

My View

Young people can help keep acequias alive

By Ralph Vigil

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The vast majority of New Mexicans are brought up knowing that water is one of our most precious resources. Native New Mexicans believe that water is not just a commodity, it is in our blood, it is spiritual and it is life, or, as we like to say, “*El agua es la vida.*”

Growing up in east Pecos along the Acequia del Molino, my father always stressed the importance of protecting our land, water and culture by cultivating crops for the benefit of our community and the survival of our future generations. Naturally, I listened to my father and his words of wisdom and began cultivating our acequia-irrigated land. I now grow certified organic crops using that sacred water, to help nourish my community and continue this vital practice.

As the chairman of the New Mexico Acequia Commission, I have been seeing a disturbing trend. Our youth, our future, is not as invested in acequias as past generations have been. Even more disturbing is the fact there are not many from my generation passing along this knowledge to our youth, thus creating a huge gap.

The traditions of our acequias are deeply rooted and trace back more than four centuries here in New Mexico, over 800 years back to southern Spain and have evolved over 10,000 years in the

arid regions of the Middle East. The tradition lives on within acequias of New Mexico as they continue to sustain our communities.

Without our acequias, the surrounding environment they have long provided for and the quality of life they so preciously provide for our communities will continue to diminish. Fortunately, it is not too late to make a difference and bring back our historical views and traditions over our land and water.

The commission is working on assisting and advocating for curriculum in our educational system and policies to reflect the contributions our acequias have provided to the advancement of our communities. To keep our acequias vibrant examples of survival and culture, we must be proactive in passing on the teachings of our acequias by talking to our children and grandchildren.

Take them out to your local acequia, share the stories and memories the acequias have given you as a child, and stress the importance of preserving this vital part of who we are. Go out and help clean the acequia along with your community. Encourage your family to become embedded in the tradition that provided you with memories and your community with sustenance. Most of all, make sure that when we are speaking about our acequias, we are talking about the future and not just that past.

Ralph Vigil is a 12th-generation New Mexican from east Pecos. He is a certified organic farmer and chairman of the New Mexico Acequia Commission.