

New Mexican farmers struggle to stay on the land

Can a tax break keep New Mexico's struggling farmers from selling out?

J.R. Logan/The Taos News | Sept. 6, 2016 | [http://bit.ly/1Wp8m3t](#)

Louis Romero has been through two knee replacements, a heart attack and a bout with cancer. At 73, he's not up for farm chores any more.

Romero and his wife, Emily, live on 5 acres just north of Taos, New Mexico, that were once part of a larger family farm. Emily and her three sisters inherited the land from their dad, who worked as a school bus driver mornings and afternoons and dedicated the rest of his time to the farm.

"I have such an emotional tie to this land," Emily Romero says, tears welling up behind her wire-frame glasses, as she recalls endless hours spent shucking peas and churning butter.

The Romero continued to run cattle on their property until they were forced to sell the herd during a drought a decade ago. Their kids have shown no interest in working the land. Some can't even stand the smell of fresh manure. As a result, the land has sat idle for years.

DEFENDING THE VALUE OF OUR LAND

Agricultural Valuation in Santa Fe County

By J.R. Logan

New Mexico is a beautiful state with a rich history and a diverse economy. One of the state's most valuable resources is its agricultural land. This land is the foundation of our food security and rural economy. However, the value of this land is being eroded by the way it is taxed.

The state's agricultural land is currently valued based on its use as agricultural land. This is a problem because the value of the land is often much higher than what it is worth as agricultural land. This means that farmers are paying more in taxes than they are receiving in benefits.

One solution is to value agricultural land based on its potential as residential or commercial land. This would allow farmers to receive a higher property value and, therefore, a higher tax rate. This would also encourage farmers to sell their land if they are no longer able to work it.

Another solution is to provide a tax break for agricultural land. This would allow farmers to pay a lower property tax rate than other types of land. This would help farmers stay on their land and continue to produce food for the state.

Finally, the state could create a new type of property tax for agricultural land. This tax would be based on the value of the land as agricultural land, but it would be significantly lower than the current property tax rate.

There are many ways to protect the value of our agricultural land. The state should take action to ensure that farmers can stay on their land and continue to produce food for the state.

It is time for the state to take a closer look at the way it taxes agricultural land. We need to find a way to protect the value of this land and ensure that farmers can stay on their land for the future.

For more information on this issue, please contact the author or visit the High Country News website.

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Staying on the land

J.R. Logan Sept 6, 2016

<http://www.hcn.com/news/staying-on-the-land/index>, 007-wd62-7442-1166-914c-478804b4d51.html

Taxed off the farm

New Mexico's rural property tax laws could price out longtime residents.

Emily Steinmetz | July 24, 2008 | [http://bit.ly/1Wp8m3t](#)

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Nestled in the mountains of northern New Mexico, Mora County is a patchwork of agricultural properties that have been divided up and passed down to generations of heirs for centuries. Like many longtime residents, Angela Romero and her brothers and sisters inherited parcels of family land. "Dad had 55 acres and he split it between six of us," she explains. After buying out her sisters, she now owns 21 acres.

Because she's the Mora County assessor, Romero won't be too surprised when she gets a property tax bill that's nearly 20 times higher, perhaps more, than this year's bill. But other residents may do a double take when they receive their 2009 property tax bills.

In the past, county residents who grazed livestock were eligible for a special property valuation — a low, fixed, per-acre tax on any land used for grazing. Next year, however, tracts of land smaller than 47.4 acres will not qualify for

[http://www.hcn.com/news/taos-forum-draws-big-crowd-to-discuss-ag-tax-issue](#), 007-wd62-7442-1166-914c-478804b4d51.html

Taos forum draws big crowd to discuss ag tax issue

J.R. Logan | Taos News, Saturday, May 17, 2014 12:00 AM

Taos County landowner Albert Ortega made clear the doesn't take issue with the fact the county assessor is reviewing the agricultural status for properties that are no longer productive. Instead, he told a crowd Saturday (May 16) the focus shouldn't be on the assessor, but on weakness in a state tax law that doesn't consider the impact of devastating drought.

"I think that our time should be spent seeing how we're going to change the law to maintain the way of life here in Taos County that has existed for hundreds and hundreds of years," said Ortega. Ortega was among more than a hundred people who turned out for a public forum to discuss the effects of changing ag status and explore possible solutions to prevent landowners from being forced to sell.

Starting last year, the county assessor's office began a focused review of recent parcels that have been enjoying a substantial discount on their taxes because they were being used for agriculture. However, the assessor's office has found that more than half of the parcels receiving the discount are no longer producing any agricultural products. As such, those properties had their ag status yanked, resulting in substantial property tax increases for many landowners.

Nick Stauber began the meeting by showing slides of dozens of properties that lost ag status over the years and were now being sold for tens of thousands of dollars. By contrast, slides of properties that still carried the ag discount, including fields still producing, said that appeared well maintained.

Ortega said that he also supports a change in the way the law is applied, but he also supports a moratorium agreement that Taos County's long agricultural tradition is suffering for a variety of reasons. "Landowners have argued that focusing on the productivity of ag lands in the midst of a

drought is unfair. Judge Peggy Nelson, who is also an assessor commissioner in San Cristóbal, called the crackdown "Why the hell now?" I mean this is the worst time period that

Nelson said, referring to the crippling drought that's made it next to impossible for some to get water. She said legislators consider changing the existing law to mirror a provision in Washington

and state that a way for those who preserve open space to pay lower taxes than those who want to sell and develop. She said that a moratorium on ag status for properties that have been abandoned for a long time is a reasonable idea. She said that a moratorium on ag status for properties that have been abandoned for a long time is a reasonable idea. She said that a moratorium on ag status for properties that have been abandoned for a long time is a reasonable idea.

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Katherine Egan/The Taos News

Louis Romero is among the hundreds of Taos County residents who have a big stake in property taxes because their agricultural land is used for grazing. He is looking for the legislature to pass a law that would allow farmers to pay a lower property tax rate on their land.

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When 'fixing the forest' hits a tax snag near Penasco

By J.R. Logan

TAOS — Up a steep and fairly dirt road on the outskirts of Penasco, the green pine trees form a thick wall of forest. Just north of the town of Penasco, the pine trees are being cut down and replaced with a different type of tree. This is part of a reforestation project that has been going on for several years.

The reforestation project is being led by the Santa Fe National Forest. The project is part of a larger effort to restore the forest to its original state. The project is also a part of a larger effort to restore the forest to its original state.

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County landowners fight assessment change that would hike taxes on plots used for farming

By Sarah Madlock

The New Mexican Feb 14, 2015

<http://www.santafenewmexico.com/news/legislators-investigate-landowners-fight-assessment-change-that-would-hike-taxes-on-lands-used-for-agriculture>

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