

CONSERVATION Showcase

Warm Pecan Pie Has Roots in Deming

When you are sitting around the kitchen table after supper immersed in that delectable piece of warm pecan pie dripping with melting ice cream, think of Rick Holdridge and subsurface drip irrigation. Yes, subsurface drip irrigation.

While New Mexico continues to excel in production of traditional Southwestern products, agriculture in the state is much more than spicy peppers nowadays. New Mexico is a major dairy state, and in 2006 topped Georgia as the leading pecan producing state.

And, it is farmers like Rick Holdridge of Deming who are raising those pecans and utilizing the assistance of the USDA-Natural Resources Conservation (NRCS) to create an economy and conservation legacy that makes us proud.

A conservation 'secret' that is spreading through the state from south to north is subsurface drip irrigation. First introduced in the crop belt in the southern part of the state during the 1990s, use of this resource saving technology has moved north through the Hatch valley and is now being tested in the Socorro area in partnership with NRCS. This technology delivers water right to the roots of plants through tubes installed below the ground surface. This cuts evaporation, thus using less water, and saves energy because less water means less pumping. Because plants get the water they need, when they need it, they are less stressed and production increases.

It is the Rick Holdridges that are making introduction and success of this technology in New Mexico happen. Holdridge is a standout in any crowd; and in New Mexico's conservation circles, where water is so precious, he has demonstrated a 65 percent savings of irrigation water using subsurface drip irrigation. He is monitoring, with tissue sample analysis, the fertilizer application process of all the nutrients that are applied through the subsurface drip irrigation system. Holdridge is realizing these conservation



Rick Holdridge explains fine point of subsurface drip irrigation to Dennis Alexander, NRCS state conservationist.

achievements on his 300-acre pecan orchard, and never to let dust settle on his shoes will be installing another 120 acres of pecans under subsurface drip irrigation over the next two years. He has been recognized as one of the best of the best through the Conservation Security Program.

In addition to his personal strides, this achiever has spearheaded major conservation advancements in his community. As the recent past chairman of the Deming Soil & Water Conservation District he has helped his district secure funding from the state's Interstate Stream Commission for a loan program that will assist farmers make irrigation improvements, and gained state legislative capitol outlay funds for equipment the district can loan to ranchers to break down brush and aid in rangeland improvement. And, there are many other noteworthy achievements.

But, Holdridge probably is proudest when you are happily munching down that piece of pecan pie, and thinking ... "Hey, what was that guy's name down in Deming that grows these pecans?"