

Subject: Farm Bill News & Acequias Adaptation To Water Scarcity

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Cousins cooling off in the Acequia in Rio Lucio, NM -Photo taken by Savannah Rodriguez

Noticias de las Acequias

New Mexico Acequia
Association
June 29, 2018

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The Art of Irrigation In Times of Drought



LaEscarda: Hoeing weeds is probably the most important activity to support crop growth in general but especially during drought -Photo taken by Miguel Santistevan

By Miguel Santistevan

It is difficult to write a piece on 'the art of acequia irrigation' at a time when so many *parciantes* are already feeling the effects of water shortage. Many acequias are dry or drying up and irrigators are struggling to get sufficient water to their fields. These times of water shortage remind of times when the ancestors of acequia culture also withstood drought. Times of drought likely motivated our water sharing customs in addition to the development of methods, crops, and ceremonies that helped weather water scarcity and became cornerstone to acequia traditions.

Research into acequia culture across the region has allowed me the privilege of interacting with many *acequiero/as* that shared information with me which is profound and relevant in adapting to water shortage. In my last article on acequia irrigation in the Summer 2017 edition of 'Noticias,' I wrote about the traditional terracing systems in the acequia landscape and re-creating irrigation structures that create water conservation in soils through refined irrigation techniques. Application

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The NMAA is a charitable, educational non-profit organization that relies on membership contributions and foundations for its general operating expenses. We rely on folks who join as members to contribute membership dues and donations to support our work. It has never been more important to have a united front to protect our acequias and strengthen our land and agricultural traditions.

Technical Assistance

HOW DO WE PROTECT OUR WATER RIGHTS HOW DO WE GROW

of these techniques can conserve irrigation water as soil moisture that can have lasting benefits through the growing season and beyond.

But once acequia waters run out, other methods need to come into play to optimize the harvest given the potential deadly effect of water scarcity, heat, and wind to crop production. A primary consideration for weathering drought is to shift the cropping system toward crop types that are hardier during dry years. A memory of "*secano*" or "*al temporal*" styles of dryland or rainfed agriculture reminds of us the potential for crops to survive, and even thrive, during dry years. Crops such as *habas* (fava beans), *alberjón* (peas), *trigo* (wheat), *cebada* (barley), garbanzo beans, lentils, and a diverse array of beans like *bolitas* have been successful in dryland conditions. Many of these crops are also frost tolerant and can make use of early springtime precipitation, even snow, and will not freeze while giving us a head start on the season before water stress of the summer fully sets in.

To read the rest of this article, please follow:<https://lasacequias.org/2018/06/25/the-art-of-acequia-irrigation-in-times-of-drought/>

Acequia Community Spotlight: Pilar Acequia Association

FUNDING TO
IMPROVE OUR
ACEQUIA? WHY?
CAN OUR ACEQUIA
DO TO PROTECT
OUR EASEMENTS?
WHAT PROGRAMS
ARE AVAILABLE
SUPPORT FARMERS
AND RANCHERS?

The NMAA offers
technical assistance
Acequia Governance
and USDA programs
for landowners. If
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of these questions
apply to you or your
acequia, please submit
a

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Assistance](#)



Carl Gray Witkop and Leroy Naranjo, current and former Mayordomo, Pilar Acequia Association
-Photo taken by Pat Blumm

Interviews with Acequia Commissioner Patrick Blumm and Mayordomo Carl Gray Witkop

Interviewed and written by Olivia Romo, NMAA Staff

What is the history of your acequia community, as you know it (or as you've been told)?

The riverside village of Pilar is located 16 miles south of Taos at the intersection of State Highway 68 and 570 in Taos County. Pat Blumm, Acequia Commissioner jokes that, "the population of the village is about 120 people or maybe more like 150 if you count all of our dogs". Pilar is the first populated community on the banks of the Rio Grande and was settled in 1775 by the Spanish as the Cieneguilla Land Grant. Pat excitedly confirms that, "the heirs of original settler families Vigil, Archuleta, Suazo, Sanchez and Gurule are still active members of our community and acequia today". With a respectful interjection, Carl, Mayordomo of the Acequia adds, "However, prior to Spanish occupation the indigenous Ute and Apache people farmed and irrigated the land they called the womb from local springs on the north side of the Picuris Mountains. These 5 springs create the Aguitas Caliente Creek and today feed the five miles of the Pilar Acequia Association.

