

New Mexico

Insider

Anaerobic Digesters Are the Sweet Smell of Success

New Mexico is one of several states to participate in building anaerobic digesters, which use manure as fuel to create energy. The goal is to construct them over a four-year period, through USDA's Rural Development, Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) and Farm Service Agency (FSA).

On October 26, Agriculture Secretary Tom Vilsack announced funding for 19 biodigester projects in 8 states, funded through Rural Development's Rural Energy for America Program (REAP). In FY 2011, USDA, through REAP, provided nearly \$21 million in assistance for biodigesters, and leveraged over \$110 million in project development. Through its Value-Added Producer Grant program, USDA provides planning grants of up to \$100,000 and working capital grants of up to \$300,000 to be used for establishment of a biodigester. Additionally, NRCS offers financial and technical assistance through the Environmental Quality Incentives (EQIP) program. Anyone who has ever been around dairy or hog farms knows strong smells can permeate the air around them. There are other issues associated with high-volume animal production, too, including air and water quality con-



cerns, and storage of waste water and solids.

Controlled anaerobic, or oxygen-free, digestion of animal manure is a way to treat manure to prevent foul odors while generating a usable energy product. Anaerobic digesters break down liquid manure into biogas and a low-odor anaerobically digested manure, or effluent. The biogas can be burned to produce heat, electricity or both, while the effluent can be stored and applied to fields with significantly less odor than stored, untreated liquid manure—but with the same amount of nutrients.

New Mexico does not have large poultry or swine producers, but is one of the country's largest dairy producers. USDA will focus mostly in the south and eastern portions of the state, where about 70 dairies are located. All together, there are roughly 225,000 dairy cows in New Mexico on any given day.

The manure of one cow can power a 100-watt light bulb continuously, according to Chuck Braden, agricultural engineer for NRCS New Mexico. That makes cow manure a significant and continual renewable energy source.

In an anaerobic digester, the manure



An anaerobic digester with discharge pipe feeds into a wetland at the Jarratt Dairy in Los Lunas, NM. (Photo by Tetra Tec, Albuquerque, NM)

must be maintained at a constant temperature of at least 100 degrees for 20 days in order to generate the maximum amount of biogas or methane to power an electric generator. The energy produced can be used where it originated, helping dairies keep operating costs down.

After the compressed biogas is pre-treated, the product can be pumped into existing gas pipelines, from where it can be sold and distributed throughout a multi-state region.

The concept of using anaerobic digesters is not new—it's been around for nearly six decades. In fact, some European countries have been getting up to 80 percent of their electricity from anaerobic digesters for years. Now, with the help of USDA, the U.S. is moving in the same direction!

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New Mexico NRCS

State Conservationist's Notes



Norman Vigil, Acting State Conservationist

The beginning of Fiscal Year 2012 looks similar to the start of FY 2011. Both years launched at a hectic pace. All federal agencies are currently working under a Continuing Resolution from Congress.

The budget constraints under which we are operating is designed to primarily support mandatory programs with very limited discretionary spending allowed. NRCS New Mexico will continue to do its best to work within these parameters.

Discussions on what the next Farm Bill will contain are underway. It is uncertain how the final bill will shape up. The Department along with NRCS leadership will keep us informed as things develop.

I want to discuss the Hispanic/Latino Farmer Conservation Planning Initiative. New Mexico is one of the states asked by NHQ to place an emphasis on reaching out to Hispanic farmers in developing their conservation plans. Factors such as tradition, culture and personal pride may contribute to Hispanic/Latino agricultural producers not taking full advantage of the opportunity of NRCS Technical Assistance.

By developing conservation plans, we believe this will encourage these producers to seek financial assistance that leads to conservation on the ground.

We want to help change that. NRCS New Mexico is making a concerted effort to connect more with the underserved and disadvantaged producer. We want to provide information and assistance in terms, venues and opportunities best suited to our customers.

