

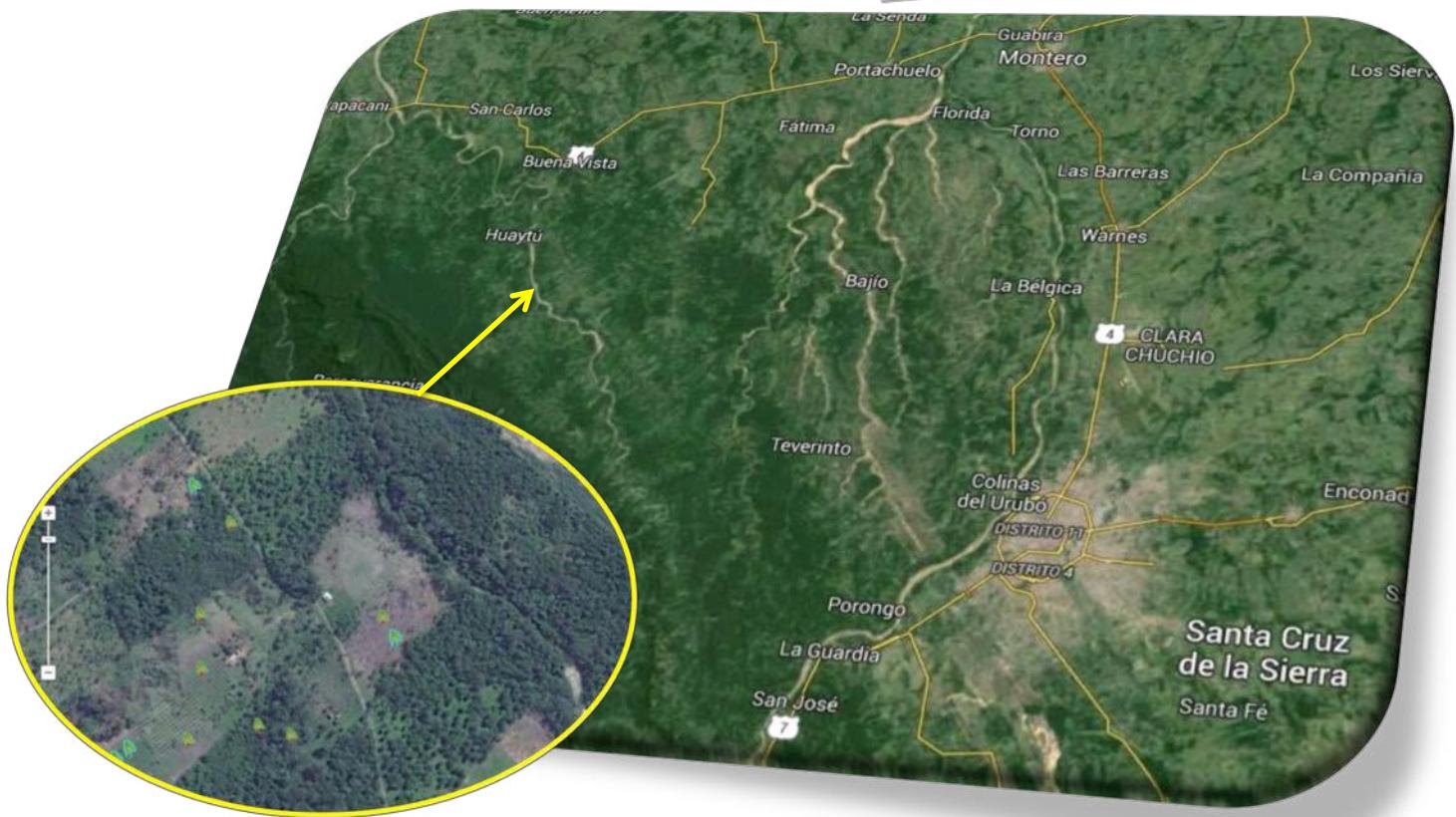
Farmer Stories - Elias Mamani & Florencia Rodriguez



Elias Mamani and Florencia Rodriguez live with their 6 children in a small settler commune called La Envidia – or “Envy” in English - presumably because of its location on the southern bank of the Surutu river, which means it is technically within the beautiful Amboro National Park. However, the simple wooden huts, the lack of electricity or a bridge across the river, let alone a tarmac road, may not stir too much envy among visitors from the developed world.

Elias came here from Potosi with his elder brother when he was 11. When his brother married he wanted to buy a property and to marry himself. Elias and Florencia had to work very hard for 10 years cultivating corn, rice, peanuts to get enough money to buy their land.

There have been good and bad times with illness causing problems but with the two eldest children working they now have 70 hectares. They have been working with ArBolivia for 2 years, having been contacted by German, the project's liaison officer.





Elias originally thought about growing teak (see page 4) but following discussions with his technical adviser he started out in 2013 with 350 tejeyeque trees, a leguminous native species that can help improve the poor, sandy soil.

He was also given 80 citrus trees to help him earn an extra income until his trees mature. The following year they have planted another 1300 trees in two plots (900 and 400) as well as another 80 citrus trees (mandarina incor).



Although the payments for maintaining their trees are only modest, Elias and Florencia appreciate the additional income now that there is an extra mouth to feed. The trees are really for the children's future. As the mother of six children, Florencia in particular has many different household roles to play but the children too are all expected to contribute as they can. Unlike cash crops which need daily attention, tree maintenance is much less labour intensive and can be fitted in around other chores.

However, what they appreciate most is the comprehensive ongoing practical support they receive from their technical adviser.

They have already learnt about intercropping and complementary planting. For example, they are now growing both coffee and maize between their mandarin trees (left).



Like most settlers from the altiplano, Elias and Florencia used to grow rice as their staple crop but rice depleted the already poor soil even more, so that either they were forced to spend money on expensive and harmful chemical fertilizers or abandon the plot altogether and clear more forest.

Now they are growing cassava, which is more nutritious and less harmful to the soil. They are also growing their cassava between rows of tejeyeque trees, which also help to improve the soil by fixing nitrogen and the roots help to protect the sandy soil from erosion both from wind during the dry season and from flooding during the wet season.





One company from Santa Cruz has started buying up the more accessible land along the dirt road from Buena Vista and has been planting teak in the conventional way – but without much success. This is their second attempt , which also appears to be failing. The company has also been trying to persuade local farmers to grow teak on their own land as well but it does not offer farmers the ongoing technical advice and support they need to make their efforts successful in the long term.

Below: The view south from the dirt road from Buena Vista towards the Surutu river, La Envidia and Amboro National Park. Larger land owners tend to buy the better land for cattle ranching, leaving the poorer settlers the forested, hilly terrain or lowland areas prone to flooding.

La Envidia is actually within the National Park, which makes ArBolivia's role even more sensitive and important – a fact appreciated by Elias and Florencia and many other families.

