

Changes in farming practices in New Caledonia

The case of the taro patch / field of Canala

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The historical method of cultivation: irrigated taro patch terraces

Irrigated taro patch terraces have been following the contours of New Caledonia's landscape for more than a 1,000 years (Sand et al., 2003). Particularly well suited to the island's landscape, this type of horticultural installation helps limit soil erosion and facilitates water management.



The taro patches on a flat ground

Smaller and closer to dwellings, the proliferation of taro patches on flat ground is a response by farmers to the decline in farm labour and the loss of specific skills.

«Since my two sons left to work in the mines, and another who lives in Noumea, we've never done things the way we used to. All I have left is a small field not too far away». Farmer (aged 51)



The taro patches on a log

Cultivation on ridges (small mounds flattened on top to encourage water run-off and prevent gully) helps to limit the effects of high humidity or rainfall.

«We're growing certain varieties that are perhaps adapted to more water. In relation to the water since the Niña [2020-2023], we're ridging much higher, spacing the rows so that they're more often aerated. We're using less mulch when we know we're still in the Niña period.



Taro patches on the ridge and mulch

Farmers are already thinking about the future : combining cultivation on beds or ridges and mulching practices means that taro patches are better able to adapt to changing climatic conditions.

