91. Selection, management and diffusion of Açaí Branco by smallholder farmers in the amazon estuary

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Açaí, the purple fruit of the palm *Euterpe oleracea* Mart. serves an important function in the amazon estuary as both a staple food and a primary source of income amongst smallholder riverine farmers. Açaí branco, an ethnovariety that lacks the purple pigment, is considered sweeter and more easily digestible and is priced higher in the markets of Pará and Amapá. In response to surging global demand for purple açaí, standardized cultivars are under development. However little attention has been given to the selection efforts of its primary producers, smallholders, who play an important role in conserving diverse traits and varieties. Açaí branco provides an opportunity to explore the role of economic and cultural incentives in maintaining agrobiodiversity in a crop entering a phase of industrialization. Objectives: 1) Determine açaí branco production amongst smallholders in three estuarine communities across several seasons. 2) Describe applied silvicultural strategies in the selection of açaí branco. 3) Trace the spatial and temporal diffusion of the variety through informal seed systems. Methods: Forty-two structured interviews, 14 questionnaires and 15 transect walks were conducted between three communities of Amapá and Pará, Brazil. Mapping of açaí branco distribution was conducted with a GPS unit and eight açaí agroforest plots were sampled to determine management intensity. Results: On average, 93.5% of households were producing or planting açaí branco, and production increased from the previous sea-son in all communities. Of the fruit produced, 36% was sold and 64% consumed or gifted despite hi-gher market prices. Propagation and regeneration techniques were more highly specialized in the ca-se of açaí branco. Participation in seed exchange networks varied from 17% to 100% of participants between communities and was correlated with pre-sence of pre-existing açaí branco, and community age. Conclusion: The low proportion of açaí branco being sold demonstrates that risk-averse strategies can be motivated by mo- re than economic incenti-ves alone. As a locally important variety of a globally marketed crop, the case of açaí branco demonstrates the importance of cultural preferences and local knowledge in driving innovations and technology transfers that promote agrobiodiversity through the diffusion and adoption of new crop varieties.