

Rio Grande Agricultural Land Trust

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Spring-Summer, 2020

The Importance of Protecting Our Local Foodshed

We hope this newsletter finds you healthy, secure, and embracing time with your family and friends, and strengthening your community during these challenging times. This spring the nation faced a shocking break from our normal routines and has given us time for reflecting on what is most important to us and to recognize the many things we took for granted. Simple ordinary things such as socializing with family and friends, a handshake or hug, eating meals out, meeting up with friends for a coffee or beer, sports activities, and full grocery shelves are no longer a part of our everyday lives. And in many ways, social distancing for the health and safety of the community has brought us even closer together. Many positive outcomes are occurring. Families are spending more time together, we are cooking at home, eating meals with our families has replaced the fast-paced lives that kept us on the go and often apart. Our lives are suddenly less cluttered with activities giving us the space to relish a sunset, play with our children, check in on friends and family, plant a vegetable garden, take a walk, and enjoy our breathtaking and vast landscape.

The Covid19 Pandemic has the nation moving us to adapt, rethink our priorities and has made us keenly aware of those who keep us alive. On March 19th, Homeland Security deemed agriculture necessary infrastructure. RGALT's work to protect agricultural land and water, our local foodshed, has never felt more important. Suddenly access to food has become a top priority for all of us. Food security has become a concern as grocery store shelves are emptied and transport systems are overwhelmed. Getting food from farmers' fields to markets to people has become challenging. It has spurred the local farm and food businesses to action, creating new business models to ensure our communities have access to local food.

Amidst all the chaos, spring arrived, summer fast chasing on its heels and natural cycles remain consistent. The late spring and summer bird migration is underway. Kingfishers, vermilion flycatchers, and other neotropical birds are flitting about the valley. The seagulls nesting in the middle Rio Grande have returned, ducks and white-faced ibis

are seeking refuge in flood irrigated farm fields. Farmers are out in their farm fields planting, fields are being watered, and spring crops are being harvested. And as always, farmers are adapting to the changes and challenges of feeding the community. New Mexico farmers are planting more than ever and are planting a broader variety of crops in order to help provide food security in our local communities. And consumers are reaching out to us farmers to find out what we are growing and how we are marketing our products.

Here in New Mexico, farmers and market managers worked to ensure the markets are open and are considered essential food sources along with grocery stores. Market managers are working with farmers to develop ways shoppers can obtain their local food safely and efficiently while minimizing social interactions. Meanwhile, many farmers are joining together to form Community Supported Agriculture (CSA) businesses and opening local food stores. These CSA businesses will provide customers weekly access to fresh local food via home delivery or pick-up and new local farm food shops are remaining open.



RGALT Executive Director Cecilia Rosacker at her market stand.

This break from "normalcy" inspires creative thinking, business opportunities, and an opportunity for positive changes that will make us more resilient and more considerate of our local foodshed. Together we can make our communities more resilient. YOU can make a difference here at home. Eat Local. Buy Local. Join RGALT in our efforts to protect agricultural land and water, YOUR local foodshed.

Please join our June Membership Drive (*see p4*) and help us protect New Mexico's agriculture for a more viable and vibrant future!

Warmest regards,

Cecilia Rosacker
RGALT Executive Director and Middle Rio Grande Farmer

Jackie Bouker's Conservation Easement

Last fall, RGALT worked in partnership with Bernalillo County to complete Jackie Bouker's conservation easement on her small north valley farm, marking Bernalillo County's first conservation easement. This pilot project has laid the groundwork for RGALT and the county to work together to develop and launch an official Bernalillo County Conservation Easement Program (BCCEP). Jackie has played an instrumental role in advocating for open space and trails in the County. RGALT is honored to work with Jackie and partner with Bernalillo County on their first CE project.

