

Oil Palm Restores Degraded Jungle Areas and Opens Market Opportunities for the People of Ucayali

Oil palm cultivation restores degraded forests in Ucayali, replacing illicit crops and creating income and long-term opportunities for communities.

PUCALLPA, UCAYALI, PERU, May 13, 2025 /EINPresswire.com/ -- Today, talking about the development of the jungle is also talking about oil palm. Where once there were coca leaves or indiscriminate logging, today there are plantations that can reach up to 15 meters in height, where new microecosystems are being created to turn



The Aguaytía River flooded the Shambo Porvenir community.

green a region that the State has been responsible for relegating and obscuring.

Peru21 traveled a few weeks ago to the Ucayali region to learn about the coexistence of oil palm

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This kind of collaboration between communities and private companies sets a new standard for forest protection and sustainable development."

Michael Spoor, CEO of Ocho

Sur

and the native communities that have seen this crop as an opportunity to integrate into the local entrepreneurial economy.

Ucayali is an Amazonian territory rich in biodiversity. With approximately 10.5 million hectares, the area is home to extensive forests, a great variety of native species, and ecosystems ranging from flooded forests to dense jungle areas.

However, in previous years, Ucayali was the epicenter of

deforestation. A plague of illicit crops and the uncontrolled expansion of the agricultural frontier left the region to its fate. Coca leaf from drug trafficking played a crucial role in the dynamics of deforestation. These illegal crops were established in areas that were difficult to control and highly remote, where state presence was minimal.

According to reports from the Regional Government of Ucayali, the incidence of illicit crops accounted for more than half of the cause of forest loss in certain periods. Deforestation linked to coca not only involved the direct removal of the forest canopy but also facilitated access for other illegal activities, deteriorating the integrity of ecological corridors.

Today, the expansion of oil palm cultivation in Ucayali largely takes place on the lands of former coca plantations and has become a significant source of income and employment for many communities. Opponents, generally environmental NGOs, accuse it of being a predatory monoculture. But what is truly more predatory: poverty and the ongoing neglect by the State of Amazonian communities or a plant that can produce continuously for up to forty years?

FORGOTTEN AND OPPORTUNITIES

In early March, the Aguaytía River had overflowed its banks. Peru21 received an alert from the Shambo Porvenir native community. Reaching its streets was quite a journey. The river had submerged the only rural road, and the only option was to travel by boat. We embarked on the waters of the

GREEN CANOPY. Where coca fields once stood. efforts are now underway to sustainably reforest the jungle, including through oil palm cultivation.



Aguaytía, and along the way, the oil palm plants also endured the onslaught of the rains. Everything else had been lost: no corn, no rice, no papaya, only palm.

According to a report by Junpalma Peru, the National Oil Palm Board, this ability to withstand periods of flooding is a distinctive trait that stems from a series of evolutionary adaptations developed over centuries in tropical environments. One of the keys to its resilience is its fibrous and extensive root system. Unlike crops that rely on a single taproot, the oil palm deploys an extensive network of fine roots that extend into the topsoil. This network facilitates rapid drainage of excess water, preventing the soil from becoming saturated and allowing the plant to maintain its stability', says Junpalma in several studies.

Shambo Porvenir was flooded. The community had lost all its crops, and the only hope for generating an income was palm.

"We are looking to work with oil palm. We have 80 hectares; with rains and floods we have lost 70 % of the plantation. Corn and rice are single season crops. With oil palm, we harvest every two weeks and the income is higher" says Bruno Tangoa, former Head of the Shambo Porvenir community and current President of the Agroforestry Association.

A few kilometers away, the community members can bring their palm crops. Ocho Sur has set up a collection center in the town of Amaquella. The rules are clear from the entrance. You can see the prices in dollars per ton and the palm growers, from the first moment of the process, know that they will receive US\$188 per ton of loose fruit.

In addition, Ocho Sur has emphasized the traceability of the crop, as the Peruvian rainforest cannot afford even one less primary tree to continue in its ongoing expansion of the agricultural frontier without control. Therefore, the company signed two agreements with the native communities of Shambo Porvenir and Santa Clara de Uchunya to protect more than 2,000 hectares of primary forest for 25 years. The agreements entail providing economic incentives for forest monitoring and promoting sustainable activities such as ecotourism and reforestation. "This type of agreement and collaboration between communities and private companies is a milestone. We are at the forefront, creating a new model that protects forests and improves people's quality of life," says Michael Spoor, CEO of Ocho Sur.

From Lima, environmental NGOs tell the natives of Ucayali to plant coffee, corn, and papaya to survive. But from the comfort of an office in the capital, without feeling the harshness of the jungle under feet and hands, it is easy to theorize about the problems of the Amazon. Now, we ask again: Are environmentalist political speeches worth more, or are the communities that have already taken the initiative to approach and be part of a sustainable development model over time?

DID YOU KNOW?

- Palm oil harvesting and extraction in Ucayali follow strict protocols and are environmentally responsible.
- A single hectare of cultivated oil palm can produce up to 25 tons of fruit per year.
- The native community of Shambo Porvenir currently cultivates 80 hectares of oil palm.

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