences 3. agrarian structure
4. climate change 5. farms 6. sustainability 7. governance
I. CATIE II. Título III. Serie IV. Alejandra Martínez Salinas
V. Catalina Abadie VI. Claudia Sepúlveda VII. Laura Benegas
VIII. Leida Mercado IX. Marianela Arguello X. Pablo Imbach
XI. Reinhold Muschler XII. Róger Madrigal XIII. Rolando Cerda

Citación sugerida:

CATIE (Centro Agronómico Tropical de Investigación y Enseñanza, Costa Rica). 2024. VIII Scientific Wallace Conference Proceedings (en línea). Scientific Wallace Conference (8, 2023, Turrialba, Costa Rica). Turrialba, Costa Rica, CATIE. 100 p. (Serie divulgativa/ CATIE, no. 24). Disponible en: <https://repositorio.catie.ac.cr/handle/11554/5175>

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A socioenvironmental approach to contribute to the sustainability of oil palm smallholders

Abstract

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Mexico is the second largest importer of palm oil in the Americas. For more than 20 years, oil palm cultivation has been promoted by local and national governments as a strategy to reduce imports and as a tool for agricultural development, particularly among smallholders who own over 53% of the plantations. The state of Campeche holds the second largest plantation area in the country. Smallholders face a difficult situation since public fund has stopped the support to the oil palm plantations, and the umbrella organization that represented them has declared bankruptcy, leaving debts and mortgages among its members, at a time when the plantations have reached the end of their productive cycle. Therefore, smallholders need to find ways to adapt to the changing circumstances reconfiguring their socio-ecosystem. This study identifies the economic, social, environmental, and agronomic constraints faced by smallholders and explores ways to overcome them, in order to find a path for oil palm plantations towards a sustainable future. We used a non-probabilistic sampling approach and conducted 43 surveys and semi-structured interviews with authorities and oil palm producers in seven rural communities. Additionally, we conducted three focus groups using a participatory modeling methodology to develop a conceptual model of the oil palm socio-ecological system, which was later validated. The study found that smallholders are willing to continue oil palm production despite constraints in production and poor resource management by the umbrella organization. To overcome these challenges, smallholders suggest reconfiguring the role of the umbrella organization as a representative and not an intermediary for the resources received. Smallholders also perceive interactions with industrial societies as an opportunity for mutually beneficial relationships. These findings suggest a need for a change in the interaction of smallholders with other actors in the production chain, where they transition from being only suppliers to becoming key actors in the production of the state while improving local conditions and bringing them closer to achieving their sustainability goals.

Keywords: ejido,
sustainable
agriculture,
adaptive
governance