

## A New Purpose for Don Jose's Land in Costa Rica

**By Kathy Bryson**

**International Training Director**

*Editor's Note: Three SIFAT donors purchased land in Costa Rica this year for our SIFAT Central American Training Center's permanent home. We are excited to share more news in the next issue of the SIFAT Journal.*

*In this article, the title of Don is given to a gentleman to show respect and honor.*

Don Jose grew up in rural Costa Rica with six siblings. They were poor, but proud, and worked hard to survive on their small farm. When Don Jose was 10, his father gave him a small plot of land to work. He said, "Son, it is your job to make it produce." He showed Don Jose how to prepare the land and gave him seeds to grow cilantro. "You are in charge. We are counting on you to help us survive."

Don Jose finished primary school. no one went to high school; there was not one nearby. The next step was to work to make a living, supporting the family.

Besides his daily farm chores, Don Jose carefully tended his plot of cilantro. When harvest day came, he rolled up the cilantro into 100 small rolls, neatly packed them and

set off down the dirt road on his bicycle to sell them to his neighbors and to the nearby village. He worked until sunset and sold all his cilantro, thrilled to have made money for his family. Since then, he has worked nonstop.

Early life experiences formed the hard work ethic so apparent in Don Jose's character. It also gave him skills in raising cattle, pigs, chickens and goats, as well as skills needed in maintaining a farm including carpentry, plumbing and small repairs.



*This year, SIFAT bought property in Costa Rica for a permanent Central American Training Center. Don Jose (above) sold us the land and is excited to be part of SIFAT's new center. He shares his testimony in this article.*

Don Jose has an indomitable spirit. He has lived through difficult times and learned that through grit, hard work and perseverance, he can make it. Later, his positive attitude and spirit of encouraging others allowed him to land a lucrative job. He kept getting promotions as a salesman in an international shoe company. They sent him throughout Central America. He used his smarts and ability to relate to think fast on his feet and to adjust to changing conditions to forge a larger market share for the company. His micro-

entrepreneurial spirit led him to start small businesses in town, including a bakery for his handicapped son to have employment.

He started on his dream 16 years ago—buying land and investing to create an ecotourism farm for Costa Ricans to

bring their families from the city to learn about life on a farm. They could milk a cow, harvest organic produce, catch tilapia for dinner and enjoy pristine jungle wildlife with monkeys and parrots. Things went well until the economy stalled. Then, COVID-19 struck. His businesses failed. Soon, he was facing bankruptcy.

This crisis led Don Jose to reassess his life. Years of hard work had paid off financially. His family was doing far better than how he grew up. Yet he had drifted away from his wife and children, working constantly.

He had begun drinking heavily. When the crisis struck, his money sources dried up, but the bills continued. Debt was crushing him, and creditors were incessant. He was drowning and saw no way out. He was losing the farm, his businesses, the family home—everything!

He joined a local Christian businessmen's association that would change his life. Slowly, God started to work in his life. Don Jose realized he had his priorities all wrong. He was empty inside, having neglected his spiritual life and his family. He made a commitment to put God first. The group prayed together weekly for God's will for his life.

In the midst of the crisis when Don Jose was at his lowest point seemingly without hope, God lifted him up. Recently, he and his wife Emilia invited me for lunch on the farm SIFAT had just bought from him. Don Jose shared his testimony with me.

"These last two years have been the worst of my life in many ways. However, this has been the best time because of what God has shown me. He has done a miracle with my relationship with my family. I would not change that for all the money and success in the world! I truly thank God for the hard times because it was through those circumstances that I came to God, and He transformed me inside. I am a new man. I am clear whose I am and that together with my family, we can face an uncertain future fearlessly with God."

He continued, "Amazingly, at the last possible moment when it was inevitable that the bank would repossess the farm I had worked so hard to develop, I just prayed— 'OK, God, whatever you have for me, for my life, for my family ... Here I am.' That day, SIFAT called and proposed saving the farm from the bank. You offered for me to continue to



*Don Jose and his wife Emilia at the new SIFAT property.*

work and become a part of the SIFAT mission to help others. My wife and I and our extended family could scarcely believe this miracle. My faith had been too small.

This is a new chance that builds upon what was started with this farm and with my previous life experiences. God knew SIFAT, and He knew me. His plan to bring us together to help others from different countries, sharing our experiences, skills and testimonies about how important it is to put God first in our lives, to not neglect our spiritual lives and to invest in our families. I am so thankful and excited about the possibility to dedicate my life to support SIFAT and God's plan in this mission!"

As we finished our coffee around the wooden table in the open-air kitchen, Emilia sat quietly listening. Now tears just trickled down her face. Her husband reached over and squeezed her hand tenderly. "God has changed my husband and our family," she said from the depths of her heart. Don Jose has a powerful testimony to share. He will surely be a role model for the Latino men who come to study at our Central American Training Center.

SIFAT works in Community Development, promoting the Integrated Gospel of Jesus Christ. We are clear that the poverty and overwhelming human need on our planet has both spiritual and physical components. Don Jose's testimony reaffirmed our focus on restoring broken relationships. Clean water filters, sustainable food production, fuel-efficient cookstoves and other life- saving appropriate technologies are important, but so are transforming broken relationships with the power of our Awesome God!