

Telire women and her streams

On the subject of water, being in an indigenous area of the Telire River and its channels, we are very friendly towards nature. For us, the rivers and streams are incredibly important. Like children, adults all care for them, this nurturing relationship is how we keep our rivers. For all of us here, we have learned well from our elders who taught us to care in this nurturing manner, because rivers are part of us.

We share them with fish, and all the other animals that are sustained by water, like us. We take care of them as best we can, and teach our children to do the same. However, we have noticed that there is less water than there was in past generations. Simply, the population has grown much larger than before. In the location where we have historically collected water, we now need to travel further upstream, as many more people are now residing there. An example of this growth is that our buckets that we gather for our daily use, are not as full now. And from this shift, it is also taking longer to collect our water.

But despite the observed populations changing, we always hold close the care of our rivers. We remain mindful to ensure that the rivers are not poisoned. We safeguard that each river that is normally fished, recognizing that we must let the streams be alive as they are, allowing the animals to thrive. With this allowance, the animals eat the fish, the allowance of the fish to eat the flies, we are keeping a balance, and do not hurt the rivers. If we take too much out of this alive system, we fully understand that we injure ourselves in the process. Disrupting these life circles not an option.

Water feeds all life.

Our waters, the Jamen, Tucuriri, Bele, are the three largest streams we have from the Telire. These channels fill up very big when full. They are abundant in many species and quantity of fish, shrimp, and are wonderfully beautiful. We eat fish to consume, especially during Easter, but no fish are sold. This is one of the reasons why their populations remain strong today. Telire is a feminine river system, one that nourishes and provides our community with life. Our ancestors walked of her streams. We live, raise work closely along her winding banks.

We are a women-run grower and distributor collective of produce. We are 75 producers strong and growing. Out of the 75, most are organic but some are conventional and making the shift towards not using chemicals on their crops.

The idea within our cooperative is to sell all kinds of fruits, not just bananas. Historically, bananas are new for our farmers. We have grown cassava, cacao, oranges, yams, mangoes, and many other crops in one plot, all organic.

Each fruit we sell here can open up doors for us to sell our goods in national or international markets. The banana, too. But that's the vision; we are starting to develop our banana markets more strongly and for a year now they have been growing alongside our other crops.

We have received support from the Mixed Social Welfare Institute (IMAS acronym in Spanish) with banana and with the Ministry of Labor for various jobs such as weight or internal work to be carried over and that. Then the Ministry of Labor has supported us in this and we are mostly

women than men in this organization. Because at the beginning our organization was mainly ran and staffed with women, but then with the new law came into order that we needed to have the participation of men within our organization.

An issue we are presented with in relation to our changing waters of the Telire and the values we hold towards them concerns what is organic and not — this is mainly with banana cultivation.



**WOMAN-RUN PRODUCER'S COLLECTIVE, MIDDLE BASIN, THE SIXAOLA RIVER BASIN.
PHOTO: J. TANNER (2016)**

Today, bananas are the largest good produced across our growers, and I believe this also holds true in the entire basin. An interesting fact is

that our region, and this river basin, is a prime exporters of bananas in the world to Europe.

I am proud to say that we are very friendly with nature in our farming practices. We work with what is sensible for the environment, hence we are more organic than conventional farmers, because we believe that in our farms we must sell, what we would eat.

We have all learned that bananas are not difficult to grow in our regions of Talamanca and these lower valleys. They grow incredibly well in our near-coastal climate. However, the choice as to how to grow the banana is a difficult one for many growers.

As indigenous, we grow organic.

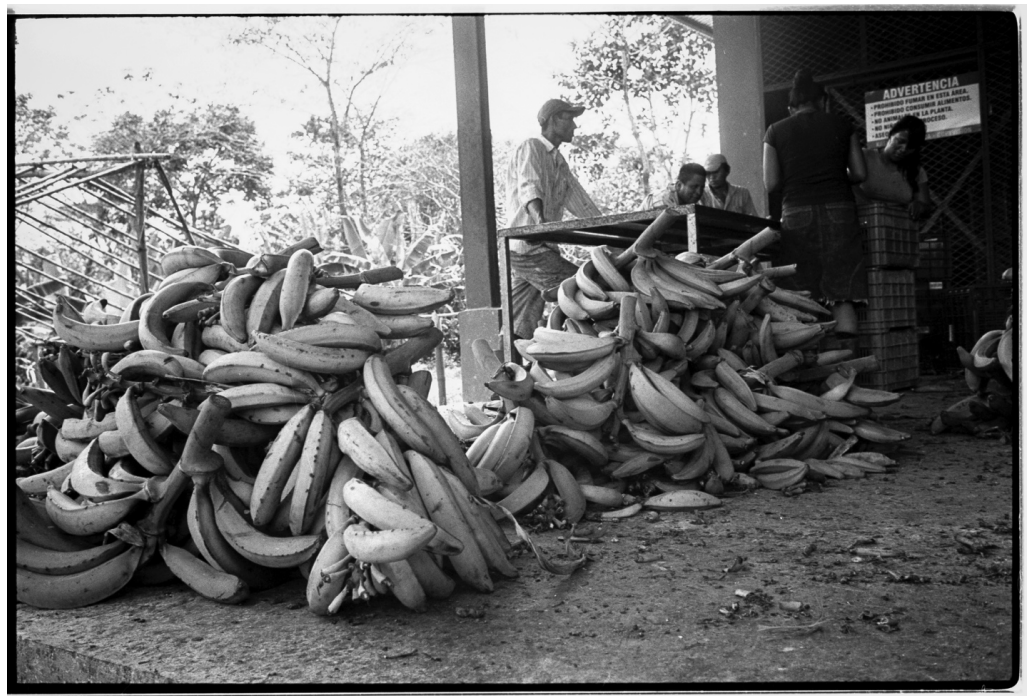


FIGURE TELIRE, WOMEN-RUN PRODUCER'S COLLECTIVE, MIDDLE BASIN, THE SIXAOLA RIVER BASIN. PHOTO: J. TANNER (2016)

The bananas that are grown with the other fruit crops, are grown for our own consumption, and therefore, are organic. But the bananas that

are grown to be sold to national and international markets, some of our farmers use conventional methods of agricultural, which are the same methods as larger growers, wherein chemicals are applied. We do not support this approach. It all comes down to education.

