

3. Characterization of family farmer's properties in the Brazilian semi-Arid

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The Brazilian northeast, occupied mostly by the semi-arid climate and the Caatinga ecosystem, has suffering an environmental and social degradation caused mainly by the non-sustainable use of the natural resources. This degradation has been gradually compromising the condition of this ecosystem, decreasing the economical and technical support of the family property. To improve the progress in this region, it's important to develop economical and social structures to enhance living conditions for its population and for that, the sustainable agricultural practices has an important role. To propose some alternatives of management systems; the Brazilian Agricultural Research Corporation (Embrapa-Goats) and partners did a characterization of communities who lives in the Brazilian semi-arid. Those communities were called "Fundo de Pasto", which explore collective areas without environmental knowledge. Questionnaires on 45 properties were applied (rural families) in the period of December 2005 to January 2006. The land that has been occupied for 37.9 years on average has the size ranging from 4 to 1,844 hectare. Electricity was found in 26.7% of the properties and the presence of woman was significant in all families. The income was obtained mainly from farming activities. More than half of the farmers used fire to prepare the land to crop. Chemical fertilizers were not used but, organic fertilizers and pesticides were used by less than a third of the producers. Corn and bean were harvest together as the main crop. Livestock was found in 75.5% of the properties including goats, sheep, cattle, hogs and poultry. Only 4.4% of farmers produce forage to feed their animals and 88.9% had no technical knowledge to storage feed. In all properties the livestock was vaccinated and received anti-helminthics as the main sanitary control. The indigenous Caatinga was found in only 25 properties, showing destruction of the native environment.