



## CASE STUDY

# Conserving Latin American Lands Through Regenerative Ranching and Agriculture

## Successful Adaptive Teams Adoption Helps Regenerative Ranching and Agriculture Team Focus and Align

Conservation in Latin America — where pasture and cropland already occupy 38% of the land — will take an approach that transforms ranching and farming practices while also supporting the many people who rely on the land for their livelihoods. The Nature Conservancy’s Regenerative Ranching and Agriculture (R2A) team has taken on this complex and momentous task across five countries in Latin America and fully recognizes what’s at stake.

“Ranching is the activity that covers about a third of Latin American lands,” says R2A Director Mauricio Castro Schmitz. “It’s using a lot of land — and badly. It’s degrading soils, it’s degrading pastures, but also converting forest into pasture.”

### TEAM:

Regenerative Ranching and Agriculture (R2A), Latin America

### PROJECT:

Adaptive Teams (Theory of Change workshop, Reflect and Adapt workshop)

**TNC 2030 GOAL:** R2A transition on 12 million hectares across the Latin American Region

*Photo: Through TNC’s Regenerative Ranching and Agriculture (R2A) program, more than 4,000 producers have been able to restore habitats while increasing soil productivity. To date, they have planted 3.5 million trees. [Photo by Juan Arredondo.](#)*

R2A seeks to transform grazing and agricultural practices from degrading the soil to restoring it, creating regenerative landscapes that strengthen climate resilience and productivity. Castro Schmitz says without transforming agricultural and ranching production systems and transitioning to regenerative ones, it will be very difficult to reach TNC's 2030 goals.



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— MAURICIO CASTRO SCHMITZ, R2A DIRECTOR

“Agriculture is the human activity that affects everything we care about in TNC: water, biodiversity, soils, and carbon — both in the soil or above the soil,” Castro Schmitz says. “So all these elements that we care about, that we have programs dedicated to protect, are affected by agriculture and ranching. If we don't take care of how agriculture is being done today and how it's expanding, we won't get to the 2030 goals.”

