

# INGA ALLEY CROPPING - A SUSTAINABLE ALTERNATIVE TO SLASH AND BURN AGRICULTURE

Mike Hands

GRAND PRIZE WINNER

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## INNOVATION

Inga Alley Cropping is a promising alternative to slash and burn agriculture developed by Mike Hands, the Director of Inga Foundation, based on the insights gained through over a decade of research into slash and burn farming in partnership with the University of Cambridge.

This cropping enables maintaining soil fertility and good harvests year after year, thereby breaking the cycle of slash and burn and allowing families to gain long term food security on one piece of land.

### MIKE HANDS



Inga Foundation Founder and Director Mike Hands has been working to halt the destruction of the rainforest for over 20 years. An experienced tropical ecologist and scientific researcher, Mike divides his time between his farm

in Cornwall, UK, and the Inga Foundation's chief project, the Land for Life Project in Honduras.

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## DESCRIPTION

Once the alleys of Inga trees have developed, they are pruned at chest height. At this stage, they have dominated the site and shaded out the weeds. The branches are stripped of leaves and used as mulch, thus protecting the soil and preventing further weed growth. The crop is then planted through the mulch into the pruned alleys. No herbicides or pesticides are used. The pruned Inga trees recover and regrow, providing the crop with some shade and protection from the sun.



Chili tabasco growing between pruned Inga tree alleys

Once the crop is harvested, the Inga is then left to grow until the next planting season arrives, by which time they have fully recovered and the whole cycle is ready to be repeated, starting with pruning the Inga alleys once again.

## RELEVANCE

This system delivers huge benefits through ensuring a reliable harvest year after year from the same plot of land with minimal labor. By recreating the conditions naturally found on the forest floor, Inga out-competes the aggressive invasive grasses which normally dominate the farmers' plots. This biological weed control is hugely important, as without it securing a harvest can require a huge amount of labor in terms of weeding per year. In fact, it is often the combination of the takeover by weeds, as well as the loss of fertility, that forces farmers to abandon their plots and clear new areas of forest.



Growing black pepper, plantains and curcuma

Larger branches are used as firewood, allowing families to obtain all the wood they need for cooking from the Inga plots and thereby tackling another important cause of deforestation.

The farmers are now successfully growing perennial crops like plantains, curcuma, black pepper in the Inga allee farmlands.