

Enhancing biodiversity in Chilean farms requires locally-adapted agroecological protocols

Aumentar la biodiversidad en predios chilenos requiere de protocolos agroecológicos adaptados localmente

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The need for a local understanding in harnessing farm biodiversity

In the 1992 Earth Summit held in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, the concept of sustainable development, understood as the balance between economic, social, and environmental factors interacting in space and time. was recognized by representatives from 179 countries as vital to sustain human life without compromising the planet (United Nations, 1992). Nowadays, as humanity faces unseen anthropogenic problems such as climate change and biodiversity loss (IPCC, 2021), the concept of sustainable development has been recently highlighted by United Nations through the creation of 17 Sustainable Development Goals, aiming at improving environmental and human well-being globally (United Nations, 2015). Among these goals, attention has been made to ecosystem restoration, conservation, and sustainable use, of both marine and terrestrial environments. In this sense, the global food system based on monocultures, and subsequently the application of synthetic pesticides and fertilizers, has significantly contributed to ecosystem degradation by land use changes (Sala et al., 2000; Ramankutty et al., 2018) impacting local biodiversity and by releasing greenhouse gases. The latter is estimated to range between 21% and 37% of total anthropogenic global emissions, having a direct impact on climate change (IPCC, 2019). Therefore, a paradigm shift is needed to transform current food systems to contribute to the provision and regulation of multiple ecosystem services (benefits to humans) derived from the agricultural sector to enhance human well-being beyond just producing food for the increasing world population (LaCanne and Lundgren, 2018; Wratten et al., 2019). In this sense, feeding an estimated of 10 billion people by 2050, under rapidly changing climate change scenarios, requires a myriad of strategies that consider the whole food chain from applied in-field approaches, to national policies that promote the transition towards more sustainable agricultural systems (Wezel et al., 2020; Tscharntke et al., 2021).

At the farm level, recent research suggests that infield biodiversity can provide multiple ecosystem services without compromising crop yield (Dainese et al., 2019; Tamburini et al., 2020; Ricciardi et al., 2021; Fenster et al., 2021; Tscharntke et al., 2021), while also contributing to the mitigation of climate change impacts on farm production (Altieri et al., 2015). However, similar farm principles applied to different crops and geographic areas can have different impacts on the outcome. For example, the concept of regenerative agriculture uses the principle of harnessing biodiversity that when applied to corn fields can reduced corn yield compared to conventionally-managed fields (LaCanne and Lundgren, 2018), while in almond orchards, the same principle was applied but no yield differences were found when compared to conventional almond orchards (Fenster et al., 2021). Despite these inconsistencies in yield responses, in both examples, net profit was higher in regenerative farms (LaCanne and Lundgren, 2018; Fenster et al., 2021), highlighting the economic feasibility of enhancing biodiversity in conventionally managed agroecosystems. Then, manipulating biodiversity in farms as a strategy to enhance specific ecosystem functions could also produce neutral or negative effects on multiple ecosystem services (Tamburini et al., 2020), likely as different socio-ecological factors interacting at a given time and space generate complex outcomes (Liu et al., 2007; Tscharntke et al., 2016; Karp et al., 2018). Thus, knowing the interactions and outcomes of harnessing biodiversity at local scales is crucial to advance into applied protocols that could benefit many farmers in a widespread area, such as in Africa with the Push-Pull system (Khan et al., 2014) and in Asia with Ecological Engineering in rice (Gurr et al., 2016). Additionally, impacts at greater scales may mitigate or modulate the farm level effects, by providing ecosystem services to greater geographical areas. However, much remains to be learned about how local habitat management is modulated by landscape effects and agricultural practices at different spatial and temporal scales (Karp et al., 2018; Ahmed et al., 2020; Iuliano and Gratton, 2020), which makes its influence on ecosystem service delivery uncertain and site-specific and thus, its implementation difficult. Indeed, interactions between ecological processes and agricultural practices are influenced not only by habitat management at the farm-scale (high in-field plant diversification), but also by the surrounding habitat structure at landscape level, as well as farming practices (e.g., pesticide use) (Lichtenberg et al., 2017). The enhancement of plant biodiversity, through enrichment of the farm matrix could increase the abundance and/or diversity of many key organisms, which provide important functions for agroecosystems (Altieri, 1999; Dainese et al., 2019; Tamburini et al., 2020). Therefore, the extent to which habitat diversification strategies can subsidize multiple ecosystem services (e.g., biological control, pollination, soil nutrition, water quality, among others) needs to be measured also considering the variety in landscape contexts. For example, farms in complex landscapes with rich semi-natural and natural habitats (e.g., field margins, hedgerows, woody and herbaceous habitats) which provide shelter, alternative hosts and sugar sources (SNAP sensu Barnes et al., 2009) may reduce the shortcomings of management at the farm scale by enhancing the cross-habitat movement of natural enemies, enhancing biological control (González-Chang et al., 2019). In addition, as biodiversity increases, complex interactions are generated where intraguild predation can be reduced, because natural enemies can complement each other to affect different pest species, increasing the efficacy of biological control (Snyder, 2019). On the other hand, simple landscapes, with poor non-crop habitat resources, which do not provide SNAP may not limit the effect of

