

The Production of New, Existing and Native Crops Under Conventional and Organic Production in Costilla, NM, Garcia, CO, and at Taos Pueblo

Craig Mapel (New Mexico: Research & Education Grant Program)

Project Number: SW96-027

Title: The Production of New, Existing and Native Crops Under Conventional and Organic Production in Costilla, NM, Garcia, CO, and at Taos Pueblo

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New vegetable varieties were introduced through the grant.

Major Participants:
The Taos Economic Development Corporation
Taos Pueblo Agriculture Department (about 10 farmers and ranchers)
New Mexico Department of Agriculture
New Mexico State University Cooperative Extension Service
Rio Costilla Cooperative Livestock Association
Sangre de Cristo Growers Association
New Mexico Organic Commodities Commission
Questa Producers Association

SARE Grant: \$71,686

Participants discuss ways to enhance local ag production.



Situation:

The villages of Costilla, Questa and Taos Pueblo in northern New Mexico's Taos County and Garcia in southern Colorado's Costilla County have high rates of unemployment and poverty. Employment is limited to seasonal work at local ski resorts or other low-paying jobs.

Most of the residents who farmed land in these areas before World War II left to seek employment in cities like Albuquerque and Denver. Their children, now grown and in their 40s, are the clientele for this project. These residents have land, water resources and some equipment, with farms ranging from 1 to 40 acres and averaging around 10 acres.

The growing season can be as short as 80 days, and water for irrigation is highly variable, ranging from none one year to a surplus the next. What's more, the irrigation infrastructure has often deteriorated from a lack of maintenance.

Despite these limitations, there exists a strong sense of community in each village and willingness within and among communities to cooperate and remain on the land. Farming presents one of the few remaining alternatives.

Objectives:

1. Demonstrate the production of new, existing and native crops under conventional and organic/low-input production practices in Costilla, NM, Garcia, CO and Taos Pueblo
2. Perform an economic analysis on those crops at those locations



Baked goods from organic wheat produced in the project.



Wheat acreage nearly doubled.

Actions:

This project builds on a 1995 project funded by the New Mexico Department of Agriculture to sustain localized agriculture in northern New Mexico, southern Colorado and at Taos Pueblo.

The initial project was expanded to include farmers in Questa, New Mexico, and to develop a small greenhouse project in Costilla.

In 1998, these activities were undertaken:

