

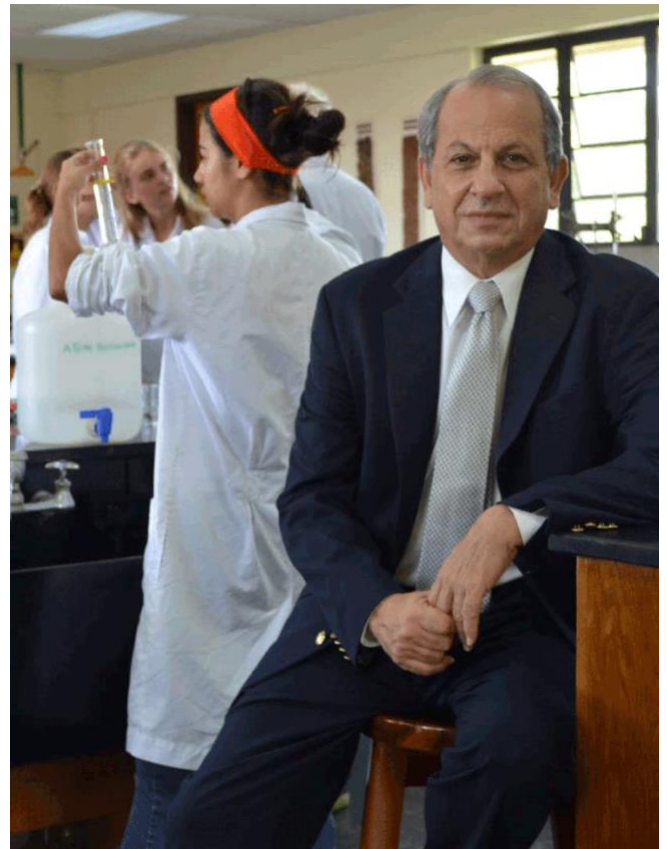
April 1, 2021



Dr. José Zaglul is the founding president (1989-2016) of EARTH University in Costa Rica, and currently serves on SHI's Board of Directors. He holds multiple advanced degrees, including a PhD in Animal Science and an M.S. in Food Science and Human Nutrition from the University of Florida. His life's work has focused on educating the next generation of environmental stewards. He has been an enthusiastic supporter of Sustainable Harvest International for years, and is thrilled for SHI to extend its tried and true extension model to transform one million farms by 2030, radically expanding its impact in order to create a more just and healthy planet.

When I became the first president of EARTH University in 1989, the driving inspiration was to create a new institution that would break old paradigms in higher education and prepare a new generation of ethical agricultural leaders in Latin America. This new institution was to be an international private, nonprofit school with a main emphasis on the humid tropics since between 50 to 80% of the globe biodiversity is present in these regions and is at great risk of being lost.

"As human beings, we have behaved as a plague on our natural resources and now nature is telling us no more. We must remember that we do not own the Earth, and that our very survival depends upon the integrity of our globe's interconnected and interdependent systems."



Dr. José Zaglul was the first president of EARTH University, serving in that position from 1989 to 2016.

Before I joined EARTH University, I had learned many formative lessons in my work as the Dean of Research and Extension at a state university in Costa Rica. In one of my academic trips, I visited a small rural village in the northern part of the country and met many of the village's farmers. I realized then how abandoned they were by agriculture extension agents, the universities, and all those that were supposed to provide support to them. In the village, I met a noble farmer and as I talked to him about how to improve his agricultural practices, I realized he knew much more than I did about the challenges and hardships they endured. His name was don Uriel. Not only did he teach me about the struggles he had to go through to cultivate and market the products of his papaya farm, but also gave me a lesson I never forgot. He had a young daughter, and I was convincing him to send her to study agriculture at my university in the old capital city of Costa Rica. He looked at me and told me somberly: "Why should I send her to your institution? Universities build one-way bridges; you take our children to college, but you never return them to us. When we are gone, who is going to take our place in farming? They never return."

The day of my inauguration at EARTH University in 1989, I made a promise in my speech that our graduates would become changemakers committed to giving back to their communities. EARTH graduates would develop and practice social awareness to improve and transform the lives of small- and medium-scale farmers. Our objective was to promote sustainable agricultural practices, protect biodiversity, and make sure that our farming practices would enhance the land. During my twenty-eight years at EARTH University, I always strived for the institution to be true to those values.

Given all of this, I hope that it is clear to the reader why I am so passionate about SHI. I learned about SHI while I was still at EARTH. I was thrilled to learn about its mission, which so closely aligns with EARTH University's mission. We had several student interns who completed internships with SHI projects, applying the skills acquired at EARTH over a full semester. Most importantly, they learned about the lives of the people impacted by SHI projects and how to build two-way bridges between the community and the university. These bridges are still being traveled by our students and community members.



EARTH University student participates in community projects for sustainable development.

Today, the COVID-19 pandemic has changed our world. The pandemic has exposed the poor management of the planet's natural resources. Over the years, biodiversity has suffered in the name of progress. What has been boasted as better and more competitive business practices, including in agriculture, has been achieved at a high cost to life on Earth. We have invaded the oceans and forests, even into space, and have contaminated all of it. As human beings, we have behaved as a plague on our natural resources and now nature is telling us no more. We must remember that we do not own the Earth, and that our very survival depends upon the integrity of our globe's interconnected and interdependent systems.

In the face of these challenges, I remain optimistic. I believe in the capacity of individuals and organizations to change the status quo and change the world. An organization like SHI is at the forefront of the positive forces working with many smallholder farmers in regenerative agriculture and, most importantly, in regenerating their hopes and aspirations in life. SHI partnering communities in Central America, that soon will be in the thousands and millions in the region and beyond, will be role models in a world of opportunities and peace for all. Today, in the midst of a global pandemic, I see SHI as being a powerful agent of change. I know the SHI Founder, Florence Reed, and the members of the SHI Board of Directors. These are extraordinary people who put all their energy, resources, and wisdom into promoting a change in the agricultural practices of small farmers who have recuperated their hope in society and see a brighter future for themselves. What SHI is doing is bringing hope that translates into peace and progress for the world. I am proud to be involved with SHI. Now I can tell don Uriel that through SHI we are building two-way bridges around the world so that their children will go back to them. When they do, we will be accompanying them, including them all as part of our extended family. SHI will keep the promise alive.



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.

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