



CONNECTING AGRICULTURAL LAND AND WILDLIFE HABITATS



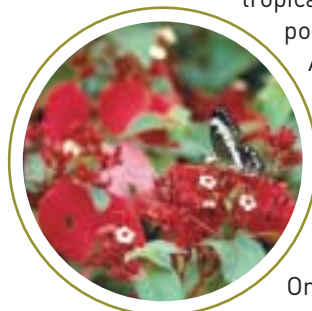
Setting up protected areas such as national parks or nature reserves is a common solution to the problem of conserving biodiversity. But a protected zone that provides a safe environment for plants and animals is just one small piece in a complex, global environmental puzzle. If that piece does not fit snugly with other pieces of the environment, then the gaps will

defeat the purpose of the protected area. After all, birds and animals cannot read warning signs, seeds blowing in the wind do not stop spreading because there is a chain link fence, insects burrowing through soil never know they have entered or left a protected area, and seeping water does not carry a compass.

In other words, if protected zones border conventional agricultural lands, there is no way to stop the seepage of pollutants, there is no way to warn birds and bees not to land on fields sprayed with potentially dangerous chemicals.

Moreover, many of the world's recognized ecoregions are in tropical and semi-tropical regions, populated by people living in poverty.

Agriculture, as practised today, has the potential to cause serious threats in many of these regions. Forty percent of the earth's land is agricultural and another 12 percent is protected.



Organic agriculture offers a solution for connecting all of the pieces. Organic farming methods can reduce the detrimental effects of conventional farming and, in fact, can help restore natural

resources and increase production. **With its focus on crop rotations, natural inputs, local breeds and species, and family activities, organic is a natural link between agricultural practices and the biodiversity that needs to be protected.** If farm land bordering and connecting protected areas employs organic methods, there is no reason to fear the loss of wildlife or contamination of air, water and soil. These buffer zones are critical to the success of conservation in the protected areas.



Eco-forestry within organic farm



Biodynamic farm in buffer zone of Circeo national park, Italy

Organically farmed areas not only provide safe buffer zones between protected areas, they increase the impact of the protected area itself. Many studies document benefits in terms of protected and

improved habitat for native wildlife. From micro-organisms in the soil to migrating birds, endangered species not only return, they often flourish in organic settings. **The absence of synthetic pesticides and the presence of hedges and higher crop density on organic farms mean safe access to food and shelter for wildlife species.**



Organic coffee under forest cover

In addition, organic farms can operate safely within certain types of protected areas. There are numerous examples of successful organic agriculture inside protected areas such as Muraviovka Park, Russia (wetlands), Yaoluoping National Resource Reserve, China (mountains), Monte Azules Biosphere Reserve in Mexico (tropical forests), and the Meso-American Biological Corridor that stretches across seven countries.



On organic farms, wild patches between rows are kept for pest predators



Most protected areas traditionally belonged to local villagers, so organic agriculture allows local people to maintain some management control over land they consider theirs. **Organic farmers protect land through their farming practices, reap its benefits for themselves and, at the same time,**

they conserve and improve their natural environment which benefits the entire planet.



Photos: FAO / R. Faidutti - M. Mizzol - N. Schlabbe

Collecting vitamin C rich fruits from forest, Guinea Bissau

