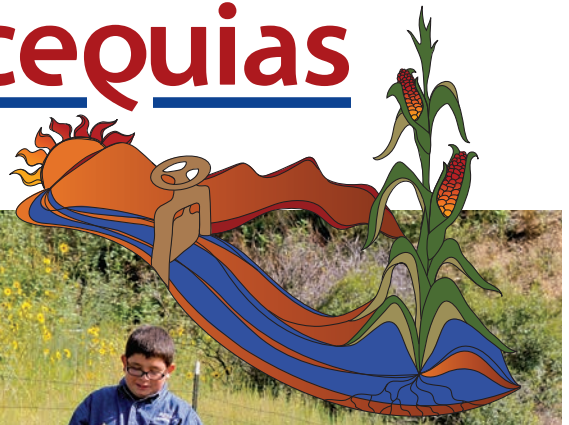


Noticias de las Acequias

New Mexico *Acequia* Association • Fall 2020



NMAA Los Sembradores Farm Apprentices and youth tend their field in Arroyo Hondo. Photo credit: Donne Gonzales

Acequias in the Time of Covid: Growing More Local Food

by Paula Garcia, NMAA Executive Director

For decades, many in New Mexico have worked toward a vision of greater autonomy in our food production that values our land-based traditions and the need for affordable, healthy food. The COVID-19 pandemic has brought new urgency to that vision and has highlighted the need to protect and use our land and water for growing food. While we mourn loss and human suffering caused by the pandemic, we can also use this as an inflection point in transforming our communities to be more sustainable and socially just.

Only two generations ago, most of our communities were able to grow much of the food we needed to survive. Many of our grandparents raised grains, vegetables and meat, in addition to harvesting wild foods. By the end of the 20th century however, we were importing most of the food we eat through a highly concentrated industrial food system. These days, New Mexico imports most of our food, while exporting much of what is grown here for processing elsewhere.

Now we are at a time of reckoning to choose our path forward to re-localize our food systems and make them more just and equitable. This must include honoring Indigenous and acequia

community food traditions; protecting land and water for agriculture; honoring farm work as a dignified livelihood; building food system infrastructure; and investing in the next generation of growers.

The COVID-19 crisis has revealed the weaknesses of the industrial food system. Early in the pandemic, we witnessed grocery store shelves emptied in a frenzy as the pandemic disrupted supply chains. We saw reports of farmers plowing under fields of vegetables and animals being euthanized, while at the same time, food banks called out for help, needing more and more donations to feed millions of families in economic distress. We have also seen that producing cheap food comes at a profound human cost, with farmworkers lacking basic health and safety protections. In observing this, we now have even more strong evidence that the industrial food system is deeply flawed and prone to disruption.

For traditional, land-based people, our source of our food is closer to home... to some extent. In acequia communities, thousands of families across rural New Mexico continue to irrigate pasture and farmland. Many continue to raise small herds of livestock and traditional crops. In recent years,

continued on page 3

NEW MEXICO ACEQUIA ASSOCIATION

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*La Asociacion de las Acequias
del Valle de Mora*

Alfredo Montoya

Las Nueve Acequias del Rio Grande

Gilbert Sandoval

*Jemez River Basin
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*Rio Quemado, Rio en Medio,
Rio Frijoles, Rio Santa Cruz
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*Farmer Trainer and
Youth Education Coordinator*

Antonia Romero

Acequia Law Fellow

Working From Home But Here For You!

Since mid-March, the NMAA team has been busy working from home to do our part to reduce the spread of COVID-19, and we will continue to work from home for the foreseeable future. We are however, available as usual to assist acequias on a range of topics related to acequia water rights and governance. Please call our office at 505-995-9644 and leave a voicemail, or reach members of our team by email.

- Acequia governance or infrastructure issues - serafina@lasacequias.org
- Youth, seeds, and farming - donne@lasacequias.org, or emily@lasacequias.org
- General questions about NMAA - juliet@lasacequias.org

With love and care for our communities, The NMAA Team



2019 winners Eluid Martinez (art, adult) and Miguel Santistevan (photo, adult)

2020 Acequia Art & Photo Contest

Submit your photos and art to the 2020 NMAA Acequia Art & Photo Contest and show us what acequia culture means to YOU!

** ART CONTEST DETAILS **

- Submit poems, videos, paintings, sketches, mixed media, models, and MORE! – showing us “What does acequia culture mean to you?” or “Why are acequias important to your family, culture, or community?”
- Art participants are limited to one entry.

** PHOTO CONTEST DETAILS **

- Send photos in any of these categories – Acequeros Working the Land; Digitally Altered Imagery; Regando; Food and Seed Traditions
- Photo participants are limited to one entry per category!

** HOW TO ENTER! **

- Art and photos must be submitted by November 30, 2020
- Submissions must be sent in HIGH RESOLUTION/high quality format
- Email - emily@lasacequias.org OR mail to 805 Early Street Bldg. B, Suite 203 Santa Fe, NM 87505
- Include: (1) Name of Artist (2) Town (3) Acequia Name (4) County (5) Art/photo description or title.

** PRIZES! **

- 1st Place: \$60.00 & T-Shirt – 2nd Place: \$40.00 & T-Shirt – 3rd Place: \$20.00 & T-shirt (separate prizes for adults & youth!)

Acequias in the Time of Covid-19 *continued from page 1*

increasing numbers of farmers have also learned to grow food in a manner that is economically viable through market gardening, as is evident in the beautiful displays of food at local farmers markets.

However, we have a long way to go to realize our potential. First, small-scale agriculture, which is what is typical with acequia irrigation, is at a disadvantage within a political and economic system that prioritizes and subsidizes large-scale commodity production. Cheap food from corporate monopolies makes it challenging to grow, process, and sell food on a smaller scale in a manner that cares for the health and well-being of land, water, community and farmer.

Second, even though most of our farm and ranch income in acequia communities comes from small herds of livestock, we have almost no local infrastructure for meat processing, forcing cattle growers to sell at rock-bottom prices at auctions that funnel our animals into meatpacking monopolies.

Third, our land and water is constantly at risk. Our beautiful acequia farmland, viewed by land-based people as precious and irreplaceable, is treated in the dominant society as mere real estate that can go to the highest bidder. Acequias must be constantly vigilant to prevent transfers of water rights away from agricultural land; resist accelerating gentrification, displacement and push-out of rural youth; and protect water quality from pollution. We are living under the weight of an economic and political system that does not prioritize locally grown food, clean water, and strong, independent communities. While this has resulted in hardship, we are still here and we are still committed to maintaining and continuing our lifeways.

Amidst all of this, there is much to celebrate. Farmers markets have blossomed. More communities have small commercial kitchens for value-added processing. More schools, restaurants, and senior centers are purchasing locally grown food. Small cooperatives are forming, along with community supported agriculture businesses (CSAs) that are building a new way forward. In acequias, as well as Pueblo and tribal communities, Indigenous food traditions are being revitalized. Acequias have made important strides in protecting water rights through policy reforms. All of this work has come from grass-roots movements.

We can and must build on this progress while also confronting the deep structural problems with our food systems. We need stronger protections for our land and water, without which we can have no agriculture. Priorities must shift from subsidizing cheap food to investing in a more resilient, distributive model that is viable for local farmers and ranchers. We need better infrastructure for efficient irrigation, appropriate technology and equipment for small-scale production, and food processing infrastructure. We need to push back against the view that associates working in agriculture with living in poverty. No farmworker or farmer should live with economic insecurity while providing the food and nutrition needed for human existence.



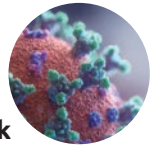
"Nuestras Semillas" retablo painting, watercolor and ink mounted to wood by Simone Wimett Jaramillo.

