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## "What was formerly dry pasture, now is a forest!" The restoration of the Valley of the River Doce to its original state of rainforest

The dream of planting a forest in Brazil gave birth to the Instituto Terra.

This project is the result of an ambitious initiative taken in the late 1990s by L lia Deluiz Wanick Salgado and Sebasti o Salgado. Confronting environmental devastation in and around a former cattle ranch bought from Sebasti o Salgado s family near the town of Aimor s, in Brazil s state of Minas Gerais, they decided to return the property to its natural state of subtropical rainforest. They recruited partners, raised funds and, in April 1998, they founded the Instituto Terra, an environmental organization dedicated to the sustainable development of the Valley of the River Doce. Since then, the couple s dream has already borne much fruit. Thanks to the work of the Instituto Terra, which has now been declared a Private Natural Heritage Reserve (PNHR), some 17,000 acres of deforested and badly eroded land in a broad stretch of the Valley of the River Doce have undergone a remarkable metamorphosis. More than four million seedlings of the multiple species native to Brazil's Atlantic Forest have been raised in the institute s own nursery. Those plants are now reforesting what was long known as the Salgado family s Fazenda Bul o, or Bul o Farm, and are also contributing to similar environmental restoration programs in surrounding areas.

Once in a state of advanced natural degradation, this former cattle ranch has been transformed into a fertile woodland, alive with flora and fauna which for millenniums had made the Atlantic Forest one of the world s most important repositories of natural species. The experience shows that, with the return of vegetation, water again flows from natural springs and Brazilian animal species at risk of extinction have again found a safe refuge.

### Our Story

Founded in April 1998, the Instituto Terra is a community non-profit non-governmental organization that operates in the whole territory of the Valley of the River Doce between the states of Minas Gerais and Esp rito Santo. It is a region that for centuries has suffered from rampant deforestation and uncontrolled exploitation of natural resources, notably iron ore. The resulting droughts and severe land erosion have also had a devastating impact on the living conditions of the region s rural population.

The institute has defined its objectives as restoration of the ecosystem, production of Atlantic Forest seedlings, environmental outreach programs, environmental education and applied scientific research.

The Instituto Terra manages the 1,754-acre Bul o Farm, 1,502 acres of which have been declared a Private Natural Heritage Reserve. It is the first such PNHR in a ravaged area of the Atlantic Forest. Inspired by Bul o Farm s success as a pilot project, in 2004 the state of Minas Gerais established the category of the Private Reserve for Environmental Restoration (PRER) to encourage other private property owners to follow suit.

With the reforestation of the Bul o Farm, where the first planting took place in December 1999, the Instituto Terra is nearing completion of recovery of a single uninterrupted section of the Atlantic Forest. This is an unprecedented achievement in modern Brazil.

