



Noticias de las Acequias January 2012

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# Noticias de las Acequias

New Mexico Acequia Association  
January 2012

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For the early settler who braved the "Jornada del Muerto," in 1598, it was not simply a matter of finding good soil and water to plant in order to survive, it also meant learning to understand nature and their new environs and applying the knowledge they brought with them to this new homeland.

Reading the sun, the moon, and the stars was an old tradition, one that could be easily applied to new worlds and geographies. The arid landscape of New Mexico was similar to that of Mexico, Spain and the Middle East. The settlers brought with them knowledge of place, or *querencia*, that ran through their blood. This knowledge included the sacred triumvirate of water, weather, and land passed down from father to son and mother to daughter in an oral tradition that was accumulated from those with whom the settlers came into contact, an accretion of knowledge that was life sustaining.

"January has the secret of all twelve months," or so says an old proverb in Spanish. Or it could be that the month is August, depending on what part of the Spanish-speaking world one lives in: In New Mexico the *dicho* is referring to the reading of the *cabañuelas*, which people still use to predict the weather for the coming year.

The *cabañuelas* is the name given to the first twelve days of January. Each of these days in turn will indicate the kind of weather that will be produced in the following months. Though no one knows for sure where the term originated, it may have come from Zamuc, or "Fiesta de las Suertes," the feast of luck, from the Babylonian calendar, which in Hebrew translates to the Fiesta of

**Sales support the NMAA!**

## **Acequia Governance Workshops**

**MARK YOUR CALENDARS!**

**The NMAA will be hosting the following monthly workshops:**

Financial Mgt for Acequias  
**Thursday, February 16th**

Acequia Governance and Customs  
**Tuesday, March 6th**

Acequias and NM Water Law  
**Monday, March 19th**

Water Rights, Water Transfers, and Water Banking  
**Thursday, May 17th**

Conflict Management, Enforcement, and Risk Management  
**Thursday, June 21st**

For more info please contact Janice Varela at (505) 995-9644 or email her at [organizer@lasacequias.org](mailto:organizer@lasacequias.org)

## **Alcalde Winter Field Day**

**Thursday, January 19th  
1:00 to 4:00pm at the Sustainable Agricultural Science Center in Alcalde**



the Tabernacle.

Cabañuelas comes from the word cabaña, a shelter, small cabin or house. La fiesta de las cabañuelas is of Jewish origin but is of mixed cultural heritage. Arab and Jewish cultures were a part of the Spanish heritage brought to the Americas and transplanted in New Mexico.

But these people were also pragmatic; that is, they had to rely on the cabañuelas from someone who was a real farmer, not simply an armchair observer, for they say hombre lunero no llena granero (men who spend too much time observing the moon, don't fill up the granary), olabrador con mucha astronomía en eso se pasa el día (or farm laborer who spends his time in astronomy, in the meantime the day goes by).

The cabañuelas are a system of predicting the weather for the coming year based on observation - nothing scientific, but usually very accurate. They can also be said to be a ritual of creation and regeneration, for they utilize the vast amount of knowledge that the agriculturalist has, especially of his individual microclimate. Example: the cabañuelas for Taos will not be the same as those for Santa Fe or Albuquerque, much less Las Cruces. Cabañuelas apply only to the microclimate where the individual agriculturalist is reading them, and it takes years and generations to acquire this knowledge.

During cabañuelas, if the rastrojo or stubble on the fields is "correoso," flexible or leathery in the morning, it means clouds; if the grapes are moist, it signifies cold. In general the cabañuelistas don't want rain at the beginning of the year because it's a bad omen, for they say that the cabañuela "se vacia," o "se revienta," that is, that the cabañuela "empties" or "bursts."

Farmers would look to the moon, when it was a quarter moon, for answers and to know whether it would rain. If the quarter moon was on its belly it meant it would be dry but if the moon was tipped towards the bottom it meant it would rain.

When we delve into the origin of the cabañuelas, we have to reach back into our Sephardic past, since they are Jewish in origin. Cabañuelas was a festival of Jews in Toledo (Spain; historically a place of coexistence of Christian, Jewish and Muslim cultures) celebrated in August in memory of the time they spent in the desert known as the "Feast of the Tabernacle." The Muslims also had their "almanaques," or calendars, while the Christians followed the Jewish tradition of the cabañuelas by substituting Saints days.

Featuring information about various [hoop house options](#) based on a NMSU study.

Refreshments will be provided.