After decades of conservation easement outreach and interest from landowners, a BCCEP will allow RGALT to finally help land rich, cash poor landowners who want to protect their agricultural land in the county. Protecting the county's remaining agriculture is one of the priorities of the 2017 Bernalillo County GreenPrint. The Bernalillo County 2014 Conservation Mill Levy can help fund the BCCEP as well as provide funding to leverage other conservation programs bringing federal and state dollars into the county for protecting agriculture and natural habitat.



Bouker Conservation Easement.

Bernalillo County Commissioners presented Jackie with a Certificate of Recognition for offering her farm to serve as a pilot conservation easement project.



Cinco Estrella Chile field.

Farm Bill Changes Make Conservation Easement Funding Accessible

Changes to the Farm Bill provide opportunities for landowners to protect their land and get paid for up to 50 percent of conservation easement value. For the last two decades, landowners have reached out to the Rio Grande Agricultural Land Trust asking us to help them protect their land and their water for future generations. And for decades we have had to say sorry we can't help you. The Natural Resource Conservation Service-Agricultural Conservation Easement Program (ACEP) and Agricultural Land Easement (ALE) Programs required a non-federal match from conservation the entities. Changes to the NRCS program now allow the landowner to provide the required 50% non-federal match by using the residual value of the conservation easement. NRCS may contribute up to

50 percent of the fair market value of the agricultural land easement. Where NRCS determines that grasslands of special environmental significance will be protected, NRCS may contribute up to 75 percent of the fair market value of the agricultural land easement.

Landowners who have been caring for their land for generations can now protect their land and water from development and protect their water from being transferred to the cities or industrial use. RGALT can help landowners access this program, advance agricultural and natural habitat protection in the middle Rio Grande, and bring millions in federal dollars to NM. Interested landowners can contact us to learn more about the program and whether their agricultural or natural habitat property will qualify for funding.

Congratulations Alan Hamilton!

Alan Hamilton, Rio Grande Return Director and RGALT advisory board member, was awarded the 2019 Intermountain West Joint Ventures Conservation (IWJV) Partner Award at RGALT's 2019 Harvest Dance. Alan has been one of the cornerstones in bringing partners together to protect and restore wetlands, riparian habitat and farmland across the middle Rio Grande.

"This award is especially meaningful having come to know so many of you and other remarkable conservation partners in NM, and throughout the IWJV, who have dedicated so much of their time and energy to preserving the natural heritage that we all share. But in hindsight, I am honored even more by the acknowledgement of being valued as an intrinsic part of a community. It has always been clear to me that communities exist because of a shared responsibility to place. I think I've had a nostalgic and perhaps romanticized sense of community that I imagined to exist in indigenous and agrarian communities - written about so eloquently by Wes Jackson and Wendell Berry. Reflecting on the past couple weeks, it seems to me that what we have developed together over the years goes way beyond important public/private partnerships, we really have developed a community that I thought I was missing. What I was looking for next door I found in Socorro



Charles Wohlenberg , Johnny Pack , Alan Hamilton, Doris Rhodes , Paul Tashjian (AudubonNM), Gina DelloRusso (SOBTF), Ron Thomas, Joy Morris (IWJV), Jonathon Hayes (AudubonNM) Sue Conklin, front row Chuck Muncy, Cecilia Rosacker (RGALT).

and Missoula (IWJV). Our relationships, often minimized as "work", are based on the shared commitment to preserving natural heritage of a migratory corridor that has been in use for 20 million years, and a cultural and agricultural heritage that goes back several thousand years in the middle Rio Grande. A place this dynamic and precious has of course engendered a dynamic and precious community - and being recognized as a valued part of this community is truly the award that I've been given." – Alan Hamilton

"We thank Alan for bringing such heart, soul, and energy to the middle Rio Grande and the IWJV for the past decade. He has brought together partnerships that will last and we recognize YOU for making a difference and contributing to thousands of acres of conservation for generations to come."

- ALI DUVALL, IWJV

RGALT Annual Harvest Fundraiser - October 24, 2020!