We know there is a desire for locally grown food, and we know first-hand of the many people who want to be growers. Starting in March at the onset of the pandemic, the New Mexico Acequia Association (NMAA) sent packages of local seeds and planting guidance to hundreds of families across the state as part of our 'Semillas pa la Gente' (Seeds for the People) campaign. We also convened a series of six online pláticas which brought many experienced and new farmers and gardeners together to share farming knowledge and inspiration at this challenging time. The topics were based on the time of the growing season including how to prepare garden beds, irrigation techniques, natural pest and weed control, harvesting and food safety, and seed saving.

Through our Fall season 'Comida pa la Gente' (Food for the People) project, we purchased hundreds of pounds of fresh, acequia-grown food from local farmers so it could be donated to families and food relief efforts. Some of the local and traditional foods that were distributed to local families included fresh vegetables including carrots, various leafy greens, potatoes as well as chicos, and freshly made posole (nixtamal). This effort highlighted that our acequia farmers have the will and the skill to feed their communities, if only they can get a little support to do so. These are just two small steps towards having more locally grown food.

All of us can contribute by planting seeds, growing our gardens, and sharing what we grow. This is already happening and it is beautiful. The movement for a more just food system starts with our core values and our relationships with each other. From this historical moment of learning and of crisis, we can and must build and work toward a future that is centered on foodways that honor ancestral connections to land and water, that provide healthy food for all, and that sustain dignified livelihoods for those who work the land. ***Let's do this! Vamos a sembrar! Let's grow some food! 💧***

Guidance for Acequia Annual Meetings during Covid



by Antonia Romero

Many acequias are holding their annual meetings this Fall and have time-sensitive issues – including elections – that need to be addressed. NMAA is providing some basic guidance to acequias for how to address the need for annual meetings and also protect your members from spread of COVID-19 by following the requirements of the public health orders issued by the Department of Health (DOH).

The most important requirement that affects acequia meetings is that **any gatherings over five people are prohibited**. The DOH public health order, which was updated November 5, 2020, prohibits “mass gatherings” which are defined as any public or private gathering that brings together more than five individuals indoors or outdoors. There are some limited exceptions and “mass gathering” does not include individuals who are public officials or public employees in the course and scope of their employment, and it does not include the presence of more than five people who reside together. In summary, the prohibition on mass gatherings includes acequia membership meetings.

The Attorney General has provided a guidance letter for public bodies, such as acequias, during the COVID-19 State of Public Health Emergency recommending that public entities “follow the guidance of the Department of Health and other health officials to ensure the health and safety of both members of the entity and the public.” They also recommend the following:

- Public bodies **should not proceed with an in-person meeting** at this time given that the current Public Health Order limits mass gatherings to 5 people even in an outdoor space.
- The best and most efficient way to comply with the Open Meetings Act and the current public health orders would be **to postpone or cancel a public meeting**.
- A **virtual public meeting may be held** if a public body has to address an issue that is **“time-sensitive.”** Virtual meetings may be held through telephone conference, videoconference, live streaming, or similar technologies provided that the public is provided instructions on how to access the meeting.

NMAA is available to assist acequias during this public health emergency. Some examples of services we can offer related to conducting acequia meetings include:

- Assistance drafting a meeting notice to include all the information necessary to ensure compliance with the public health order and the Open Meetings Act;
- An NMAA staff member can attend and help with the virtual or telephone meeting to ensure the meeting runs smoothly and is in compliance with the Open Meetings Act; and
- We can offer the use of our Zoom video conference platform or telephone conference line.

Any acequia can request use of our Zoom link or conference call number. We ask that the request be made well in advance to manage schedule conflicts.

We also understand that this is a very difficult time and many areas of the state do not have reliable internet service or phone service. We are available to discuss additional options for you at this time to ensure all members of the community are safe and have an option to attend the meeting. Please contact our office to discuss your options.

Elections. If it is an election year for you Acequia, you may decide to hold a virtual meeting under the “time-sensitivity” standard. Voting may take place either by conference call or via an online platform such as Zoom. On the other hand, the Attorney General’s guidance allows postponement until it is safe to hold a meeting in order to ensure maximum participation.

Proxy voting. Proxy voting may still be utilized during virtual meetings. In order to implement proxy voting, your Acequia will need some clear procedures for your members to follow. If proxies are utilized, we encourage the commission to carefully review the Acequia’s bylaws to familiarize themselves with the Acequia’s unique proxy requirements.

Some examples of how to manage proxies include setting a deadline for delivering written proxies to the Commission of the acequia and/or allowing proxies to be presented at the virtual meeting. The acequia may require that proxies be mailed to the Secretary of the Commission by a deadline in advance of the meeting. The acequia can also allow proxies to be presented at the virtual meeting provided that the written proxy be delivered to the commission within five days. Your acequia can determine your own procedures as long as you communicate it clearly with your members.

Please contact our staff to discuss the specific details related to proxy voting generally, and, in particular, how to effectively use proxies at virtual meetings held during the pandemic.

Bylaws amendments. Also, we suggest that, if your Acequia is adopting or amending its bylaws at the annual meeting, you send the bylaws to parcientes ahead of the meeting and ask them to send questions or comments prior to the meeting to facilitate discussion during the meeting.

Please contact NMAA staff if you have any questions in making a decision about whether to postpone or proceed with your meeting. We are also available to provide guidance on conducting your meeting virtually, attending your meeting to assist in using Zoom, or providing our teleconference number or Zoom meeting link. We are also available to assist with election procedures, including the use of proxies. Contact us at 505-995-9644. We are not working in the office, but we receive our messages daily and will respond to your request as soon as possible. 💧

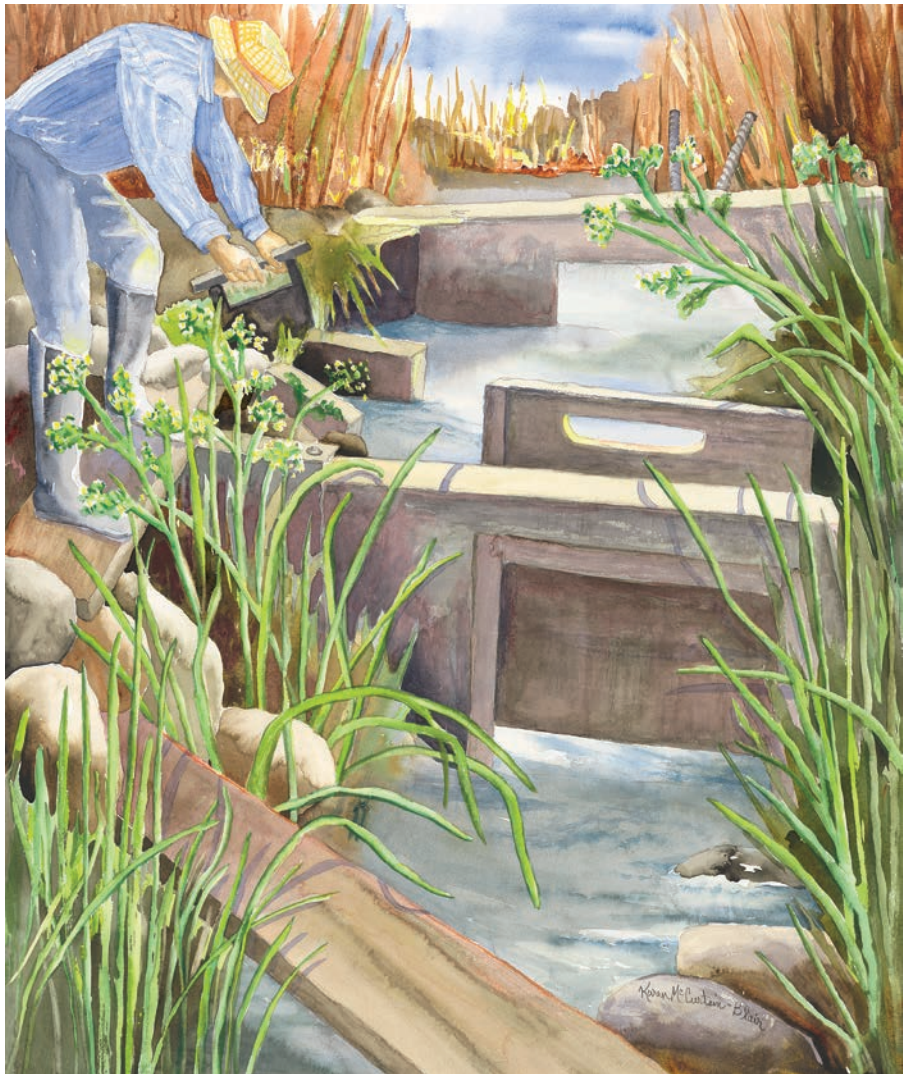
Lessons of Respeto, Caridad, y Repartimiento in the Acequia Culture of Northern New Mexico

