Throughout the developing world agriculture and forests compete for available land, with agriculture usually the winner. Rapidly growing populations, escalating needs for cash, and eroding traditional resource management practices further exacerbate the situation. The Pacific Islands have not escaped this development dilemma. Tropical forests of the Pacific, rich in biodiversity and ecologically important to the maintenance of fragile island ecosystems, have vanished at an alarming pace in the past few decades. This loss of forests, and the subsequent degradation of cleared agricultural lands from unsustainable agricultural practices has led governments, funding agencies, scientists, and others to seek ways to, in the authors' words, "rehabilitate the damaged interface of agriculture and forests and prevent further deterioration." Agroforestry, defined simply as "the collective name for all land-use systems and practices in which woody perennials are deliberately grown on the same land management unit as crops and/or animals," has emerged as a major strategy for sustainable agricultural development throughout the world.

The practice of agroforestry, however, is not new to Pacific Islanders. For thousands of years, indigenous Pacific agroforestry systems have been fine-tuned to the unique environments and cultures of each island, and along with the lagoon and ocean ecosystems, have provided sustenance to island inhabitants in the form of various products, including food, prestige and material goods, and numerous services, including environmental stability. From the earliest arrivals of indigenous peoples through European contact and colonialization to modern agricultural development schemes, Pacific agroforestry has evolved slowly, the various systems constantly adapting to the changing circumstances of the practitioners. New crops and practices have been assimilated into existing agricultural systems, with only minor impact on island cultures and landscapes. Even today, largely traditional agroforests still make up the majority of forest cover on most islands. The authors offer an extensive review of available published information detailing examples of traditional Pacific Island agroforestry from throughout the region. These case studies, which are presented in separate chapters covering the geographic divisions of Melanesia, Polynesia, and Micronesia, help the reader appreciate the prevalence, diversity, resilience, and antiquity of agroforestry as a land use practice in the Pacific Islands. This extensive coverage of actual examples of indigenous Pacific Island agroforestry is the most complete collection of case studies to date, and is a substantial contribution to the literature on Pacific Island agriculture.

The authors and contributors, all recognized experts on Pacific Island agricultural geography, argue that in the modern Pacific context of rapid
population growth, increasingly mechanized technology, growing monetization, wage employment, and the continued search for new export production, traditional agroforestry is apparently no longer able to keep pace. As in other parts of the developing world, age-old agricultural systems, renowned by scientists and other outside developments for their great contributions to the biological and physical sustainability of island environments, are no longer providing needed social and economic benefits to the heirs of the Islanders who developed them. Islanders, often with the official encouragement of governments, agricultural experts, and funding agencies, are rapidly discarding traditional agroforestry in favor of largely unsustainable agricultural practices like commercial monocropping, commercial livestock production, and industrial forestry, mainly for commercial commodity export markets. The authors argue that this agricultural “simplification,” leading to a loss of biological diversity, “agrodeforestation” (the conversion of native forests to agriculture), and thus of overall environmental sustainability, is contributing to the overall deterioration of the environmental and economic well-being of Pacific Island societies.

The challenge facing the development community in the Pacific is, according to the authors, to find ways to “progress with the past.” The large body of traditional agricultural knowledge accumulated over thousands of years of survival on Pacific Islands has been largely overlooked by modern scientists and development specialists. If Pacific Island agricultural development is to be truly sustainable and equitable, new efforts must be made to incorporate traditional agricultural knowledge into modern agricultural developments. The authors offer several recommendations on how to accomplish this. First, a concerted effort must be made to build appreciation for traditional agroforestry systems among governments, funding agencies, scientists, and Pacific Island communities. Further research and documentation, concentrating on the desirable environmental and sociocultural aspects of traditional agroforestry, can help identify indigenous strategies that have proven sustainable in the generally harsh and fragile environments characteristic of the Pacific Islands. With this information documented and disseminated, traditional agroforestry practices could then be used as “prototypes for development” rather than obstacles to be overcome in the development process. Next, increased efforts need to be made in encouraging agroforestry as a land use practice. This will involve improved agricultural extension efforts, decreased sectoral compartmentalization of forestry and agriculture within governmental structures, formal and informal education, expanded nurseries and related support services, environmental impact assessment of proposed agricultural developments, and, in certain cases, agricultural intensification. The authors contend that with the proper institutional support, Pacific agroforests can continue to play a significant role in the provision of useful products, the enhancement of productivity and diversity, and the general stability of agroecosystems in the Pacific.
The casual reader may be overwhelmed by the abundance of scientific plant names and necessary technical jargon, but this publication will be especially valuable to researchers, development specialists, teachers, and students of agriculture throughout the Pacific region as an extensive reference on traditional agroforestry practices in the Pacific Islands. The authors have included an excellent appendix "One Hundred Pacific Island Agroforestry Trees," which provides the names, botany, distribution, cultivation, and uses of the most common trees found in Pacific agroforests, and will no doubt prove useful for those interested in learning more about and promoting agroforestry in the Pacific Islands.

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