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Floresta Offers Unique Solution to Controversial US Immigration Issues

International non-profit works to solve the problem at its roots by improving economic, environmental conditions in Mexico

San Diego, CA – April 17, 2006 – As tension heightens nationwide over pending immigration legislation, one US-based nonprofit organization working in Mexico is quietly demonstrating a unique position on the controversial issue. Floresta USA, an agency striving to reverse poverty and deforestation among the world's rural poor, works on both sides of the U.S./Mexico border, and their solution to immigration issues is a relatively simple one: create increased economic opportunity within the country, reducing the need for the nation's poor to flee their country in search of work. The program is designed to simultaneously overcome environmental degradation that has rendered much of the country's land useless and exacerbates rural poverty.

A significant percentage of Mexican immigrants who cross U.S. borders illegally come from the Mixteco region where Floresta's program in Oaxaca is based. Having worked among poor rural farmers there since the late 1990s, Floresta has seen firsthand the economic and environmental issues that create a vicious cycle for Mexico's rural poor, driving many to desperation and subsequent illegal immigration to the United States. Floresta is working to change these conditions by addressing issues of poverty and deforestation through a holistic solution that combines microenterprise credit, community development, improved agriculture, and reforestation efforts. At the core of Floresta's work is empowerment: giving poor farmers the tools, training, and resources they need to create lasting solutions to their problems, without creating issues of dependency.

The agency's unique approach has thus far proved successful: since work began in Mexico nearly ten years ago, Floresta has helped hundreds families in more than 40 communities to improve their lives through training in sustainable agriculture, small business loans, reforestation efforts, improved water resources, and a host of other successful initiatives. With Floresta's help, these families, who may otherwise have resorted to illegal immigration, are now gradually beginning to transform their lives within their own nation, experiencing the dignity and hope that comes with this remarkable transformation.

Just miles from the Mexican border, Floresta's home city of San Diego has been a particularly volatile hotbed for debate over immigration legislation. The recent flurry of media attention has prompted the organization to speak up regarding its unique take on the controversial topic. "We at Floresta feel that the recent debate over immigration issues is really a symptom of a larger problem," says Floresta's Executive Director Scott Sabin. "By working to improve conditions in Mexico we are not only being good neighbors, we're treating the problem at its core, and putting an end to the poverty and desperation that drives illegal immigration."

About Floresta

Floresta is a faith-based, non-profit environmental organization that works internationally to reverse the devastating effects of deforestation and transform the lives of the rural poor. Since its establishment in 1984, Floresta has sponsored reforestation projects and community development initiatives in South America, Africa, and Asia. For more information, please call (858) 274-3718 or visit www.floresta.org.

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