
Cashew Growing Observations

Ian Wallace, Igreja Evangelica da Guine-Bissau on cashew. Ian writes that "On the whole I am not greatly enamored with cashew as a crop and would advise anyone thinking of large-scale cashew production to proceed with caution." His letter arrived just as I had visited some sites in the Amazon basin where cashews seemed to produce well and was wondering if I had been too negative in EDN 32-4. Perhaps someone in our network knows of a very successful cashew project. If so, please drop me a line. I would like to correspond with you. Ian's helpful observations follow:

"I was interested in your article on cashew production. Here vast areas of virgin bush have been cleared and planted with cashew trees in the past 10 years. Certainly the crop has not fulfilled all that was expected of it. Perhaps expectations were too high, or orchards are inadequately tended. Because the initial stages of raising the trees is so straightforward, there is a tendency to sit and wait for the tree to do its stuff with many orchards remaining uncultivated. The crop is unreliable.

"The little that is processed locally is of poor quality, the toxic skin being burnt off in an open fire. The majority of the nuts are exchanged by the government for rice then shipped raw to foreign processing centers. The true value of the crop remains unrealized since much of the profit is only added after processing. We have seen a disastrous fall in rice production as well. It is easier to collect cashew nuts and exchange them for imported rice than it is to work the rice fields. Although this is obviously a fault of the exchange policy, it is hard to see an alternative. There are no other markets for unprocessed nuts and the government has no other means of paying.

"You are right in saying that it is a labor intensive crop. Harvest time involves an army of workers, many of whom are children from age 6 upwards who are taken out of school for that purpose. It is rare to see men involved in the harvest. It appears that the system which is evolving is oppressive to the weaker members of the community, who rarely see any great benefit from the harvest.

"Cashew production has aggravated another social problem, drunkenness. The squeezed juice ferments quickly and without human intervention, to make a strong alcoholic drink in days. The cashew wine is available in far greater quantities than palm wine. Cashew season sees a very marked increase in drunkenness.