



Land. Hope. Life.

October 2023

Stories of your gifts in action – You helped transform the lives of families in Central America!

Facilitating Ownership

Land ownership is at the heart of Agros' mission. It all began 38 years ago when our visionary founder, Skip Li, embarked on a journey to the highlands of Guatemala with a profound purpose – to purchase land and transfer ownership to the rural poor. Over the years, Agros has successfully acquired more than 8,000 acres, turning the dream of land ownership into a reality for thousands of families in Central America.

Despite remarkable progress, limited access to land persists, perpetuating poverty for generations. Although the region has since achieved a measure of political and economic stability, the underlying issue of land concentration continues as a fundamental obstacle. Despite major agrarian reforms in Latin America little has changed in the landscape of land distribution over the last 50 years. Two main negative tendencies prevail, concentration and fragmentation.

Land concentration in Latin America is alarming. Just 19% of the total farmland is owned by small landholders, while 81% is owned by international companies, regional businesses, and wealthy individuals. This is the highest concentration of land ownership in any region of the world. The concentration of land in the hands of a few has several negative consequences. It exacerbates income disparities, chokes economic mobility, and makes it difficult for small farmers to subsist. It also contributes to environmental degradation, as large, corporate landowners are more likely to engage in abusive agricultural practices.

As agribusiness operators compete over limited farmable land, the pressure to acquire quality land



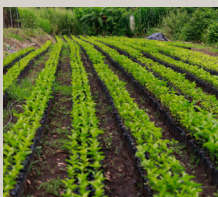
has also intensified. Increased land costs make farms smaller, leading to fragmentation. Small farmers are pushed to marginal and less productive land, further away from each other and any centralized resources. As plots shrink, it becomes harder for a family to generate the food and income they need to subsist, making agriculture unsustainable and pushing families to migrate. Agros recognizes the intergenerational importance of land as more than just a tangible asset. For the families we serve, land represents belonging and hope. It signifies the chance for families to stay together, flourish, and create thriving, stable communities.

Empowering Regions Through Land Ownership

Agros' mission is firmly grounded in the belief that breaking the chains of poverty requires addressing

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Ministry Moment

As an Agros supporter, you know the life and ministry of Jesus Christ inspires our mission of serving the most vulnerable. In the bible, Jesus is referred to as the Prince of Peace, fulfilling Old Testament prophesy by sharing with us His vision of a 'new kingdom' made up of believers living in peace with one another. We know that in bible times as well as today, living in peace is more easily said than done. It represents not only unity and accord with our neighbors but harmony with God.

But how does an organization that focuses on farming try to follow Jesus' example of peaceful living?

Living in unity and accord with neighbors can be a new concept for individuals who have spent decades as day-laborers moving from place to place. In our village model, we encourage our families to live in peace with each another through community self-governance, dignified work, and opportunities to share faith values. We empower families and communities to build a life and a future established in opportunity and hope. While we may not always get it right, God has continually blessed our meager offerings, and we agree, as the Psalmist David says,

"How good and pleasant it is when God's people live together in peace!"
Psalm 133:1 (NIRV)



From Day Laborer to Vegetable Farmer!

If you have ever tried to grow a garden, you know that having the right soil for what you want to grow makes all the difference. The same is true for our Agros villages—the crops and opportunities in each village uniquely reflect the land and soil available to the community.

The village of Nueva San Jose began as part of a strategy to increase efficiency in planting and harvesting so that families could produce more on less land.

In 2015, Agros saw an opportunity to transition families into a modern agribusiness solution. This meant helping them directly access commercial buyers so families know which crops are in highest demand, and help them sustainably grow those crops using modern, restorative farming techniques and technology, ensuring high yields and greater returns from the market. This has resulted in much faster loan repayment. When comparing the repayment rates of several villages across the past few years, the rapid repayment timeline of land loans has shrunk from eight years to three!

Having land is not just a material reality, there is a spiritual aspect for poor rural families. Attachment to the land is at the core of their soul. To have land is to experience the possibility of wholeness. Owning land is a game changer, and when stewarded well it changes forever a family's trajectory and life prospects.



Average length of repayment has dropped from eight years to THREE!

Opportunity for Hundreds of Families!