natural enemies, if local management practices provide sugar resources as floral nectar using flower rows or intercropping (Snyder, 2019) or as honeydew directly from the hosts of these parasitoids (Luquet et al., 2021). Therefore, landscape composition (i.e., number of habitats in the landscape) and configuration (i.e., shape, size, spatial arrangement) play a key role in delivering biodiversity-based ecosystem services (Haan et al., 2021), as small and isolated patches can accelerate species loss compared to larger ones (Chase et al., 2020). Also, the availability of complementary flower resources at the landscape scale can thus offset negative insecticide effects on ecosystem services (wild bee reproduction and pest control) in agriculture dominated landscapes (Klaus et al., 2021). In this manner, understand the extent to which the promotion of lowintensity farming practices limiting the input of habitat disturbances (e.g., pesticide use) and augmenting resource availability for natural enemies, pollinators, birds, mammals, among other groups, are mediated by landscape structure and its impact on ecosystem services will be essential for the maintenance of sustainable agroecosystems.

Adapting agroecological protocols through experimentation and trust

Despite the recent increase in the number of scientific research covering topics associated to maintaining and/or enhancing biodiversity in agroecosystems (González-Chang et al., 2020), the contribution of these has often not led to locally-adapted protocols that farmers can easily use. This reduces the likelihood of spreading agroecological protocols among farmers, and turning rare, biodiversity-rich farms into common biodiversity-rich landscapes (Nicholls and Altieri, 2018; Tscharntke et al., 2021). In a broadest sense, agroecology can multidisciplinary deal with the agrarian complexity occurring within landscapes through technological, cultural, and political perspectives that encourage a paradigm shift from our current food system (Wezel et al., 2020). In this manuscript an agroecological protocol is understood as a locally-adapted practice or set of farm practices that harness native or functional biodiversity to produce concrete socioecological outcomes (González-Chang et al., 2020; Wyckhuys et al., 2020) based on scientific, traditional and/or indigenous knowledge (Wezel et al., 2020). However, this knowledge is not always widely available or accessible to farmers, nor adapted to their local socio-ecological context. Recently, González-Chang et al. (2020), proposed a theoretical framework consisting of 11 steps describing the ideal pathway from the concept of biodiversity to create agroecological protocols to enhance socio-ecological transformations at the farm level. This approach aims to guide efforts towards understanding biodiversity interactions in agroecosystems to promote multiple ecosystem services and highlight the importance of considering the involvement of different stakeholders, such as farmers, farmer networks, policy makers, and scientists, to advance in the co-creation of locally-adapted protocols that harness biodiversity. Therefore, the well-accepted principles behind different agroecological approaches (Altieri, 1999; LaCanne and Lundgren, 2018; Wezel *et al.*, 2020) can be translated into specific farm practices (González-Chang *et al.*, 2020), which can improve one or multiple ecosystem services (Dainese *et al.*, 2019; Tamburini *et al.*, 2020).

An interesting approach that has helped to translate agroecological principles into locally-adapted practices are the so-called "agroecological lighthouses" (sensu Nicholls and Altieri, 2018), which are experimental field stations where different practices are tested and adapted using participative and horizontal educative methods, such as Campesino a Campesino (Holt-Giménez, 2008). When farmers perceive that the success of a certain practice can increase their well-being, by reducing production costs and/or increasing profit, they tend to be inclined to try to adapt such a practice (Kleijn et al., 2019). This approach helps the agroecology practice spreading through the local farming community as other farmers observe the successes of their colleagues and tend to trust and adapt their colleagues' approaches rather than directly implement suggestions from scientists and/or policy makers (Nicholls and Altieri, 2018). Thus, through concepts like "agroecological lighthouses" agricultural practices could be developed and adapted to local conditions and socio-ecological challenges (Nicholls and Altieri, 2018; González-Chang et al., 2020; Wyckhuys et al., 2020). Trialing and then demonstrating the successful practices in agroecological lighthouses enables farmers to avoid the unknown costs of experimenting themselves as well as some of the negative impacts of conventional farming (Garibaldi et al., 2017; Nicholls and Altieri, 2018), if they can adopt the locally adapted agroecological practices (González-Chang et al., 2020). In Chile, examples of agroecological lighthouses exist across the country, but a remarkable one is the managed by CET (Centro de Educación y Tecnología), a non-governmental organization (NGO) that since the 1980s has been promoting locally-adapted practices to enhance biodiversity and food sovereignty among small farmers (Nicholls and Altieri, 2018). For example, in the last 20 years, more than 130,000 people had visited CET in the Biobío region, suggesting the role of such a place in the spreading of adapted agroecological practices in Chile (Nicholls and Altieri, 2018).

