

My Turn

Acequia parciantes must voice opinions on Abeyta Settlement projects

by Leo Valencia Jr.

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I was fortunate to grow up in a family that ranches and irrigates in El Salto, New Mexico. My dad and relatives and now myself have raised horses and livestock on our beautiful family land for generations. This has been our blessed heritage.

Naturally I was interested when details of the Abeyta Settlement were announced in 2013 to our community. As I asked questions to try to understand this agreement, I got the message from certain leaders that it was none of my business.

So I made it my business to learn more. I became a commissioner of the Acequia Madre del Rio Lucero y Arroyo Seco in 2015 and attended meetings presented by the Taos Valley Acequia Association to try to understand the impacts and options available to our ditch.

The more I learned, the greater my concerns grew. My acequia parciantes shared these concerns with me. We learned that two deep wells were planned in El Salto and that Rio Lucero water would be chlorinated and pumped 1,000 feet into the ground. We questioned how this would impact our shallow drinking wells. We realized expenses for operating the wells could soon bankrupt our acequia. To me it seemed like we would be operating a complicated expensive machine instead of the gravity-fed acequias originally hand-dug by our ancestors.

It made me proud the way our community came together to organize and demand information and accountability about whether the deep wells would be good for our acequia community. I was proud to see large attendance at our acequia meetings, more volunteers cleaning ditches and strong interest by the community in keeping our acequia alive.

This Saturday marked a historic moment for our Acequia Madre del Rio Lucero y Arroyo Seco. Our community voted unanimously to reject the deep ASR wells that had been proposed by the Abeyta Settlement parties for our acequia. I am not against the Abeyta Settlement. Instead I am for the long term survival of our acequia tradition. It would be better if the people who know this land and have irrigated the waters for generations could give their input to the proposals of Abeyta before complicated projects that might harm our communities are constructed.

I encourage other parciantes and citizens to ask questions about the other planned deep wells in the Taos Valley, to expect straight answers from the Abeyta leaders and to work together so our agricultural way of life that has sustained us can survive into the future.

Valencia is a rancher in El Salto and a parciante of the Acequia Madre del Río Lucero y Arroyo Seco.