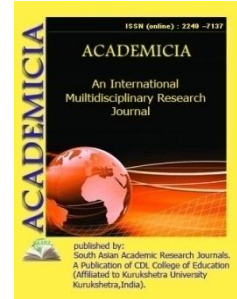




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THE DEVELOPMENT OF INSECT FARMING

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ABSTRACT

Agriculture has developed separately in three insect orders: once in ants, once in termites, and seven times in ambrosia beetles. Agriculture has evolved independently in three insect orders. Despite the fact that these insect farmers are very distinct from one another in certain respects, they are surprisingly similar in many other aspects, which suggests that they have evolved via convergent evolution. All of them reproduce their cultivars as clonal monocultures inside their nests, and in the majority of instances, they propagate them clonally over several farmer generations as well. Despite the fact that long-term clonal monoculture presents unique challenges for disease control, insect farmers have developed a variety of strategies to manage crop diseases: they (a) isolate their gardens from the surrounding environment; (b) monitor gardens closely, controlling pathogens as soon as disease outbreaks occur; and (c) occasionally access population-level reservoirs of genetically variable cultivars, even while maintaining their own gardens. Rather of cultivating a single cultivar purely for nutrition, it seems that insect farmers produce, and potentially “artificially select” for, integrated crop-microbe consortia, which are then distributed across the field. It is possible that crop domestication occurred in the setting of coevolving microbial consortia, which may account for the agricultural success of insect farmers that has been documented for 50 million years.

KEYWORDS: *Agriculture, Evolution, Insects, Microorganism, Termites.*

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