

# CONSERVATION Showcase

## Spanish Musica Beans and AWEP Signing Greet Acting Under Secretary

USDA Acting Under Secretary for Natural Resources and Environment Ann Bartuska may not have acquired dirt under her fingernails when she visited the Rio Grande Community Farm in Albuquerque on August 11, 2009. But she savored the fresh, crisp taste of Spanish musica beans (an heirloom variety of string beans), and used her well-versed scientific background to engage in an in-depth discussion of the finer points of flushing subsurface drip irrigation systems.

Acting Under Secretary Bartuska toured the facility with New Mexico Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) State Conservationist, Dennis Alexander, after participating in an Agriculture Water Enhancement Program (AWEP) signing ceremony with the Santa Ana Pueblo.

Both projects tell much about the future of agriculture along the reaches of the Middle Rio Grande.

The Rio Grande Community Farm (RGCF), at the Los Pablanos Fields Open Space in Albuquerque, has a two-year contract with Albuquerque Public Schools to provide New Mexico grown, organic produce. Some deliveries were made by the Rio Grande Community Farms to the Albuquerque Public Schools last year, and provision of fresh foods by the Rio Grande Community Farms to the schools will be effective during the 2009 season.

RGCF hopes that subsurface drip irrigation will allow them to increase yield and volume of food crops and therefore establish an increased source of fresh, organic food for the Albuquerque Public Schools and customers like La Monanita Coop, Whole Foods, and various local restaurants.

The USDA-NRCS is cost sharing a subsurface drip irrigation system using the 2008 Farm Bill's Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP) that it is anticipated will increase their production ten-fold. This will not only increase water conservation efficiency but allow the plants



to receive the right amount of water, where and when they need it.

Minor Morgan, RGCF Executive Director, is hoping the facility will be an example for both organic and small farms in New Mexico with a subsurface drip irrigation system that has a water-to-plant efficiency of about 90 percent, versus flood irrigation which only has a 20-40 percent efficiency.

By contrast, the Santa Ana Pueblo will be lining dirt ditches with concrete with the assistance of the 2008 Farm Bill's Agriculture Water Enhancement Program. Most of the Pueblo's irrigation ditches and canals are unlined, and these structures waste an enormous amount of water through seepage and transmissions losses.

Acting Under Secretary Bartuska had the opportunity to hear the concerns of Pueblo Governor Bruce Sanchez and Lt. Governor Myron Armijo, and discuss the Pueblo's work that will enhance the agricultural infrastructure the Nation's individual farmers are dependant upon.