A historic event that occurred in our community was the Battle of Cieneguilla on March 30th 1854an act of resistance of the Jicarilla Apaches and Ute Allies against the American 1st Cavalry Regiment from Fort Burgwin in their attempt of Western Expansionism in the Four Corners Region". The result was an Apache/Ute Victory with a retreat by the dragoon regiments to Ranchos de Taos after 20 were killed and 30 wounded by flintlock rifles and arrows.

With a grin, Pat chimed in, "You see, Pilar is rich in a history of resistance. In the early 1900's a legal dispute broke out between the acequia and the Copper Hill Mining Company as they illegally diverted more than half of the water of Aguatita Caliente creek that historically irrigated community of Pilar. The community refused to allow the company to divert a majority of their water resulting in an injunction that the mine filed trying to prevent people from trespassing on the springs to divert the water and commanding the acequia to court. Mysteriously, the attorney for the mine withdrew from the litigation and the company had to back pay the association for damages to their acequia. This was one of the most heroic victories of our community, as you could image that our predecessors who challenged the mine did not speak any English but defended our water in court and resisted industry so that we can continue to farm and irrigate today!"

To read the rest of this story, please follow: <https://lasacequias.org/2018/06/25/acequia-community-spotlight-pilar-acequia-association/>

6th Annual Statewide Commissioner & Mayodromo Conference



Procession and prayer to San Ysidro with Commissioners and Mayordomos -Photo taken by Paula, Garcia

The New Mexico Acequia Association is pleased to announce another successful statewide acequia conference on June 21th 2018 at Los Luceros Historic Ranch in Alcalde. This year, we focused on the struggle of drought and highlighting innovative ways that acequia leaders are managing water, enhancing soil health, and more effectively communicating with our neighbors to overcome dry times. The morning began with a procession to the orchard where the Hermanos Penitentes lead with a prayer for San Ysidro, setting the tone for a day in deep meditation for rain, water and one another.



Charlie C de Baca discussing water struggles in La Cienega, NM -Photo taken by NMAA Staff

There was a dynamic and very heartfelt conversation that carried on throughout the day. Acequia farmers shared their experience in sharing water but also what is not working within their communities that makes farming in New Mexico one of the most difficult. In unity, the larger acequia community leans on one another, lending out knowledge, seeds, and wisdom to help one another continue to farm and preserve our cultural heritage in times of uncertainty.

We want to personally thank and celebrate all of you for making the time and effort to be there and for bringing the knowledge back to your communities. Special thanks to Norma Naranjo who prepared a delicious meal for lunch, Donne and Edward Gonzales who facilitated an educational drip irrigation demonstration, and all of our presenters who shared knowledge about farming methods that are feasible with little water.

Please look for a full summary of the conference in our electronic newsletter in July!

Que vivan las acequias!

**Farm Bill Provision Allows Acequias To Qualify For USDA
Conservation & Environmental Programs**



Sostenga Farm in Espanola, NM

WASHINGTON - June 28th 2018, **U.S. Senators Tom Udall (D-N.M.) and Martin Heinrich (D-N.M.)** announced that they have secured a provision in the Senate's 2018 Farm Bill to make acequias eligible for grants and technical assistance from conservation and environmental programs through the U.S. Department of Agriculture's Natural Resource Conservation Service (NRCS) to increase agricultural water efficiency and further conservation of soil, water, and other natural resources.

