

**NaturAceites reiterates its commitment to sustainability, transparency, and respect for the neighboring communities where it operates.**

In response to an article published by *Prensa Comunitaria* on November 11, 2024, authored by journalist Juan Bautista Xol, NaturAceites finds it necessary to clarify several points mentioned in the article that are inaccurate.

NaturAceites formally requested a right of reply from *Prensa Comunitaria*, in accordance with Article 35 of the Political Constitution of Guatemala, which establishes the principles of freedom of expression: “[...] *Quien en uso de esta libertad faltare al respeto a la vida privada o a la moral, será responsable conforme a la ley. Quienes se creen ofendidos tienen derecho a la publicación de sus defensas, aclaraciones y rectificaciones [...]*”

Despite making three formal attempts to engage with the media outlet, no response was received. Therefore, NaturAceites has chosen to publicly clarify the following points.

- 1. The article states: *For the past three months, residents of the Se’ Wach’iil community have built wooden and metal shelters to protect their lands from NaturAceites workers, who have planted oil palm in the same area they used to grow their crops. Although they sought a solution from the Panzós Municipality in May, April, and July of this year, they have received no response.***

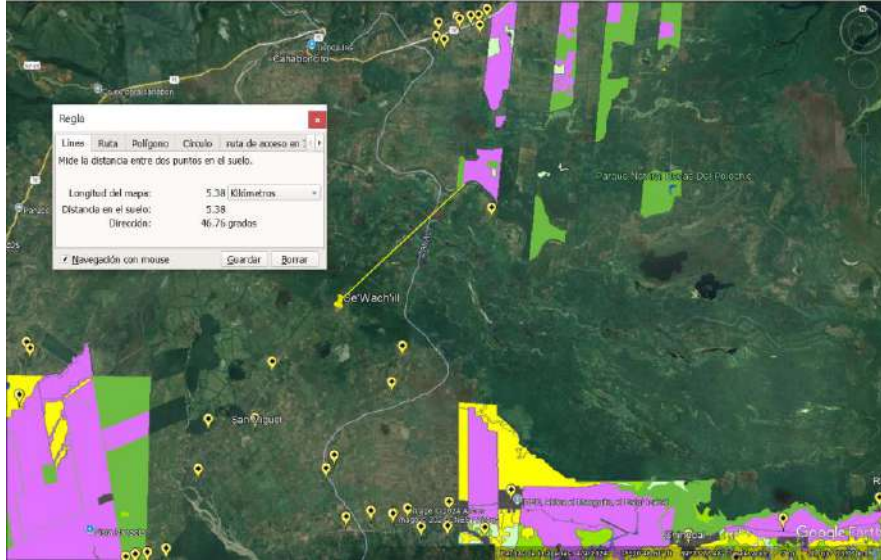
Journalist Juan Bautista Xol interviewed individuals from the Se’ Wach’iil community, who occupy the area under what is classified as “land usurpation” of private property, according to Article 256 of the Guatemalan Penal Code. These individuals are illegally residing in the area.

It is important to clarify that this location is not near the plantations operated by NaturAceites. Publicly available information on Google Earth confirms that the nearest NaturAceites plantations are more than 5 kilometers away in straight line, as illustrated in Figures 1, 2, and 3.

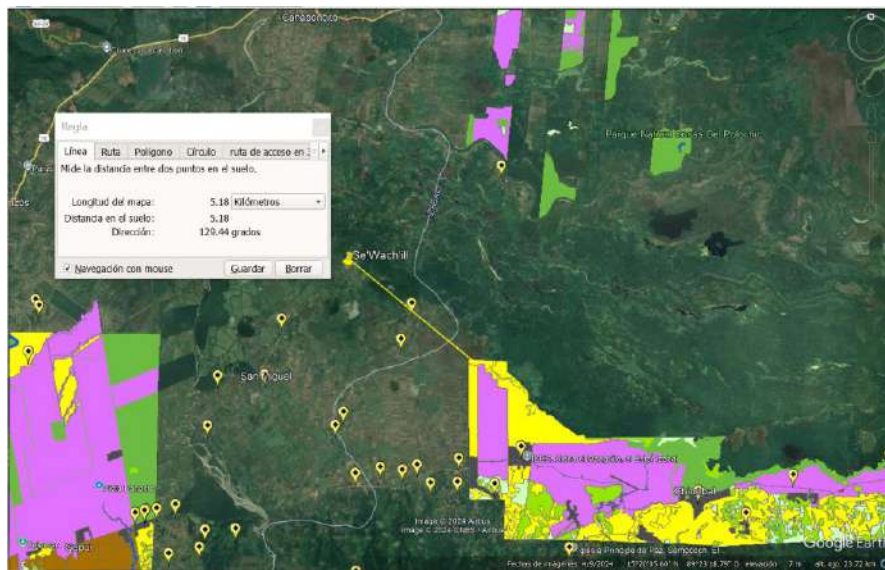
NaturAceites categorically denies any involvement or statements calling for the eviction of individuals occupying the disputed lands.

