

Abstract:

Tropical fruits offer a magnificent opportunity to increase incomes of the rural poor with the added benefit of providing a healthy, productive and pleasant living environment. At present most government agencies see the local markets for individual tropical fruits as insufficient to justify large investment in their development, and hence direct their research to potential export crops. Within this context the focus of the Tropical Fruits Program is to provide farmers, groups of farmers and diverse development agencies information that broadens the scope of their options to link the rural community to modern markets. It is estimated that there are nearly 2000 species of tropical fruits worldwide, many of which are not cultivated and are only consumed locally. There are opportunities to develop many of these relatively unknown fruits, and since most crop species become economically important away from their centre of origin there appears to be tremendous scope for introducing many of these fruits to regions far from their centre of origin.

The development of a tropical fruit program at CIAT cannot be looked at in isolation. The effort at CIAT will only be a small part of a continuum of activities carried out by partners in many organizations from the public and private sectors. While development of individual crops requires very crop-specific research, there are several overriding problems that are being addressed more generically. The activities of broad based support given by CIAT are directed to three principal areas: Generic research to open new opportunities in a number of crops; defining what crops can be grown where; and establishment of rural agro enterprises. Understanding flowering at the molecular level will prove useful across many species. Likewise, the development of methodologies that determine which crops can best be grown where and techniques for selection and propagation of elite clones will be applicable to many crops.