

Social and Environmental Aspects of Tobacco Production in the Region of Santa Cruz do Sul/RS/Brasil

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Abstract

This text presents results of the research entitled Tobacco Growing and Ecosystems Effects, realized from August 1999 to December 2001. Under the coordination of the University of Santa Cruz do Sul — UNISC, an interdisciplinary and interinstitutional team was formed involving the University of Campinas — UNICAMP and the Federal University of Rio de Janeiro.

The study area comprehends the Pardino River watershed, an important tributary of the Pardo River. This basin is located in the municipalities of Gramado Xavier, Sinimbu and Santa Cruz do Sul, located in the middle of Rio Grande do Sul State.

Brazil is the largest tobacco producer in Latin America and one of the most important worldwide ranking third in world tobacco production. The main tobacco-growing region is located in the region of Santa Cruz do Sul (state of Rio Grande do Sul) and is based upon family cropping units. Tobacco is labor and pesticide intensive crop, involving all members of the family. Severe ecosystem health menaces are present, due to contamination of the environment by pesticides and an important decrease of the remaining native forests, as wood is used during the process of tobacco growing.

The general objective of the research was to evaluate the impacts on the ecosystem and human health caused by tobacco cultivation in the region of Santa Cruz do Sul and to generate new knowledge that may contribute to foster the use and dissemination of alternative practices based on sustainable environmental community management.

To achieve such objectives, an option was made in order to make a systemic interpretation of the problem as a starting point. Then the analysis of the reality of the tobacco growing area of Santa Cruz do Sul, looking for an integrate diagnosis to serve as a base for the proposal of concrete actions and politic alternatives which can drive a better future for the researched population.

Keywords: Environment, human health, tobacco production