**Figure 1** Se’ Wach’iil Encroachment Located 5.4 km Northeast of the Nearest NaturAceites Plantation





**Figure 2** Se' Wach'ii Encroachment Located 5.2 km Southeast of the Nearest NaturAceites Plantation

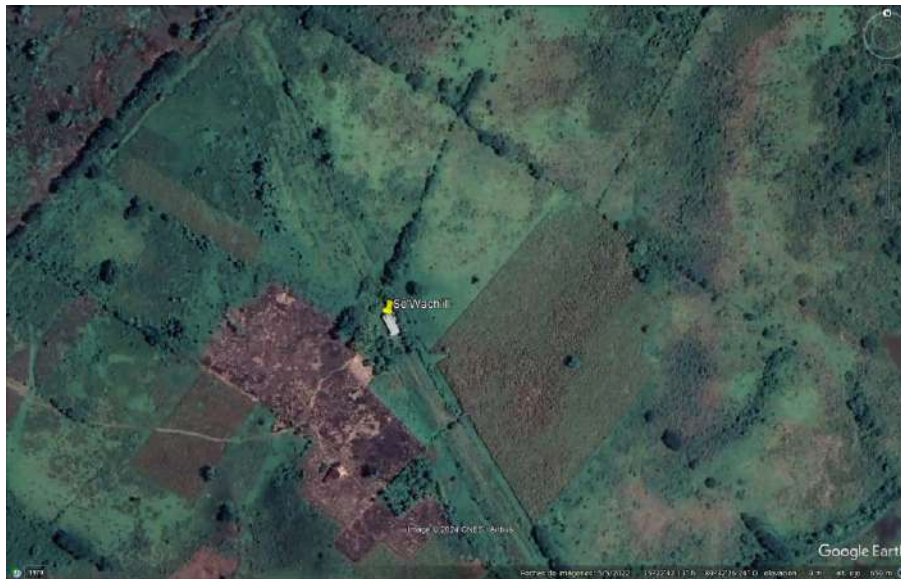


**Figure 3** Se' Wach'ii Encroachment Located 6.7 km Southwest of the Nearest NaturAceites Plantation



Additionally, the satellite images provided help to clarify and differentiate between areas of grasslands and shrubs (Figure 4), a mature oil palm plantation in production (Figure 5), and a new oil palm plantation (Figure 6).

**Figure 4** Area covered with grasslands and shrubs where the Se'Wach'ill invasion is located



**Figure 5** Oil Palm Plantations in Polochic Region



**Figure 6** New Oil Palm Plantation of a small producer in the Pombaaq community, part of the AsoPombaaq association.



2. The article further states: *They recalled that, in May of last year, a group of employees planted over 800 oil palm trees in the same area where residents grow corn, beans, and rice. In response to this imposition, the residents uprooted the trees, which caused damage to the crops they had at the time.*

The community members interviewed by journalist Juan Bautista Xol claim to have witnessed the planting of 800 oil palm trees by NaturAceites employees in the Se'Wach'ill invasion. This statement is entirely false for several reasons:

- The planting images featured in the report and attached to this document, Figure 7, show coconut palm trees, not oil palms. Figure 8 shows, the morphological differences between the two crops. This misrepresentation is not only offensive to NaturAceites but also misleading to the regular readers of Prensa Comunitaria, who have been subjected to manipulation and deceit by the community members.
- Furthermore, before any new plantation is established, NaturAceites conducts a participatory mapping process with Free, Prior, and Informed Consent (FPIC), carried out

by an independent external entity. This process involves all neighboring communities to define plantation areas, ensuring compliance with legal requirements, including land titles. This highlights yet another reason why the claims made by the community members to the *Prensa Comunitaria* journalist are false. Oil palm plantations are NOT improvised, making it impossible for NaturAceites employees to have planted 800 oil palm trees on an invaded property as alleged by the interviewees.

**Figure 8** Journalist Xol, trusting the claims of the community members, published photographs of *Cocos nucifera* (coconut palm) in an attempt to mislead readers.



**Figure 9** The trunk of the oil palm is thicker than that of the coconut palm.



3. The article published by *Prensa Comunitaria* states: [...] ***But NaturAceites insisted, and in July 2023, the workers returned with new oil palm seedlings to plant. This time, they even threatened to kill the affected locals.***

These are irresponsible statements made by one of the community members, falsely accusing the entire company and its employees of attempting to commit reprehensible and illegal acts. The article does not provide any evidence, because there is none, as the claim is entirely false. NaturAceites strongly denies this accusation and is considering filing a complaint against the individual who made such irresponsible, serious, and factually inaccurate statements.

4. **Another incorrect quote from the article is: *Óscar Cucul, one of the locals, said that he has confronted the company's overseers, but his voice has also been intimidated. 'They told me I should only harvest this last rice crop I have here, otherwise, they would no longer allow me to enter my land, he said while showing the area where oil palm has been planted.***

Mr. Óscar Cucul claims to be the leader of the land usurpation in San Felipe and, at the same time, an ancestral authority of Se'Wach'ill. However, he is registered as part of the COCODE of the Concepción II community. These false claims reveal that journalist Juan Bautista Xol was misled and manipulated by Óscar Cucul.

