

RESPONSE TO ALTIERI AND FARVAR ARTICLES

Dear Members of CEESP,

Recent articles by Miguel Altieri and Taghi Farvar critiquing the concept and vision of ecoagriculture and the initiative of Ecoagriculture Partners have been widely circulated by CEESP. These papers misstate our positions and mischaracterize the activities and philosophy of Ecoagriculture Partners. Moreover, they unfortunately look past the significant overlap between ecoagriculture and agroecology, thus impeding a natural and desirable alliance. We appreciate the opportunity to provide a response based on the facts and to help correct misconceptions.

'Ecoagriculture' applies an ecosystem approach to entire agricultural landscapes, rather than just individual farms. It is not a technology, but a broad framework that calls for land use transformations that enhance rural livelihoods and agricultural production systems (of crops, livestock, fish and forest), and also conserve or restore ecosystem services and biodiversity at a meaningful landscape scale. Most existing ecoagriculture strategies rely on an understanding and application of the ecological synergies between farming and natural systems management, at plot, farm and landscape scales. Ecoagriculture embraces agroecology, organic agriculture, agroforestry and numerous other innovative approaches emerging worldwide. But we consider that these efforts need to be scaled up and coordinated among land users to address landscape-scale conservation challenges. We need to reach out to a variety of actors—including conservation organizations, the food industry, municipal planners, and innovative agribusinesses—whose involvement is required to address the challenges of food production, rural poverty and biodiversity loss. We also need to work at the policy level to promote viable alternatives to industrial agriculture, backed by a strong international ecoagriculture movement.

Miguel **Altieri's** paper invents a version of 'ecoagriculture' that does not correspond to our definition. Furthermore, he ascribes virtues to agroecology which are, in fact, largely shared by ecoagriculture. References to some of our core texts (full citations below) show that, contrary to the assertions in Miguel's paper:

- Ecoagriculture fully recognizes and promotes the role of crop, livestock, and tree genetic diversity in ecoagriculture systems—this is a central feature of ecoagriculture (McNeely and Scherr 2003, pp. 7, 176-180; Nairobi Declaration).
- We especially emphasize the importance of conserving forms of biodiversity of greatest importance to local people and their livelihoods and cultures (McNeely and Scherr 2003, pp. 12-15, 231-237; Nairobi Declaration; Molnar et al. 2004). A major strategy we highlight is to build on traditional production systems (McNeely & Scherr 2003: Cases 4, 5, 7, 17, 21, 25, 28, 29, 35, 36; Molnar et al. 2004).
- Ecoagriculture Partners is deeply concerned with rural equity. The desire to find a way to achieve equity and livelihood security in agricultural regions with high conservation values was a key motivator for developing the ecoagriculture concept (McNeely and Scherr 2003, pp.5, 44-50; Molnar et al. 2004). We do not blame the poor for most environmental degradation in agricultural landscapes—quite the opposite (McNeely & Scherr, Chapter 4; Molnar et al.).
- Jeff McNeely and I are both longstanding critics (not champions!) of strategies purporting to save

global biodiversity through high-yield monocultures in high-potential lands (McNeely and Scherr, pp. 5, 136-140). In some landscapes, sustainable agricultural intensification may be one element contributing to ecoagriculture (op.cit, pp. 136-146).

- Ecoagriculture Partners does not promote the use of agrochemicals, but rather identifies and encourages numerous options to reduce, eliminate or minimize the impacts from their use (McNeely and Scherr, pp. 150-161; Nairobi Declaration).
- Ecoagriculture Partners does not endorse or promote GMOs (McNeely & Scherr, p.83, Nairobi Declaration). Nor do we not rule out the possibility that GMOs could in the future play some role in ecoagriculture systems if designed explicitly to benefit rural communities and protect biodiversity (McNeely & Scherr, p. 153). To deny the possibility of such a role is without scientific foundation

Miguel's pre-publication review of our core text, *Ecoagriculture*, was sufficiently positive that the publishers quoted it on the back cover! His paper could be prompted by a perception that ecoagriculture is a competitor to agroecology, which Miguel has energetically championed for several decades. His attack on ecoagriculture is surprising and hard to explain, as while not synonymous the two visions have much in common.

