

# Marketing Agroforestry Food Products in Germany

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## Introduction and Objective

Agroforestry combines agricultural land use with woody plants offering multiple ecological and socio-economic benefits such as protection from wind and water erosion, a cooling micro-climate and diversified income opportunities (Herder et al. 2015; Ramachandran Nair et al. 2022). Agroforestry products therefore entail a range of hidden benefits but currently lack visible labels, making it difficult for consumers to identify them. In order to both highlight and valorize the value of these products, appropriate marketing is needed.

The research aimed to analyze German consumers' knowledge about and preferences regarding agroforestry products, as well as their information-seeking and purchasing behavior. Special attention was given to the use of collaborative business models involving consumers, as these offer the potential to explain the farming method and its diverse sustainability benefits more directly. This, in turn, can increase consumers' awareness, understanding, and acceptance of agroforestry products.

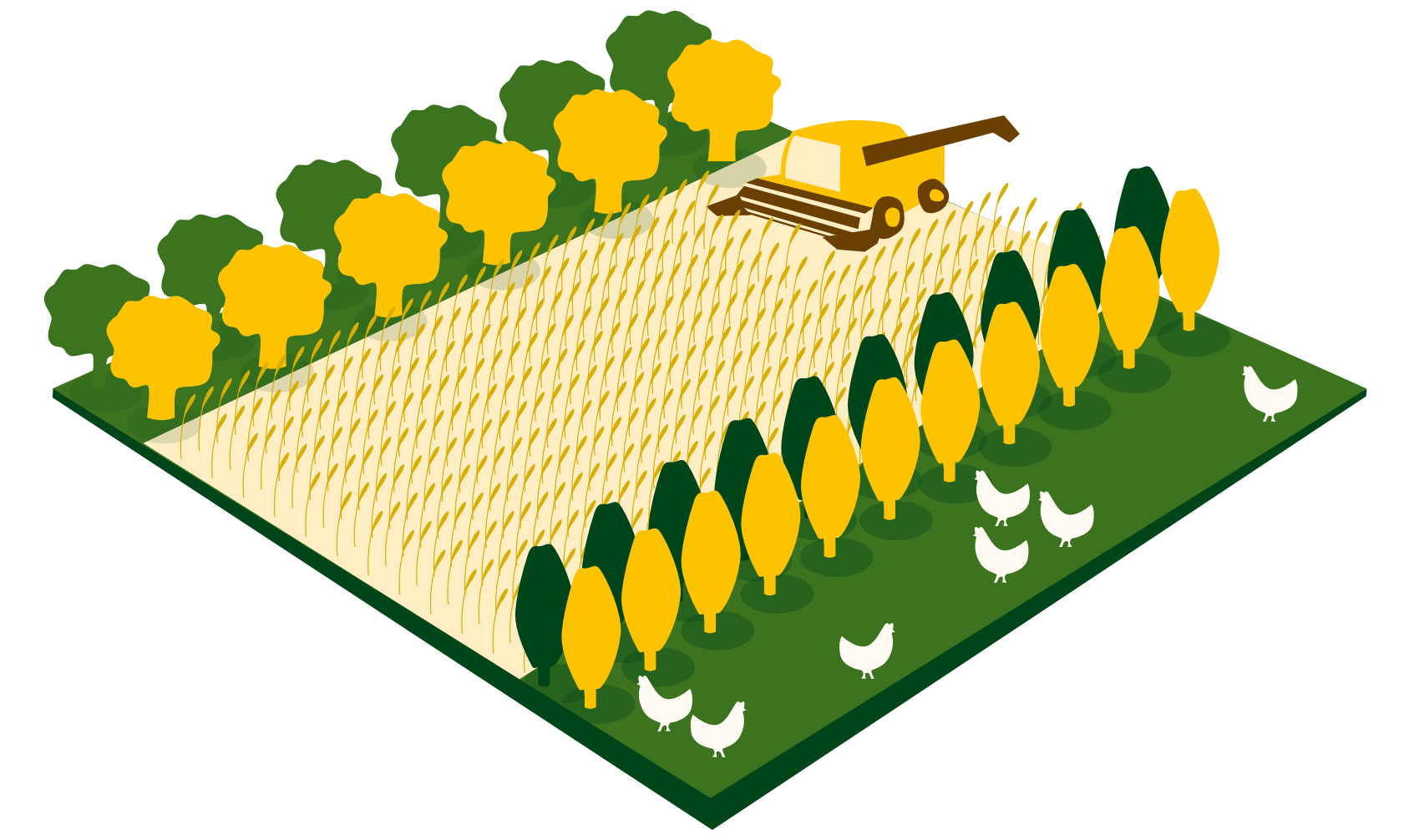


Fig. 1 Example illustration of an agroforestry system (HNEE)

## Conceptual Framework and Methods

The conceptual framework for the analysis of consumer insights on marketing of agroforestry food products is based on the marketing mix by Strecker et al. (2021). Mapping of collaborative business models along the value chain according to their access to the market, which also indicates the intensity of involvement of consumers from (1) Prosuming (high involvement), (2) solidary commitment (medium involvement) to (3) sustainable consumption (low involvement) is based on a conceptual framework by Rommel et al. (2019) on collaborative business models involving consumers. A representative online survey in Germany (n=1,089) was conducted and analyzed using descriptive statistics and dependency tests.

## Results: Consumer Insights on Marketing Agroforestry Food Products

Knowledge of agroforestry is generally low: 62.2% of consumers reported being unfamiliar with the term, 30.6% were somewhat familiar, and only 7.3% were familiar with it. Some respondents confused "forestry" with "frost", associating agroforestry with frozen products. After a brief explanation, 8.4% indicated already having purchased agroforestry food products within the past two years, while 59.3% were unsure whether they had done so. Moreover, 75.2% expressed interest in purchasing agroforestry food products.