We have waffled back and forth... should we go forward with our annual fall fundraiser event? We decided to go with a farmer's approach, keep positive and keep moving forward! We are planning to hold our annual fundraiser event on Saturday, October 24. We are delighted to let you all know, we are invited back to Cinco Estrella Farm again this year. Last year, our guests let us know our fall fundraiser party in Lemitar at Glen Duggins's Cinco Estrella Farm was one of their favorite RGALT events yet! The middle Rio Grande urban and rural communities came together to experience the land that feeds us. The young, old, and in between joined us for a good ol' country barn dance, hay

rides, horse and pony rides and of course all our traditional New Mexican foods. It was a huge success and fun was had by all.

We are planning the same fun again this year. Mark your calendars, watch for our E-News and postcard announcements for details. We hope to share our valley with you!

If you want to support RGALT but plan to take a pass on this year's event, please consider becoming a sponsor, a one-time gift, or become a sustaining member with a monthly gift that feels right for you. You can call us, mail us, or go online at www.rgalt.org/become-a-member



Help Support Our Efforts to Protect the Rio Grande

The Rio Grande Agricultural Land Trust (RGALT) is launching a June membership drive to help sustain our efforts to protect the middle Rio Grande in New Mexico. People have been living along the Rio Grande for centuries and have been dependent on the river for survival. The Rio Grande is not only critical for people, the natural habitat and the farmland provide essential habitat for wildlife species.

By becoming a member of RGALT you can invest in the community and help ensure we maintain our local foodshed, natural habitat, and open space for all of us.

RGALT is a grassroots organization that was formed in 1997 by a group of Socorro farmers sitting at the kitchen table discussing ways to protect their land and water from the threat of development and loss of water rights. We researched ways to protect our farms while still keeping it a voluntary option for each landowner. That's when we learned about land trusts and conservation easements (CEs) legally binding, real estate transactions that limit the development of private lands and protect conservation values of the land forever. We reached out to dairy farmer, Ellen Straus, one of the founders of Marin Agricultural Land Trust, MALT. Ellen Straus gave us guidance on how to start a 501c3 non-profit land trust.

For over two decades RGALT has been protecting land for people and wildlife in the middle Rio Grande. RGALT's focus area includes four counties in the middle Rio Grande (Sandoval, Bernalillo, Valencia, Socorro) in NM's most populated area and includes the state's largest metropolitan area, Albuquerque. This area of NM is the most threatened by development and loss of agricultural water rights.

RGALT has been a frugal operation serving the largest, most threatened landscape in NM. This landscape includes 60,000 acres of irrigated farmland stewarded by private landowners. The challenge in RGALT's work is not unlike that of farming; it has proven to be a labor of passion and tenacity. We have been protecting these lands on a shoestring budget that afforded only one staff person to serve the entire middle Rio Grande. Last year we hired our first part-time staff person. Protecting

these highly threatened lands and serving the needs of the communities in the middle Rio Grande means we need to increase our staff.

We need your support to increase staff and protect these lands important to the community.

For the last twenty-three years RGALT has worked to bring diverse groups together to protect the fragile and highly threatened middle Rio Grande in New Mexico. RGALT has invested decades in building relationships and trust in the community and with working landowners. RGALT has a record of success in building bridges between agricultural landowners and conservation organizations that has resulted in land preservation that benefits both people and wildlife. This makes RGALT an essential partner in the middle Rio Grande landscape conservation effort.

RGALT has been able to access funding for CEs through diverse public and private conservation collaborations. In the last 6 years alone, these partnerships have resulted in \$10.5 Million in conservation funding for CEs on privately owned farm land and riparian wetlands and projects that protect and restore natural habitat on both public and private lands. RGALT has accomplished 28 CEs with six more in process right now. These CEs will protect over 7000 acres of high value land threatened by development or transfer of water rights.

Together we can protect the Rio Grande, our land and water that has sustained us for centuries. With increased funding we can increase our staff capacity in order to take full advantage of these conservation opportunities highlighted in this newsletter and others that will help protect the lands we cherish, our way of life, our cultural traditions, our legacy.

