

Best practices for intercropping in coffee and cocoa

Intercropping is a major component of agroforestry and there are practices that have to be undertaken to get the best out of agroforestry.

Intercropping perennials like coffee, cocoa or food trees enhances ecological and social economic benefits. Specific combinations of trees can be adopted according to the needs of the farmer, the environment and market access. Suitable intercropping depend on the location specifics, bio physical and farmer preference.

Choice of intercrop

The choice of intercrop depends on preference and capacities eg equipment, labour and the time available of the farmer. When developing a land use plan, select the suitable trees and crops but also consider planting pattern and management to reduce on competition between the components.

Coffee can be intercropped with for example, spices or fruits in parallel rows or around the boundary of crops. Intercropping with legumes add nitrogen which can be used by coffee plants.

Cocoa is often established together with maize, cassava, papaya and banana. These not only provide food but also provide shade to the young seedlings hence reducing mortality.

Considerations when intercropping

Optimize shade management as this provides the necessary shade for a healthy main crop while keeping competition for water

and nutrients at a minimum.

Fertilizer and pest management requirements need to be adopted for each crop in the system.

To intercrop in an existing plantation, first remove unproductive trees, do targeted pruning and thinning to create more space for the intercrop. Choose the intercrop based on preference, market opportunities and local climate and soil characteristics. For easy management, plant the new crops in a structured manner and according to recommended planting distances.