We owe it to every private landowner who can benefit from our technical advice and program support. I know that you stand by me as we reach this objective.



Contact us:

♦ **NRCS New Mexico State Office**
(505) 761-4400

♦ **Public Affairs Officer**

Rey T. Adame (505) 761-4406

♦ **Earth Team Volunteer/ Editor, NRCS Insider**

Triston Lovato (505) 761-4405

Area Offices:

♦ **NW Area** (505) 761-4447

♦ **South Area** (575) 522-8775

♦ **East Area Office** (575) 762-4769

NRCS Brings Out SWAT to Help Lesser Prairie Chicken in New Mexico

NRCS New Mexico is serious about supporting the Lesser Prairie Chicken Initiative (LPCI) – they're bringing in the SWAT to help!

The purpose of LPCI is to reduce threats to the species and to enhance and maintain existing habitats within the historic range of the species. LPCI provides financial and technical assistance to landowners and operators to implement practices that support these goals.

NRCS New Mexico and the National Fish and Wildlife Federation (NFWF) have jointly agreed to the creation of a Strategic Watershed Action Team (SWAT) aimed at protecting and enhancing Lesser Prairie Chicken habitat.

The two entities will provide specialists in field biology, rangeland management, Geographic Information System (GIS) and other habitat professionals (botanists, ecologists, etc.) to work with NRCS field offices. Their purpose is to provide technical assistance to farmers, ranchers and other private landowners to optimize wildlife conservation on private and State lands.

The SWAT will assist in conducting range and habitat inventories, implement grazing plans, and evaluating range health and habitat expansion. The team will conduct outreach, assist in monitoring and evaluation, and support NRCS efforts to evaluate the effects of conservation practices designed to



benefit lesser prairie chickens. The three-year, \$700,000 cost will be equally funded by NRCS and NFWF.

Ogallala Aquifer Initiative Projected to Save 1.3 billion gallons of water in N.M.



New Mexico is committed to making the most of every drop of water it receives, so actually saving water is a

huge success.

Curry, Lea and Roosevelt Counties primarily draw upon the Ogallala Aquifer for water. By participating in the Ogallala Aquifer Initiative (OAI), these counties are learning to save water while finding the best use of their natural resources.

One key component to water conservation is encouraging private landowners to find methods of reducing water consumption used in agricultural production. Working

County/Area	# of Acres Contracted and the Cost	Amount of Water Saved per year	Timeframe (3-year minimum)
Curry County (Clovis area)	411.1 acres for \$248,657	7,400 acre-inches	200,934,169 gallons per year
Lea County (Lovington area)	123.0 acres for \$92,679	3,075 acre-inches	83,498,550 gallons per year
Roosevelt County (Portales area)	2,260.1 acres for \$1,438,995	40,682 acre-inches	1,104,673,597 gallons per year

Collectively that equates to 2,794.2 acres, saving 51,157 acre inches per year or 1,389,106,316 gallons per year at a cost of \$1,780,311.

one-on-one with agricultural producers NRCS NM helps them assess whether converting from farmland to rangeland is a viable option. Using the Conservation Plan those producers helped to create, NRCS

helps them to achieve their water conservation goals. The three-year projected savings is 1.3 billion gallons of water that would remain in the Ogallala Aquifer.

Emergency Watershed Program Saves New Mexico Community

by Clifford Sanchez, ASTC Water Resources
NRCS New Mexico

Disaster struck northern New Mexico on June 12, 2011 as the human-caused "Track Fire" exploded north of Raton. Within 72 hours, 27,790 acres were scorched in New Mexico and Colorado. The fire obliterated the Sugarite Canyon (New Mexico) State Park, Railroad Canyon and Linwood Canyon areas.