YOU can make a difference today! Invest in your community, your legacy, and in the future.

You can make a one-time gift by mail, online, or in person, donate assets like stock or property, or become a sustaining member with a recurring monthly gift of an amount that feels right for you. If you would like to leave a legacy that represents your lifelong values, RGALT presents a variety of planning and giving options including bequests and beneficiary designations. www.rgalt.org/become-a-member.



IWJV Water 4 Tour

WORKING WETLANDS *for* WILDLIFE IN THE WEST



In November 2019, RGALT helped launch the Intermountain West Joint Ventures Water 4 Initiative by hosting a tour of our Socorro County conservation easement projects for conservation stakeholders. The Water 4 Initiative aims “to support agricultural producers, public land managers, and other conservation partners with wetland conservation on working lands in ways that matter to people, including improved forage production, wildlife-associated recreation, and enhanced groundwater recharge.”

The tour helped familiarize the IWJV staff with the middle Rio Grande (MRG) landscape, meet landowners and partners, discuss challenges and opportunities, and help shape how Water 4 can support partners’ efforts. The CE projects showcased the public/private partnerships that have resulted in protecting and restoring land for people and wildlife in the MRG. A portion of the day was set aside to allow landowners to tell their stories and to express their concerns and needs to remain economically viable. Stakeholders gained a better understanding of the challenges landowners face to sustain their agriculture operations and the role private lands play in the MRG ecosystem resiliency. Stakeholders also gained a better understanding of the role RGALT plays in helping landowners accomplish their



conservation goals through land protection and by facilitating implementation of other conservation programs. Private land is a major component in the MRG, ensuring agricultural landowners remain economically and ecologically viable is essential for a MRG landscape conservation effort.

We would like to thank the landowners who shared their land and their stories with us. We would like to thank the IWJV and Rio Grande Headwaters Land Trust for making the journey to our valley and providing input and stories about their conservation efforts that are truly connected to our own. And thank you to all the local partners who joined us.

Welcome New RGALT Staff and Board Members

We would like to introduce our new RGALT team members. But first we would like to acknowledge and thank our dedicated staff and board members who have moved on after many years of commitment to RGALT. Thank you Sarah Wentzel-Fisher (6 years), Elan Silverblatt-Buser (2 years), Allison Mazan (2 years), and our dear Bill Hume (10 years) who passed away in May 2019. And last but not least, Zoey Fink who served on the board for a year and then as the Executive Director for a year.

Please meet the following new team members.



SUZANNA DENISON
RGALT Executive Assistant

Suzanna Denison is a passionate advocate for farm and ranch land access and preservation. She grew up on a conventional vegetable farm in Maine, which transitioned to organic production in the 1990s. In the

early 2000s, her family worked with an area agricultural land trust to place a conservation easement on their land. Off-farm, she directed the Western North Carolina FarmLink program, which was a partnership facilitating successful relationships between farmers looking for land to farm, and landowners aspiring to keep their farm and forest land in agriculture. In an effort to expand her work in farm and ranch transition planning, Suzanna became a certified farm succession coordinator through the International Farm Transition Network in 2018. Currently also working part-time at the American Farmland Trust, she serves as the Program Manager and a Land Access Trainer for the Farms for the Next Generation national initiative. Suzanna is thrilled to join the RGALT team! She can be reached at suzanna@rgalt.org.



TANYA TRUJILLO
New Board Member

Tanya Trujillo lives in Santa Fe and works with a coalition of foundations to support NGO projects in the Colorado River Basin. She previously worked as the Executive Director for the Colorado River Board of

California and prior to moving to California, she worked in Washington, D.C. for the Department of the Interior and for Senator Jeff Bingaman as Senior Counsel to the U.S. Senate Energy and Natural Resources Committee. In 2019, Tanya was appointed by Governor Lujan Grisham as a member of the New Mexico Interstate Stream Commission, and she previously served as General Counsel for the Commission and started her legal career in private practice in Santa Fe. She enjoys running, biking, and hiking and thinks red chile should be part of every meal.



