

## Agroforestry: the new old paradigm for Asian food security

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### Abstract

Rising population pressure and urbanization, coupled with land degradation, soil salinization, and global warming are causing food insufficiency in large parts of Asia. Agroforestry, or woody perennial-based mixed species production systems, has the potential to arrest land degradation and improve site productivity through interactions among trees, soil, crops, and livestock, and thus restore part, if not all, of the degraded lands. Many such practices are sited on the smallholdings of tropical Asia, characterised by sub-optimal management and subsistence farming conditions. Food production either directly (producing food grains, root crops, fruits, and vegetables) or indirectly (improving soil conditions and thereby promoting understorey crop productivity especially on degraded sites) constitutes the central theme of most smallholder agroforestry practices. Low input use and ecological security are other intrinsic attributes of this unique land use activity. Despite such advantages, agroforestry as a land use option has not attracted much attention from the planners and extension community. Reasons for this include inconsistencies in understorey crop productivity (positive, negative, or neutral effects depending on species, site, and management) and lack of public policy support. Conscious efforts on system management and policy adjustments are therefore imperative to promote agroforestry adoption by the farming community.

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