It has also been proven before various local governments, institutions, and people in the area that Óscar Cucul is a controversial figure who, in recent years, has been involved in land usurpation and socially destabilizing the local population, many of whom reject his presence.

5. **Prensa Comunitaria interviewed another local: *Francisco Tzun, 65 years old, is another of the affected individuals. He expressed his concern about the situation and assured him that the land where they plant belonged to his parents, and they protect it so their children will also have a place to grow crops or even build their homes. 'This land belonged to our parents; we have kept it for our children. I remember that since I was young, I had grown rice on this land. Together with my father, we carried the sacks on our shoulders to sell them, and when we returned home in the afternoons, we brought bread, meat, and money for the week,' commented Tzun, who continues the same tradition with his family.***

It is important to highlight that, according to a 1950 census of the Polochic area, there were only 2,000 people living in the region at the time, half mestizo and half Maya. Additionally, as shown in Figure 10, one can see how land that has been impacted by human activity looks like, including community settlements and staple grains crops, alongside an area of grassland and brush that was recently usurped and has not yet been cultivated. Therefore, the account given by Francisco Tzun, whose real name is Francisco Chu, is inaccurate.

**Figure 10** Area of grasslands and shrubs where Se'Wach'ill is located and land inhabited by communities and evidence of agricultural activity.



Additionally, there is no evidence to support the claim that Francisco Tzun's ancestors (or anyone else) cultivated the Se'Wach'ill area 50 years ago, as stated in the article. Figure 12 shows satellite images from 1969 and 1985 of the Se'Wach'ill area, and there is no evidence of crops or human

activity in the area during that time.

**Figure 12** Satellite Image of the Se'Wach'ill Area from 1969 and 1985, Showing no Evidence of Human Activity.



6. **Bautista Xol concludes his article as follows: *This is not the first time NaturAceites has been denounced. In the Polochic region, the palm oil company has impacted the communities of Panzós, Alta Verapaz. In August of this year, authorities from seven communities denounced the construction of a bulwark along the Polochic River, which causes flooding of their crops and even their homes when the river overflows during the rainy season.***

NaturAceites has repeatedly suffered false accusations regarding the construction of a bulwark along Rio Tinajas built at the request of communities San Vicente I, San Vicente II, and La Isla located in Panzós, Alta Verapaz.

Ninety families settled near the river in 2002 and learned to live and overcome the river overflow. However, their story changed in November 2020, when tropical storms ETA and IOTA struck the region and caused severe damage in these communities.

Francisco Tiul and Domingo Maquín shared that they could no longer plant their crops because their land had been covered with sand from the river's overflow, and they had come close to losing their homes. Distressed, they sought help from government entities, including FONTIERRAS, CONRED, and the Panzós Municipality.

While these authorities listened to their concerns, they informed the families that the only viable solution was to build a bulwark to prevent the river from flooding their plots. However, none of these institutions provided logistical or financial support to resolve the situation.

Having exhausted all other options, the families and the COCODES turned to NaturAceites, with whom they have a cooperative relationship. They requested the company's logistical support to construct the bulwark recommended by CONRED and FONTIERRAS.

At the request of local authorities, the families in San Vicente I, San Vicente II, and La Isla received a positive response to the requests made in March 2021 and were provided with technical and logistical assistance.

With the bulwark now built on the communities' lands, the situation improved for the farmers and their families. The water was prevented from flooding their land, allowing them to grow their crops.

It is important to note that the communities mentioned by Xol in his report were also approached by NaturAceites to ask if they needed assistance. These communities declined the company's technical and logistical support and subsequently faced the natural consequences.

### **Testimonies from community members benefiting from the embankment**

"Now, thank God, we can work every day. There are no more floods, and we have crops to harvest. We can already see the results of the embankment; there are no more floods," said Tiul.

"We feel safe and protected. Before, we thought about moving somewhere else, but now with the embankment, we feel safe in our homes. We're already harvesting corn," added Maquín.

Josefina Xi, from the San Vicente II settlement, expressed her satisfaction: "Now we have a safe place for the children, they can go out and play freely. We can harvest now; we have crops for our children, before we had nothing," she said with joy.

The communities in Panzós, like other areas of the Polochic Valley, are prone to flooding. Sixty percent of the land in the municipality is flat, and more than 25 rivers flow through the fertile lands, mainly used for agricultural activities.

**NaturAceites is a leading company in sustainable palm oil production, directly employing over 5,000 Guatemalan families. Its Sustainability and Human Rights Policy ensures that all practices are carried out with respect for people, the environment, and the law.**

**Therefore, the company completely denies the claims made by *Prensa Comunitaria* and urges the public to avoid fueling false narratives that contradict NaturAceites' practices. These misleading reports are part of an international agenda funded by national NGOs aimed at creating social destabilization.**

**NaturAceites once again calls on *Prensa Comunitaria* to review the technical, legal, and scientific evidence provided, which strongly refutes the allegations made in their article.**

**NaturAceites will continue working with transparency and the highest sustainability standards to contribute to the comprehensive development of the communities where it operates and to environmental conservation.**





**NaturAceites**  
Responsables por Naturaleza



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