by Levi Romero (Presented at New Mexico
Acequia Association Plática, June 6, 2020)

Levi Romero, the 2nd eldest of five children to Elías and Carolina Durán Romero, is a native of San Antonio del Embudo, or what is now known as Dixon, New Mexico. He is the grandson of Silviares Durán y Anita Valdez Durán and Juan Andres and Juanita Atencio Romero. Whether in the village of my birth and upbringing or wherever I travel, work, or reside, the honor, dignity, and respect that I have for others begins with the respeto that I have for myself. My sense of self is encoded in a personal history linked through many generations. And no matter what I do it is always connected to the family names I carry. Who a person is, where I am from, is identifiable by the family they belong to. In small towns throughout northern New Mexico *¿quién es tu familia?* is an often-posed question when a person meets someone they don't recognize. And although my parents and grandparents are deceased, my personal character is still connected to who they were.

In a world that becomes increasingly complacent to regarding traditions of honor and respect, surely two cultural values that nurture the health of a community's wellbeing, the acequia systems of northern New Mexico embody lessons of *respeto* through acts of charity and kindness, or what we call *caridad*, and the water distribution and sharing custom known as *repartimiento*. These concepts are essential for living in harmony with one's community. A few years ago a man was going through a very difficult situation, one in which required that he be gone away from the home for a short period of time. In addition to his preoccupation with family matters, he was concerned that during his absence he would lose the garden he had so caringly been tending to. It was mid-summer and the heat and weeds would surely destroy the vegetables. Upon learning of his situation, various neighbors assumed responsibilities for tending to the garden while he was away. They took turns weeding and irrigating until the man was able to return home. Through this collective act of charity, the *caridad* that his neighbors exhibited not only saved his garden but ensured that their actions served as a model for the rest of the community.

Indigenous peoples throughout the world recognize that mother earth, *la madre tierra*, is the great nurturer and



"Working the Acequia Headgate," watercolor painting by Karen McCurtain-Blair, Acequia Madre de Rio Costilla.

provider. The term the Cañari's in Ecuador use for mother earth is *Pachamama*, or Good Mother. Respect for Pachamama is a respect for oneself, for one's neighbor, for one's community. In northern New Mexico when it is said of a person that they exemplify respect, *tiene respeto*, it is implied that that person is not only respectful of others, but that they also have a regard for the land, traditions, language, knowledge, wisdom, and spiritual values. And all of that is inclusive of the culture that helps us sustain, endure, persevere, and ultimately adapt without losing the essence of who we are, a land-based people whose identity is homogeneous with an ancestral past rich in tradition and respect for all life in general. For the concept of respeto is synonymous with a resiliency of spirit. As we move forward into the future, we are mindful that it is our past that is leading the way.

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Lessons of Respeto, Caridad, y Repartimiento

continued from page 5

Dr. Tomás Atencio in his book, *Resolana: Emerging Chicano Dialogues on Community and Globalization*, quotes a ninety-year-old man sharing his views on the disintegration of honor. "In earlier days", reflected the man, 'we had men of honor. In those days one man would ask another, 'Amigo, lend me two dollars and I will pay you when the sun sets.' At dusk the man would return the two dollars, because the word was honored. Not so today. The word of honor is useless." Reflecting more profoundly about these changes, this man offers an explanation: "The true value of things has been exchanged for a promise--- an anticipated life in the future. Our communities and the activities of everyday life have become alienated because our sustenance and our possessions have been purchased and have not derived from an intimate relationship among each other and with nature. We no longer pay for the harvest that sustains us with the sweat of our brows; hence we no longer feel the satisfaction of having done something useful and meaningful. We do not feel the soul of the earth because it has become a disgrace to soil ourselves with its dust. We no longer recognize the miracle—the milagro—of food because we have not bent our bodies over a plant to care for it or to pluck its fruits. Neither do we feel the humility nor the nobility of being human because we neither do the most sublime nor the most basic of things. We are satisfied with a life of leisure; with a life of no pain."

The colloquial expression, *La Cultura Cura*, meaning that culture is healing, is not an ambiguous or abstract idiom. For us it is real and tangible. When our spirit feels disembodied, when we stumble as we make our way across the threshold between the traditional and modern worlds, it is cultura that helps cure us of the ills born out of displacement. Acequia communities do not live anticipating the real and potential effects of cultural change, as some might profess. What they fail to realize is that we have already experienced the effects of cultural change within our communities. What many of us do live with is the anticipation for change that will illuminate a return to honor, respect, humility, and acts of charity that encourage a sense of community in all areas of our lives. It was not so long ago that foot paths between neighbor's houses were a common sight. An opening along a fence line ensured free mobility between vecinos. People relied on each other and shared of what they had. As a pariente reminded me recently, "*una persona no es rica por lo que tiene, es rica por lo que puede dar.*" And my cousin's words ring true in the old way, it is not a person's possessions that make them rich, but their kindness and generosity.

The lessons born of scarcity, not abundance, is what teach us how to share. Repartimiento, the division of water among the parcientes of an acequia system, is a custom most practiced during times of water shortage. There is nothing more divisive among vecinos than when the need for water is extreme. Repartimiento ensures that water will be allocated equally among parcientes. As young kids growing up in humble and modest living conditions, we were always instructed to share

what we had with our siblings, "toma, repartate con tus hermanos." Reparto as a concept of sharing is integral not only to the acequia system but in everyday life as well. In the old days, everyone was an hermano and hermana to each other and repartiendo was not only encouraged but expected.

Dr. Sylvia Rodriguez in her book, *Acequia: Water Sharing, Sanctity and Place*, illustrates the act of respeto in the following passage. "*An old custom among Nuevomexicanos, less practiced today but still known to the post- World War II generation, involves an adult requesting a drink of water from someone younger, typically a child. The spoken request is, 'Hija (or Hijo), tráeme agua' (child, bring me water). The youth is supposed to stop whatever he or she is doing, obediently fetch a glass or cup of water, and stand attentively before the elder, arms folded, until the vessel is drained and handed back. The elder then blesses the junior. Those familiar with this practice often comment that it has become rare, because as everyone knows, young people today 'ya no tienen respeto' or 'les falta respeto': they lack this kind of respectful attitude. Nonetheless, responding to a request for water in such a manner is still considered the hallmark of good upbringing.*"

Documents such as *Recopilación de las Leyes de los Reynos de Indias*, the Laws of the Indies, established guidelines for the design and development of early settlement towns, and recognized that to live in harmony with one's surroundings, it was necessary to respect the laws of nature. These ordinances addressed issues of solar orientation, prevailing winds, soil quality, and the establishment of paths of progression, scale, zoning guidelines and even building styles. They have been cited as "probably the most effective planning document in the history of man-kind." What the authors of these ordinances understood is that to live in harmony with the land requires a sense of respect, *tiene que haber respeto*. Unfortunately, we have moved away from utilizing the methods taught by *Las Leyes de Las Indias*, *Las Siete Partidas*, and the wisdom of our antepasados. Our towns and villages now suffer for the lack of understanding and implementation of these principals.