Acequias provide water for many small and traditional farmers in New Mexico. There are hundreds of acequia associations throughout the state that will be eligible under Senators Udall and Heinrich's provision. Udall and Heinrich have long worked to help New Mexico's traditional communities access federal programs and funding for water and resource conservation projects. In 2017, the senators introduced the [Providing Land Grants and Acequias Conservation and Environmental Services \(PLACES\) Act of 2017](#), legislation that forms the basis of Udall and Heinrich's farm bill provision. The 2018 Farm Bill improves upon the PLACES Act by granting acequias direct access to NRCS programs by expressly including them as eligible entities for NRCS programs. This cuts red tape and allows for parity with other producers.

"Acequias and the majordomos and parciantes that operate them represent an integral part of New Mexico's centuries' old heritage that continues to this day, providing good stewardship for our land and helping maintain our state's water infrastructure since before statehood," **Udall said**. "Acequias hold great historical and cultural significance in New Mexico, and acequia users produce healthy food for our families and communities, protect our water quality, and conserve our lands. Our water, agricultural lands, and rural areas will benefit now that acequia associations can apply directly for NRCS grants and technical assistance. For too long, the federal government did not recognize acequias as eligible entities and

producers could not easily access these federal programs. Our new provision in the Farm Bill remedies that."

"Acequias are the lifeblood of northern New Mexico's rural communities. New Mexico's acequia associations and land grants should be able to access important federal water and land conservation programs and resources just like any other irrigation districts," **Heinrich said**. "By securing this provision in the Farm Bill, we can improve the process to allow New Mexico communities to access the resources they need to make long-term plans on a landscape scale and conserve our vital natural resources for future generations."



Hay Field in Los Lunas, NM -Photo taken by Daniel Sonis

The bill makes acequias eligible for grants and technical assistance from the NCRS Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP), Conservation Stewardship Program, and Agricultural Conservation Easement Program.

The Environmental Quality Incentives Program helps agricultural producers adopt practices that ensure sustainable production on farms, ranches, and working forest lands that protect soil, water, plan, wildlife, and other natural resources. Funds from EQIP can be used to improve irrigation delivery systems - like water control structures, pipelines, and concrete ditches - that benefit individual or multiple land owners.

The Conservation Stewardship Program (CSP) helps producers build on their initial conservation efforts while strengthening their operations through increasing crop yields, improving grazing conditions, developing wildlife habitat, and other measures. New Mexico has the second highest number of acres enrolled in CSP.

The Agricultural Conservation Easement Program helps conserve agricultural lands through easements that limit non-agricultural uses and helps protect wetlands through easements that restore and enhance wetlands.

Acequia associations are political subdivisions of the State of New Mexico, but unlike other subdivisions, they can't levy taxes on users. Therefore, the cost of upkeep and repairs is borne by individual members of the community. Direct access to NRCS grants and technical assistance will give acequias access to needed resources to improve their farm and ranch operations, carry on their cultural traditions, institute sustainable practices, and protect our natural resources.

Ralph Vigil, Chair of the New Mexico Acequia Commission stated, "Our Acequias have been the life and blood of New Mexico's communities for over 500 years and have persevered in times of drought and water shortages over the centuries. As we continue to experience changes in our climate and ecosystem, this legislation will provide the necessary tools in building long term sustainability for our Acequia communities for the next 500 years."

"We greatly appreciate the efforts of Senators Udall and Heinrich to improve the eligibility of acequias for conservation programs in the Farm Bill," **said Paula Garcia, Executive Director of the New Mexico Acequia Association.** "Acequias are centuries-old irrigation systems that support the livelihood of farmers and ranchers who contribute to New Mexico's agricultural economy and cultural heritage. Investment in conservation practices and improvements in acequias will help to expand the availability of locally grown food and support the livelihood of farmers and ranchers."

Support the NM Acequia Association! Donate Today



Acequia Madre San Jose de la Cienega -Photo taken by Dustin Vigil

NMAA has a comprehensive approach to fulfill our vision of acequias flowing with clean water and people working together to grow food and celebrate our cultural heritage. Our work centers on all aspects of keeping acequias thriving, including: acequia governance, water rights protection, farmer training, leadership development

and organizing, policy advocacy, youth engagement, food and seed sovereignty.

Will you join the NM Acequia Association TODAY with a donation and membership to advance *el movimiento en defensa del agua*?

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