



Update, Dec 2013: Ethiopia adopts Australian Acacia as a multipurpose agroforestry tree.

The Tigray Agricultural Research Institute (TARI) is finalising a research project, conducted in partnership with World Vision, entitled: 'Acacia species for Food Security and Environmental Rehabilitation Project.' Some 11 resulting research papers are now being finalised. TARI has called an international acacia conference to present the full findings on 7-8th of March 2014 in Mekele.

The project, which commenced in 2009, is conducted across 3 districts in Tigray, Northern Ethiopia with a target population of 19,500 people in farming communities. This project has wide support and involvement from Ethiopian NGOs and Government.

The acacia species *A. saligna* has been planted for over thirty years in Tigray and represents a major underutilised resource. The trees cover tens of thousands of hectares, mainly on otherwise non-arable hillsides in-between farmland.

The project involved training over 150 farmers to introduce acacia practices into farms and neighbouring acacia plantations. 12 researchers assessed the results. Awareness raising activities, such as demonstrations and field days, spread knowledge of the successful acacia practices to the extended target population, including over 30 relevant organisations and the media.

Farmer Research Groups are actively engaged in TARI's research process. The effectiveness of this collaboration delivers quality, meaningful research with high likelihood of uptake. Farmers willingly plant and protect *A. saligna* in their grain fields, provide input into research directions, anticipate updates and are first hand observers of the results.

Major outcomes of the project include:

Proven importance of *A. Saligna* as fodder for livestock: The nutritional value of *A. Saligna* leaves is now known and the leaf preparation drying process established. Following training of 114 farmers, *A. saligna* leaves have been successfully introduced as fodder for 228 sheep and is now being promoted for fattening small ruminants. Introduction of fodder for dairy cows has commenced to increase milk production and thus available nutrition for families.

Proven importance as fodder for honey production:

A. Saligna flowers twice during the critical dryland season, therefore pollen is available for bee fodder when indigenous pollen is scarce. The quality and colour of Tigray honey is unaffected.

Important contribution to environmental rehabilitation and livelihoods:

Training in pruning and management of existing *A.Saligna* plantations has been found to address problems of poor household communities by reducing the workload and distance of women and children who travel in search of fire wood and animal fodder.

Selection of optimal multipurpose agroforestry tree:

Provenance trials of some 50 sub species of lowland edible acacia for selection and use in dryland farming systems are underway at the TARI compound. High growth of up to 3m per year has been demonstrated. Adaptable sub species will be selected for environmental rehabilitation, wood production and fulfilment of human and animal protein demand over a 3-year period.

Note that trials of acacia seeds for human food are still underway.