MICHAEL JENSEN
New Board Member

Michael brings thirty years of experience in international development, science and technology policy, transportation, the arts, healthcare, and the environment. He has worked with communities

across the state impacted by uranium mining, toxic stormwater runoff, industrial zoning and legacy waste. He has facilitated citizen science in the Bosque and the Rio Grande, including a two-year water quality monitoring project in the drains and ditches along the river. Since late 2016, he has been deeply involved in helping develop a resource management plan to convert 130 acres around the Rio Grande Nature Center into a natural mosaic landscape. In an earlier life, he lived and worked on a farm in Norway and appreciates the commitment it takes to operate a farm across generations while dealing with the vagaries of the market and the weather.



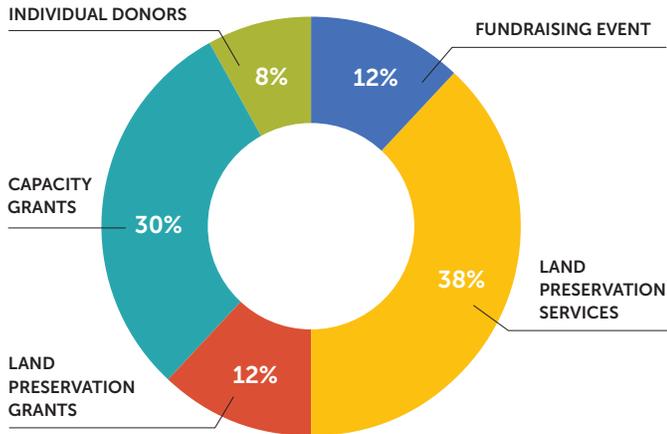
JEFF GOEBEL
New Advisory Board Member

Jeff Goebel is a leading expert in helping individuals and communities attain their goals and remove the obstacles that lie in the way, with over thirty years of national and international successes in consensus building,

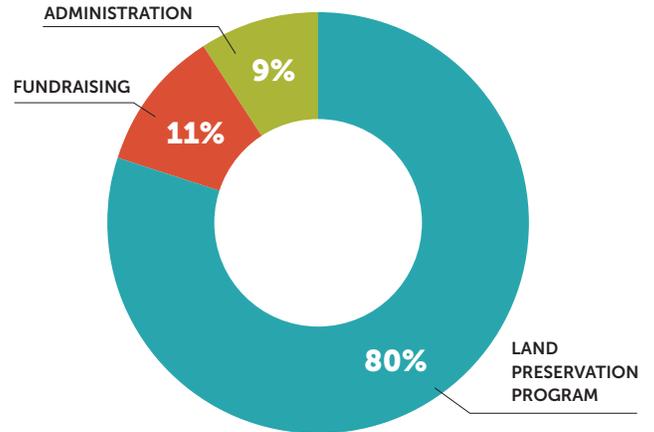
conflict resolution, and regenerative solutions. He has worked on catalyzing positive change from non-profits to government agencies, multi-national corporations to small family ranchers. Jeff has developed an effective program of respectful listening, visioning, and planning that attains long-range, sustaining change through 100% consensus. His clients include the National Geographic Society, federal and state agencies, various American Indian tribes, a northern CA biodynamic coastal community, a CA rancher to rancher project, parent-teacher partnerships in schools and complex eco-restoration and socio-economic renewal programs in Molokai, Navajo healthy soil restoration and restoring the pastoral way of life for the Maasai in Kenya.

FISCAL REPORT

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Thank You RGALT Supporters 2019!

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 Julia and David Stafford

We also want to extend our gratitude for all the RGALT supporters who attended and donated to the Harvest Dinner auction and provided in-kind contributions throughout 2019.

