About Acequias

In celebration of World Water Day, let's learn about an important aspect of agriculture in northern New Mexico: the acequia.

An acequia is a man-made irrigation ditch that brings water from a river, spring, or stream to a parcel of land. Today, the only surviving acequias in the US are found in New Mexico and southern Colorado.

The benefits of acequia irrigation stems not only from crop production, but from cultural, ecological, and sustainable conditions that transform our landscape. As an institution, the acequia network binds together local communities through hundreds-year old traditions and rituals that surround the irrigation of agropastoral landscapes. Acequias have their beginnings with the Pueblo tribes. When the Spaniards colonized the area, they incorporated techniques they learned from the Moors. Now, acequia associations are like "water democracies" operating outside government. Each acequia community is led by an elected mayordomo. The mayordomo's responsibilities are to organize the annual spring cleaning of the acequia. This event is the most symbolic of communal gatherings since it brings together neighboring land-owners and hired hands to clean the ditch, and it is a time to discuss community issues. The mayordomo also manages the distribution of water in a fair and balanced way using a schedule based on land use, crop type, and land size. This weekend and next is when you will find many acequias being cleared of branches, leaves, sand, and loose rocks so that when the acequia starts running again, it will be clean and clear!

In Santa Fe you may have heard about Acequia Madre – or "Mother Ditch." This acequia is reported as being the largest and oldest in Santa Fe. Dug in 1680, it runs no less than 3 miles from the Canyon Road

area to Agua Fria. Even though it is not used as often due to agriculture land becoming residential, this acequia is still used for irrigation.

Learn more about the rich history of acequias in New Mexico [here](#) and [here](#).