

## **Felipe Arreaga (easy version)**

Felipe Arreaga is a poor farmer. He has spent his whole life in the mountains of southwestern Mexico. When Felipe was growing up in the 1950s, there were few roads, few schools, and few doctors in his part of Mexico.

In Mexico, most of the land is owned publicly, not privately. In 1917, a area of land was given to every village in the country. This land could not be sold. It belonged to everyone who lived in the village, and those people, as a group, decided how the land was going to be used.

Up until 1950, the mountain forests had not been touched. Almost none of the trees had been cut down. Around that time the government began to allow companies to cut down the trees and sell the wood. They were allowed to do this even though the land was supposed to belong to the people who, like Felipe, lived in the mountains.

The people who lived in the villages thought that they would get some of the money from the trees and that they would be able to use it to improve their lives. But that is not what happened. Instead, the farmers' lives got worse. Because the trees had been cut down, the rain washed away the earth. Also, some of the farmers' land was taken from them and used for growing marijuana. And the farmers didn't get any new hospitals or schools or roads.

It was during that time, in the 1950s, that Felipe and some other farmers began working together to stop the companies from cutting down any more trees. They asked the government for help, but instead of helping them, the government sent the army into mountains to fight against Felipe and the others.

In 1976, the army came to Felipe's village. They killed his mother and his aunt. Felipe was hurt and put in jail.

During the following years, Felipe kept trying to save the forests and improve the farmers' lives. But more and more trees were cut down.

The farmers blamed a huge American company called "Boise" for a lot of what was happening to their forests. In 1998 Felipe and some other farmers stopped Boise's trucks from using the mountain roads. Because of this, Boise stopped cutting down trees and said it was leaving the area. But then the army started hunting the farmers again and they had to hide.

When the army had gone away, Felipe and his wife, Celsa began teaching the farmers how to farm in a safe, healthy way —and a way that would not harm people or forests. They taught them how to grow fruit trees in small valleys, and how to farm without using pesticides to kill insects. They explained how important it was to make sure the rain water didn't carry away all the good earth.

**marijuana:**  
dried leaf of common plant; smoked for pleasure

**valley:**  
low land between mountains

**pesticide:**  
used to kill small animals and insects ('pests') around house and farm;

**gone:**  
left; not 'there' any longer

**speak out:**  
criticize (say bad things about) publicly