However, to disseminate this kind of knowledge and overcome the simplicity of the conventional biocide approach to pests, weeds, and diseases (Bernhardt

et al., 2017; Gould et al., 2018), local farmers should be involved in co-creating the necessary practices to adapt their agricultural systems to more diversified ones (González-Chang et al., 2020; Wezel et al., 2020). By promoting the co-creation of knowledge, the likelihood of socio-ecological transformations in farming systems can be enhanced. This is essential to increase the reliability and efficacy of agroecological practices (Wezel et al., 2020) and builds the trust between scientists and farmers that is required for the acceptance and adoption of agroecological protocols (Warner, 2007). Different literature reviews have shown that a lack of fundamental applied knowledge based on agroecological principles is one of the biggest barriers farmers faces in transitioning towards diversified farming systems (Wratten et al., 2012; Westphal et al., 2015; Garibaldi et al., 2017; Gonzalez-Chang et al., 2020). Co-developed knowledge's basis would allow farmers to be involved in the entire process but also ensure that the knowledge and science being produced is both in line with farmers needs and in forms that are both useful and easy for them to follow (Warner, 2007; Holt-Giménez, 2008; Garibaldi et al., 2017; Nicholls and Altieri, 2018; González-Chang et al., 2020; Wezel et al., 2020).

In addition to the need to involve farmers from the conception of trials and demonstrate agroecological successes, a greater integration to understand the interactions of current biocide use and agroecological practices is crucial for future farming and increase the adoption of agroecological protocols. Conventional agriculture uses broadly applied prophylactic management approaches that rely on strong chemistry to overcome different local challenges (Brzozowski and Mazourek 2018; Wratten et al., 2019). This is based on the acceptance that agrochemicals are currently considered a necessity in at least some capacity for many cropping systems (Gould et al., 2018). However, most agrochemicals have negative impacts on biodiversity and ecosystem services (Bernhardt et al., 2017). For instance, most pesticides negatively impact soil invertebrates regardless of the types of pesticides and invertebrates involved (Gunstone et al., 2021), also increasing the likelihood of pest resistance against the chemical compounds applied (Gould *et al.*, 2018). Therefore, the direct and indirect effects of pesticides, particularly sub-lethal doses, and long-term effects, on agroecosystems needs to better be understood, especially as these compounds reduce the efficacy of biodiversity-based approaches (Brzozowski and Mazourek 2018; Dainese et al., 2019; Fenster et al., 2021). Nevertheless, if correctly assessed, agroecological practices can reduce the need for chemical inputs by restoring missed ecological functions (Altieri 1999; Gurr et al., 2016; Tamburini et al., 2020; Wezel et al., 2020). Thus, these knowledge gaps need to be approached with the aim of reducing chemical inputs and allowing the enhancement of multiple ecosystem services through harnessing biodiversity in farms, for the transition towards more sustainable agricultural systems (Wratten *et al.*, 2019).

Agroecological protocols have been shown to be economical, scalable and provide multiple ecosystem services, however there is an increasing gap between the growing agroecology-related scientific literature and farmer adoption worldwide (González-Chang et al., 2020). To mitigate the increasing environmental. economic, and social issues facing agriculture, agroecological protocols need to become more integrated with conventional practices and effectively communicated through demonstration in local conditions through practices locally validated by farmers, in a language that farmers can easily understand. In Chile, some advances have been made in terms of understanding biodiversity effects on agriculture. For example, a recent study demonstrates that adding native flowering vegetation strips in avocado orchards in Central Chile can increase fruit yield through pollination (Muñoz et al., 2021). In addition, efforts to harness biodiversity in horticulture (Salas, 2019) and vineyards (Díaz-Forestier et al., 2021) have also started to be explored, which highlight the growing interest of farmers for understand, apply and benefit from biodiversity-based protocols within their farming systems. Nevertheless, Chilean policies related to the use of natural resources are mainly conceived as extractive activities that diminish biodiversity (Urbina et al., 2021), in which conventional agricultural systems heavily rely on monocultures and agrochemicals, partly contributing to the degradation of natural ecosystems, and thereby, affecting human wellbeing. Despite that, the theoretical approach proposed by González-Chang et al. (2020) can contribute to the creation and dissemination of agroecological protocols by guiding through the necessary steps involved in socio-ecological transformations at farm and landscape scales, a responsible governance is also needed for complement, support, articulate and spread the findings arising from this approach, efficiently. Through understanding the importance and role of native and functional biodiversity in agroecosystems, and the associated ecosystem services it regulates, maintains, and supports, Chilean agriculture can advance to fulfill the Sustainable Development Goals proposed by the United Nations related to zero hunger, good health and wellbeing, climate action, life on land and below water. In addition, Chile has today the chance to move forward to a greener and sustainable economy as elected constituents create a new constitution (Urbina et al., 2021). Thus, environmental integrity should be placed at the center of economic growth, encouraging the design of sustainable and biodiversity-rich agroecosystems that provide multiple ecosystem services.

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