



Regional Workshop Report:

Challenges and opportunities for sustainable cattle production

Under the framework of the project *“The Zero-Deforestation Revolution: Breaking the link between agricultural commodities and deforestation”*, and in coordination with the Colombian Roundtable on Sustainable Livestock, the Tropical Forest Alliance, and the Zero Deforestation Agreements for Dairy and Beef, the National Wildlife Federation and Proyección Eco-Social Foundation organized four workshops. The workshops aimed for participants to learn about the existing forums and agreements established to promote sustainability within the cattle sector, systemize regional perspectives, and create an enabling space for discussions around sustainability in the sector that will contribute to the creation of policies, strategies or new projects focused on sustainable cattle production.

The main themes of the workshops were:

- 1) Policies, projects and scenarios for the creation and support for zero deforestation and sustainable cattle production.
- 2) Presenting regional success stories and other geographically-localized experiences (Antioquia).
- 3) Financial and strategic collaboration opportunities for sustainable cattle projects.
- 4) Participatory workshop on the effects (environmental and social) of traditional cattle production at the regional level.

The workshops took place in the Casanare, Arauca, Caquetá and Meta Departments, which were selected based upon relevant factors, such as percentage of total livestock, rates of deforestation, participation in the regional roundtables for sustainable cattle, and other environmental factors such as presence of important non-forest ecosystems.

The workshops addressed themes such as: success stories of sustainable cattle production projects, silvopastoral systems, collaboration and cooperation, zero deforestation agreements, best practice sustainable cattle policies, and others.

Results of Participatory Workshop

Each workshop included a participatory exercise and feedback session comprised of two sections:

- a. An individual written exercise where participants expressed their thoughts on the social and environmental impacts associated with cattle production in the region; either positive or negative.
- b. A conversation on the impacts and a round of discussions to summarize the findings and arrive at a consensus.

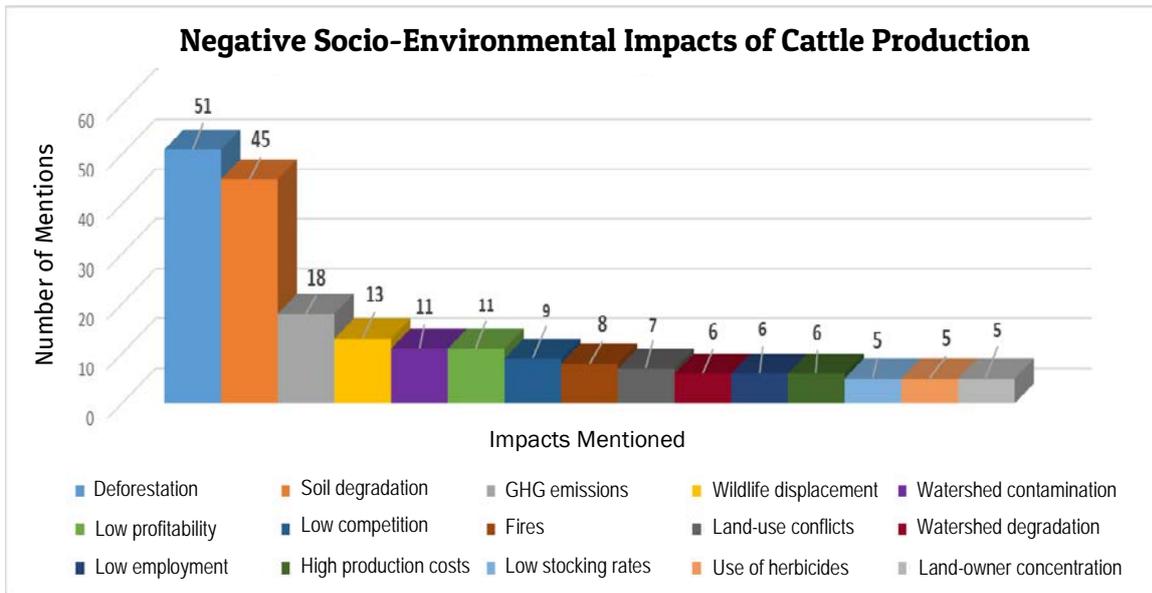
In total, 269 people attended the four workshops. Ninety-seven participated in the workshop focused on evaluating the effects of cattle production.

