

## Udall, Heinrich Introduce Legislation to Help Acequias and Land Grants Better Access Federal Conservation Programs

Press release

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**WASHINGTON** — **U.S. Senator Tom Udall** introduced a bill to help acequias and land grants in New Mexico access additional federal resources for water and resource conservation projects. The bill, *Providing Land Grants and Acequias Conservation and Environmental Services (PLACES) Act of 2017*, cosponsored by **U.S. Senator Martin Heinrich**, will allow acequias and land grants access to federal programs that provide funding and technical assistance to farmers to increase agricultural water efficiency and further conservation of soil, water and other natural resources.

Udall and Heinrich have been long been working to help New Mexico's traditional communities access federal programs and funding for water and resource conservation projects. In 2014, the New Mexico delegation included a provision in the [Farm Bill](#) to allow irrigation associations, including acequias and land grants, to access Natural Resources Conservation Services' (NRCS) grants through a partnership with the Regional Conservation Partnership Program (RCPP). It has been one of the most successful partnerships in the country, giving New Mexico farmers access to programs that help them implement conservation practices on their farms to conserve water, protect soil and assure that farmers have the tools needed to remain productive in the future. Udall's new bill will build on this success and allow acequias and land grants to apply directly for federal programs, including EQIP, which provides funding and technical assistance to farmers, and the Watershed and Flood Prevention Operations Program, which helps producers by improving off farm infrastructure to reduce soil erosion, enhance water supply and quality, increase wildlife habitat, and reduce damages from natural disasters.

"New Mexico's traditional communities have long been good stewards of our land and have been an integral part of our state's water infrastructure since before statehood. These communities hold great historical and cultural significance in New Mexico," **Udall said**. "Water is critical to our economy and our ability to grow, but water scarcity is a real challenge in New Mexico. Finding solutions that make the most out of every drop — sometimes even twice — is a necessity. Through New Mexico's traditional communities, our ancestors have been managing New Mexico's water and land efficiently for generations, and we should be doing everything we can to support them, including giving them full access to the programs within the USDA. This bill will continue expanding access to federal programs to ensure that acequias and land grants have the tools they need to help New Mexico's farmers and ranchers make the most of every natural resource."

"Our way of life in New Mexico depends on the health of our land and water. 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," **said Heinrich**. "I

am proud to support this legislation to ensure New Mexico communities have the resources they need to make long-term resource plans on a landscape scale and conserve our vital natural resources for future generations.”

The bill text is available [here](#) and a summary of the bill is available [here](#). The legislation is supported by the New Mexico Acequia Commission, New Mexico Acequia Association, and the New Mexico Land Grant Council.

“Acequias are the life-line of the cultural traditions, heritage and the economic base of New Mexico. Through acequias, our ancestors’ managed our water effectively, efficiently and fairly to provide a sustainable means to take care of their families for centuries,” **said Ralph Vigil, chairman of the New Mexico Acequia Commission.** “This legislation will provide the acequias a much-needed tool to continue building economic sustainability in farming and ranching for our acequia communities.”

“We greatly appreciate the work of our congressional delegation to improve acequia eligibility for conservation programs,” **said Paula Garcia, executive director of the New Mexico Acequia Association.** “Investment in agriculture will expand the availability of locally grown food and support the livelihood of farmers and ranchers in New Mexico’s acequia communities.”

“Land grant communities are part of the unique cultural and agricultural heritage of New Mexico. Land grant governing bodies have managed their common lands for the benefit of their local communities for centuries,” **said Juan Sanchez, chairman of the New Mexico Land Grant Council.** “Making community land grants eligible for programs like EQIP provides access to important resources that will further conservation and restoration efforts on land grant common lands, as well as generate new community and economic development opportunities. These activities will positively impact the socio-economic and ecological health of rural communities throughout New Mexico, and will provide lasting benefits for future generations.”