



Voices

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Husband and wife Nicanor Pinedo and Julia Espinoza migrated to the Peruvian Amazon district of Padre Abad from the highlands of Huanuco in 1985. Like so many other migrants who came to the jungle in search of a better life, they struggled to adapt to the harsh conditions of the region. The soils of Padre Abad are deficient in phosphorus and other key nutrients needed for successful plant growth, and the hilly terrain and heavy rainfall combine to expose fields to erosion and thus further nutrient losses.

Working together to meet these challenges, Nicanor and Julia have established their farm as a model of sustainable production within their community. On their 30-ha plot along the banks of the San Alejandro river, they manage about 4 ha of cocoa in association with a range of other tree species. They also have 12 ha of food crops (rice and plantains) and a small home garden planted with citrus and other fruit trees; the remaining 14 ha are secondary forest.

Nicanor and Julia are leaders of their local cocoa producers' association, which consists of approximately 5,000 producers in the Aguaytia watershed. Other farmers frequently visit their plot to learn from the couple. Like the majority of producers in the association, they derive most of their income from the sale of cocoa to a nearby cooperative for export. The cooperative currently exports the cocoa beans, but is taking steps to establish a cocoa-butter processing plant that will enable growers to receive a higher price for their product.

Nicanor and Julia have always managed their cocoa in association with the tree crop 'guaba'

"At first, it was difficult to clear the fields without burning. It took more effort, and when we harvested our first crop, our yields were lower than before. But now I see my yields improving with each harvest, as the branches and leaves left behind fertilise the land."

— NICANOR PINEDO

J Lewis



(*Inga edulis*). However, local demand for the wood and fruit derived from this species is limited. In collaboration with ASB scientists, the couple started planting a variety of other trees in association with their cocoa. Their most successful combination is cocoa with the medicinal plant 'sangre de grado' or dragon's blood (*Croton lechleri*), the timber species 'capirona' (*Calycophyllum spruceanum*) and 'pijuayo' or peach palm (*Bactris gasipaes*). The medicinal latex derived from sangre de grado is well-known and in high demand both locally and in the Amazon as a whole. International demand for the product is also on the rise, and a local group in Aguaytia is organising its sale to the USA and Germany. Local demand for capirona timber and for peach palm fruit, valued for its high beta-carotene content, is also high.

Nicanor and Julia dream of covering their entire plot with cocoa, and planting this shade-tolerant tree crop in their secondary forest as well. Their elder daughter Yelitsa, who is attending school back in Huanuco, wants to study agronomy at university in order to help her parents achieve this goal. Unlike so many other children of small-scale farmers from this challenging region, she does not want to escape from rural life. On the contrary, she sees a bright future in the land.

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