Below, the Socio-Environmental impacts identified in the workshops are presented. The findings suggest that the negative impacts (Graphic 1) most representative of cattle production are: deforestation, soil degradation, and greenhouse gas production. However, it is important to mention relevant issues such as water basin contamination and fires started by ranchers, two topics that participants highlighted often.

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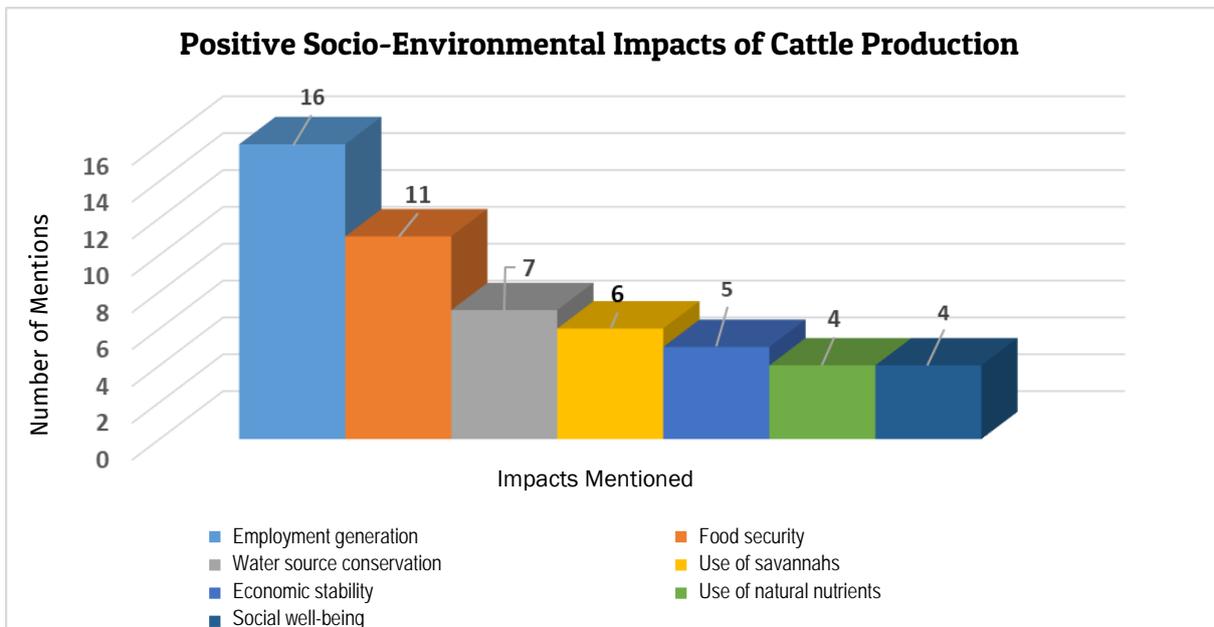
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Graphic 1: Negative Social-Environmental Impacts identified during the participatory session of the workshop. *The number of repetitions references the number of people that specified that the impact was relevant.

Employment opportunities, food security, and care for water sources were the three most identified positive impacts (Graphic 2). It is important to highlight that during the activity, external factors came up that need to be taken into consideration, such as the lack of clear policies for cattle production, lack of technical support, and the lack of structure within the cattle sector, among others.



Graphic 2: Positive Environmental Impacts identified during the participatory session of the workshop. *The number of repetitions references the number of people that specified that it was as relevant impact.



