

XII.A.5. Setting up the Books for On-farm Ecological Accounting

Brooks Anderson

Annapurna Farm, Bharat Nivas P.O., Auroville, T.N. 605 101

Although it is increasingly apparent that environmentally oblivious capitalism generates economic selection pressures that advantage farmers who abuse natural resources, insights from ecological economics have yet to be operationalized in the form of measures that modify producer and consumer behaviour. This paper surveys the existing body of ecological economics literature for baseline data and research methods that can be used to develop applicable understanding of the environmental costs of food production and the value of agricultural conservation practices. This paper has been prepared during the first stage of an ecological accounting exercise conducted on farms in and around the experimental, international township called Auroville, in Tamil Nadu. The aim of this exercise is to generate information about the environmental impact of various agricultural practices. The findings of this exercise were presented to Auroville's farmers, policy makers, and consumers to help them make environmentally responsible choices.

The first component of the exercise was the compilation of a partially annotated bibliography. In the section following the bibliography, methods and findings of selected studies are summarized. The summaries are analyzed in the paper's discussion section to assess the adequacy of the methods and findings of studies for informing empirical, on-farm ecological accounting studies. From the literature reviewed, the discussion section distils answers to the questions; What are the parameters of interest for doing on-farm ecological accounting? and, How are those parameters to be measured, analyzed and interpreted? The discussion section presents the results of a search for baseline data and methods that can be incorporated into on-farm research, research that should generate information about environmental impact that can be presented as an empowering management tool for farmers, while also informing those who make policies that influence the prices of agricultural inputs and products.

The discussion section also draws attention to discrepancies between the findings of various studies, and considers the possible causes and consequences of such discrepancies. In addition to the paper's discussion of the methodological challenges of applying ecological accounting on farms, the bibliography itself should prove useful to students and researchers by surveying the scope of work to date, as well as clarifying the gaps where analysis remains insufficient.