

Paso Alto starts to see a new future

by José Cueva, Consorcio Toisan

After almost three years of continuous work in the Paso Alto region, the positive results are beginning to show. Our first big task was focused on the diffusion of an agro-forestry production model which includes coffee as the primary product, and is also associated with various species of fruit and timber trees. Bearing in mind that the Bellavista, Pamplona and Barrio Nuevo communities are made up of colonists who have been dedicated to cultivating sugar cane and establishing pastures in forested areas, the option of a mixed production which only starts to generate income after 3 years, didn't look an easy one. However, it is great to report that after this period of time, we can now enjoy seeing the people who first adopted the model, starting to harvest their first grains of coffee and other fruits.

It hasn't been easy to convince people of this new system, however there are now more than 40 farms that have established these parcels. The process has involved people adapting to a new and more integral system of farming. This change in many people and their families has also enabled them to move forward with certainty in the communities' commitment towards the conservation of the important remaining ecosystem of Paso Alto. Finally in December 2009 we handed in the official management plan, carried out with the communities' full participation, to the Ecuador Ministry of Environment and we have since received the official declaration of Protected Forest Status.



Coffee, the principle crop at Barrio Nuevo

Photo: Jose Cueva



Photo: Jose Cueva

Agroforestry. Coffee planted by the Media Villa family

The process has involved people adapting to a new and more integral system of farming.

For the communities, the most important is to now understand the multiple advantages that the forest has under conservation. It was their decision in the current Paso Alto project, funded by Rainforest Concern and its donors, to redirect the project to carry out a general mapping of the area and its farms. With this mapping finished, the people will be able to start sorting out the community lands and the state lands, which will become property of the community and local Government. With their lands legalised it opens up the possibility of entering into the formal financial systems and obtaining funding for investing in their productive systems, whose viability they have now been able to witness with their own eyes.

This legalisation will also allow them to enter into new initiatives of environmental services which the Ecuadorian state is offering, and in a not too distant future, this could also be through international co-operation. Other important economic activities, such as ecotourism and the mini hydro scheme are also planned by the communities in Intag.

Every day we are closer to the moment in which Paso Alto becomes a privileged place to be, with an integral production of coffee and fruit to provide important sources of income for the communities and the more than 5,000 hectares of Andean cloud forests being well conserved, regenerating and offering their own benefits.