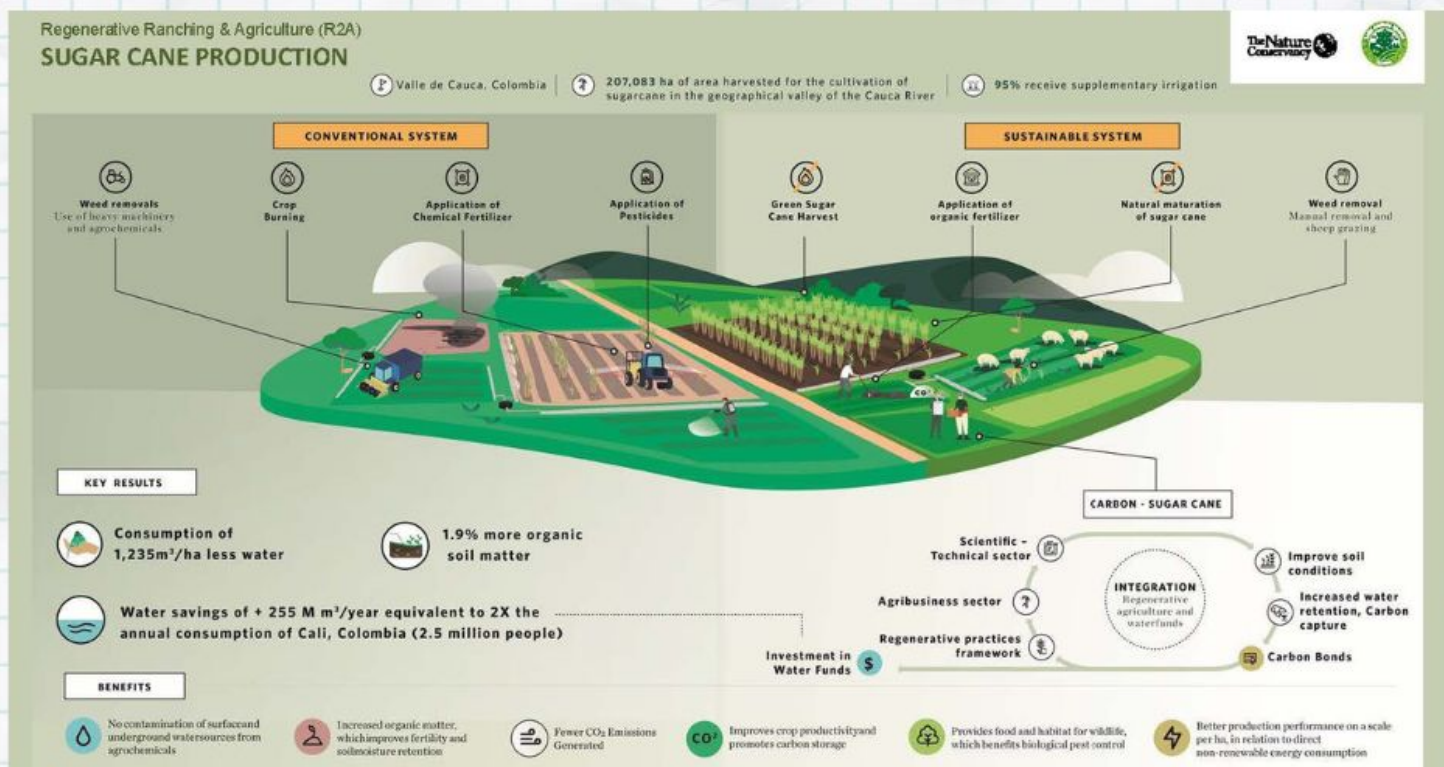
The R2A team's success is vital to not only the region but the world. Latin America plays a key role in global water and climate regulation, as well as biodiversity conservation, with 46% of the region classified as forest ecosystems. While the region covers only 15% of the Earth's continental area, it receives 30% of global precipitation and generates 33% of the world's fresh water. Meanwhile, ranching and agriculture are responsible for two-thirds of freshwater consumption and 70% of habitat loss in the region, causing biodiversity reduction, soil degradation, intrusion of the agricultural frontier into natural areas, reduced groundwater and aquifer recharge, and increasing greenhouse gas emissions.

Regenerative practices seek to turn the story around by restoring soil health, capturing carbon and improving biodiversity. It's a complex task, and R2A worked with The Agility Lab to develop key components of its strategy and implementation.

## Developing an R2A Implementation Approach to Transform Agriculture

R2A defines regenerative agriculture as an approach to managing agri-food systems that integrates scientific and local knowledge to actively conserve and restore ecosystems and biodiversity in and around production areas. These practices contribute to reducing the footprint, building resilience, and improving productivity, all while enhancing human health and livelihoods. The R2A team's goal is for 12 million hectares of lands in the Latin American Region

— including both large and small mainstream agricultural producers — to have started the R2A transition by 2030.



Implementation of R2A is a complex, multi-country undertaking. As one example, this graphic shows the potential of R2A for sugarcane production in Colombia.

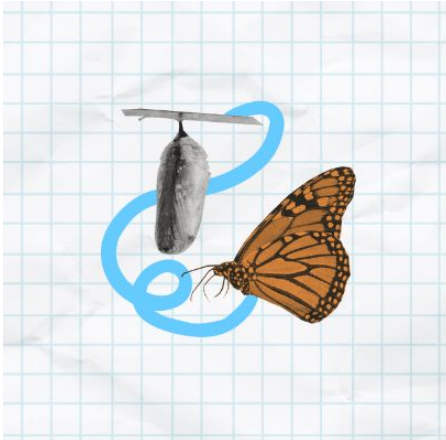
Castro emphasizes that conservation strategies must not only be environmentally regenerative but also provide good productivity and margins to the producer. Ranching and agriculture are vital to Latin America's economy and rural livelihoods, employing 14.1% of the region's total labor force and accounting for an average of 4.7% of the GDP. The strategies must work for both the land and the producers.