## USDA Deadlines

### Farm Service Agency (FSA)

#### **Deadlines:**

#### **January 30th**

Last day to file a claim under the [Livestock Forage Program \(LFP\)](#)

#### **January 31st**

Deadline to purchase NAP ([Noninsured Crop Disaster Assistance](#)) coverage for alfalfa, mixed forage, native grass forage, peppers (including chile), cucumbers, and pecans.

### Natural Resource Conservation Service (NRCS) Deadlines:

#### **February 3rd**

Deadline for both EQIP [Organic Initiative](#) and [Seasonal High Tunnel Initiative](#).

## Agricultura Aquí y Allá: Regional Opportunities Abound

Please join us at the workshop for farmers and ranchers to explore production strategies and marketing opportunities.

### **Saturday, February 4th Rural Events Center Abiquiu, NM**

Hosted by the New Mexico Acequia Association, Rio Arriba County, the Rio Arriba County Food Policy Council,

Cabañuelas now seem to be exclusive to the Spanish-speaking world; from Spain to the Canary Islands, to northern New Mexico, to Mexico and Cuba, this tradition is still observed. In some of these locales, the Cabañuelas de Santa Lucía is from the 13th of December to the 6th of January.

Here in the Americas the cabañuelas became Americanized through being influenced by the Mayans. The Mayans called the cabañuelas "Chac-chac," and observed it in the same manner. The months from January to December are known as Xoc-ki, and from December to January, Ualak-xoe. It is believed that in pre-Hispanic Mexico, the Aztecs adopted this knowledge from the Mayans.

Agriculturalists think that the first of January or August (depending on what part of the Spanish-speaking world the cabañuelas are read) give a glimpse as to what the weather will be for the upcoming year. Copious notes are needed. The first day of the month then represents the "llave del año, or "key to the year." The second is January, and so on until you get to the 13th, which represents December. Then you start counting backwards, that is, the 14th represents December, the 15th November, until you get to the 25th, which is January. Then the 26th represents January and February, 12 hours for each day, the 27th, March and April, and so on until the 31st represented November and December. But if the first is not observed as "llave del año," then the 31st is broken into two hours to represent each month.

Hopefully, every village can train someone who will become the one who learns how to "leer" or read the cabañuelas, and thus keep this tradition alive. This could be something that can be added to the resumé of the mayordomo's things to do.

### Acequias and the New Mexico Centennial

By Paula Garcia



As New Mexico celebrates 100 years of statehood, we are reminded that becoming part of the United States was only the latest chapter in New Mexico history. The deeper history is like an onion with layers upon layers of stories of resilience, conflict, intermixing, and survival. For centuries, and for millennia for the Native

USDA, and the Regional Economic Development Initiative (REDI)

For more info contact Patrick Jaramillo at (505) 995-9644 or email [patrick@lasacequias.org](mailto:patrick@lasacequias.org)

### Become a Member!

#### [Become a member of the New Mexico Acequia Association!](#)

Partial and Supporter Memberships are \$20/year and includes a quarterly newsletter subscription. Membership for an Acequia is \$40/year including a newsletter subscription for all four officers.

The NMAA is a charitable, educational non-profit organization that relies on membership contributions and fundations for its general operating expenses. We rely on folks who join as members and to contribute membership dues and donations to support our work. It has never been more important to have a united front to protect our acequias and strengthen our food and agricultural traditions.

### Thank You!!!

The New Mexico Acequia Association greatly acknowledges the support and dedication of the many partials and supporters who are NMAA members and who have made donations.

Thanks to our fundations supporters including (in alphabetical order) Catholic

Americans, living in this place we call New Mexico required a reverence for land and water and a humility that comes with an understanding of scarcity. By carving out an existence in New Mexico, the communities who established our present day acequias learned these lessons of living with a love of place and a respect for the water flowing through the rivers, into the acequias, and onto our fields. As New Mexico enters its second century as a state, policymakers should draw upon the lessons of living in this arid land from the ancient land-based cultures that have endured and continue to contribute to our heritage as a state.

In the middle of the 19th century, New Mexico territorial laws codified some ancient practices of acequias recognition of customs of water sharing it times of scarcity and the local election of the Mayordomos, or caretakers, of each acequia. The 1905 and 1907 water codes added a new layer of water governance with the establishment of the state engineer, the adoption of the prior appropriation doctrine, the transferability of water rights, and the definition of the adjudication process. These were later incorporated into the constitution and statutes upon New Mexico statehood.