The acequia systems in these communities were also constructed according the Laws of the Indies. After many centuries, these ancient waterways continue to provide the water that nourishes the food we set on our table. They also function as a model of cooperation and mutual respect whereby the members of the acequia system known as parcientes, participate in the annual ditch cleaning called *la saca* and in the periodic maintenance required throughout the year. These communal activities ensure that relationships among neighbors are symbiotic and bound by a collective interest. The resiliency of our communities is based on knowing who we are as a people, having respect for our heritage and the land that we have been granted, and a respect for the cultural traditions that have made us who we are. In addition, we must honor one another. Honoring the traditions that enabled our antepasados to live in harmony with nature and with each other will allow us to survive in this ever-changing world. And not only survive but flourish, *con respeto*. 💧

Report on the 2020 Drought



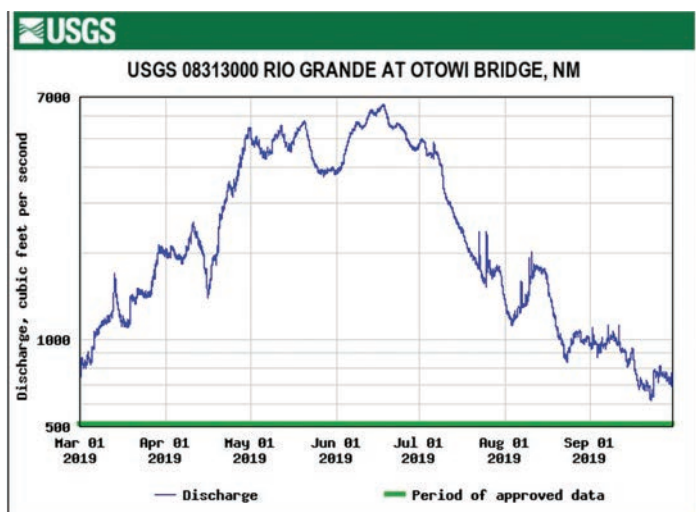
by Paula Garcia, NMAA Executive Director

The growing season of 2020 will be remembered as a drought of profound frustration. After a dry year of historic significance in 2018 and a moderately better year in 2019, this year had little or no runoff in most of our streams, nor was there a monsoon season typical of past years.

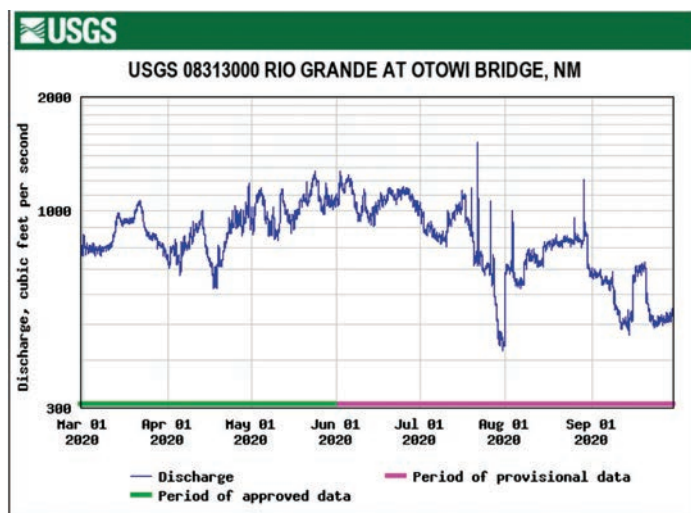
Historically, the month of May was the best month for Spring runoff as snowpack melts and rivers swell with water. However, stream flows in New Mexico were well below normal this year. April was a very dry month with high temperatures and little moisture.

According to the NRCS Basin Outlook report for May, "The month of April left New Mexico with deficits in both snow and precipitation. With temperatures steadily climbing throughout the month into record setting levels the northern mountains began to quickly shed what little snow was left. Coming off a marginal snow accumulation season and a dry spring has left the streamflow forecasts with well below average values."

As of May 1st, snowpack in New Mexico was at 39% of normal compared to 106% last year. The stream flow at Otowi gage, below the confluence of the Rio Grande and Rio Chama was at 64% of normal. As the season progressed, the river flows continued to be much lower in 2020 than in 2019. The graphs below show the dramatic difference between the two years shown by the graphs below:

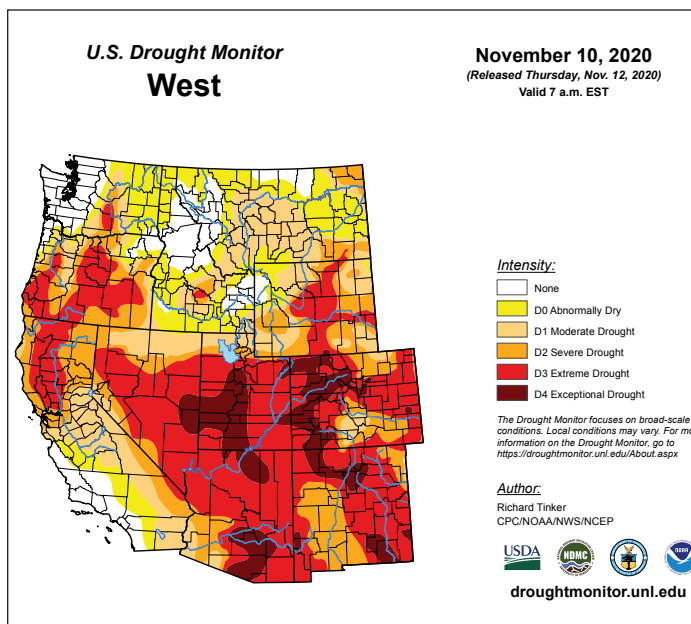


2019 stream flow data on the Rio Grande at Otowi gage. Stream flows peaked at close to 7,000 cfs. Source: US Geological Survey.



2020 stream flow data for on the Rio Grande at Otowi gage. Stream flows at their peak remained well below 2000 cfs. Source: US Geological Survey

As of early November, drought persists in New Mexico. The US Drought Monitor shows that most of the state is gripped in extreme to exceptional drought.



Source: US Drought Monitor, National Drought Mitigation Center.

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Report on



How did this affect the 2020 growing season?

NMAA asked some acequia leaders to share their observations along their own rivers.

the 2020 Drought (cont. from page 7)

"Acequia del Bosque, the lowest of the 8 sharing acequias... only had enough for a full rotation among parciantes on 4 occasions all summer. The four upper acequias gave up water 4 days a week, but had full rotations on the other 3 days. The lower acequias struggled all summer."

—Rob Templeton, Embudo Valley Acequia Association

"This year the Taos Valley Settlement Agreement was used to share water on two of our stream systems the Rio Lucero and the Rio Pueblo. We worked with the Taos Pueblo and other stream parciantes to make sure everyone was able to get their share of the water. The Rio Hondo has a water sharing agreement in place since early 2000. They had regular meetings to measure the water and distribute accordingly. The Rio Grande del Rancho and Rio Chiquito share water on a custom basis which seems to work for all of the acequias - they let lower acequias irrigate first and move up to the closer acequias so everyone is able to get at least one irrigation in case of drought. This year we have begun the process of developing a Stream Commission for the Rio Fernando."

