

# Acequia Agriculture in New Mexico: Opportunities for Rural Development

Economic and Rural Development Committee  
New Mexico Highlands University, Las Vegas, NM  
Wednesday, October 12, 2016



## New Mexico Acequia Association

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

### Acequia Agriculture Fact:

Of NM counties, Rio Arriba County has the highest acreage devoted to growing apples!

Acequia agriculture makes a significant contribution New Mexico's economy. Counties with highest number of acequias make up about 40% of the total farms in the state.

	New Mexico	Acequia Counties	
Number of Farms	11,430	4,856	42%
Irrigated Acres	680,318	185,985	27%

\* Source: USDA 2012 Census of Agriculture. Counties are Rio Arriba, Taos, Mora, Lincoln, San Miguel, San Juan, Cibola, Grant, Sandoval. Note that county-level data also includes other agriculture.

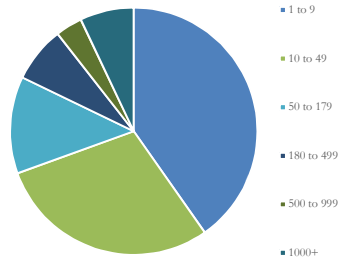
*Photo: Velarde, Rio Arriba County. Home of numerous orchards and Las Nueve Acequias del Rio Grande.*



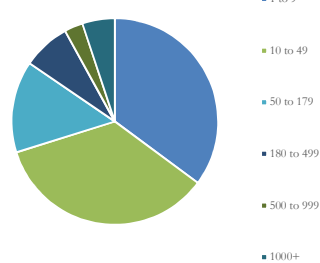
**In New Mexico, and in acequia communities, small farms (under 50 acres) are the majority of farms.**



New Mexico – Number of Farms with Irrigated Acreage



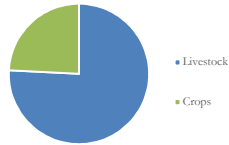
Acequia Counties – Number of Farms with Irrigated Acreage



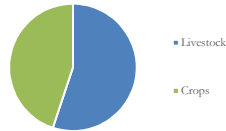
Agriculture is a major contributor to New Mexico's economy, with acequias playing a significant part.

For both, sales of livestock comprise most of the market value produced.

New Mexico - Livestock and Crop Production



Acequia Counties - Livestock and Crop Production



Acequias contribute to the statewide agricultural economy.

Market Value of Livestock and Crops Produced		
	New Mexico	Acequia Counties
Livestock	\$1.9 Billion	\$104 million
Crops	\$617 million	\$84 million

In their respective counties, acequias are the foundation of the local agricultural economy.

Average Market Value Produced per Farm	
Mora	\$19,468
Rio Arriba	\$10,031
San Juan	\$27,135
San Miguel	\$21,244
Sandoval	\$10,287
Taos	\$8,560



## Acequias in New Mexico

Updated acequia inventory, 598 Acequias in 20 counties.

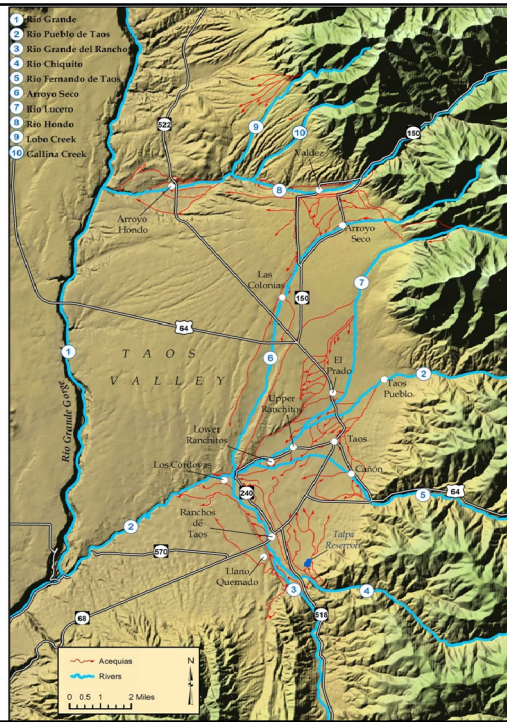
Number of irrigators ranges from 3 to over 400. If average per acequia is 25, approximately 15,000.

Number of miles averages 3, approximately 1,800 miles.

Number of acres per acequia averages 100, approximately 59,800 acres.

Note that US Agricultural Census does not account for all acequia agriculture. Taos Valley has over 7,000 irrigators, yet census counted about 700 farms.

*Photo: Taos Valley from Sylvia Rodriguez, Acequia – Water, Sanctity, and Place (2012)*



## Acequia Policy Platform

- Protect Acequias and Agricultural Land
- Affirm Acequia Governance and Water Management
- Strengthen Local Food Systems
- Strategic Reinvestment in Irrigation Infrastructure
- Protection and Management of Rural Water Rights
- Fair and Timely Adjudication of Water Rights
- Watershed Management



## Policy Recommendations

### Capital Outlay Reform, Investment in Infrastructure

Acequias should be eligible for CO for well-planned projects. Most projects have matching funding and many complete Infrastructure Capital Improvement Plans.



### Protect Agricultural Water Rights and Farmland

There is tremendous pressure to transfer water rights out of agriculture for other commercial uses. Policy development should include consideration of the economic contributions of agriculture.



### Farming and Ranching as Workforce and Small Business Development

New Mexico has some established farmer training programs. Build upon prior success and align existing resources to emphasize support and training for farmers and ranchers.



## Success Stories and Partnerships

### Acequia Rehabilitation Initiative

Partnership between NM Association of Conservation Districts, NM Acequia Association, and Interstate Stream Commission. Granted federal funds for acequia water conservation projects through the USDA Resource Conservation Partnership Program (RCPP). Funds are matched with ISC 90-10 funds and local funds.



### Acequia Farmer Training

Partnership with the American Friends Service Committee (AFSC) to train new farmers in business planning and farm development. Trainees have led creation of farmer cooperatives and some now serve as trainers of additional farmers. The program uses a year-long, hands-on method.