The 20th century laws represented a shift to a greater emphasis on water as a property right and opened the door to a market-based approach to water allocation. Although the water is owned by the state, the right to use water is owned by individuals. As such, this made possible the transfer of water rights from existing uses to new uses. Adjudication and transfers also depend on a different method to measure or quantify water as a commodity rather than a shared resource that changes with time. This was a conceptual shift in the acequia communities where water was regarded as a community resource shared between families having derechos measured in units of time rather than acre feet. Remarkably, even with these legal changes and adjudication of water rights in many places, acequias continue to operate through customary practices that have been in place for generations.

Toward the end of the 20th century, the legislature enacted important policy reforms relating to water transfers. One was the enactment of a statute defining public welfare as an additional criterion in the water transfer process adding it to two other criteria that had to be considered in any water transfer: impairment of existing water rights and conservation of water. By requiring public welfare be considered in water transfers, policymakers recognized socioeconomic and cultural

Campaign for Human Development, The Christensen Fund, Marguerite Casey Foundation, New Mexico Community Foundation, McCune Foundation, Panta Rhea Foundation, and the W.K. Kellogg Foundation.

We'd also greatly appreciate the financial support provided to us by state and federal sources: the U.S. Department of Agriculture's Office of Advocacy and Outreach; and the State of New Mexico's Department of Finance Administration.

### NMAA Staff



(From left): Quita Ortiz (Mapping and Special Projects), Lori Spillman (Administrative Support), Janice Varela (Community Organizing), Virgil Trujillo (Ranch Specialist), Lucille Trujillo (Membership Services), Pattie Ravenheart (Administrative Director), Pilar Trujillo (Program Director), Paula Garcia (Executive Director), Kenny Salazar (Technical Assistance), Juliet Garcia-Gonzales (Community Projects), David Garcia (Community Education), and Patrick Jaramillo (Community Outreach).

values inherent to water in addition to the physical measure of water. Another reform was authorizing acequias to approve or deny transfers depending on whether such a transfer was "detrimental to the acequia or its members." This was an important affirmation of the value of acequias and the need to protect them from being unraveled through negative impacts of water transfers. These policy reforms were important steps in creating long term sustainability but much work remains.

One hundred years after statehood, New Mexico faces acute water issues. In some communities, water scarcity has reached a crisis. Over the past hundred years, our growing communities have developed a heavy reliance on groundwater. The predominant approach to increasing supply has been to transfer surface/agricultural water to urban, commercial, and residential development which often pumps from groundwater. While it addresses an immediate need, it does not take a long-term view. At the rate it is being pumped, groundwater is practically non-renewable. Our current pattern of water reallocation permanently dries up agricultural land and shifts that water use to irreversible mining of groundwater. At this point, it is not clear whether drilling into deeper aquifers offers a sustainable alternative. In order to get on a sustainable course with regard to water, the next hundred years will need to include a dramatic shift in how we view our water and how we care for the scarce resources we depend upon for our existence. Hopefully for the bicentennial of New Mexico statehood, our citizens will look back with admiration that we were able to rise to the challenge. They may say the following:

1) New Mexico became known for a water ethic based on its indigenous and land-based history and harnessed its brightest minds to create innovative management plans and conservation technologies admired around the world.

2) Communities in New Mexico are resilient because of their ability to adapt to long-term and periodic drought. Remembering past water sharing customs and instituting new arrangements for the common good maintains water uses for agriculture/food production and ecological needs while also providing for rural and urban community development.

3) Water policy in New Mexico reflects multiple values and protects communities, particularly rural, low income communities, from being targeted for water transfers to wealthier interests of regions of the state. Greater safeguards are in place to protect water from contamination.

## Taller Tocante a Derechos de Entrada y Salida

by Janice Varela



In early December the NMAA held a workshop, Taller Tocante a Derechos de Entrada y Salida (Easement Workshop). It was well attended with 42 participants. In this meeting we tried a new approach to presenting information and problem solving. Using an assessment tool from the Escuelita de las Acequias model, participants were engaged in lively discussions about how to look at a problem and talk about solutions. Stories were shared about the problems among different acequias have had with easements, both successes and ongoing struggles. Using these stories and shared experience, people engaged in small group discussions and came up with possible ways to deal with certain situations.

We recognize the valuable experience that our Comisionados and Mayordomos have in protecting the bordo of the acequia as well as other easement issues, including dealing with the USFS. They deal with legal issues, delivery of water to parciantes in time of drought, broken infrastructure and much more. La Escuelita recognizes that we are all maestros. These acequia experts came from communities, throughout the state, Upper Hondo, Coyote, Chimayo, Santa Cruz, El Rito, Pecos and the South Valley of Albuquerque, just to name a few villages and regions represented.