—Judy Torres, Taos Valley Acequia Association

"The State Engineer personnel that monitored the implementation of the shortage sharing agreement between non-pueblo and the Pueblos of Zia and Jemez Officials gave their report. It showed better than 95% compliance. The Pueblo Officials and State Engineer Representatives were beyond grateful and expressed their gratitude to me on behalf of our Mayordomos."

—Gilbert Sandoval, Jemez River Basin Coalition of Acequias

"The MRGCD water sharing policy treats all irrigators equally, both senior and junior, except for the Pueblos, for whom the BOR reserves storage at El Vado, when MRGCD rights are exhausted. MRGCD plans to delay the start of the irrigation season next year and end it early. They are also considering not offering water bank

leases to irrigators who sold their pre-1907 water rights, and the BOR is funding late season forbearance contracts to farmers to keep the Rio Grande wet for species preservation."

—Santiago Maestas, South Valley Regional Association of Acequias

"My informal queries in the valley suggest a worse drought than in 2018 -- and 2021 will probably be worse. Forage losses were massive, probably > 70%. Many of those without supplemental wells lost their home gardens during our rotation/curtailment implemented after our 850 af of purchased water ran out on July 9. We shared what little water there was. We were helped by the release of Rio Grande Compact water - there was not enough native water to cover conveyance costs to get our water to our diversions without that gift."

—Tim Seaman, Rio Chama Acequia Association

"My acequias in Ledoux did not get any water to irrigate. The rivers had low flow in March, so we left the water in the river for livestock. The rivers dried in early summer. We did not have a good monsoon season so the pasture did not grow. Morphy lake barely filled up to minimum level. Most people are selling their livestock. I am using a well for the cows. I am afraid that it could dry up. Cows drink a significant amount of water."

—Harold Trujillo, Acequia de la Isla, LeDoux

"Our region experienced the same drought conditions as most of New Mexico. Acequias in Las Vegas operated under a voluntary sharing agreement with the City of Las Vegas and among themselves. There was insufficient water to meet all needs. Crop yields were lower this year creating potential shortages of hay for this coming winter. Those with livestock hauled water due to lack of water in stock tanks. Pastures did not produce sufficient forage thus supplemental feeding was necessary."

—William Gonzales, Rio de las Gallinas Acequia Association



Unidos con Fuerza

ACEQUIAS RISING TO MEET THE
CHALLENGES OF OUR TIMES



CONGRESO DE LAS ACEQUIAS 2020

SATURDAY, DECEMBER 12TH

FROM 10:00-12:00 AND 1:00-2:00

VIRTUAL GATHERING - JOIN BY COMPUTER OR PHONE

The annual Congreso de las Acequias is a vibrant gathering of acequias and our supporters from throughout New Mexico and Southern Colorado.

This year, our theme is **Unidos con Fuerza** - in which we honor the collective strength of our communities to endure climate change and the current pandemic. We will lift up our strength with a united voice to defend and protect our precious waters, and a call to action to use our knowledge, land, and water to grow food that nurtures our families, elders, and children.

REGISTER ONLINE OR BY PHONE:

www.lasacequias.org/congreso

(505) 995-9644

Bendición de las Aguas

Música y poesía

Comunidad

**ALSO JOIN US FOR SPECIAL
PRE-CONGRESO
COMMUNITY PLÁTICAS**

NOV. 18TH, 6-7:30 PM: WATER

NOV. 24TH, 6-7:30 PM: FOOD

DEC. 2ND, 6-7:30 PM: YOUTH

Other Important Acequia News

Waters of the United States (WOTUS) Rule Threatens Acequias

In June, the Trump administration adopted a definition of the “waters of the United States” that significantly rolls back protections for the Nation’s waterways. Streams, rivers and wetlands in the West, especially in New Mexico, will be particularly hit hard by the Rule’s removing several categories of waterways from federal protection. These “non-jurisdictional” waters would include ephemeral streams (those that do not flow continuously throughout the year) and even some intermittent streams that may flow more or less continuously throughout the year but do not reach “traditionally navigable waters” like the Rio Grande and Rio Chama. Also at risk of losing protections are the Gila and Rio Costilla which under the old rule were protected because they are interstate waters. The NM Environment Department estimates that 96% of New Mexico’s streams would lose protections under the new Rule.

Consistent with NMAA’s mission to protect clean water, NMAA submitted comments against the Rule because its implementation would have devastating effects on several of its members, including acequias that are downstream from municipal wastewater treatment facilities or national laboratories such as LANL. Despite comments from several diverse stakeholders, including municipalities like the City of Santa Fe and the Town of Taos, the EPA issued the Rule without meaningfully addressing the comments that were raised. Lawsuits against the Rule have arisen all over the country. NMAA has recently joined other co-plaintiffs in a lawsuit against the EPA to ensure the quality of the water that makes its way from New Mexico’s rivers and streams to our acequias and to our farmland.

Water Use Leasing (Intrepid Litigation) Update

The NMAA has long advocated for a change to the State Engineer’s policy of allowing immediate use of leased water prior to a hearing and resolution of protested water use leasing applications. During the 2015 and 2019 legislative sessions, NMAA has spearheaded legislation that would clarify that applications submitted under the water use leasing statute are subject to the same notice, protest and hearing requirements as other water transfer applications. Although those attempts were ultimately blocked by special interest groups, the NMAA and other supporters of these efforts were vindicated by a district court judgment in April 2020 that held that the OSE’s policy of approving immediate use of leased water was illegal.

The district court judge, R. Romero, ordered the OSE to revoke the “preliminary authorization” it had granted to the applicant

(Intrepid Potash) for immediate use. If the applicants were allowed immediate use of the leased water, 4,700 AFY would have been depleted from the system even before the parties had a chance to present their arguments at a hearing. Even if the protestants (Carlsbad Irrigation District, Otis Mutual Domestic and the ISC) would actually win at a hearing, the harm would already have taken place. The CID and Otis have recently requested sanctions against the OSE for continuing to ignore the Court’s order through what they call “wrongful conduct...intended [to] delay and subver[t]” the Court’s jurisdiction to issue the writ of mandamus after the Court had already denied the OSE’s motion for a stay on enforcement. In the meantime, the applicants and the OSE have sued Judge Romero and petitioned the NM Supreme Court to quash his order. Recently, the Supreme Court granted a motion consolidating the OSE and Intrepid cases but a decision on the merits of the case has not been made yet by the court.

Water Transfer Protests – Navigating OSE’s Online Notices

Last year, the NMAA successfully advocated for a change in the law that brings greater transparency and protections to water right owners in the water transfer application process, specifically notice requirements. Rather than having to rely solely on combing through the legal section of a newspaper to identify if a water transfer application has been filed that may impact your water rights, you can now view all notices of transfers on the OSE’s website. Here’s a short primer on how to locate and identify notices:

1. Go to the OSE’s website (www.ose.state.nm.us) and click on the “Notices of Publication” tab at the top of the page.
2. On the far right-hand side of the Notices of Publication page there is a list of NM Counties (you may have to scroll down). Choose the county(ies) your acequia is in.
3. If any applications have been filed, a list will appear that shows the File Number of the water rights that are the subject of the application; the Name of the Applicant; the Date it was posted; and whether the Affidavit of Publication has been received by the OSE from the applicant, proving that the notice ran in a newspaper for three consecutive weeks. The list will provide a link to the notice itself, which should match the notice that appears in the newspaper.

