

Inflation Reduction Act in Action:

Bell Rock Livestock Association Partners with USDA to Keep Traditions Alive

By Leonard Luna, NRCS, New Mexico

Just west of Albuquerque, New Mexico, lies what many describe as an enchanting landscape of mesas, foothills and mountains. Spanning four counties of this vast western landscape is the 500,000-acre territory of the Pueblo of Laguna - a federally recognized Native American people.

This landscape also offers some of the state's most interesting rock formations. In fact, one distinctive bell-shaped rock formation atop the Mesa Gigante cliffs inspired the name of one of the Laguna Pueblo's livestock associations - the Bell Rock Livestock Association.

Over the years, members of the Bell Rock Livestock Association, alongside USDA's Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS), have implemented significant conservation practices and enhancements across the landscape. Through Farm Bill programs such as the agency's Environmental Quality Incentive Program (EQIP) and the Conservation Stewardship Program (CSP), these practices improved water source locations for livestock and wildlife as well as grazing lands.

In 2023, the association once again consulted with NRCS on incorporating stewardship goals specifically focused on livestock and wildlife climate-smart agriculture practices. This time, funds from the Inflation Reduction Act are helping achieve these goals.

Utilizing Inflation Reduction Act funds through CSP, the association will incorporate forage sampling throughout its vast livestock working lands. Forage sampling is collecting a representative sample of grazing material across a field to represent what the livestock are grazing in that field. Forage sampling is part of CSP enhancement - E528A (Maintaining quantity and quality of forage for animal health and productivity). Forage samples



NRCS New Mexico staff performing a rangeland health assessment. Photo credit: Aaron Lorenzo, Jr.

are submitted to New Mexico State University, and the association uses the results to help maintain forage quality and quantity to improve animal health and productivity, while enhancing soil carbon stocks through more precise forage management. Forage samples taken from the rangeland help increase understanding plant quantity, along with nutritional values, and aid in identifying the most nutritionally valuable grazing areas for cattle during breeding and weaning seasons.

"We are honored and grateful to be able to work with all the Los Lunas NRCS office staff - past and present - and hope to continue doing business with them for the better future," said Aaron Lorenzo Jr., President of the Bell Rock Livestock Association.

Created in the early 1990s, the association's chosen working lands encompassed long-neglected acres of land consisting of poor soil, minimal plant populations, sparse water availability and unfenced areas where sheep used to graze. Thanks to the association's partnership with NRCS, these neglected working lands are now sustainable, regenerated grazing lands.

Quick Farm Facts

Location: Laguna, NM

Operation Type: Livestock

Climate-Smart Practices:
Forage Sampling

The Inflation Reduction Act (IRA)

IRA represents the single largest investment in climate and clean energy solutions in American history. It provides an additional \$19.5 billion over five years for climate-smart agriculture through existing NRCS conservation programs. nrcs.usda.gov/inflation-reduction-act.

Climate-Smart Agriculture and Forestry (CSAF)

is an integrated approach that enables farmers, ranchers, and forest landowners to respond to climate change by reducing or removing GHG emissions (mitigation) and adapting and building resilience (adaptation), while sustainably increasing agricultural productivity and incomes. View the [practice list](#).

How to Apply

Learn more about the exciting opportunities to use Inflation Reduction Act funds for forest land conservation at your local USDA Service Center, which you can find at farmers.gov/working-with-us/USDA-service-centers.



Spanning four counties of this vast western landscape is the 500,000-acre territory of the Pueblo of Laguna - a federally recognized Native American people. Photo credit: Aaron Lorenzo, Jr.

NRCS time and resources have helped the association keep their tradition of animal husbandry alive, according to Lorenzo. “There is still plenty of effort that must be put in to make something work for you, because there is a lot of upkeep that has to happen to be able to take care of the land and animals,” Lorenzo said.

With an eye on wildlife preservation, the association and NRCS are also collaborating with the Laguna Pueblo Natural Resources Department to develop a comprehensive Grazing Management Plan for the area. The plan aims to reverse wildlife population declines and establish healthier pronghorn antelope, elk, and deer populations in identified areas of the rangeland.

A key to success will be utilizing deferment periods that prevent livestock from grazing on specific acres at specific times to help enhance the health and vigor of vegetation, which can also boost soil carbon sequestration, especially during the growing season. These deferments will also help minimize livestock disruptions and disturbances to wildlife during their breeding and fawning seasons. Two pastures will be deferred from May 15 through August 15 over the next four years. The association has also developed a grazing management contingency plan for the deferred acres in case of wildfire and flooding emergencies.

The Bell Rock Livestock Association members are committed to keeping the pueblo’s traditions alive for today and future generations. New Mexico NRCS staff are excited to continue their long-standing partnership with the Pueblo while implementing climate-smart conservation practices through Inflation Reduction Act funding.

“We are very fortunate that this has become easier with all the new technology that we have nowadays – and to have NRCS assisting us with funds to purchase materials that are needed to carry on what we need to keep teaching our younger generations about what the families did before us on the land before we were here,” said Lorenzo. “We all need to respect the land, water and animals that keep this world alive, our Mother Earth.”



Cattle grazing with Bell-Rock Stone Formation on Mesa Gigante in the background, where Bell Rock Livestock Association gets its name. Photo credit: Aaron Lorenzo, Jr.



Little cowboy, big dreams. Photo credit: Aaron Lorenzo, Jr.