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Youth in Colombia in view of generational transfer and income generation in the forage-based livestock sector – Activity Report

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Justification

Alquería, a major dairy company in Colombia, leads one of the most important rural education initiatives in the country, aimed specifically at the livestock sector (dairy farmers), their families, and new generations of young milk producers: Heirs of Tradition. After years of pilot training programs, field days, and technical training sessions, the company identified low schooling rates in milk producing areas as a key element hindering productivity, product quality, and overall continuity of new generations in the livestock industry (Triana & Ariza, 2019). The objective of Heirs of Tradition, a project operating since 2012 to the present, is that young generations of milk farmers from different, even conflict-affected regions of Colombia can be effectively trained in livestock practices at no cost, thus enhancing their knowledge and skills on subjects such as soil management, animal care, and environmental sustainability.

Through Heirs of Tradition, Alquería (in conjunction with Colombia's National Learning Service, SENA) offers a complete solid technical formation open to students from all parts of the country (yet still prioritizing sons and daughters from suppliers). The program has a total duration of two years, awarding its participants with the degree of Livestock Production Technologist. During the first eighteen months, the trainees study at the SENA educational centers in Cundinamarca or Meta (Pacho, Mosquera and Villavicencio respectively). The last six months are devoted to practical on-the-job experience (students receive a stipend paid by the company) in which they implement, on a given farm, a model of diagnostic, planning and monitoring stages) applying what they have learned at the training centers to improve sustainability and productivity (Triana & Ariza 2019; Triana et al., 2020).

The Alliance of Bioversity International and CIAT (CCAFS) achieved in 2019 a powerful collaboration with Alquería's Heirs of Tradition within the framework of the "Agricultural innovation for the development of low-emissions cattle value chains in Latin America"



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project. The initiative interests CIAT-CCAFS as it serves as a platform for disseminating knowledge on environment, productivity, and socioeconomics as well as for its strength in capacity building.

The alliance was established in the spirit of offering students training on the identification, selection, management, and utilization of medium and low tropical forage germplasm, soil management, and forage conservation practices during critical times, enabling them (and their families) with more adequate responses to the challenges posed by climate change. Additionally, students training sessions also featured the use of the Tropical Forages web-based tool (formerly SoFT, www.tropicalforages.info) and socioeconomic components including workshops on value chain analysis and gender inclusion that facilitate the understanding of the contexts in which productive activity takes place, the bottlenecks, and the opportunities of the Colombian livestock and dairy industry.



Training session in Pacho (Cundinamarca), Colombia. Photo: JL Urrea (CIAT)

Due to the COVID-19 pandemic and the restrictions imposed in national travel and operations in Colombia, the first edition of these collaborative training sessions took place during the first semester of 2021, remotely, and counted with the participation of Tropical Forages Program scientists and research associates and Heirs of Tradition students temporally located in milk collection centers that could guarantee a proper access to connectivity to all participants.



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A total of 4 online training sessions were performed, which counted with the participation of 50 people on average, including students and technical workers at Alquería's Livestock Development Center.

Summary of Activities

<i>Title of the training session</i>	Date
<i>Sustainable livestock production and the use of improved forages. This session also included a socio-economic component with the aim of contextualizing the financial importance of using and adopting improved forages.</i>	March 26, 2021
<i>Management and importance of proper seed selection processes in livestock production with the Tropical Forages tool</i>	April 9, 2021
<i>Value chain analysis and the politics of livestock production in Colombia</i>	April 23, 2021
<i>Gender gaps and gender blindness in the livestock sector. The session featured practical examples from other Latin American regions in an attempt to underscore the productive importance of gender parity in agriculture at large.</i>	May 7, 2021

Contribution

A parallel (and previous) research work on the historical impact of Heirs of Tradition conducted by the socio-economic component of the Tropical Forages program determined that low schooling rates and scarce opportunities of accessing formal education in rural Colombia are detrimental for younger generation's continuity in the livestock industry ((Triana & Ariza 2019; Triana et al., 2020).). The evaluation, which featured qualitative work with current and former students of the program was decisive in underscoring the technical and scientific areas where students could and should receive more training and improve their capacities, empowering them with proper knowledge and tools to tackle generational transfer, visualize new opportunities of income generation and impact their communities with environmentally-smart, scientifically oriented decisions over farm productivity.

Subjects such as soil management, seed selection processes and socio-economic areas of expertise such as value-chain analysis and gendered perspectives on the challenges of the industry were proposed both by the Alliance personnel and Alquería's students and technicians, in an effort to strengthen the existing curriculum.



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Despite the remote nature of training sessions, students were guaranteed proper access to connectivity and participated voluntarily (and enthusiastically). Both Alquería and the Alliance-CIAT and CCAFS recognize that this joint effort to empower youth as agents of change in the face of climate critical junctures is vital in rural development. Through direct contact with students and trainers, these sessions assessed the importance of enhancing and promoting the access to technical and scientific knowledge as a solid attempt to tackle the dangers of generational transfer while also planting the seed to the generation of new income models for milk producers.

References

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