Clearly, if you see a notice that mentions your acequia’s name and you are unsure whether the acequia was involved in the process, you should be concerned. However, many non-acequia water transfers may impact your water rights, including groundwater transfers, especially where large amounts are being transferred and where new wells may impact surface diversions. Also, notices are now required to indicate the protest deadline, so you are not left guessing. The new law set the protest deadline to be 70 days from posting on the OSE’s website which means a monthly check in on the OSE’s website should be sufficient to catch new applications. Once you’ve read through the notice, feel free to call us so we can help you determine whether you should be concerned about the application.

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Celebrating our 2020 Los Sembradores Farm Trainees

The importance of cultivating the next generation of farmers and raising food locally has been heightened by the Covid-19 crisis. For the last four years, Chicoyole Farm in Chamisal has been our main learning site - but only a month into this year's program we had to make major adaptations to eventually make the program contact free and covid safe. This has been a major feat, and we acknowledge the great leadership of our Farmer Trainer and Manager, Donne Gonzales. She has been creative and adaptive, and ever committed to sharing her skills and love of the land. Our revised methodology has included supporting our apprentices to work their own land, with weekly personal and team check-ins. Donne has also been making short videos about farming - check them out on Facebook, Instagram and Youtube, and remember to share with your friends and family!

We celebrate the tenacity of our Farmer Apprentices and thank young people everywhere striving to continue our land-based traditions! Our 2020 cohort started in Mid-February, and will graduate in early December. We wish them well in their agricultural endeavors!

If you are interested in applying for the 2021 NMAA Farmer Training Program please contact donne@lasacequia.org or call 505-995-9644 for more information!



**Aimee Lynn Stearns -
Des Montes, NM**

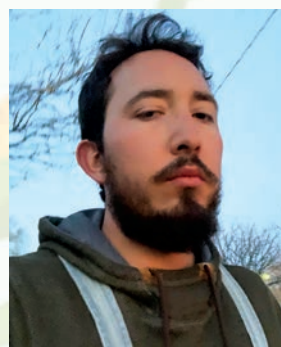
"One of my richest experiences of the Sembradores program has been reconnecting with the traditions of my grandparents. Most of their land-based traditions were not passed down to me, due to subsequent generations being encouraged to find success in other ways. This resulted in a persistent feeling within me of being "de-skilled," which, to me, means feeling like I did not have access to the skills and

knowledge that had been passed down from generation to generation before me.

Even at a young age, I understood that the apple trees in my orchard and the acequia that flowed through them were special, but now as an adult, I am cultivating the vocabulary and skills to foster my connection to that sacredness. As soon as I began the program I realized that I was going to have opportunities to "re-skill" and re-remember the knowledge of the land stewards before me. I was so excited when I realized that I would have the opportunity to learn and grow in ways I didn't know were available to me. In addition, doing this work, alongside these people, has inspired confidence in myself and my abilities. I am so grateful to be guided by all of the mentors and friends with whom I am growing alongside. Also, I am grateful that the plants have so much to teach me, and I am glad I listened to their beckoning.

This program has helped me to reconnect to the land, water, community, and my familia. Now, during harvest time, I had the beautiful experience of sharing the abundance of squash that I grew with my family. Driving along our acequia in Des Montes, to each tio and tia's house, feels like a re-inspiration, a remembrance, and a return to my home and family. I feel very grateful that this is the work I am doing, now at a time when land access and local food security should be the focus for New Mexicans.

Moving forward, I intend to return to teaching, mentorship, and working with youth. I am inspired by my experiences this season to help young people to reconnect to land, *querencia*, water, and seed. In addition, my personal goal is to secure land for myself to grow food using traditional and modern growing techniques, using acequia waters."



**Emilio Borrego -
Cordova, NM**

"This program has given me a new sense of what small farming operations can look like and how much land transformation can occur in a single season. It

has shown me a new perspective on expectations to see in myself and I now have a clearer sense of what ambitions I wish to pursue. I've been able to learn from other young farmers and experience some of what they have learned and the projects they have created for themselves. Everyone's experience is unique and it's our collaboration that gives us the most tools to grow and improve our practices.

In this experience I've been exposed to and have learned far more about the cycles of a growing season, the many variations of nearby areas within this greater region, and just how flexible many crops can be from place to place and within a broad planting/growing window. I think I see now that there's really no right or wrong way to approach farming, in every challenge there are many solutions. For me what's most important, especially in this rapidly changing world, is to stay flexible and constantly learn and adapt from your surroundings. Growing food and medicine seems to become a sort of intuition that you learn to listen to over time.

With the tools I have now, I feel that in future seasons I can plot out a far more efficient

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growing season and be more and more prepared and pliable with the challenges that come with farming. It's a hard lesson to take in — that with farming comes both an abundance of disappointments and rewards, but in persistence you can find your resilience. Through this learning process I've sparked multiple new interests and now I have a greater map of ambitions to pursue and the tools to bring them to fruition.

The pandemic has changed life across the board. Food sovereignty feels more valuable than ever when the functions of modern society has been pushed to the point of further exposing its fragility. I feel very lucky that I came into this program at the time I did. This Sembradores experience has definitely not been conventional but we have adapted and taken on the learning challenges in innovative ways. Personally, it has pushed me to establish what I need to on my own land for the future to come. I feel equipped to take on the responsibilities of caring for this land and this time has been an encouraging opportunity to embrace that connection."

**Simon Patrick Vaughn -
Las Trampas, NM**

"I was raised in Las Trampas on very beautiful land. I have worked the land with my grandpa since I was a little boy. I want to learn how to get more produce out of my area. I want to learn new ways of farming, as I've always known a traditional side. I love everything about the land I grew up on, and my community. I come from a small community where everyone is acknowledged as neighbors and lend helping hands. I want to continue to plant in my garden and provide fresh organic food to my family and neighbors."



Jacob M. Torres - Taos, NM

"The program has impacted me in many ways, positively showing me there is a lot more that goes into growing produce than just putting seeds in the ground and putting water. There is cultivation of seeds, understanding that different seeds enjoy different environments, understanding that different plants need to be planted at different times of year, and that some plants grow and blossom quickly and some take time and patience.

I've learned many different plant types, how to harvest seeds from different plants, and that growing is just as much about patience as it is hard work. Also how to set up grow beds, how to set up drip tape, and how to harvest root vegetables. I enjoyed growing squash and corn with my grandpa. He and my family have always raised animals, and it was very fun to change it up a bit. The thing I enjoyed planting most was the many pepper plants

with my uncle, like jalapenos, tabasco peppers, habanero and many more. It was good to see the acequia used for more than watering the grass on the field for cows.

I hope to have a full scale garden of my own some day to grow for my own consumption and to share with friends and family. Covid has shown the importance of growing food and not only relying on stores for them, and also taught me how important it is to properly clean vegetables and exercise good hygiene habits."

Other Important Acequia News

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NMAA Joins Outstanding Waters Petition for the Pecos River

On April 20, 2020, NMAA joined several other partners (San Miguel County, Village of Pecos, and Molino de la Isla Organics), in filing a petition with the Water Quality Control Commission (WQCC). The petition seeks to designate the Upper Pecos River Watershed as an Outstanding National Resource Water (ONRW) under the Clean Water Act. The watershed is threatened by development, waste disposal, potential hard rock mining, and climate change.

The Upper Pecos Watershed is culturally significant to the people of Jemez Pueblo, as ancestral homelands. Since the mid-16th century, acequia communities in the Upper Pecos

Watershed have depended on these waters for traditional land-use practices like growing crops and raising livestock.

The petitioners are calling on the WQCC to designate 14.1 miles of the Pecos River, 56.2 miles of its named tributaries, 698 acres of wetlands, and 180.03 miles of ephemeral and intermittent drainages of the Pecos River Watershed as ONRWs. ONRW protections allow current activities, such as farming and ranching to continue, but require new activities to demonstrate that they will not degrade water quality.

