



Hugh Hammond Bennett (right), first Chief of the Soil Conservation Service.

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## NRCS Announces EQIP Application Period

The FY2007 Environmental Quality Incentive Program (EQIP) application period is underway and will continue until November 3, 2006, according to Norman Vigil, New Mexico's assistant state conservationist for programs for the USDA-Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS). EQIP is a key program under the 2002 Farm Bill that provides cost-share funds to working farms and ranches for conservation improvements. Like all NRCS programs, participation is voluntary.

EQIP is typically used in New Mexico for irrigation system improvements that conserve water, and rangeland improvements such as brush management and development of water sources for livestock and wildlife. In FY2006 \$18.2 million was allocated in New Mexico through EQIP.

"EQIP provides incentive payments and cost-share funds to private livestock or agricultural producers to implement conservation practices," said Vigil. "It promotes agricultural production and environmental quality as compatible goals.



And, it is extremely important for producers to note that the application closing date is early this year."

According to Vigil, the November 3 closing date is a continuing effort to improve the funding process. The accelerated program cut-off dates will allow producers time to complete practices during the first years of their contracts. The earlier application deadline date will

help accommodate field work in preparation for a project, to be done in the fall before winter weather sets in. Finally, the early date will allow producers to get to their project work in the spring rather than later in the summer when they are in the middle of the growing season.

"The accelerated process makes coming in to our field offices early to meet with the NRCS staff more important than ever," said Vigil. "I would personally encourage our farmers and ranchers to come in and visit with our staff now. We know that producers that get in early and have a good conservation plan, generally have a better chance of getting funded."

EQIP, like all NRCS programs, is a voluntary program that is intended to yield high quality, productive soils; clean and abundant water; healthy plant and animal communities; clean air; an adequate energy supply; and working farms and ranchlands.

For assistance in applying for EQIP visit your local NRCS Field Office today.

State Conservationist's Notebook:  
by Dennis Alexander

## What's Different Between Then and Now?

During my first five months in New Mexico, I have been treated to probably the two most extremes in weather one arguably might say they will see in a lifetime.

When I arrived in April, we had just gone through a winter with historically low snow pack combined extreme drought. Four short months later, much of our state is in the middle of a monsoon season that has brought the highest rainfall amounts in recorded history. While we in New Mexico probably can argue that we have the best "average" weather in the country, the past year has shown that our weather variability also rivals most locales across this country.

As I have observed the hardships brought on by the severe drought and torrential rains, I also must marvel at the progress New Mexico farmers and ranchers have made through their local

soil and water conservation districts over the past 50 years.

We have had blowing soil, reduced crop yields, and ranchers reducing their herd size due to drought. During the monsoons we have seen many of our local communities faced with the tragedies associated with flooding and many a field of crops have washed out.

While the impacts of drought and flooding have been severe, we must also wonder what these impacts might have been without the soil and water conservation efforts of New Mexico farmers and ranchers over the past 50 years. Historians tell us that during the drought and dust bowl of the 1930's the weather on the drought side was actually less severe than we have recently experienced. What's the difference between then and now?

I think we can attribute the cumulative effects of all the

conservation work New Mexicans have put on the ground in recent history. By continually striving to improve the health of our soil, grazing lands, forests and water with sound soil and water conservation measures we have improved our sustainability in this sometimes harsh environment.

Over the past 10 years, New Mexico farmers and ranchers have committed to put conservation systems on over 15 million acres of privately owned working farms and ranches utilizing NRCS technical assistance and financial assistance programs such as the Environmental Quality Incentives Program. While this conservation work will never fully mitigate the impacts of drought and high rainfall events, it will lessen extremes we face in New Mexico, and make life more sustainable for all of us.

### Natural Resources Reporter

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## NRCS Flood Protection Project Benefits Truth or Consequences



Construction of the concrete chute that directs water into a large storage basin that was built to collect the water from several arroyos

Sixty percent of the area classified as floodplain along the Morgan Street Arroyo in Truth or Consequences, New Mexico was removed from its floodplain classification because of the Watershed Protection & Flood Prevention Act project there, according to local officials.

The Sierra Soil & Water Conservation District, the project's sponsor, and NRCS New Mexico hosted a tour of the facility for Senator Jeff Bingaman on July 6, 2006 that included city and county representatives. At the same time, NRCS let for bid Phase V of the

project which will complete the effort that has been done in phases.