David Benavides of New Mexico Legal Aid presented legal information, statutes and Commissioner powers. David also facilitated the conversations and meeting. The entire NMAA staff

worked so hard in preparing for this workshop and also did a fabulous job at the workshop. We look forward to our future workshops and gatherings with our maestros from throughout Nuevo Mejico. ¡Que vivan las acequias!

### Secretary Vilsack Announces Disaster Package

On Wednesday, January 18th, Agriculture Secretary Tom Vilsack announced an important disaster assistance package for farmers, land owners, and communities to recover and rebuild after a year of natural disasters in every corner of the country.

The package totals \$308 million, intended to provide financial and technical assistance to those affected by natural disasters in the last year, including flooding, drought, tornadoes and other natural disasters. The funding is provided by the NRCS' [Watershed Protection Program \(EWP\)](#) as well as the FSA's [Emergency Conservation Program \(ECP\)](#) and the [Emergency Forest Restoration Program \(EFRP\)](#).

Vilsack said, "Landowners, individuals and communities have endured incredible hardships because of the intensity and volume of natural disasters that have impacted their livelihoods. America's farmers and rural communities are vitally important to our nation's economy, producing the food, feed, fiber and fuel that continue to help us grow. This funding will help to rebuild communities, while states can use the funds to carry out emergency recovery measures. At the same time, this assistance keeps farmers on the farm, ranchers on the ranch, and landowners on their land, helping to keep American agriculture profitable."

### Acequias in the Middle Rio Grande & Acequia

Associations of the Valle de Atrisco

Source: South Valley Regional Association of Acequias

The Acequias of the Valle de Atrisco, with the support of the Congreso de las Acequias, led by the New Mexico Acequia Association, and under the leadership of the South Valley Regional Association of Acequias (SVRAA) held its legislative meeting and strategy session to present the [joint memorial](#) that Acequia Associations intend to introduce for the 2012 legislative session.

The local Acequia Associations, and their members, has requested the South Valley Regional Association of Acequias to introduce a Senate Joint Memorial to request the New Mexico Acequia Commission to study conservancy district powers over acequias to protect acequias in the Middle Rio Grande. The fear

is that "Conservancy districts exercising their powers of eminent domain may effectively transfer water rights to other parties without just or fair compensation or due process for the rightful owners of these water rights [in the Middle Rio Grande]". Senator Ortiz y Pino has agreed to carry on the bill on behalf of the Acequias. Eric Griego and Miguel Garcia are supporting the memorial, as well as a number of other legislative allies and supporters, such as the American Friends Service Committee-New Mexico Program and the New Mexico Acequia Association.

The intent of Acequia Associations in the Middle Rio Grande is "to put water rights in the Middle Rio Grande to "beneficial use" which means application of water to a lawful purpose that is useful to the appropriator and at the same time is consistent with the general public interest." The contention of Acequia Parciantes is that "preserving the agriculture of the middle Rio Grande Valley promotes and supports valuable traditional cultural values surrounding agriculture as well as substantial financial benefits for the middle Rio Grande Valley." Therefore, it is the position of Acequia Associations that the first beneficial use for water should be agriculture. If these water rights cannot be put to beneficial use then these water rights should be managed for the benefit of the citizens that own them."

In fact "according to the United States Department of Agriculture, the sum of benefits from farming in Sandoval, Bernalillo, Valencia and Socorro counties, within the MRGCD, is \$134,795,000. Local acequias should be in the position to support a network of small farmers that are producing and recreating a local economy, and the ability to access good food that is produced locally, thus providing us with food security. In 1910, Herbert W. Yeo estimated that "there are approximately 31,435 irrigable acres in the South Valley of the Middle Rio Grande alone. This represents approximately 94,305 acre/feet in pre-1907 water rights. The enormous cultural and capital values of these water rights are irrefutable." The cultural, economic, social, and political value of water rights was irrefutable then, and it continues to be today.

As part of this process of asserting the rights of acequias in the Middle Rio Grande despite the perception that "within the Region, there are no longer acequias in the Rio Grande Valley, because all the then-operating acequias diverting off the Rio Grande joined to form the Middle Rio Grande Conservancy District," on January 7, 2012, the Township of Atrisco-Merced and the South Valley Regional Association of Acequias signed a Memorandum of Understanding to collaborate on issues related

