

CONSERVATION Showcase

Sometimes It Takes Tweaking

As New Mexico's innovative farmers and ranchers seek new and better ways to conserve our natural resources, resounding successes do not always happen the first time. Sometimes it takes tweaking.

And, this state has the foresight of farmers on the Acoma Reservation to thank for advancing the technology of rubberized ditch liners.

Rubberized ditch liners are available under a number of different brand names, and feature some advantages over concrete lined ditches. A key advantage is ease of installation. The material is relatively easy to work with, and can quickly be laid down in a ditch. Another feature, which had great appeal for the Acoma farmers, was that it does not break apart from frost heaving like concrete, and if it does separate at a seam it is easy to replace rivets to repair the separation.

Before the Acoma farmers tested this kind of liner in the past couple of years, there were those in the Espanola area who experienced some trials with the material. Lessons learned through these efforts were that liner without a lip and pins to hold it down could get seepage underneath it when the material was overtopped. This could lift the lining and require action to solve the problem.

The liner installed on the Acoma Reservation east of Grants was specifically designed for rehabilitating concrete ditches. It was manufactured to fit inside an existing concrete ditch that had cracks and breaks, and thus had a lip and is held in place with pins. The Acoma farmers, however, had liner that lifted where there were not



overshots or undershots where arroyos intersected the ditch. Rainstorms in August of 2006 lifted in spots the rubberized ditch liner that had been installed the previous winter and spring. The problem is being rectified, and the trial is moving forward.

The technology of rubberized ditch liners holds some real promise as New Mexico farmers and ranchers continue to search for new ways to better utilize irrigation water. It is through their efforts that breakthroughs are reached that make our agricultural economy and communities strong. Rubberized ditch liners are a new technology farmers are definitely watching and testing. And the farmers of Acoma are thanked for their efforts.