"We should be doing agriculture in the best way we know," Castro says. "We already have a lot of evidence and examples of good work that supports soil conservation, that supports carbon sequestration in soil and above soil, that supports less biodiversity impact, but also supports people. It's about people as well, people and livelihoods." Implementing R2A across multiple countries is a complex undertaking that requires a well-researched and planned approach. The R2A team began working with Agility Lab in 2021. Since beginning work, they have developed a Theory of Change and a Conceptual Framework for its work. In June 2023, R2A also participated in The Agility Lab's Reflect and Adapt workshop.

The Agility Lab LAR Project Manager Facilitator Guillermo Tafurt co-facilitated the team's process. Tafurt says there were three challenges that the R2A team sought to address. With five countries, multiple strategies and several external partners at play, the team is contending with a high level of complexity — all with very ambitious goals to transform agriculture and ranching toward regenerative practices. It was within this context that Tafurt says the teams sought to create and strengthen a cohesive team and processes that enabled value creation and impact.

The Agility Lab Latin America Program Lead Diego Parra adds that for all it seeks to achieve, the R2A team is relatively small, made up of about 15 people who have to coordinate to implement the R2A strategies within their respective countries, each with their particular context. This makes coordination and adaptation key skills.





## THEORY OF CHANGE

An action-focused, multi-day workshop that helps conservation teams rapidly develop a first draft of their idea, then gather early evidence to make informed decisions on their next steps

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“Those 15 people, 100% of their outcomes or their goals are codependent on what happens at a country level,” Parra says. “...They have to coordinate the deployment, the implementation of this strategy at a country level and they're codependent on what the country moves.”

## Strong Strategic Approaches Built with a Systemic Cadence of Touchpoints

The R2A team secured funding for its systematic, multinational approach, which is spread over a six-year period. Going into the project, Castro says he wanted a strategy that was developed on the ground with the teams, with ways to quickly and regularly check in to determine if work is moving in the right direction.

Taufurt says a critical result of the different planning and co-creation exercises with the teams included the development of strong strategic approaches to deliver outcomes on the problems that the five country teams identified and prioritized. Those strategies and the full Theory of Change subsequently provided a means to create an aligned work plan with the country teams and the teams' implementation partners. He says the Theory of Change was then adapted to the reality of each country to ensure relevance and articulation with the regional team.

While the team continues to work on adaptations to make its strategies more efficient and effective, Castro says the Theory of Change helped focus the team on its priorities, giving the team a bedrock foundation regarding what it's driving toward.

“I think it became clearer, looking at the Theory of Change, where we needed to focus next year,” Castro says. “...It was good to have the tools to say, 'Look, these are the three, five things that we really need to focus on.' It was good for the team to have that in front of them.”

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Aerial views of Jose Palomo's Los Potrillos ranch in Becanthen in Mexico. Palomo has adopted "silvopastoral" ranch practices as part of R2A. Photo by Erich Schlegel.

Tafurt says the R2A team exemplifies the value of implementing a systematic cadence of reflection and adaptation to continuously improve the ability to drive impact across a region. "The R2A team is a great example of Adaptive Teams practices, values, and culture," Tafurt says. "They invest time, energy, and effort in ensuring the systemic cadence of reflection and adaptation happens consistently."

## The Shift to Adaptive Teams Culture

Parra says the most important outcome has been the cultural change within the R2A team. He says the conservationists on the R2A team embraced an adaptive culture that realizes the importance of questioning its actions, reflecting, and using what they learn to reprioritize its work to be more impactful. The team has established a regular cadence for these reviews, using Agility Lab-style formats for its meetings.

Parra says that willingness to reflect and adapt — and the fluidity and agility it affords teams — may sound kind of obvious, but it's not. That goes for any kind of team, not just conservationists. "Teams sometimes tend to consider that stopping and reflecting about the work monthly is a waste of time," Parra says. "So they'd rather create a plan — invest three to four months developing a plan and start implementing it. Then one year after they stop and say, 'Have we achieved it, have we made it?' Sometimes the answer is yes, sometimes the answer is no. But when the answer is no, it is too late. We don't have that time."

## Let's collaborate.

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