At the markets, when a farmer is attempting to sell their organically grown banana, without the use of plastic bags to cover them, they are bitten by bugs, burned by the sun, and browned a little. The farmer sees a conventional banana next to theirs, one that is golden-yellow without blemishes, and it is difficult for the farmer to believe that their bananas, browned, and bug bitten, will sell beside the yellow bananas.

So, they use conventional methods, and with the selection of monoculture, as means to compete with larger growers.

Across our collective we are trying our best to educate our farmers about the benefits of crop diversification, and the lessening, or rather ceasing of chemical application on their crops. In these efforts, we highlight that when the land is sterilized in the way that it is needed for the banana, other types of fruits cannot be grown there. The likelihood that their entire crop could be wiped out by disease increases. This is a present concern, and is something that has been witnessed in our basin. We have heard that the die-off of crops is not unique to our region, and in Central America, but is happening in communities all of the world with the banana.

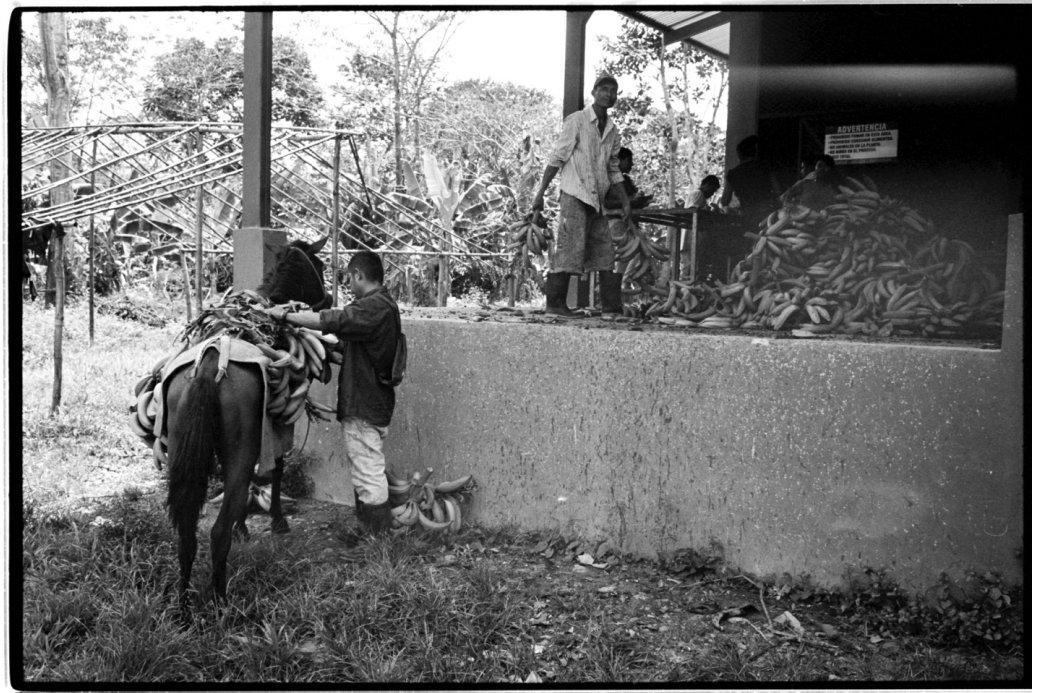
To avoid placing our livelihoods at stake and to avoid injury to the environment, in our beliefs and culture, we work more with earth, because that is what gives us life.

We live in the basin so we care for us to work with chemical is something that allowed us to us Indians because it is something that will damage gusanito from the smallest to the largest.



TELIRE, BANANA DISTRIBUTION, MIDDLE BASIN. PHOTO: J. TANNER (2016)

Bananas are brought in by individual farmers to the collective. They are counted, weighed, and sent to shipping and trade facility in Puerto Viejo, Costa Rica, a coastal town well known for coastal commerce, including import/export of goods, and tourism.



TELIRE, BANANA DISTRIBUTION, MIDDLE BASIN. PHOTO: J. TANNER (2016)

Our problem here is infrastructure; the road is in bad condition. The rivers, when they are full, take all of the roads with them. And with it, our capacity to sell. We cannot sell our produce in bad weather, as it rains a lot here in rainy weather like sun, there are times when there is a fairly severe drought, but thank God also raining at once.

Here, we suffer both at once, the extreme rains, and then near drought conditions. There's not a single summer time, but many. We try our best to listen to the rivers, and to adapt. Simply, in Talamanca, we do not know the weather here.

It is our vision, and within our cultural beliefs that we care for our rivers, our streams, and will do what we can to protect them for our future generations in the basin. It is our sole responsibility, if not us, then who? The government(s)? No. It starts and ends with us, with our actions, our community and our families — we affect and are the affected.

God gifted us this land, and we as caretakers always try to do our best by it. At times it's difficult, but we choose to do better than what we hear other growers, producers, and communities have done elsewhere.

If we hurt the rivers, we hurt ourselves.

This text is an excerpt from *"Navigating Cultural Currents: The Sixaola River Basin Story, that can be found here:*

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