



# A VISION FOR TRANSFORMATION

By: Dave Cushing

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*Sustainable Harvest International's Million Farm Transformation is an ambitious vision to leverage SHI's expertise to turn the tide of climate change. By 2030, SHI will transform one million farms through regenerative practices, reversing degradation on eight million acres of land and achieving food security for five million people. SHI board member and scale task force co-chair, Dave Cushing, explains both why and how SHI will lead a paradigm shift towards a global food system that can heal people and the planet.*



For nearly twenty years, I've seen and supported how Sustainable Harvest International's work has transformed lives, communities, and ecosystems in Central America. It has been thrilling to watch the organization learn, grow, and adapt its programs with remarkable creativity and persistence. SHI was founded on a compelling vision of positive change for people and the planet, and since the time I saw that vision in action, I have been an enthusiastic advocate of SHI's work.

When I joined the board of directors in the early 2000s for my first term, I was able to travel to Nicaragua to see our work firsthand. It was a vivid trip on many levels, including taking the longest yellow school bus ride of my life, followed by a dugout canoe and finally on horseback to reach the community of La Pichinga, whose members were transforming their lives with guidance and support from SHI's dedicated field staff. The community welcomed us into their homes and seamlessly made us feel part of their families. At a riverside ceremony the following day, community members spoke movingly and even tearfully about the impacts of climate change on the patterns of rainfall and river flow, and how important it was for all of us to do what we can to slow and adapt to these impacts. They spoke of how the trees they had planted were already helping stem the accelerating erosion from more extreme flooding events, and how having a variety of green vegetables to eat was helping their health. These testimonies made an indelible mark on me.

By the time I rejoined the board in 2018, SHI's methods and results had been replicated and proven across many communities throughout Central America, while the urgency of environmental and social issues in the region and across the globe had only intensified. SHI's effectiveness and breadth of impact was driven home during a board trip to Panama in early 2020, when we met with a number of communities in various stages of SHI's 5-year intensive agroecology training program. It was remarkable to see the improvements these communities had achieved at each stage in their progress through the SHI program, as well as join the graduation celebration for 33 partnering families from the community of La Candelaria. This most recent trip was even more impactful than my first experience in Nicaragua because I realized just how many lives and ecosystems had been transformed through SHI's programs in the intervening years. The time was ripe for us to ramp up our efforts to scale SHI's impact.



Dave planting a tree during a visit to SHI's Nicaragua program in 2010.



Ruperto Valdez and his family in El Limón, Panama are one of the three thousand families that have partnered with SHI to adopt regenerative practices on their land.

I was honored to be asked to assume leadership of the Scale Task Force in 2018, a joint effort of the board and staff that had been laying important groundwork and which was now ready to enter a more active and public phase. Like SHI's core mission, our vision for scale is bold: there are hundreds of millions of small-scale farms around the world that are home to over a billion people. Our ambitious goal is to make SHI's proven methods available to one million small-scale farm families. To do so, we'll bring down costs through a financial model based on earned income, mentorship ("pay it forward"), and a more streamlined program. Critically, the partnerships that we form with both replicating partners and funders hold the key to our ability to scale broadly and quickly, while not sacrificing the values of justice, respect and integrity that form the core of our mission.

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Working together to create a  
just and sustainable world  
through transformative farmer  
training that nourishes  
communities and the Earth.

— SHI Mission Statement

2020 was our first full year of this new public phase, and we achieved a number of important milestones, including the drafting and board approval of a detailed scaling plan, the establishment of SHI's Advisory Council, the signing of a Memorandum of Understanding with Jungle Project, our first potential replicating partner, and working with BCE Consulting, who generously donated its expertise to SHI, advising on how best to execute our scaling vision, including in areas of staffing, project management, and funding.

Now, in early 2021, we have mapped out the coming year's roles and responsibilities for both task force volunteers and SHI staff. We will be reaching out to prospective partners, both for replication and funding. We will be testing innovations and refining the metrics that will be needed to scale and measure our impacts. In short, we are energized and excited by the road ahead, with a clear objective of greatly magnifying our impact and equally clear game plan of how to get there.

**Please join us** on this once-in-a-lifetime journey as we work together with individuals, communities, and other partners to restore and regenerate our shared planet, and in so doing make a highly meaningful contribution to alleviating the acute social and environmental crises we face and *must* address.



Sustainable Harvest International (SHI), a US-registered 501c3 organization, provides regenerative agriculture-focused technical assistance to smallholder farming families in support of improving their diet, income, and health, while simultaneously reversing soil degradation, protecting water sources, increasing biodiversity, sequestering carbon and stabilizing the climate. Over the past 24+ years, SHI has helped over 3,000 families in four countries successfully adopt regenerative agroecology practices, including the planting of 4 million trees on nearly 30,000 acres of previously degraded land.

[www.sustainableharvest.org](http://www.sustainableharvest.org)