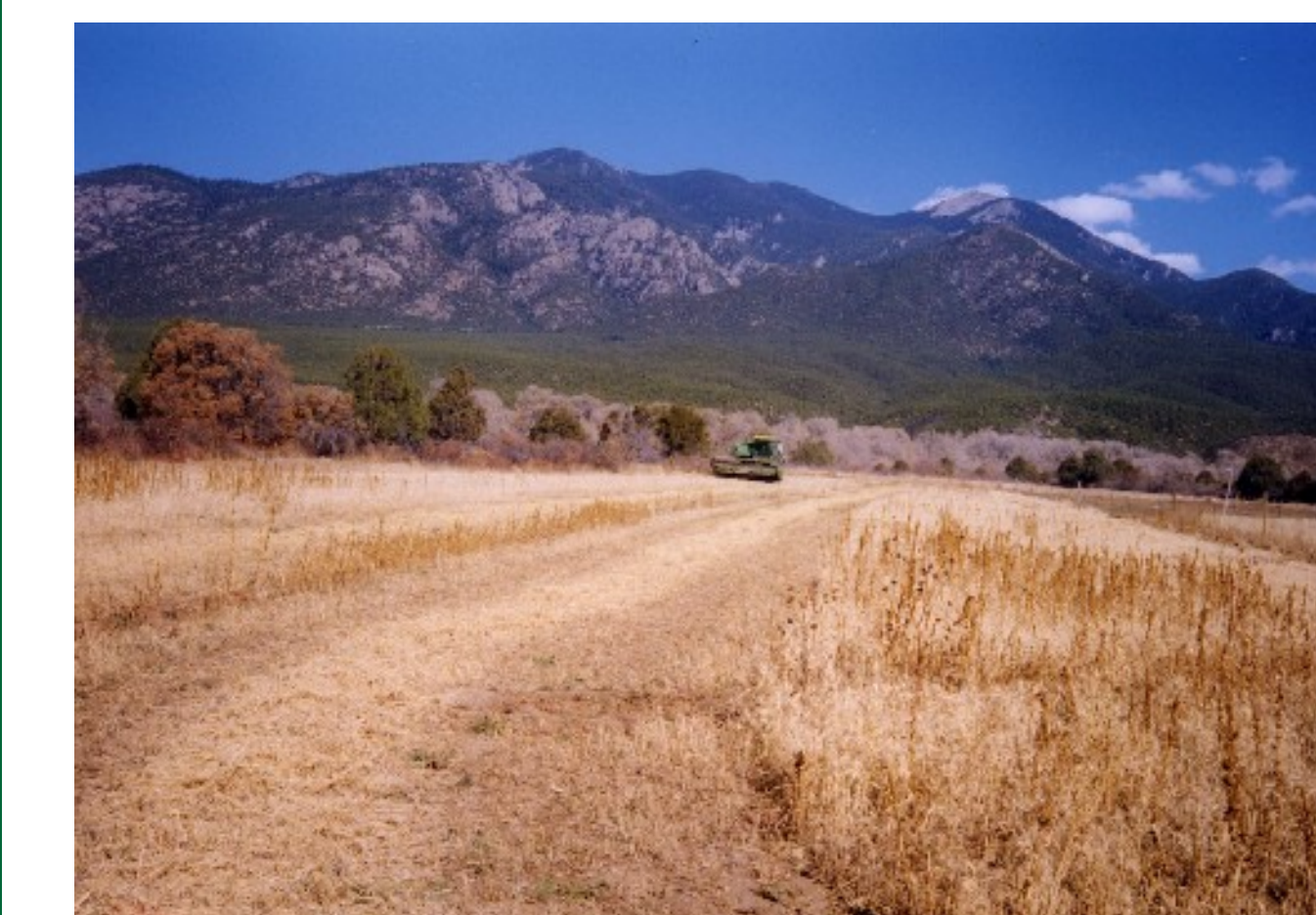
- 10 farmers participated in the crop planting, primarily wheat
- 10 farmers participated in demonstration plots of high-value specialty crops, primarily cool-season varieties
- 9 people worked in the greenhouse project, producing transplants for use by local residents and for sale at the Santa Fe and Taos farmers markets
- a community garden begun in 1997 at the Taos County Economic Development Corp.'s headquarters was continued in 1998



Customers sample the organic baked goods.

Results:

- Wheat acreage was expanded in 1998 to more than 300 acres, up from 160 in 1995
- All growers involved were certified organic in 1997 and again in 1998 under the New Mexico organic certification process, a step that committed growers to the program
- A certified organic flour mill was located in central New Mexico, and a high-end Santa Fe bakery committed to buying all wheat from the project to develop a new product line
- The community garden at the Taos County Economic Development headquarters enabled several young women on welfare or in the Women, Infants and Children program to plant, grow and market vegetables from about 1 acre and earn supplemental income
- Results of the project were published in news articles, showcased on a public tour and promoted through a video and brochure



Potential Benefits:

The project had direct, positive benefits on more than 30 local farmers and their families, with many farms bringing income to families for the first time in a generation, and they did it without the use of chemicals. Net income was estimated at \$230 an acre, which exceeds returns from alfalfa in the area.

While most of the nation had been losing farms, communities in northern New Mexico and Southern Colorado gained a few farms.

In a social sense and in the context of sustainability, the project had the immeasurable impact of keeping families on farms within their communities. And it has seen individuals coming together to work as a team, in a cooperative spirit, during planting and harvest.

The project also proved that a wide variety of state, local and federal agencies can work together with private industry to stimulate economic development in rural areas.



Vegetables for the project were started in the greenhouse.