PHOTO: CHRISTI BODE

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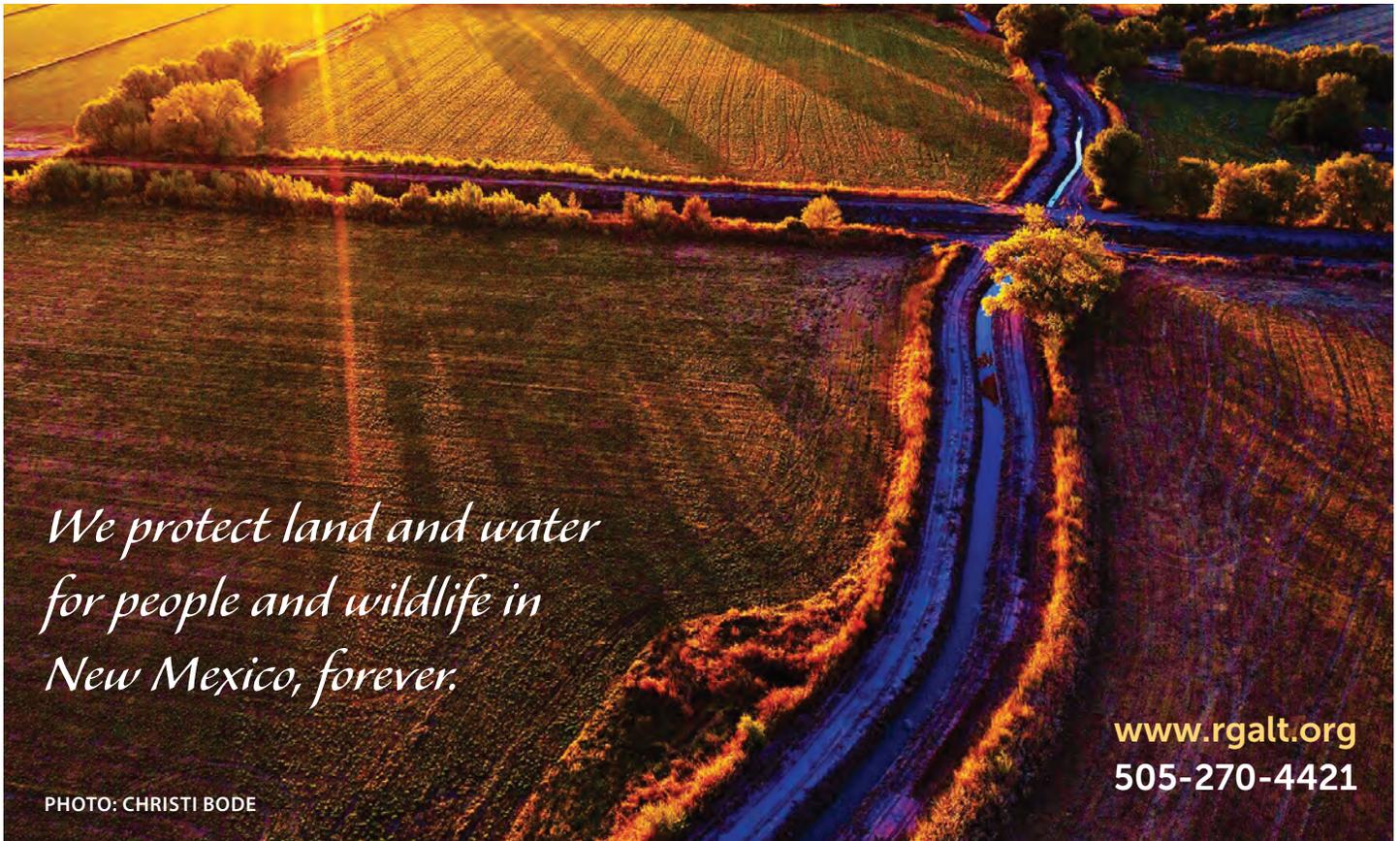
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*We protect land and water
for people and wildlife in
New Mexico, forever.*

PHOTO: CHRISTI BODE

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