Overview: Healthy Agricultural Systems in Latin America

Latin America is one of the world’s most biodiverse regions, hosting 40% of Earth’s species, a quarter of its forests, and a third of its freshwater. These exceptionally rich natural assets have enabled Latin America to become a global breadbasket, with the world’s largest net food exports, and more than a quarter of the world’s medium to high potential farmland, feeding populations from Brasilia to Beijing.

This has come at a cost: Current agricultural and ranching practices—among the leading causes of biodiversity loss in Latin America—consume 70% of freshwater resources and cause 70% of the region’s habitat conversion. Almost half of Latin America’s total land area has some level of degradation, and deforestation is now three times the global rate, making agriculture the leading contributor to Latin America’s greenhouse gas emissions. Conventional agricultural practices, in the quest for expansion and high yield, have damaged the natural capital upon which the region’s agricultural success depends, jeopardizing its outstanding potential to continue contributing to global food production.
Healthy Agricultural Systems (HAS)

The Nature Conservancy (TNC) in Latin America is demonstrating that agriculture can lead the way in transforming the market dynamics that deplete the natural capital we all depend on for food and health. Spearheaded by TNC, the Healthy Agricultural Systems (HAS) approach brings together governments, corporations and producers to implement science-based practices, methods and policies that drive forest restoration and the protection of environmental resources and services at a broad scale. The resulting soil regeneration and enrichment, recovery of native vegetation cover, increased carbon storage, conservation of biodiversity and habitats and improved watershed protection, generate agricultural systems that are environmentally resilient and thus, more productive. The HAS approach goes right to the very core of the agriculture business by emphasizing the need to boost long-term, sustainable productivity and profitability at the farm level and up the value chain.

Working together with key partners, producers, scientific experts, the private sector and policy makers, TNC is pursuing four synergistic interventions to leverage systemic change:

- **Transform agricultural sector norms** to standardize production practices that recognize the importance of natural capital
- **Develop and institutionalize business models** that incorporate the value of ecosystem services
- **Develop and/or strengthen compliance with environmental laws** and regulations
- **Support market transformation** to value the future productivity of the land, not just today’s yield

Sustainable and scalable solutions

HAS interventions are developed on a multi-stakeholder, multi-sector, systems-change platform designed to generate tangible results at transformational scale, based on these key principles:

- **Design for scale**: Move from local successes to broader regional systems change

- **Avoid unintended consequences**: Maintain focus on long-term wins, not just quick fixes

- **Correct feedback loops**: Keep yesterday’s solutions from becoming tomorrow’s problems

- **Take a multi-faceted approach**: Focus on drivers to accelerate solutions

With HAS, we can create win-win scenarios for nature, agriculture and communities:

**Win for Nature**
- Ecological systems and processes are conserved and restored across the region.
- Biodiversity is recovered and protected in agricultural landscapes.

**Win for Agriculture**
- Yields increase with fewer inputs, generating healthier soils, using less water and benefiting ecosystem services. Producers weather shocks from climate change and market fluctuations.
- Agribusiness transitions from purveyors of products to providers of services with environmental and social co-benefits.

**Win for Communities**
- Rural communities improve livelihoods with cleaner water, steady income, resilient production systems and better market access.

By mainstreaming HAS practices across the agricultural and ranching system, Latin America can lead the next generation of agriculture by increasing production through lands conservation.

**Why The Nature Conservancy**

As a leading global conservation organization with a mission to protect the lands and waters on which all life depends, The Nature Conservancy has a critical role to play in creating a world where people and nature thrive. We are mobilizing decades of experience and science to advance conservation for the planet, transforming the way people think about nature and reinventing ways to protect it. Our strength lies in our 4,000 scientists and conservationists, more than a million members and voluntary leaders, wide-ranging partnerships, a strong financial base, and an unparalleled deal expertise.