

# CONSERVATION Showcase

## Sichler Farms Produce Introduces Subsurface Drip Irrigation to Socorro County

Most of us are familiar with the marketing advertisement with the catch line “Let Mikey try it.” Designed to sell a new product, the ad portrays a kid brother who is boldly diving into an unfamiliar cereal and liking what he finds.

In modern business terms, this adventurous kid brother is an early adapter; that is, an innovative person who is open to cutting-edge ideas, and one who will adopt these ideas and capitalize on venturing into new territory when the effort proves fruitful.

To the benefit of all New Mexicans, early adapters populate our state’s agricultural communities and bring to our farms and ranches the best new ideas and technology.

Chris and Paula Sichler in Socorro county are two of them.

Sichler Farms Produce grow a variety of vegetables, and is well known in the Los Lunas and Albuquerque markets. To their credit, the Sichlers are pioneering drip irrigation systems in their operation this spring near San Antonio, and bringing this technology that is so popular in southern New Mexico to test its feasibility in a new and important cropping area. It is anticipated this first year chile will be planted in the 43-acre field, with subsequent rotations of onions and melons.

The USDA-Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) is participating with the Sichlers in this venture through cost-sharing for the drip irrigation system under the 2006 Environmental Quality Incentives Program.

“This technology has been moving north through innovative farmers in the Hatch valley,” said Mike Shivers,



Mike Shivers at Sichler Farms Produce drip irrigation site

Socorro NRCS district conservationist. “High value cropping appears to be a trend for the future in the Rio Grande valley.”

The technology will offer the Sichlers several advantages – chief of which is increased production. The increased productivity, according to Shivers, occurs because the plants are not stressed like they are in flood irrigation. They are kept continuously moist rather than being too wet or too dry which happens with flood irrigation. The right amounts of water and fertilizer are delivered through subsurface drip irrigation tubes; therefore, evaporation is minimized. Soil remains fluffy in this situation rather than becoming compacted as occurs in flood irrigation.

Early adapters, like the Sichlers, are not only some of New Mexico best farmers, they are also an asset to their communities as they pioneer the way to progressive and better ways of nurturing their natural resources.