

The Subsidy from Nature: Palm Forests, Peasantry and Development on an Amazon Frontier. A.B. Anderson, P.H. May and M.J. Balick. New York: Columbia University Press, 1991. Pp. xxv, 233. no price given. ISBN 0-231-07222-8.

The basic message of this outstanding book appears to be environmental conservation, even though its central theme revolves around the babassú palm and its potentialities for a region of the eastern Amazonia of Brazil which has already suffered from wanton forest destruction to an unbelievable extent.

As Malcolm Gillis states in this preface: "Evidence of the economic, social and ecological costs of tropical deforestation has grown steadily over the past decade, but so has the pace of this destruction. . . . It is not necessary to invoke the specter of global warming . . . to make a compelling case for arresting the present pace of tropical deforestation The authors . . . [propose] an unusually innovative and comprehensive examination of the possibilities for sustained management of tropical forest resources."

This approach goes beyond the high economic and ecological cost to the human race of destruction of environments. They combine the knowledge of their academic and field work in the natural and social sciences to the potentialities of exploitation of the wild stands of this useful palm in the babassú region of the southeastern Amazon of Brazil, especially in the State of Maranhão.

In addition to its highly practical suggestions concerning the value of the extraction of babassú oil in household and in market economy, the authors have considered in depth the natural history of this most promising natural resource.

The book is organized with 7 sections: 1) Nature's Subsidy (in which deforestation,—natural food and babassú as a subsidy from nature are discussed); 2) Regional Setting (of areas where the sundry species of *Orbignia* occur; 3) Natural History of Babassú; 4) Babassú in Household Economy; 5) Babassú in Market Economy; 6) Prospects for Development; 7) Nature's Subsidy Revisited. There follow a number of statistical appendices and explanatory notes on the contents of the six of the seven sections. The bibliographic references numbering 236 easily indicate the breadth and depth of the coverage of the book. A detailed index provides an easy key to the wide-ranging topics treated in the volume.

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