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the root causes of inequality, and land ownership is a pivotal pillar in this endeavor. But with low availability and high cost, purchasing land for the poor is increasingly difficult, even for Agros. We must adapt and continue to modernize our production systems by streamlining the other three factors of production—labor, capital, and technology. This way Agros becomes more efficient in the use rather than in the need of land. We have done it before! In the village of Nueva San Jose, Nicaragua, Agros families today are producing twice the harvest in half the land than previously used. This is an astonishing 4X increase!

As we plan for future land purchasing, our work will incorporate high-yield farming practices with new methods of land acquisition, such as

land banking and land guarantee funds, enabling the purchase of more high-quality farmland. Your role in making this happen is essential.

Land ownership empowers individuals and communities to generate income, improve food security, and access essential resources. When the marginalized gain access to land, they gain control over their destinies, enhance their dignity, and become active participants in the development of their communities.

Together, we can continue to provide the blessing of land ownership for those who need it most.

Alberto Solano
President, Agros International



Small Plot Farming: Sustainability and Viability

We often discuss the value added to our programs by incorporating climate smart practices. Practices such as terraced farming and planting forests help negate soil erosion. Strategic crop rotation demonstrates how to work with, not against, nature by breaking cycles of pests and diseases. When farmers have knowledge of practices that build healthy ecosystems, their ability to adapt becomes greater and their communities and supply chains benefit.

One way Agros supports stewardship of the land is farming on smaller plots of land using high-yield strategies. We believe sustainable businesses are possible on just .2 acres of land--about the size of two basketball courts! With the right technology and the right crops, we are helping farmers maximize land use.

When you visit the highlands of Guatemala, the beauty of the steep mountains and dramatic hillsides inspires awe. Even more striking is when you notice the farms tucked into the hills, almost vertical, and seemingly impossible to farm.

Teresa Erika, lives in one such village, Asich, where there is little land available. Teresa however is thriving and earning a good income for her family by farming jalapenos and vegetables in her small backyard. She has earned enough to make critical improvements to her home, feed her children, and ensure the health and safety of her family.

Hydroponic production centers (pictured below) are one way crop yields can increase dramatically while using smaller plots of land



Turn the page
to read one family's story



Land for the whole family

When Henry and María Hawkins first met, their community in Nicaragua was very poor. In school, María only made it to 3rd grade, and Henry to 6th grade. Once they got married, they had nowhere to live so they crowded in with María's parents.

Henry worked as a laborer, but was not making enough to support their family. María began to bake to supplement their income. One day she would bake, the next she would take it to the market to sell.

In 2011, they had the opportunity to move into an Agros village. This came as a surprise because it is rare for someone to say "take this loan, give yourself 6 manzanas of land and pay me back in 10 years". With what she earned from baking, María paid for their house, while Henry's farm profits covered the loan. María feels very good knowing that at one time she was the one who provided for the house. Importantly, her bakery can provide the family with stable income outside of harvest seasons.

Working in partnership with Agros has been important for Henry. From the start-up costs, to technical expertise and help getting harvested crops to the market, Henry says "everything I have comes from working with Agros". They now farm corn, coffee, and beans. Because of their hard work and the support Agros provided, Henry was able to pay off their loan in just three years, and has now helped two of his sons also secure land through Agros. Henry's oldest son paid off his own loan in 2023 with Henry's help. With Agros, the Hawkins family is not just subsisting, but thriving.

Henry says, "My family is well established now. I did not expect this, but when I reflect, I see everything I have achieved thanks to Agros. I am trained, empowered, others no longer deceive me, I can teach others how to do things, and we help manage community projects. I don't want to get away from Agros. I always keep learning from Agros."

Thanks to Agros, Henry and María now dream about the future.



ABOUT AGROS

Motivated by God's love for all people, and specifically by his special concern for the poor and vulnerable, Agros International empowers families and communities to build a life and a future established in opportunity and hope.

LEAVE YOUR LEGACY

Planned gifts offer creative, flexible strategies for your estate and charitable planning. Contact Agros today if you have questions on how your estate or deferred gift options could be used to support our Mission.

For more information contact us at:
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Henry posing with María's homemade bread oven