Sugarite Canyon is owned by the City of Raton. Lake Maloya watershed area is part of Sugarite Canyon State Park and is one of the premier wildlife areas in New Mexico. It is also the City of Raton's primary water supply, affecting 9,000 residents. The Track Fire severely damaged Lake Maloya – burning nearly 75% of the watershed at the High and Moderate Intensity Level. The dilemma caused by the fire created an "Exigency" (urgent and compelling) situation, calling for immediate preservation measures to protect this water supply. Many deer and other wildlife died in the fire, some from asphyxiation.

Almost all the Lake Maloya vegetation was incinerated, leaving a thick layer of ash that easily washed down slope with the slightest rains. Raton's water processing plant struggled to sufficiently filter drinking water.



Aerial seeding of one of the slopes scarred by the Track Fire proves successful as vegetation sprouts days after the aerial seeding.



Assessing the Track Fire aftermath: NRCS NM employee Brian Schwebke (far right), a member of the NRCS Damage Survey Report Team, and officials of the City of Raton, view a sediment pond.

Raton and Colfax County officials immediately contacted NRCS and a EWP team was quickly formed to assess damage and prescribe treatments. The team oversaw the installation of critical area land treatments including building several small dams as sediment catchment basins; seeding of 3 grass species; mulching a critical area after seeding to better ensure success; and contour tree felling and backfilling to act as miniature grade stabilization structures. The project sponsors also securely installed miles of wattles and sediment catchment fences. Lake Dorothy, a smaller lake upstream of Lake Maloya, was drained into Maloya and sacrificed as another sediment basin.

The City of Raton and Colfax County provided 25 percent of the cost with NRCS carrying the balance. Within 20 days an army of volunteers and contractors were able to aerially apply seeding on 6,872 acres; contour tree felling/wattles on 171 acres; mulch 307 acres; and build seven sediment basin dams.

Undoubtedly, this EWP project success could not have occurred without the resounding collaboration and cooperation of our partners. The New Mexico Congressional delegation of U.S. Sen. Jeff Bingaman, U.S. Senator Tom Udall, and U.S. Congressman Ben Ray Lujan helped to secure the exigency funding for this project. The City of Raton, Raton Water Works and Colfax County, NM State Parks joined us in bringing stability, security and preservation for the community's watershed.

Ute Creek Cattle Company Partners with NRCS NM to Achieve Sustainability

by Tuda Libby Crews

(Editor's Note: Tuda Libby Crews is co-owner of the Ute Creek Cattle Company)

In 2001, Jack and I were faced with myriad challenges as a severe 12-year drought and poor management showed 50 percent bare ground on the rangeland. Ten miles of unfenced Ute Creek meandering through the ranch was incised with high cut banks; the dry stream bed was infested with Salt Cedar; wildlife was sparse; four large pastures with four water sources were dispersed on 14,000 acres; and the straight Hereford cow herd was in-bred and wild.

In 2002, partnerships were forged with the NRCS through EQIP to implement a broad range of best management practices including riparian restoration, improving rangeland health, developing a stock water system, and creating wildlife habitat.

The NRCS initiated a partnership with the New Mexico Water Trust Board on treating salt cedar. In the past eight years the ranch has implemented aerial chemical treatment, biological treatment by herds of goats, hand spraying re-growth, monitoring, and mulching standing dead trees. A year-round stream of water to Ute Creek ranks highest among our accomplishments. Riparian restoration on Ute Creek serves as a regional model in salt cedar management. Additionally, New Mexico Department of Environmental Quality (DEQ) uses Ute Creek as a water quality standard when measuring other areas in the State.



Jack Crews and Tuda Libby Crews on their ranch in Bueyeros, N.M.

Extensive wildlife habitat was developed in the riparian areas. Wildlife species dramatically increased from pronghorn, white-tail and mule deer and coyotes to include elk, lion, porcupine, badger, bob cat, fox and bear. A Barbary sheep was sighted in 2008.