Conclusions

- ❖ The low profitability of cattle production was discussed during all workshops. In other words, a key part of sustainability is missing: the economics. This situation triggers other problems in one way or another – by aiming to be profitable without technical advancements, bad practices become recurrent and affect ecosystems in the medium and long-term.
- ❖ The drivers of deforestation are different in each region. This needs to be a determining factor during the development of plans for each Department. In Caquetá, according to participants, deforestation is seen as a consequence of land-grabbing and lack of access to lands for farmers. In Casanare and Arauca, participants highlight that there are small numbers of farmers that deforest; however these Departments have high vulnerability to deforestation.
- ❖ The ecosystems in the Andean foothills and flood-prone savannahs are highly affected by agricultural drainage and irrigation systems. It is important to highlight that in Casanare, Arauca, and Meta, reforestation strategies should be paired with silvopastoral systems and other ecosystem restoration strategies that will encourage re-planting of trees and better soil management in spaces already transformed by cattle production and other activities.
- ❖ Rural subsidies can create perverse incentives because ranchers can lose them if they finalize management plants. Furthermore, there is little to no government presence and lack of technical support.
- ❖ The lack of opportunities on farms has influenced younger generations to lose interest in agricultural work.
- ❖ There are many different opinions regarding child labor, since many believe it should be allowed on family farms; however, it is clear there is lack of knowledge of the regulations regarding child labor.
- ❖ There is a need to create strategies to improve cattle breeding and marketing of sustainable cattle products.

Recommendations

- ❖ Policies should be created together with technical and educational institutions, the government, and producers. This should be done in a participatory manner rather than imposed upon the participants. It is important to take into consideration the time necessary for policy development, and lastly, it is important to guarantee that the regional participants are represented and understand the development process. Therefore, the Colombian Roundtable for Sustainable Livestock and its regional branches should continue to develop public policies through participation, taking into consideration the different actors in the supply chain and integrate within them the participation of other forums, such as the Zero Deforestation Agreements and the Sustainable Markets Dialogue, to strengthen sustainable cattle production. In addition, it is important to take into account the environmental and cultural differences across regions relating to cattle production during the development of public policies and any other projects that are currently under development.

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- ❖ Strategies for the livelihood of small producers that are not solely dependent on cattle production should be developed. One of the proposed alternatives is the creation of projects that involve the entire cattle supply chain in a way that can guarantee the commercialization of sustainable products, with the end goal to create a system that will continue to incentivize the producer, coupled with good practices that will continue even after the end of the project. One of the practices that could be considered to optimize resources is the creation of strategic alliances between producers and buyers, promoting silvopastoral practices by clearly explaining the benefits to producers and buyers, outlining possible difficulties, management options, returns on investments, and other elements.
- ❖ It is necessary to train producers to develop products that have an added or differentiated value. At the same time, it is important to make all interested parties aware of how data is managed for the supply chain to ensure the traceability of cattle and its products. Practical and simple systems that promote traceability are needed, and an integrated information system should be developed that allows buyers to access data about producer practices. These strategies will help reduce deforestation and bring in economic, social and environmental benefits for the producer, and need to be promoted as such.
- ❖ It is important to integrate the knowledge and/or results obtained under the different projects occurring at the national level to create specific criteria for the development of sustainable cattle, while still taking into consideration the regional differences. It is important that organizations working in this space promote linkages between projects to optimize resources.
- ❖ More research is needed about the social and environmental impacts of cattle production in Colombia (human rights, labor force, child labor, gender equality, water resources, deforestation). Strengthening knowledge about the linkages between negative social and environmental impacts and producers, buyers, and the market, will allow for greater understanding and collaboration on solutions. This will help promote and facilitate access to financial strategies that promote sustainability, forest stewardship, and good practices, as well as access to new projects that will be adapted to the real needs of the regions and the producers.
- ❖ Projects that promote generational succession need to be encouraged. Actions need to respect the rights of minors, while at the same time strengthening sustainable production in the Colombian countryside. This can be done by working with educational institutions that can leverage acceptance and understanding of the importance of this type of work into the minds of youths in the countryside. It is important that there is consensus in how to ensure generational transition while maintaining positive traditions.
- ❖ Gender inequality is a little understood factor in the cattle production process. “Machismo” or male chauvinism was raised to be a factor very evident in the cattle production context, and recognized that women play a large role in supporting farms, and as such strategies should be developed that promote gender equality, strengthen the role of a woman in the fields, and highlight the importance of women in general.