Interested consumers mainly bought food regularly at supermarkets (94.6%) and discount stores (86.8%). Sales channels with medium or high consumer involvement – Food Coop, Producer-Consumer-Community, Subscription Box, CSA, Food Assembly or Animal/Tree Leasing – were rarely used regularly by a total of 7.2%. In contrast, channels with low involvement, like weekly markets (28.0%) and regional/farm shops (16.2%), were more common.

Consumers interested in buying agroforestry food products sought information about food especially via labels and information on the product (81.9%), information boards (39.4%), and family or friends (33.2%). They particularly valued agroforestry's ecological benefits: reduced chemical use (94.3%), soil (92.1%) and water protection (91.2%), and the creation of retreats for farm animals (91.8%). Cultural and socioeconomic aspects like beautification of the landscape (65.1%), knowledge transfer (72.2%) or provision of jobs in rural areas (81.2%) are less important rated (see Fig. 2).

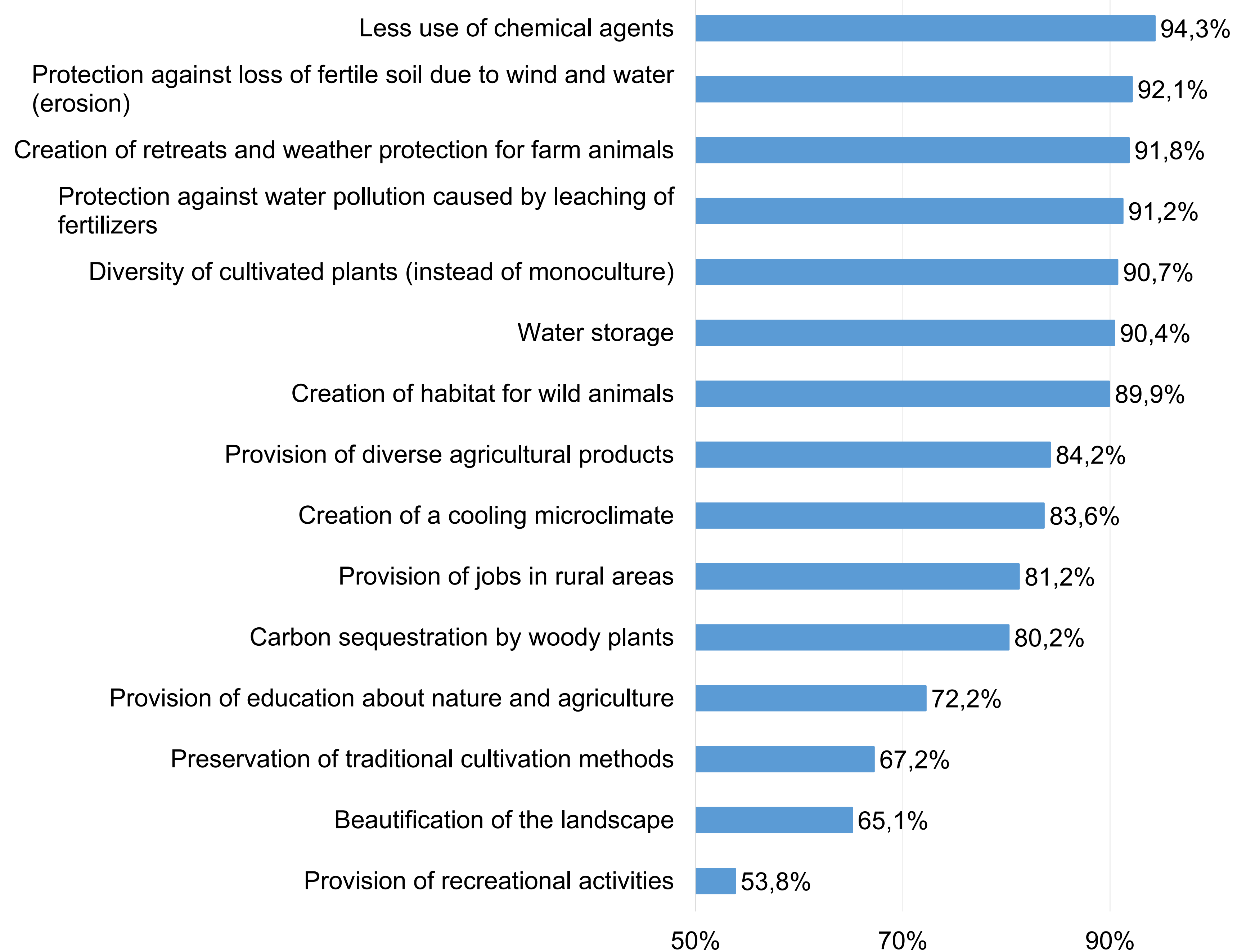


Fig. 2 Percentage of consumers interested in buying agroforestry food products who rated the listed sustainability contributions of agroforestry farms as important or very important (Source: Own research)

### References

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## Discussion and Conclusion

Consumer knowledge and awareness of agroforestry products is low, yet purchase interest is high once the farming method is explained. Interested consumers rely mainly on no or low involvement sales channels such as supermarkets and weekly markets, or regional and farm shops, underlining the need to integrate agroforestry products into mainstream distribution and enhance their visibility. Labels and point-of-sale information are key communication tools, and messages should focus on ecological benefits, which resonate more strongly with consumers than cultural and socioeconomic factors. Strengthening targeted marketing and product visibility can support agroforestry market uptake and contribute to sustainable food system transitions.

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