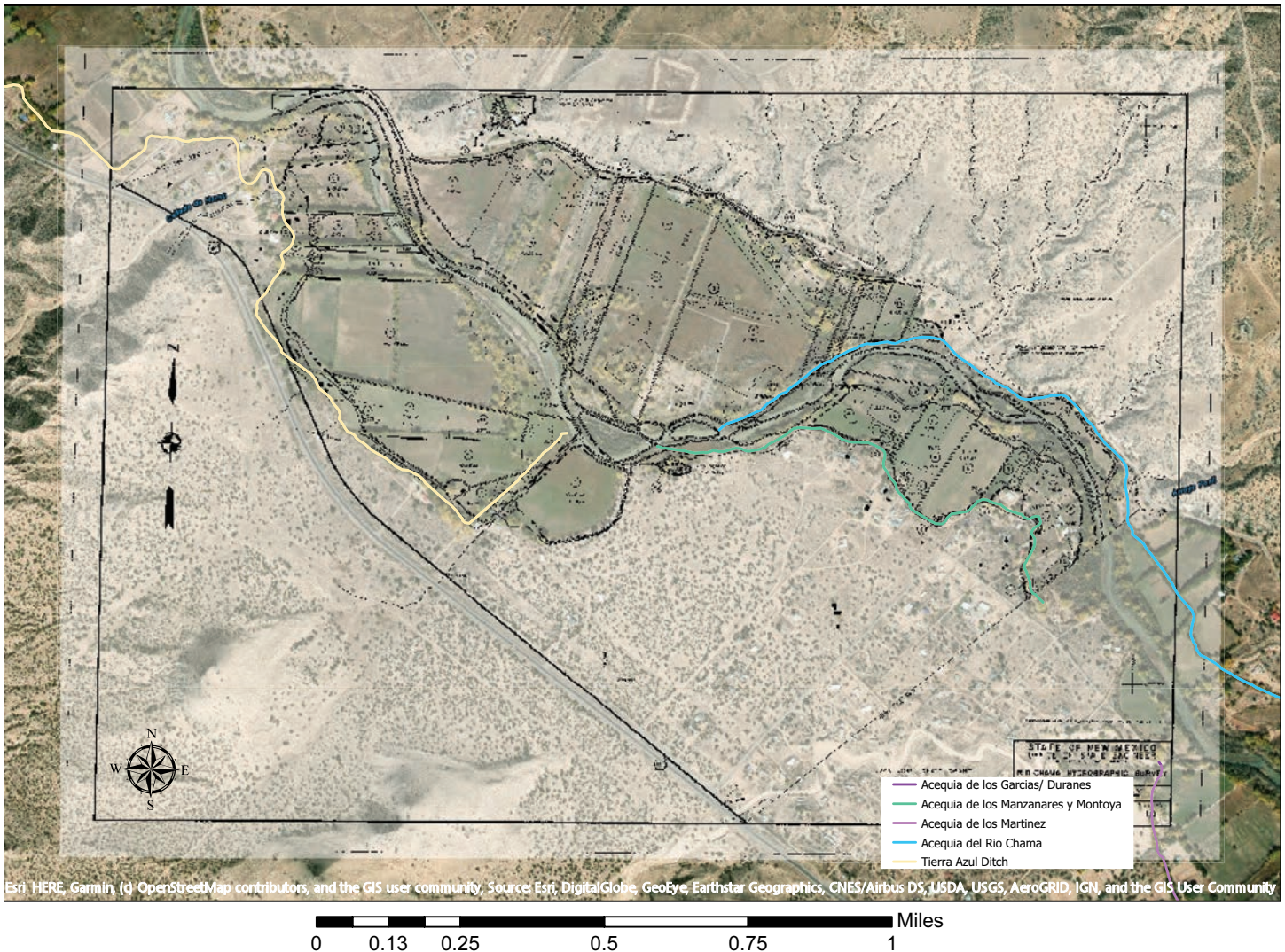
The WQCC will be scheduling a hearing in April, 2021 to take testimony on the petition. NMAA will be requesting that people, acequias, and other entities along the Pecos River submit letters of support for the petition. To learn more about this effort, please contact NMAA at paula@lasacequias.org.

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Mapping as a Planning Tool for Acequias

Rio Chama Mainstream Overlay

June 10, 2019
Hydrographic Overlay Map



Map depicting a hydrographic survey created by the OSE overlaid on aerial imagery for the Rio Chama Acequia Association.

by Chavela Trujillo, NMAA Staff

While trying to find a balance between technology and culture, we have identified great ways that technology can assist in agriculture. One of these resources is acequia mapping. Mapping acequias can be a great way of identifying the conveyance location of your acequia as well as having visual documentation to pass this knowledge on to the next generation. We can also utilize mapping to identify problem areas such as easement encroachment or damaged infrastructure - and to assist with documenting infrastructure locations, part numbers, and measurements. In some cases, we have even assisted acequias in identifying historical water rights based on hydrographic surveys then, by utilizing county assessor data, acequias can identify current or potential parcientes.

For those who have been part of an acequia community for many years, it may be simple for you to recall where the acequia travels, but new members may not be lucky enough to

know this. By walking the acequia and using waypoints to identify exact locations, we can create maps the commission can share with the community. This information can even be used to assist a new mayordomo in their duties.

A great example comes from our recent work with the Rio Chama Regional Association (RCAA). This project started with identifying all 17 of their acequias that divert from the Rio Chama, and quickly turned into a large-scale project to gain infrastructure funding for diversion dams.

The first step was for NMAA and RCAA to gain permission to survey the acequia with the assistance of a commissioner, as well as gaining previous surveys that had been conducted by the East Rio Arriba Soil and Water Conservation Districts Youth Conservation Corps (YCC) crew. Once permission was obtained, the field survey started and data was collected for areas of concern along the acequia. Part numbers, images, and

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measurements were also documented for infrastructure in the hopes that the commission and future contractors could use this information when making replacements.

In addition to this, hydrographic surveys provided by the Office of State Engineer for the RCAAs adjudication were overlaid on the map to identify areas that had historical water rights. This information also assisted in identifying the historic conveyance of the acequia. To add another step, NMAA gained permission from the Rio Arriba County Assessor's office to overlay public parcel data on these maps. Using this parcel data the commission can now identify potential parcientes and gain mailing addresses to inform them of acequia information. While these resources are constantly being updated or changing, it still provides a trail for the acequia to use as required.

All of this information provides great assistance to acequias, and NMAA has researched resources to make this data available online as a form of digital archiving for the commission. By creating an ArcGIS online account, NMAA can upload this data online and create permission for viewing specific to each commission's requests. Having an online account enables commissioners to view and manage their mapping data as well as share it in the form of links. This can be a great resource for sharing maps with parcientes, new commissioners, funders, and other entities.

While balancing the world of technology and culture may seem overwhelming, NMAA is proud to be of assistance in finding innovative ideas that can move acequias into the future! For more information regarding acequia mapping please contact Chavela Trujillo at chavela@lasacequias.org. ♦

Plan for the Future - USDA Programs for Your Farm or Ranch

The NMAA is pleased to announce our Acequia Farmer and Rancher Outreach project which is a partnership with the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) to provide support to farmers and ranchers with their operations; provide training workshops to new and beginning farmers and ranchers; and support more participation in USDA programs with one-on-one technical assistance.

During the Fall and Winter, it is a good time for producers to plan ahead for next year in terms of improvements you would like to implement on your farms or ranches. These include conservation practices that can improve soil health, water conservation, and overall viability of your operations. USDA programs can also be used to fund season extension practices on your farm such as high tunnels (a type of greenhouse). This month, our focus is on conservation programs through the Natural Resource Conservation Service (NRCS).