Early on it was determined fencing both sides of Ute Creek (with 10 miles flowing through the ranch) would result in significant riparian restoration. The west side of Ute Creek was fenced in. The ranch partnered with the National Wild Turkey Federation to remove salt cedar, install erosion control materials, and develop a turkey habitat. Six miles of the east side of Ute Creek was fenced and placed in CCRP, which eliminated grazing for a 15-year period.

This also laid the foundation for developing a cell grazing system as an integral part of rangeland restoration. Under EQIP contracts, 45

miles of new permanent fence has increased pastures from four to 19.

Managed timed grazing based on Animal Days per Acre (ADA) rotates cattle through pastures in the growing season. Allowing 90 to 120 days of rest periods for growing grass has dramatically increased forage production (*note: rain is needed for this to happen*). We saw the blue gramma monoculture range return to multi-species native grasses and now little bare ground is exposed. In 2005, after 22 inches of rainfall, rangeland produced almost 1,500 pounds of forage per acre.

Improved forage coupled with a genetic program increased calf weaning weights by 84 pounds the first year. Grazing is managed in synch with calving, branding, pre-conditioning and shipping.

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NRCS Selects Winner of American Indian Heritage Month Poster Contest

NRCS sponsors an art contest each year to discover a new design for the annual American Indian Heritage Month Poster.

Each year American Indians residing in the selected American Indian Alaska Native Employee Association (AIANEA) region, are eligible to enter their artwork.

This year, the South Central Region (Arkansas, Louisiana, Oklahoma, and Texas) was selected to conduct the contest.

On June 17, 2011, 17 entries were judged at the NRCS state office in Stillwater, Oklahoma. "Judging wasn't easy," State Conservationist Ron Hilliard said. "We received some outstanding pieces of art and each artist brought something different into the painting."



This year's winner of the American Indian Heritage Poster contest is Carrie Silverhorn of Miami, Oklahoma.

Silverhorn is a member of the Eastern Shawnee Tribe of Oklahoma and is of Eastern Shawnee/Wyandotte decent. The 32-year-old has been an artist since childhood and says, "Art is the passion that drives me to create beauty from my surroundings and allows

me to produce what my imagination whispers to me."

According to Dr. Carol Crouch, NRCS National AI/AM SPEM and District Conservationist in Norman and Purcell, Oklahoma, "the title for the poster is, *Conservation: Preservation of Land for Future Generations* and the theme is, *A true conservationist is a man who knows that the world is not given by his fathers, but borrowed from his children.*" Crouch stated, "It was important that the judges for the artwork represented our diverse workforce as well as Tribal Members."

Judges this year included the NRCS Oklahoma Civil Rights Advisory Council (CRAC), two Tribal members and NRCS leadership.

The poster will be delivered to all NRCS offices across the country and the Caribbean Pacific Basin.

The poster will be used to celebrate American Indian/Alaska Native Heritage Month in November.

Ute Creek continued from page 5

The Angus herd is so gentle now that cows eat cotton seed cake from our hand. In 2002 a set of working pens were built to safely handle livestock with low-stress and efficiency.

EQIP contracts included stock water development with installation of two 10,000 gallon storage tanks, nine miles of pipeline, and 18 drinkers with wildlife ladders. Four drinkers on fence lines simultaneously provide water to two pastures. Water development is ongoing.

Bird counts increased from 13 in

2001 to 101 in 2009. The NRCS assisted the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service New Mexico in planning a Wild Bird Sanctuary that provides water, feed, shade, breeding and nesting areas for native and migratory birds, reptiles and turtles.

The Wild Bird Sanctuary features trees, a drip system, 16 bird houses, feeders, a grape arbor, a wildlife water guzzler, and walking path. A natural outdoor classroom is underway. The sanctuary provides a venue for bridging the urban-rural divide. It attracts some (of the 98 percent of) urban dwellers to visit some (of the 2 percent of) families living on the land. It

educates folks about how ranchers are caring for the land, wildlife, water and animals.

