

CONSERVATION Showcase

Being Kind Is Not Always The Answer

Being too kind is not the answer sometimes – as the Los Lunas Plant Material Center has learned in its efforts to produce vine mesquite for riparian restoration uses.

Vine mesquite is a riparian grass that cattle and wildlife love to graze. It is used to control erosion in waterways and small gullies. Quail and doves eat the seed in the fall and early winter; and deer, rabbits, and ground squirrels eat the leaves.

Vine mesquite tends to form large stands and reaches a height of 8 to 24 inches. In New Mexico, it grows in riparian areas, the eastern plains, and montane/Ponderosa pine areas where 14 inches of precipitation normally occurs during the year.

The NRCS Los Lunas Plant Materials Center, ever in search of more riparian restoration choices, sought to propagate the species for conservation purposes. The Center put together a composite of 30 seed collections, and planted a production field three years ago – except the production field did not produce. A great deal of forage developed in the production field, but little or no seed. And, the Center needed a couple of hundred pounds of seed to release the material to growers who had expressed much interest in the plant.

After two years with no success, the Plant Materials Center shifted tactics and replaced kindness with stress. By irrigating the plants only once in May and early June, the vine mesquite produced heavy seed-



laden shoots and little forage. As fall approached the plants began to turn yellow, so the Center again irrigated to bring the seed into full development.

The potential for conservation uses of vine mesquite had not been realized in the past because the methods for production management were unknown. Using their broad knowledge about the production of native plants, the Los Lunas Plant Materials Center has been able to unlock the key to production of vine mesquite. And, in doing so is bringing into the field of conservation another choice in riparian restoration and erosion control.

For more information about vine mesquite or other native plants used for conservation purposes, contact the NRCS Los Lunas Plant Materials Center at 505-865-4684.