



## SHADES OF GREEN (I)

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**Evaristo De Miranda**

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#### PRESERVED AREAS IN BRAZIL

#### A PRESERVATIONIST TYPE OF AGRICULTURE

In absolute numbers, agriculturists as a whole have destined 177 million hectares for the preservation of native vegetation and biodiversity. The extent is unequalled, regardless of the unit of measure: 177 km<sup>2</sup> or 437 million acres.

And it is also impressive percentagewise: on average, Brazilian agriculturists use only half the total area of their rural properties for crops, pasturage and planted forests. The other half – by legal obligation, by tradition or “for goodness’ sake” – is set aside for the preservation of native vegetation and biodiversity.

What other country in the world requires a contribution of this magnitude (48% of the real estate area) from its rural producers? What other country devotes so much of its territory (20.5%) to the preservation of native vegetation on rural properties?

There is no country that comes even close to the legal requirements for preservation in private areas as does Brazil. There is no professional category that preserves the environment and dedicates so much of its private resources, its assets and time to this, as the agriculturists and ranchers of Brazil.

There is no institution, department, federal or state agency, private company or non-governmental organization in Brazil that has set aside as many areas for the preservation and protection of native vegetation as Brazilian rural producers have: 20.5% of the country, compared to 13% of all full protection preservation areas combined.

#### BEYOND THE NUMBERS: THE CHALLENGE OF MANAGING PRESERVED AREAS

The state and nature of the flora and vegetation preserved on rural properties are highly varied due to the biomes and their history of occupation, use and/or recomposition. Some remnants present reconstitutive plant dynamic processes, with or without producer intervention. Others express situations of metastable ecological balance in the territorial context in which they are inserted.

Preventing the regression or degradation of native vegetation on rural properties, when caused by natural phenomena (drought, flood, fire, presence of invasive species etc) is already a major technical and financial challenge for rural producers. This challenge is compounded by anthropic threats, often resulting from illegal activities by individuals outside the agricultural property (collection of plants, removal of products from forests, hunting, illegal burning, squatting, improper use of areas etc)

The management of areas set aside for the preservation of native vegetation calls for long-term planning and enormous financial investment. And it needs a set of rules and management procedures that have not yet been defined or legally authorized. For example, nowadays it is forbidden to interfere with Permanent Preservation Areas, even when the vegetation is prevented from growing (by plants as jitiranas or birdgrass); is choked by invasive exotic species (e.g. African grasses), or destroyed by animals (unmanaged populations of exotic species such as wild boars, or native species such as capybaras, for example).

Worse: if a fire – accidental or criminal – hits these areas, agriculturists are fined and held liable for it.

Their “strict liability” is evoked! Producers are required to maintain firebreaks and areas that isolate and protect these sites. If domestic animals – even if they belong to a neighbor – graze in the area, the producer can also be fined. They are obliged, among other measures, to maintain fences, install drinking fountains for the cattle far from natural bodies of water. Stealing wood and other products are also imputed to producers. They are required to keep an eye out on the areas and to assign personnel to do so. In some places, even armed surveillance is required. Some form of compensation ought to be considered. How much taxpayers’ money does the Government spend per hectare to maintain vegetation in protected areas? Some of these resources should be earmarked for the same tasks carried out by agriculturists, rather than burdening them with even more with fines.

How will these areas for the preservation of native vegetation and biodiversity in rural properties, covering almost 177 million hectares, fully fulfill their role in rural sustainability? It is not enough to abandon them to disuse. They must be managed appropriately and with sufficient financial resources.

At the outset, the priorities would be to make management technologies available and to guarantee means (legal and financial) for producers to appropriately manage this enormous heritage destined for the preservation of native vegetation and biodiversity for the common good. In the future, forms for the sustainable use of these territorial units will have to be promoted and authorized in the context of the different biomes.

It is up to urban society and the heralds of the environmental preservation, both here and abroad, to implement an effective means for recognizing this immense contribution by rural producers. They need to be compensated financially for their unparalleled environmental efforts. International organizations, concerned with environmental conservation in Brazil, could also provide resources for rural producers to take care of this enormous environmental patrimony. And create programs and initiatives for it. It is time. It is fair.

#### **ENVIRONMENTAL AND ECONOMIC DIMENSION OF PRESERVED AREAS**

The economic valuation of land assets immobilized by agriculturists in areas set aside for environmental preservation, the annual cost of maintaining the integrity of these areas, and payment for environmental services are three relevant themes associated with managing areas of preserved vegetation.

Embrapa Territorial has a database containing the market values of land in each Brazilian municipality. This value can vary greatly within the same locality, depending on the productive potential of the land, the existing infrastructure etc. An initial estimate of the land assets set aside by agriculturists was done. In each municipality, the areas destined for the preservation of native vegetation on rural properties were multiplied by average land values. Such work will be perfected in the future. However, this initial assessment indicated that the total amount of land set aside represents an amount on the order of R\$ 3.5 trillion or US\$ 1 trillion!

The payment for environmental services, launched at Rio 92, the World Conference on the Environment, never actually took hold, except for some spotty and limited-reach experiences. Such epiphenomena serve to exemplify its unfeasibility. They entail payments of insignificant amounts to small agriculturists, based on hectares preserved by one or another of the more than 5,000 existing municipalities. One cannot guarantee or pay a fair price even for the production of milk, corn or beans, let alone immeasurable environmental services...

The enormous effort to preserve native vegetation and biodiversity on rural properties benefits the entire nation. The cost of setting aside and maintaining these areas lies only with the producer, with no cost-sharing by society, especially urban consumers.

Citizens are willing to protest for the environment in rural areas, but they do not even think about paying for it. Producers expect fair recognition from them, with less demonization of their activities and more knowledge of their realities, their challenges and their contribution to the environment[1].

International organizations and programs aimed at preserving biodiversity could also create campaigns and raise funds to contribute to Brazilian agriculturists, or to obtain special conditions and priorities for Brazilian agricultural exports, especially for small and medium-sized agriculturists, who bear a heavy burden due to environmental preservation on their rural properties.

These and other aspects of the economic dimension and environmental services rendered provided by rural producers will be the subject of further studies. There are already initiatives in the executive and legislative branches of the government to remedy the enormous asymmetry and injustice befalling rural producers regarding this topic as they face the demands placed on them by urban society.

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[1] ([https://panamazonsynodwatch.info/?p=1381&elementor-preview=1381&ver=1564821137#\\_ftnref1](https://panamazonsynodwatch.info/?p=1381&elementor-preview=1381&ver=1564821137#_ftnref1)) *MAGGI, Blairo. Agricultura garante a preservação ambiental. Estadão, Opinião, 21/10/2017. Available at: <[http://opinioao.estadao.com.br/noticias/geral, agricultura-garante-a-preservacao-ambiental, 70002054735](http://opinioao.estadao.com.br/noticias/geral,agricultura-garante-a-preservacao-ambiental,70002054735)>. Access in Oct. 2017.*



## Evaristo de Miranda

Is an agronomist and has a master's degree and a doctorate in ecology from the University of Montpellier (France). He is the author of 40 books and of hundreds of works published in Brazil and abroad. As a researcher at Embrapa (Brazilian Agricultural Research Corporation), he has already implemented and directed three national research centers. He is currently the General Manager of Embrapa Territorial.

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