Ute Creek Cattle Company focuses on sustainability and aspires to serve as innovative community leaders. We foster education on conservation, emphasize teaching youth and demonstrate *pride* in all we do. Rural revitalization is a key component in our quest for sustainability.

All of this is done by working cooperatively with the NRCS and many other partners. We feel deeply grateful to them collectively.



The 2011 Open Season Benefits Health Fair will be held at the NRCS NM State Office on Thursday, November 10, 2011 from 8:00 - 9:30 am. Health care providers will be present to answer any questions. For more information contact the NRCS New Mexico HR Team.

Flu Shots Available for all Eligible Enrolled Veterans

Two flu shot clinics have been set up at the Raymond G. Murphy VA Medical Center in Albuquerque. The clinic is providing shots to all eligible enrolled veterans.

One clinic, located on the ground floor of Building 41 (the main building on campus), is open weekdays from 9 a.m. to noon and from 1-4:00 p.m.

The second clinic is located on the 2nd floor of Building One from 8 a.m. to noon and 1-3:30 p.m. The Medical Center is at 1501 San Pedro Blvd. SE.

Flu shots are also available at any of the 11 VA Community-based Outpatient Clinics (CBOC's) located throughout the state.

For more information about flu shots for veterans, go to www.albuquerque.va.gov or call (505) 265-1711, ext. 4551.



11/11/11



Celebrate Veterans' Day on 11/11/11

Nov. 11, 2011 is Veterans' Day and the New Mexico Department of Veterans' Services (NMDVS) is encouraging all New Mexicans to honor the service of our nation's veterans by attending a Veterans' Day ceremony.

Veterans' Day initially began as *Armistice Day* in 1918 to mark the end of World War I. In 1954, Congress changed it as a day to honor all veterans.

Most ceremonies will begin at 11am, marking this year as the first time in New Mexico's history since becoming a state that the annual 11th hour of the 11th day of the 11th month ceremony, will be observed on 11/11/11. The next such occurrence won't happen again for another 100 years — in 2111.

Ceremonies will be held throughout the state. To find the location and times of those events visit the NMDVS website at www.dvs.state.nm.us and look under the "Upcoming Events" section.

November is American Indian/Alaska Native Heritage Month

In 1976, U.S. Congress passed a resolution that allowed the President to declare a week in October as "Native American Awareness Week."

Since then a day, week, or month has been designated each year to honor the Native American Heritage and the contributions, achievements, sacrifices, and cultural and historical legacy of those original inhabitants.

In 2009, Congress and the President declared the Friday following Thanksgiving Day of each year to be "Native American Heritage Day."

Combined Federal Campaign (CFC) Reaches Its 50th Anniversary



The 50th Anniversary of the Combined Federal Campaign (CFC) is going on now and runs through November 18th. This year's theme is "50 Years of Caring". The campaign goal is set at \$3,000.

Informational brochures, Charity Listing Books and Pledge Forms are available on the table in the employee coffee room if you are interested in making a payroll

pledge. Payroll deduction will begin on your first paycheck in January 2012. You may also give a one-time tax deductible gift to the charity of your choice.

Two CFC fundraising events were held in October. The first, a bake sale was held on Tuesday, October 11 and was met with great reviews. Second was a Pumpkin Carving Contest held on Monday, October 24. These events raised a total of \$160.

For more information about the CFC contact Theresa Bennett at 761-4402 or Brenda Howard at 761-4426.

NRCS Employees Club—sponsored events through Mid-December:

Mid-November—Mid-December
Annual Roadrunner Food Bank Food Drive



USDA Launches *MyPlate* Spanish Counterpart '*MiPlato*'

USDA honored National Hispanic Heritage Month in September by introducing '*MiPlato*', the Spanish-language version of the *MyPlate* image.

USDA first introduced *MyPlate* in early 2011 as the government's new primary food group symbol. Based on the 2010 *Dietary Guidelines for Americans*, the icon is an easy-to-understand visual cue to promote healthy eating.

