

Terrafina Ag Resource Group Notes

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Weeds and the abundant Life

WEEDS AND THE ABUNDANT LIFE

“The thief does not come except to steal, and to kill, and to destroy. I have come that they may have life, and that they may have it more abundantly.”
(John 10:10 NKJV)

As we look at Christ's statement of His purpose in coming to us, how does this practically impact our worldview and how we interact with God's creation surrounding us?

Weeds of course are one of the top factors of concern for farmers among the issues they face in their work. But our interaction with weeds is based on our perspective. Do we fight them to the death for the survival of our one target crop species? Or do we study them and look for ways to harness their full potential?

A popular definition of a weed is any plant that is not valued where it is growing, especially one that tends to choke out more desirable plants. I find this common definition interesting, mostly because it subjects the value of a piece of creation to man's purposes, rather than the design of a good God.

Could this definition also be true – a plant that thrives where it is created to grow, even when target crops may not? This would give us a different perspective, wouldn't it? The first definition requires control and domination. But the latter requires curiosity, observation, and investigation. Our viewpoint changes the way we interact. Something that is detrimental without question is treated much differently than if it is viewed as something that may have a purpose and benefit yet to be discovered.

I am continually amazed to learn more about the aspects of some species of plants that I would have previously viewed as a curse. Many have one or more benefits that are simply neglected and could be used towards abundant life and health. Superior nutrition, benefits to surrounding or succeeding plants, and benefits to soil life are factors that often are not taken into consideration when labeling a plant as a “weed”.



Farmers learning about using mucuna as a cover crop in northern Ghana.

How can we harness the resilience and potential of species that are not our target crop? Do we operate from a worldview that understands that God had purpose designed into the way he has created plants to function, or do we operate from a view point that limits God's creation to what the short-term purposes of man may be?

Diversity is valued in regenerative agriculture and many species of plants that are conventionally not valued, or even viewed as “weeds”, are used in beneficial applications, resulting in increased soil

organic matter, increased plant available nitrogen, added nutrition in pasture, and more. “Weeds” can help us move towards abundant life as Christ came to show us. He has created purpose in everything. Our job as Christian farmers is to seek out what it is.



Terminating mucuna with a locally made crimper in northern Ghana.

For example, the legume *mucuna pruriens* (commonly known as velvet bean) has been adapted as a beneficial cover crop in areas of central and south America as well as many parts of West Africa. Interestingly, mucuna thrives as a native plant in areas of West Africa where its cultivation as a cover crop is being recognized as a beneficial practice in recent decades. It is not uncommon to find mucuna vine sprawling out in the bush outside of farmland or even over land in fallow. The native varieties often have extremely itchy hairs on the seed pods that, of course, come across as offensive, and therefore are viewed as “weeds”. But there are other non-irritating varieties that farmers are now using as a relay or cover crop, which are proving to be beneficial in both nitrogen fixation as well as cover for target food crops such as maize.

In regions of northern Ghana, rain patterns allow for early planting of drought resistant crops such as peanuts and beans. Corn planting normally follows months later when rain patterns increase enough to sustain the higher water needs of corn growth. In this context, it proves ideal to plant mucuna as a relay crop in areas where corn will be planted. Mucuna quickly covers the ground with vigorous vines and smothers less desirable plants in preparation for the target crop of corn. Once the time comes to plant corn, the mucuna can be terminated by crimping or slashing and the corn is planted through the thick, nutrient rich leaf mulch. While the leguminous leaves do decompose quickly, the corn can benefit from very little competition of other plants much longer than compared with planting into bare soil. In addition, the corn growth is boosted with nitrogen fixed from the recent growing mucuna. Farmers benefit from reduced fertilizer dependency as well as reduced weeding of their target crop. This is a prime example of God's provision through the attributes of a weed and His design for plant diversity.

-Nate Gray

We love to network with people interested in Christian agricultural development. If you would like to connect with us, email us at info@terrafinas.org.