“We like to do cooperative conservation,” said Dennis Alexander, state conservationist for NRCS New Mexico. “We undertook this project because the local sponsors asked for it.”

Truth or Consequences is a city that developed around hot springs along the Rio Grande in south-central New Mexico. The landscape features steep hillsides dissected by numerous arroyos, and a desert climate with sparse vegetation. Sudden cloudbursts

repeatedly caused flash floods in this environment sending walls of water washing down to the Rio Grande.

The Watershed Protection & Flood Prevention Act project through NRCS in the Morgan Street area safely routes the rainwater through that area of Truth or Consequences. It utilizes a large storage basin that collects the water from several arroyos, and then releases it at a safe rate into the Rio Grande.

*Because one of the benefits of the project was the removal of 60 percent of the surrounding land from a floodplain designation, residents there now enjoy lower insurance rates.*

“The project will be totally completed within a year,” Alexander said.

For information about an assessment of your dam or watershed project in New Mexico, you can contact NRCS's state engineer, David Pacheco, at (505)761-4489.

## NRCS Program Offers Farmers and Ranchers Financial Reward for Conservation

A U.S. Department of Agriculture program rewards farmers and ranchers who have adopted good conservation practices, and provides substantial incentives to expand or enhance current conservation efforts. Consequently, agricultural producers with on-going, documented stewardship activities will be in a better position to reap the benefits of the program when it is offered.

“Like every year, this year we want to make sure our farmers and ranchers are in the best position possible to apply when their watershed does become eligible,” said Norman Vigil, assistant state conservationist for programs.

The first step in positioning your farm or ranch to benefit from the Conservation Security Program is to contact your local NRCS field office. Producers can improve their chances of having a successful

CSP application if they focus on activities that protect soil and water quality. In addition, improving wildlife habitat and air quality, conserving energy, and addressing related natural resource concerns are important steps. Many of these concerns can be addressed in a conservation plan. And, keeping good records is a must. When your watershed does become eligible, to qualify you must go to your local NRCS office for an interview and show records of your current conservation practices – especially soil tests.

“Whether you are an old friend of NRCS or never have used USDA programs, the Conservation Security Program is a reward for New Mexico’s best farm and ranch stewards,” said Vigil. “It honors the best of the best.”

For more information about the Conservation Security Program, contact your local NRCS Field Office.

Gary Ross from Ft. Sumner was a 2005 CSP recipient as one of the best of the best farm stewards



## Conservation Proves Itself During Cuba Fire



Don Moore shows his cleared field next to brush infestation

Don Moore's continuing drive to improve his rangeland near Cuba, New Mexico is attributed as the force that restricted a wildfire that would otherwise have spread into the Los Pinos area.

"I would like to urge other landowners around the village (and throughout the area generally) to work with the Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS), Cuba Soil and Water Conservation District (SWCD), and New Mexico Division of Forestry to get brush cleared away, to get other plants

started, and to get trees thinned away from structures or in open land," said Moore. "It is now obvious that doing this sort of work not only improves the appearance and productivity of the land but it also helps to prevent the spread of wildfires."

On April 9, 2006 fire broke out at a residence and burned approximately 16 acres of private land and one structure in the Cuba area. Several fire agencies from Cuba and the surrounding area responded to the blaze that was being whipped by high winds.

Heavy equipment was used to cut a fire break around the fire, while several homes along Reed Road were threatened. Evacuation of residences in the Los Pinos Road area was considered, however, Don Moore's field that had been cleared of sagebrush prevented the spread of the fire into that area.

Moore had entered into an Environmental Quality Incentives Program contract in 2002 with the Natural Resources Conservation Service to apply brush management and range planting to his property. Thus, his field was cleared of sagebrush and not only did it not pose the hazard that the surrounding area did, but served as a barrier for the advancing flames.

"My conservation work would not be possible if agencies like the Natural Resources Conservation Service were not there to provide technical and financial assistance," Moore said.

Moore is not only involved with NRCS, but participates in a number of activities with groups to improve conservation including the Cuba SWCD's Noxious Weed Program, Rio Puerco Management Committee erosion control, and State Forestry tree thinning.

## Plant Materials Center Offers Tips for Fall Planting of Native Shrubs

The prime containerized shrub planting season (October through November) is fast approaching for the regions in desert and pinyon-juniper woodlands of New Mexico. This generally is the best time to plant in these areas because the cooler fall air temperatures and lack of wind reduce water use by the plants and allows minimal irrigation to establish the transplant. Additionally, fall soil temperatures are still warm enough to permit substantial root growth that can extend into subsurface moist soil. This root system growth will provide the plant a better chance of surviving the typical hot dry winds and low precipitation the following spring.