The *MyPlate* and *MiPlato* icons are meant



to prompt consumers to think about their food choices at mealtime. The icons place emphasis on the five food groups: fruits, vegetables, grains, proteins, and dairy.

Agriculture Secretary Tom Vilsack said the

new *MiPlato* icon is meant as a reminder to all Americans to think about healthier eating.

"Regardless of our primary language, it is important that we all learn about and embrace

healthy eating habits because a healthy nation starts with healthy people," said Vilsack.

Both icons direct consumers to ChooseMyPlate.gov, where information and the tools to achieving a healthier diet can be found.

Tuesday, November 22nd

Thanksgiving Day Potluck starts at 11:30 a.m. in Room 145.



Monday, December 12th
Christmas Cookie Exchange



Personnel

Reminder: Information Security Awareness Mandatory Training

FY 2011 marks the start of a new training year for Information Security Awareness.

All employees, contractors, partners, and volunteers are required to complete this training by March 31, 2012.



The course, entitled, "FY 12 USDA Information Security Awareness (ISA)," covers USDA information security, privacy, and rules of behavior. The course was added Oct. 1, 2011 to employee's AgLearn learning plan. All employees are encouraged to check their eAuthentication login access (username and password) to AgLearn to ensure that you do not have problems which prevent training completion. If you have trouble with your login, contact the ITS Service Desk at eAuthHelpDesk@ftc.usda.gov or call 800-457-3642 for assistance.

It is also important to update your current supervisor and email address information in your AgLearn user profile to ensure that you receive notification of your course completion and proper credit for the course. A job aid for completing this process is available at <https://aglearn.usda.gov/scorm-content/JobAids/UpdatingYourAgLearnProfile.pdf>.

If you have any questions, please contact Victoria Suazo-Chanza, Training Officer, at 761-4409.

NRCS Welcomes New Employees!

Effective November 2011:

position in Deming

Edward Foster, a Soil Conservationist with the NRCS Area 3 office in Safford, AZ has been selected for the District Conservationist position in Roswell

Effective October 2011:

Jason Martin has been selected as the Range Management Specialist in Las Cruces

David White, former Soil Scientist with NRCS in Arizona, was selected to be the Soil Scientist-MLRA Project Leader in Las Cruces

Cassandra Spradley, former Farm Bill Specialist in Cuba, was selected as Soil Conservationist in Cuba

Richard Strait, former Soil Survey Database Manager with NRCS in Alaska, has been selected as the State Soil Scientist in the NM State Office in Albuquerque

Kristen Lemoine, former Public Affairs Specialist with NRCS in Louisiana, has been selected as an additional Public Affairs Specialist to serve NRCS New Mexico

Steven Alves has been selected as the new Purchasing Agent in the State Office

Jerry Horacek was selected for the Civil Engineering Technician

Welcome to all!

Federal Employee Health Benefits (FEHB) Program is Going Green



As of the FY 2012 Open Season, paper copies of health plan brochures will not be automatically mailed to Federal Employees Health Benefits (FEHB) Program members.

"We expect to save roughly \$5 million in premiums by dropping the brochure mailing requirement," says OPM Director John Berry. "The full brochures will be accessible online, and they will still be mailed upon request. But this will save money and a lot of trees."

You can quickly and easily view your health plan's brochure online, anytime by visiting the FEHB website at www.opm.gov/insure/health, or visit your health plan's website.

Your FEHB health plan will contact you to offer you the option to receive your benefit brochure online or requesting a paper copy. If you want your health plan to mail a paper copy of your brochure to you for the next Open Season (November 14 through December 12, 2011), follow the instructions your plan provides you. For those who change plans this Open Season, your new health plan will mail you a paper copy of its brochure.

You will continue to receive the Open Season package your plan normally mails to you, and this package will include an explanation of benefit changes for the next year and your new premium rate, but will exclude the health plan brochure.