

# Laércio Meirelles, Centro Ecológico, Brasil:

## The Experience of the Centro Ecológico from Brasil

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The early 80's in Brazil were years of political effervescence in the rural area. The socio- environmental negative impacts of the Green Revolution, the distension of military dictatorship and the re-birth of social struggle in the countryside provided a special scenario for the establishment of organizations searching for a new developmental model based on ecological agriculture and cooperation. Thus, born in the environmental movement, the organisation started to work on agroecological production and farmers organization. The Ecological Farmers Associations formed have some common features: adoption of ecological agriculture, organization of small groups, small-scale processing, and the search for alternative channels to market their products. Later on the center started to promote organization of Ecological Products Consumers' Cooperatives, stimulating active participation of urban consumers. This new attempt was based on the premise that ethical consumption is an essential condition to enhance Ecological Agriculture and, to certain extent, a new model of development. The work of Centro Ecológico is based in two regions in Rio Grande do Sul - the Highlands and the North Littoral. Each of these regions has singular social-environmental characteristics, enabling different approaches in the implementation of ecological agriculture.

### Guiding Principles

The positive results achieved by Centro Ecológico are based on the following principles:

1) An ecological vision of agriculture and its interface with natural ecosystems. Agricultural production systems are interpreted and managed as complex multidimensional systems, in permanent transformation. Its restructuring, involves different levels of intervention; 2) The interaction between popular and scientific knowledge in the process of building up the knowledge in the transition towards an ecological agriculture, creating the basis for a new development model; 3) Economic and social feasibility of family farming. Smallholders are seen, individually and collectively, as protagonists on the construction of a new development model. Complementary attributions of roles and tasks are established between Centro Ecológico, Family Farmers Associations and other partners, in the process of building up and spreading technological alternatives and social organization; and 4) The construction of new principals and practices for the integration between (i) producers and consumers; (ii) civil society, public agencies and the market; (iii) city and country.



### Local Projects Global Dimension

Centro Ecológico is a local NGO that has been working since 1985 aiming at viability of sustainable agricultural systems, through the adoption of alternative technologies, oriented to environmental protection and social justice.



Centro Ecológico advises smallholders' organizations in the fields of production, processing and marketing of ecological products. The work involves the recovery of agricultural biodiversity in local agro-ecosystems, incentives to promote farmer and consumer organizations, development of a solidarity marketing network, and the design and implementation of public policies to increment sustainable agriculture and environmental protection.

### Reduction of Green House Gas emissions

At a global level agriculture is passing through a socio-environmental crisis. Prices are so depressed they cannot provide a decent living to small-scale farmers. The environmental consequences can be clearly observed in a country like Brasil: erosion of genetic resources and wild biodiversity, destruction of forests for large-scale industrial crops and extensive livestock rearing and massive application of chemical inputs. Still the small-scale sector is important for the country, it produces most of the food for internal consumption and provides employment to a large sector of smallholders. The ecological agriculture promoted by the center is based on improving the soils and soil fertility, diversification and integration of crops and animals at the farm, low external inputs and a short distance between producers and consumers. In this model organic matter is accumulated in the soil and direct and indirect greenhouse gas emissions are reduced. Furthermore, while tree-crops are included in the diversified production, carbon sequestration is further increased. The water household is greatly improved and biodiversity on the farm increases rapidly. Some oilseed crops are also introduced, providing inputs for bio-energy. These forms of agriculture and agro-forestry are clearly favourable towards climate change and the environment, so there is a potential for payments for emission reductions and for payments for environmental services as well.



### Next steps

Obtaining such payments would be a great incentive for the farmers, to shift to ecological agriculture. The center will continue working with the farmers to raise awareness on the financial and environmental benefits of ecological and organic agriculture. Research into actual carbon sequestration will be continued and coordinated with similar initiatives in Costa Rica and Cuba. Financial support however still is a bottleneck.

