

# CONSERVATION Showcase

## Groups Partner Up to Bring NRCS Conservation Solutions to Local Growers

For years, irrigators in the Deming, New Mexico area have been looking for ways to keep their farms productive as their well water went down and irrigation, fuel, fertilizer and well maintenance costs continued to rise. These farms are located in the Mimbres Basin, a closed system where producers rely entirely on groundwater.

### **AWEP: A New Partnership Solution**

With new partnership program opportunities made available by the USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS), local groups are helping to deliver conservation funding and technical assistance to save water with improved irrigation systems on these farms.

In 2009, the Black Range Resource Conservation & Development (RC&D) Council and the Deming Soil & Water Conservation District (SWCD) submitted a request to direct federal resources to help local growers address these issues.

NRCS entered into a partnership agreement with the Black Range Resource RC&D and the Deming SWCD through the Agricultural Water Enhancement Program (AWEP). The three entities agreed to jointly deliver conservation assistance to producers in a defined area of agricultural land.

NRCS agreed to provide up to \$2.4 million through the Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP) for irrigation system improvements on as many as 59 fields and 20 contracts over four year period. For their part, the Black Range Resource RC&D and the Deming SWCD



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agreed to facilitate the submission of applications and provide additional technical assistance to participants.

This gives producers in the AWEP area the opportunity to apply for funding and assistance to convert their flood or pivot sprinkler irrigation systems to more efficient drip irrigation, increase automation and monitoring of the systems, and reduce the amount of water pumped onto local fields.

### **On-the-Farm Conservation Application**

Diaz Farms, Inc., a Deming-area producer of onions, chile, small grains, and silage was among the participants. With the program, the operators are planning to

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*Drip irrigation equipment like this is being installed on local farms through AWEF.*



install a subsurface drip system to improve the placement and timing of applications and conserve water. Drip irrigation systems in this area can reduce agricultural water use approximately 30 to 50 percent.

The drip irrigation system also improves soil health. Applying fertilizers through the system reduces use of heavy equipment and soil compaction. Also, with irrigation drip tape placed eight inches below ground, the producer no longer uses deep tillage. Reduced tillage improves conditions for microbes and increases the

presence of earth worms, a key indicator species of soil health.

In addition, the automated system and reduction in tillage reduce fuel, labor and fertilizer and overall energy cost, ultimately providing the grower with an economic benefit.

EQIP assistance will also help the producer implement residue management and install an herbaceous wind barrier, windbreaks and shelterbelts to improve soil health and reduce wind erosion in late winter and early spring.



## ***The Agricultural Water Enhancement Program***

Under the Agricultural Water Enhancement Program (AWEF), local units of government, tribes, grower organizations and other groups can request conservation funding to address water quantity and quality issues on agricultural lands.

The intent of AWEF is for the federal government to leverage investment in natural resources conservation along with services and non-federal resources of other groups. Participating partners agree to direct their resources and/or services along with NRCS assistance to address a specified conservation need. More information about AWEF in New Mexico can be found online at:

[www.nm.nrcs.usda.gov/programs/awef](http://www.nm.nrcs.usda.gov/programs/awef)