

THE SUGAR CA

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I FIRST MET the Siete de Mayo sugar cane workers in May 2014 when Angie and I were hosting a group of agriculture students from The Ohio State University. One of the scheduled activities for the students' study-abroad experience was visiting a large local sugar cane operation. While we were touring the fields, I noticed a group of sugar cane workers standing idly off to one side of the field.

As the university students walked through the fields learning about how sugar cane is planted, I was more interested in learning about the group of men and finding out why they were not working. By their gestures and the tone of their voices, the men seemed uneasy. I walked over to them, introduced myself, and explained our purpose for touring the sugar cane operations. After their initial surprise that I spoke Spanish, one of the sugar cane workers recognized me from occasionally seeing me before in the village that they walked through on the way home from work. As I talked with them, I learned that they were

temporarily halted because the seed material they had been planting had run out and new material had not arrived yet. The sugar cane planters are paid by the amount of work they get done daily. When there was no material available to plant, they did not make any money.

The temperature was near 100 degrees and the men were taking advantage of the lull in the work schedule to rehydrate their bodies. One of the workers told me that they live in the mountain region above the village of Siete de Mayo where our Shalom church ministry team has been actively working for the past several years. As we talked, we learned that we had several friends in common within the Siete de Mayo community, especially Veronica, who happened to be a family member to David, one of the workers. Veronica was our key contact person when we first started a new ministry there. Without her support, it is unlikely that we would have ever been able to begin the ministry that is now growing. I was reminded how important it is to keep a positive

Planting sugar cane.

Neptali: "This is what we have to plant. Each one actually does three separate jobs of hauling, spreading, and covering it. Each person has his own area to plant. We are companions on the job. If one finishes, then he helps the others.

"We carry our own Thermos bottle for water and the tools that we work with. The company provides the hoe, hat, shoes, and glasses.

"We leave home every day at 4:00 in the morning and come back between 2:00 and 5:00 in the afternoon."



ANE WORKERS

testimony in the community and to build our network of relationships.

One of the missionaries' major challenges is to find ways to build relationships with people. With the sugar cane workers, there were potential cultural barriers at two different levels: that of a North American and even more as an outsider from their community. The first meeting out in the middle of the field with the sugar cane workers has led to more opportunities to continue talking with the men. Someday, we hope to be able to enter their communities to share the gospel of Christ. We are continually amazed at how God opens ministry opportunities by allowing us to become friends of the "friends of a friend."

In order to get to know the workers better, I approached them with a request to take photos of areas of interest in their lives. Each worker was given a disposable camera, and, once the pictures were developed, they chose one favorite picture to talk about.



ACT

Share the joy of pictures with someone new in your life just as Larry Overholt did with his new friends. Take time to share your favorites so you can learn more about each other's lives. The experience may have lasting memories just as it did here.



Sugar cane field being planted.

David: "This photo caught my attention because each soil is different. This soil, for example, has a lot of rocks in it and we earn very little. This is bad soil, it takes a lot of effort to cover the seed. When the soil is loose, we do better and earn more. I also noted this photo because of the full sunlight and the water where we left it also."

Friends working together.

Ronis: "These are all my companions and you can see they have cameras. You can see we put love into whatever we do. This is the way it is in our country. This shows how we work together as friends and companions. This is right at noon. The sun really burns at this hour. We now have the photos as memories."

