

CONSERVATION Showcase

Three Generation Farm Showcases Efficiency

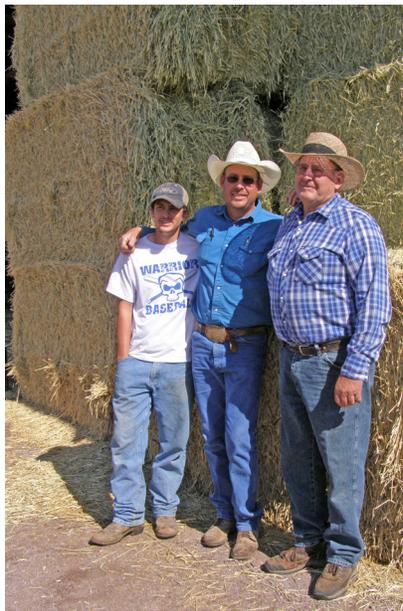
While new and innovative ideas may catch our imagination, we cannot overlook the tried and true conservation practices that are keeping our farmers on the land and aiding in the “greening” of America. The concrete irrigation ditches of Socorro County, New Mexico and on the Dennis Harris farm are prime examples.

Harris’ dad started farming in the Socorro area in 1938, and now Dennis’ grandson, Matthew, is looking forward to being the fourth generation to husband the land the family owns. Straddling the Rio Grande valley south of Socorro the Harris farm produces hay that is shipped as far as Houston, Texas and other points to support a variety of stock including dairy herds and horses. The farm is primarily used for alfalfa which is rotated with wheat and small grains to enhance their soils.

But the bad economy is felt on the farm as well as on Wall Street, and the 2008 Farm Bill’s Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP) has become more important than ever to farmers like Harris. The reality is that while fuel, fertilizer, and other costs have risen, over the past 20 years the price of hay has been relatively flat – so any financial support of conservation improvements is valued.

Harris has always been an innovator, and as a result has ensured all the irrigation ditches on his farm are concrete lined to support the most efficient use of the water he gets from the Middle Rio Grande Conservancy District.

As a result of his well-tuned irrigation system he is able to irrigate a stretch in 18 hours by himself – a feat that may take others days. In addition, he can rapidly tell you what this time savings means in labor costs, which are an important factor to the agriculturalist who must now watch every dime.



Some of the Harris concrete lined irrigation ditches were installed by Harris alone, while others have had the assistance of the Environmental Quality Incentives Program. In his most recent project, Harris carved out the end of a field to install some upland bird habitat that was planted with native, bird-friendly species with the assistance of the Los Lunas Plant Materials Center.

The Harris family members are not only conservation conscious farmers, but active in their local and state agricultural community. Dennis is the vice-president of the New Mexico Farm Bureau and his son, Travis, is vice-president of the Socorro County Farm Bureau Board.

The irrigated valley in the Socorro area hosts rich fields that serve as part of the infrastructure of a much broader agricultural economy. And, the wise use of every drop of water is an important conservation issue. So while concrete lined ditches may not be the newest or flashiest conservation practice, they are a real workhorse in New Mexico and for family farmers like the Harris’.