There are only a few species of shrubs that may be cost effective to establish by seeding. The two most common species are fourwing saltbush and winterfat. Most other native shrubs have a very slim chance of establishing from seed, and the seed is typically very expensive.

For improved transplanting success, select species and ecotypes that are adapted to your area. The best way to assure this is to use local ecotypes, plants which were originally collected from the area to be planted. If local ecotypes are not available, try to purchase plants from the Southwest that match

the elevation and latitude of your planting site. Ecotype selection can be as critical as species selection.

Any time plants are in leaf, care must be taken in transporting the containerized stock. Transport in a pickup bed can work if the plants are laid down in the bed, are well watered before transport, and if the outside of the pots do not reach temperatures lethal to roots (120 F) from sun exposure. Wind blast should also be minimized (use net coverings or minimize transport time). It is difficult to haul large quantities of plants if they are laid down in a pickup bed because it is difficult to stack the containers to prevent the containers from crushing the stems and leaves of adjacent plants. Covered transport, such as inside a van or an enclosed trailer, is preferable because the plants are protected from sun and wind damage and can remain upright allowing more plants to be transported.

Once you have the transplants at your staging area, keep the soil medium moist by watering as often as necessary (typically daily). It is often easier to store the plants in a shady area to reduce watering needs before planting. The plastic containers are typically black so they need to be protected from direct sunshine because the

container walls can get hot enough to kill roots growing along the inside surface of the pot.

Water is generally the limiting factor reducing plant survival in field plantings in the droughty Southwest. Sometimes, transplants with large root systems are easier to establish. When field planting deeply rooted transplants, embed an irrigation tube with the transplant before backfilling. This will allow for deep watering and encourage continued taproot development. By irrigating subsurface soils and not the ground surface, weed growth is much less likely to compete with the transplant. For more information we would encourage the review of the Los Lunas Plant Materials Center brochure [Guidelines for Planning Riparian Restoration in the Southwest](#) and the Standards and Specifications within the Natural Resources Conservation Service Technical Guide for [Tree and Shrub Plantings](#). Both are available on the New Mexico NRCS website [www.nm.nrcs.usda.gov](http://www.nm.nrcs.usda.gov)



## Cowboy Ingenuity Aids Lovington Rancher

Southwestern ranchers know the need for being inventive and finding practical solutions for issues on the range. Clyde Fort, of Troy Fort Ranch, 15 miles northwest of Lovington, is no exception. He has put together programs from the Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) with homegrown ingenuity to tackle burned out fences, cholla, and the need for stock water systems to bring good sound conservation to his ranch.

Fort is carrying on the legacy of his father, Troy Fort, who did much of the early fencing and other conservation work on the ranch. Clyde Fort, however, was faced with a heavy infestation of cholla cactus that needed immediate action.

“Something had to be done or the rangeland would be of very little value for the ranching operation,” said Fort.

A major step on Fort’s part was to apply to NRCS for Environmental Quality Incentive Program (EQIP) funds. He successfully competed, and used the cost-share monies for grubbing cholla, developing watering sources for his cattle, and building miles and miles of fence. Some 23 miles of his fencing was lost due the fires in Lea County this spring.

But Fort did not stop there.

Stepping outside the box and using that cowboy inventiveness he has set out to do battle with the cholla. He has worked on his own creations to remove the cholla and realize cost savings at the same time. Time will tell effectiveness of his efforts.

Not stopping there, however, Fort made drinkers on his watering tanks that are attached directly to the main storage tank. Typically a watering source for cattle will consist of a large storage tank that holds a 5-10 day supply for the number of cattle involved, with a smaller separate drinking tank that holds a one-day supply. Fort attached drinking tanks directly to the main tank that are continuously

being replenished.

Fort’s inventions were created and used outside of any of the EQIP funding, and were cost effective solutions that enhanced his overall conservation efforts. According to Fort, the rail dragging technique cost him about 25 percent of the cost of conventional grubbing.

“I needed to find ways to reduce my out-of-pocket cost,” said Fort.

Two other conservation measures he has been applying to his property are rotational grazing on all his pastures, and fiberglassing all of his watering tanks to extend the life of the tanks.



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