Some of the programs that are of most interest to acequia parcientes include:

Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP).

Through EQIP, NRCS provides agricultural producers with financial resources and one-on-one help to plan and implement improvements, or what NRCS calls 'conservation practices'. Using these practices can lead to cleaner water and air, healthier soil and better wildlife habitat, all while improving agricultural operations.



Through EQIP, NRCS co-invests in these practices with you through a cost share program in which NRCS will reimburse the producer for a portion of the cost. Some common conservation practices include irrigation systems (gated pipe, subsurface irrigation, drip irrigation), leveling of fields, planting cover crops, planting pollinator-friendly crops, managing soil erosion, etc. Starting with the 2018 Farm Bill, acequias and land grants are both eligible for the EQIP program. You may apply as an individual or as an acequia.

Resource Conservation Partnership Program (RCPP). Also an NRCS program, RCPP is based on state or regional partnerships. In New Mexico, the New Mexico Association of Conservation Districts (NMACD) is the lead partner on an RCPP grant focused on acequias. Acequias apply directly to NMACD to participate in the RCPP program. RCPP funds can be used for acequia irrigation improvements. NMACD works with several partners, including the Interstate Stream Commission, local SWCDs, and the NM Acequia Association, to conduct outreach and encourage acequias to apply. RCPP will provide either technical assistance (for engineering design) or financial assistance (funding for construction).

The NMAA is here to assist parcientes, especially those historically underserved by the USDA, to access on-farm improvements offered by the NRCS, or financial services offered by the FSA. Our team will help you navigate the process from application to implementation. Next newsletter, we will provide an overview of FSA programs.

Please contact: toribio@lasacequias.org, serafina@lasacequias.org, or 505.995.9644. ♦

Do you want financial and technical support to:

- Enhance your soil and sequester more carbon?
- Improve your irrigation infrastructure?
- Extend your growing season with a high tunnel?
- Implement any other improvements on your farm or ranch?



NMAA team member, Donne Gonzales, and her daughter, prepare seed packets for 'Semillas pa la Gente' - Photo credit: Juliet Garcia-Gonzales; Seed packets - Photo credit: Max Moulton.

Sharing Seeds With the Community During Crisis

by Emily Arasim and Donne Gonzales, NMAA Staff

When the Covid-19 pandemic hit, the NMAA team quickly saw a need to share seeds, and keep deepening our efforts to support acequeros and acequeras to give love and attention to gardens, revive fallow fields, and grow and share food with our communities. The health crisis has caused problems in purchasing seeds from many seed companies, as well as supply issues in grocery stores across the state and country, highlighting in a whole new way the importance of New Mexico grown food, and the local farmers and gardeners who take care of the land and water.

Through our 'Semillas pa la Gente' project, NMAA organized, packaged and shared hundreds of diverse seed packets with over 180 families who sent in requests from all across the state. Packages included resilient native seeds such as corn, peas, havas, beans, and calabazas, as well as popular, nutritious vegetables like chard, kale, beets, radish and carrots.

We were excited to get many replies from people who expressed their joy and appreciation in receiving seeds, and shared that they would be working with their children and grandchildren who were out of school to share their knowledge and *querencia*, and plant and tend their gardens.

As part of a separate but interconnected project, NMAA also worked alongside the New Mexico Farmers Market, New Mexico First, and other partners, to fundraise, order, and provide bulk quantities of seeds to market farmers across New Mexico who were struggling to access the seeds they needed for the growing season.

We are thankful to everyone who participated and supported our seed sharing efforts. As we exchange seeds and grow food together, we are doing vital work to care for our families, neighbors, elders, youth and future generations—and also taking practical action to ensure food access, food security, and health and survival for our communities. 💧

Other Important Acequia News *continued from page 12*

FSA Reverses Coverage for Irrigated Lands

In a bulletin dated September 1, 2020, the New Mexico FSA stated their policy that irrigated forage land is not covered by the Non-Insured Disaster Program (NAP) when drought is the cause of loss. This appears to be a departure from past practice by the agency since many producers have participated in NAP in past years and have noted that drought was an eligible cause of loss. In a letter to NMAA, FSA State Director stated that he was just clarifying an interpretation of existing NAP policy that was improperly implemented in the past.

The NAP handbook states that an inadequate water supply at the beginning of a planting period, except for trees and perennials, is not an eligible cause of loss. However, the FSA has

used this language to justify a policy that categorically excludes forage crops (which are perennial) on irrigated lands from coverage if the loss is from drought. NMAA has expressed concern about this change in policy to New Mexico's congressional delegation stating that the new policy is based on incorrect reasoning.

The change comes amid tensions between FSA and northern New Mexico ranchers in which a group of ranchers in Rio Arriba County won an appeal against an FSA decision to reduce the method of disaster payments based on crop yield. The effect of the FSA decision to change eligibility for NAP is to cut off an entire population of ranchers who rely on acequia-irrigated land for raising forage for their livestock. 💧

Noticias de las Acequias • Fall 2020

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The New Mexico Acequia Association is a statewide, non-profit organization founded in 1990.

MISSION

Our mission is to protect water and our acequias, grow healthy food for our families and communities, and to honor our cultural heritage.

VISION STATEMENT

In our vision, acequias flow with clean water, people work together to grow food, and communities celebrate cultural and spiritual traditions. People honor acequias as part of our heritage and express *querencia* through a strong connection to land and community. Knowledge and experience about growing food, sharing water, and saving seed are passed on from generation to generation.

Guided by our core values, the New Mexico Acequia Association grows a movement of people of all ages and walks of life to defend and protect our precious water by resisting its commodification and contamination. Through involvement in NMAA, families and youth are inspired to cultivate the land, care for our acequias, and heal past injustices. Communities have an abundance of healthy, locally-grown food because we recognize agriculture as a respected and dignified livelihood and way of life.

Acequia Youth Education Activities

In response to the Covid-19 school closures and rapid switch to online and home learning, NMAA has created and widely shared a series of acequia learning worksheets for children, youth and families—including an **acequia treasure hunt, poetry and art activities, coloring pages, storytelling/interview activities, and more.**

We hope you enjoy the acequia matching vocabulary activity included below, and that you continue to take the opportunity of 'stay at home' learning to talk more with the children in your life about our families' traditions and knowledge around the acequias, farming and gardening, and taking care of the water, seeds, animals, orchards, and land.

Visit our website - <https://lasacequias.org/youth-education/> - to access other youth activities, and learn more about our youth education programs.

If you would like to request a printed packet of youth activities to share with your family or community, email us at emily@lasacequias.org or call (505) 995-9644.

El Agua Es La Vida! Water is Life!

www.lasacequias.org

Do you know some of these important acequia vocabulary words?
Draw a line to match the word in Spanish to its definition in English!

Acequia	A feeling of love, dedication, and belonging to a place, community, tradition
Acequia Madre	A community member's assigned time for watering their land using the acequia
Agua	Traditional healing medicines
Ancianos	The first water of the season
Tierra	The headgate which lets water from the river flow into the acequia
Primer agua	Seeds
Querencia	The caretaker of the ditch who makes sure water flows through the acequia to irrigators
Sacando la acequia	An community member with rights to irrigate with water from the acequia
Rio	Shovel
Regar	Community irrigation ditch and the irrigators or <i>parciantes</i> who share water
Remedios	Water
Compuerta	The main "mother ditch" which feeds other smaller acequias
Tiempo	Land
Mayordomo	River
Pala	Elders
Parciante	Cleaning the acequia
Semillas	To water or to irrigate