The **Farvar** article, while raising broader questions related to IUCN collaboration with the private sector, alleges in its title ("Trojan Horse") and text that the agenda of Ecoagriculture Partners has been secretly shaped by agribusiness and against community interests. These claims are completely unjustified.

Ecoagriculture Partners focuses most of its attention on supporting ecoagriculture strategies for low-income rural communities. Participation by community-based organizations has been important in every Ecoagriculture Partners meeting since our inception. A fifth of the more than 200 participants at our recent Ecoagriculture Conference in Nairobi were from such organizations (far more than the small group from the corporate sector), and nearly all were actively involved in developing our recommendations. The Nairobi Declaration calls for action: "1) incorporating and enhancing the wide range of grassroots and rural community innovations...; 2) recognizing the importance of local and indigenous knowledge, their institutions and decision-making processes...; 3) integrating and scaling up farm-level and landscape-wide initiatives of sustainable land and water management...; and 4) supporting and building capacity of farmers and pastoral communities for collective action..." Ecoagriculture Partners is more confident than our critics about the capacity of low-income rural communities to play a globally important role in the conservation of wild biodiversity, as well as in protecting crop genetic and associated biodiversity (Molnar et al 2004).

Our program was initiated and developed by highly reputable NGOs with committed public mandates, and our work has been fully transparent. Ecoagriculture Partners has received funds or substantive in-kind support from over 40 organizations - mostly NGOs, foundations, and governmental organizations. Corporate contributions accounted for less than 5% of total resources. Moreover, there is no need to make apologies for actively engaging with the private sector in such an endeavor. If we are going to improve land and resource uses substantially, there will need to be changes in the thinking and activities of corporate and other private sector actors. All key actors in a landscape must be involved in planning and negotiations to achieve multiple goals at scale.

Ecoagriculture is still an emerging paradigm. There is need for an organization like Ecoagriculture Partners that can help innovators working in different locations, farming systems and sectors to learn from

one another. We seek to document ecoagriculture innovations, build capacity, and support policy and institutional changes that will expand ecoagriculture to a globally meaningful scale. I encourage you to assess our approach and organization yourself:

- To order a copy of the *Ecoagriculture* book by McNeely and Scherr, (Island Press, 2003) see: www.islandpress.org;
- To download a free copy of the initial ecoagriculture report “Common Ground, Common Future” by McNeely and Scherr (IUCN and Future Harvest 2001, 24 pp), www.ecoagriculturepartners.org/pdfs/FinalPrintingReport2.pdf
- To see the Nairobi Declaration on Ecoagriculture developed as a consensus document of more than 200 participants at the recent International Ecoagriculture Conference and Practitioners’ Fair, see www.ecoagriculturepartners.org/Meetings/Nairobi2004/nairobi_dec.php (2 pp)
- For an independent report of the Nairobi Conference, see the Earth Negotiations Bulletin: www.iisd.ca/sd/sdeac/sdvol96num2e.html.
- To learn about Ecoagriculture Partners, see our website: www.ecoagriculturepartners.org.

Members of CEESP may have particular interest in our most recent publication:

- “Who Conserves the World’s Forests: Community-Driven Strategies to Protect Forests and Respect Rights” by Augusta Molnar, Sara Scherr and Arvind Khare (co-published with Forest Trends, 2004, 28 pp), which can be downloaded from http://www.ecoagriculturepartners.org/pdfs/Who_Conserves_final_11-04.pdf

We trust that you will come away with a better understanding of ecoagriculture, the emerging ecoagriculture movement, and Ecoagriculture Partners. Given the very diverse views and interests and historical distrust among key actors, Ecoagriculture Partners is taking on a challenging task fostering cross-sectoral dialogue and action at a landscape scale. While we anticipate serious struggles ahead, our hope is that these can be fought more effectively with a “united front” among natural allies. We are heartened by the inspiring group of ecoagriculture innovators who have enthusiastically begun to work and learn with us, and hope that many other IUCN members will be interested in collaborating in the near future.

Sincerely,

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