

Pecos resident fights to save New Mexico tradition

Community hopes to maintain traditional use of acequias for farming

By: Sara Yingling

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PECOS, N.M. (KRQE) - They've been the lifeline in northern New Mexico communities for hundreds of years by providing water for irrigation and farming.

Now members of one New Mexico village are worried that a longstanding tradition could vanish if the story of acequias are lost on future generations.

"These acequias are how we get our water. It's how our water is distributed throughout the community and valley. Without this, we don't have any other point of distribution. This is our only source. We need this flowing at all times in order for us to be successful throughout the year," said Ralph Vigil, Pecos resident.

Vigil says about 150 families in Pecos use the acequias, including his own family who settled in the area centuries ago.

They rely on the Molina Acequia for all of their water needs.

It's a tradition passed down from generation to generation.

"My ancestors established this side, established those acequias. I feel the responsibility that we need to keep it going," said Vigil.

Vigil is so passionate about keeping the tradition alive, he left his job in real estate to become a full-time farmer.

"I felt that it was very important that we make money and that we sustain ourselves to prove that our water rights do mean something to us," said Vigil.

He now serves as chairman of the New Mexico Acequia Commission.

His mission is to teach younger generations the importance of these community-operated watercourses that were brought over from Spain more than 400 years ago.

"The most important thing is getting back to that education and trying to get people who grew up with acequias to tell their story," said Vigil.

Over the summer, Vigil says he worked with summer camps in Glorieta and showed kids the old ways.

He says he's also been working with universities.

'We can continue to teach those to respect it and hopefully, if people respect it, it will survive,' said Vigil.

Vigil says they're making progress when it comes to closing the generational gap, but it's going to take more to make it work.

"It's difficult. There's small steps that we are trying to make. It takes a long time. You know, little by little we'll get very far," said Vigil.

Vigil says to show the significance of acequias, he believes more people need to grow their own food and do hands-on activities on the acequias within communities for them to survive.

Vigil says he also has plans to work with policymakers.

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