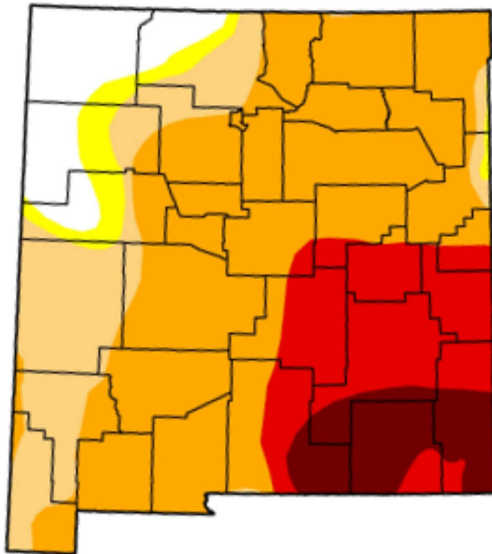
to land and water in the Valle de Atrisco. Specially to promote agricultural production using advanced irrigation systems that will allow replenishing the aquifer, while lands are used to grow small farms to produce local foods.

The Acequia Associations were reformed since 2006 as political subdivisions of the state regenerating a historic bond with the Atrisco Land Grant.

The Atrisco Land Grant and Acequias in the Middle Rio Grande trace their origins back to 1692. Both are protected under the Guadalupe-Hidalgo Treaty signed between Mexico and the US after the 1848 conflict with Mexico.

### La Niña Drought Tracker

Source: Climate Assessment for the Southwest, University of AZ



New Mexico remains drought-plagued after a very dry 2010-2011 winter that was influenced heavily by a moderate to strong La Niña event. The monsoon that followed was spottier than normal, alleviating drought in only a few regions, and widespread precipitation deficits remain entrenched. Since October 1st, rain and snow

generally have been below average. According to the most recent U.S. Drought Monitor, published on November 29th, 63 percent of New Mexico was classified with extreme or exceptional drought.

Conditions over the next several months will determine whether drought will expand and intensify or improve, particularly because sustained dry conditions make it progressively harder to reduce drought. Forecasts, however, paint a grim picture, as a weak La Niña has returned. La Niña conditions often steer storm tracks north of the Southwest, leaving the region dry. Although the La Niña threatens to drive precipitation deficits farther into the red, there is a silver lining. Winter precipitation likely will not be as scant as last winter if historical statistics bear out and La

Niña remains weak. Current La Niña forecasts call for more than a 60 percent chance that La Niña will continue through the February-March period, with the expectation that the event will remain either weak or moderate. A relatively wet December is not uncommon during a La Niña. In New Mexico, December and March often have less precipitation deficits than January and February.

### En la Memoria de Nuestros Acequeros



**Juan Elizario Montoya** (above left), 81, of Arroyo Seco passed away on November 2nd, 2011. He was born in Nambé on May 25th, 1930. Following his Army service during the Korean War, he met his wife, Isabel, while working as a chef at Bishops Lodge in Santa Fe. He obtained a B.E. degree from the college of Santa Fe which lead to his long career in teaching and coaching. He was an avid farmer who had a great love for land and water; and was active on the Sombrillo Community Ditch and the Acequia de el Rincón in Nambé.

**Gilbert Naranjo** (center), 76, of Chimayó passed away on December 7th, 2011. He was born in Guachupangue, NM and settled in Chimayó after marrying. Following retirement in 1986, he became a full-time gardener on his 2.5 acres of land, which utilized water from the Acequia de la Cañada Ancha. He learned most of his gardening skills from his grandparents in Ojo Caliente and was a life-long advocate for the protection of land and water rights. Gilbert once said, "The acequia is the life of the community. It's a life source."

**Donaldo Roybal** (above right), 63, passed away on December 12, 2011. The photo was submitted by his friend, Pedro Nolasco Romero; it shows Donaldo taking a break on the Río Capulín at Rancho Viejo approximately 2/3 of the way down from the top of the basin to Nambé. The Río Capulín joins the Río Nambé 2.5 miles below this meadow where the two friends would always take breaks. Pedro remembers Donaldo in a few words: "*Donaldo grew up on the Rancho Las Lagunas Dairy Farm in Nambé. He was a*

*hard-working individual since he was a young boy. He grew up close to the earth on the Acequia del Caño, Acequia de la Comunidad, and Acequia Nueva. He'll be missed and long-remembered in the Nambé basin. Donaldo was someone you could depend on 100% of the time. I worked side by side with Donaldo from the top to the bottom of the Nambé basin. It is impossible for me to walk the banks of the Acequia del Caño or the Río Nambé without coming past work he did or advised someone else how to do. What I'll remember most is that when he heard about someone's death he'd remove his hat, and place it over his heart to recite un sudario (prayer). He always said, "Ádios de su despedida". What I'm most proud of is that he raised his four children, Fernando, Miguel, María, and Camilla, with the same closeness to mother earth and God as he was. Ádios amigo."*

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