

Traditional Agriculture

Agricultural technologies have evolved to fulfill subsistence requirements of society. Traditional agriculture is focused on the basic production and consumption unit: the household. These traditions rely on polycultural strategies mimicking the native environment. They are based on an "industrious evolution" of labor investment rather than scarce capital inputs. The polycultural strategy for household survival is modeled after natural environmental diversity. Throughout the equatorial tropics such contemporary strategies have proved sustainable at the household level over the long-term.



The beginnings of a modern forest garden

Ancient resource management systems, as with contemporary ones, were developed over the course of millennia to minimize instability, prevent degradation and integrate both intensive and extensive labor techniques that maximize production. Traditional polycultural systems undoubtedly supported the long evolution and development of ancient Maya. Heterogeneous and biodiverse, the polycultural forest garden provided an effective strategy for survival and constituted the strength of the Maya community both in the past as well as the present. This polycultural system relies on the traditional knowledge of local farming households that today are rapidly abandoning time-proven methods in exchange for introduced technologies.

At El Pilar, the innovative polycultural design is based on a small-scale household plan and includes annuals and perennials interspersed with tree

crops. Working with local consejeros, appropriate combinations of cultigens and native economic plants are being determined. This polycultural system is adaptable to variations in forest cover, soil fertility, proximity to population and other local conditions. The Maya forest garden at El Pilar provides an ongoing source of innovation for the community, fostering resource conservation and community development that aligns with rather than opposes the natural regenerative processes of the tropical forest.

The forest garden at El Pilar incorporates the village communities' contribution towards the sustainable management of their own resources. Experiments within the reserve will be fully documented, recording failures and underscoring successes. Through farmer participation and local networking, experience and knowledge can be shared beyond the boundaries of the reserve with the goal of restoring the local landscape to a state of greater biological diversity.