The Quivira Coalition

Journal

Fostering a Land Health Movement

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Fresh Eyes

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From the Editor's Desk

This issue of our Journal is inspired by the theme of our successful Sixth Annual Conference: "Fresh Eyes On The Land: Innovation and the Next Generation."

The purpose of the event was to use "fresh eyes" to explore innovative ideas, practices, and relationships that give hope to, and receive inspiration from, the next generation. Creating hope and options for the future is the key to all our efforts. Whether the goal is staying on the land, exploring and understanding nature, or simply 'going home again,' the next generation needs new opportunities to achieve their dreams.

Miguel Santistevan is a farmer in Taos, New Mexico. He directs the Sembrando Semillas project for the New Mexico Acequia Association – the goal of which is to mentor youth in agriculture, to document traditional knowledge, and cultivate relationships. They do this through an innovative mixture of farming, radio programs, and video technology.

Estevan Arellano is a writer and researcher based in Embudo, New Mexico, whose work includes fiction, journalism, poetry, and photography. His latest book, "Ancient Agriculture," is the first English translation of Gabriel Alonso de Herrera's 1513 treatise on Spanish agriculture.

Vanessa Prileson recently completed an internship on George Whitten and Julie Sullivan's ranch in the San Luis Valley, in southern Colorado.

Dr. Mark Brunson is a professor at Utah State University, and Dr. Lynn Huntsinger teaches at the University of California, Berkeley.

The issue concludes with a letter from Wendell Berry, who responds to a question from a fan who heard him speak at the Conference.

On behalf of everyone at The Quivira Coalition, I would like to thank all our contributors. I think this issue makes a small but significant contribution to the critical question about future generations. Let me know what you think.

Happy Reading! Courtney

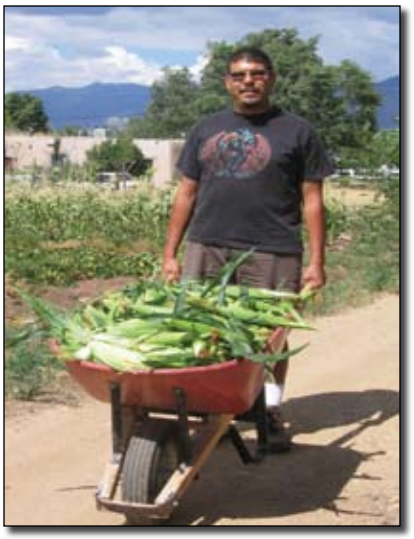
Front cover photos by Gene Peach (http://www.genepeach.com). Top Left: Lambert Yazzie, age 5, Navajo, Navajo Reservation, McKinley County, NM. Top Right: Kristine Calabaza, age 9, Jicarilla Apache /Santo Domingo Pueblo, Jicarilla Apache Reservation, Rio Arriba County, NM. Bottom: Jordan Muncy, age 8, O X Bar Ranch, Torrance County, NM.

Making a Hand: Growing Up Cowboy in New Mexico, photos by Gene Peach, essay by Max Evans, introduction by Elmer Kelton, can be ordered directly from the Museum of New Mexico Press at 800-249-7737, http://www.mnmpress.org/ It is available at most major bookstores, including Collected Works in Santa Fe.

Feature

Sembrando Semillas:
Planting Seeds of Traditional Agriculture for Future Generations

*by Miguel Santistevan and young farmers**



Miguel Santistevan:

Good morning, or as we say, "*Buenos dias le de Dios.*" I am honored to be here. I am really impressed with ranching in general and what it means for my culture, coming from the acequias. We were the original *vaqueros* and *caballeros* who brought the cattle, brought the horses, back in the 1500s. And it's awesome to see that ranching is alive and well, despite what other people think. And you can see we have plenty of young people who are interested in these kinds of things. And we do need to figure out how to nurture them in their interest. It's not a problem of not having the interest. It's a problem of not knowing how to nurture that interest. But anyways, we'll get into that.

My name is Miguel Santistevan. I'm project coordinator for what we call Sembrando Semillas, which means "planting seeds" or "sowing seeds". And the seeds are the literal seeds we are planting. But the seeds are also our youth and hoping that we're cultivating their interest in continuing agriculture, continuing traditions. So this is a plan that we came up with.

Before I continue any longer, I'd like to introduce, or have them introduce themselves, our fine young individuals that actually make this program possible.

My name is **D.J. Duran** *from Chacon, New Mexico, and I am a rancher from the mountains.*

My name is **Karen Mirabal***, and I'm a member of Sembrando Semillas. Aspiring rancher with no land, but mostly a ranch hand*

My name is **Margarita Garcia** *from Chamisa. I'm a student at UNM. I'm studying biology and I'm a farmer, but I'm also very thankful for all the ranchers for feeding me and for having the animals that have always helped my family to plow and to put manure on our land. And I'm very excited to be here and thank you all.*

My name is **Celestino Chavez***. I'm from Taos, New Mexico. And my interests are animals like sheep and having a garden and helping my parents out.*

Hi. I'm **R.J. Chavez***. I'm from Taos as well. And some of my main interests, I'd say, I've been around farming and ranching since I've been, well, since I was real young. But I'd like to get more involved in raising cattle, herding sheep and stuff that some of my ancestors used to do. And also planting gardens and working with acequias much more. And just gain more into my culture and gain more into my tradition, and all that. I'd like to be more a part of it and be more in touch with it. That's kind of what I want to do.*

Miguel – Excellent. Thank you. We'll hear a little more from them in a while. I wanted to explain our project so you would have a context to understand what we're doing, and then show some of the works they have done, besides the hands-on work.

The New Mexico Acequia Association had to rise and organize because of pressures on our state's water supply...and we've made a lot of gains in the legislature...But as we were making these gains in the policy realm, we were looking around at all these meetings, as I'm sure you're very familiar, and looking at people who were of an older generation. And really

* From a presentation made on January 18th, 2007, at The Quivira Coalition's Sixth Annual Conference "Fresh Eyes On The Land: Innovation and the Next Generation"

wondering, well, where are the younger people and how do we bring them in? How do we bring in the future generation of *parciante?* And a *parciante* is an irrigator. How are we going to create a situation, create the conditions to where we can bring the next generation in so that they can get the hands-on experience, learn the culture, but also understand that the water belongs to them as well? And they need to be involved, so we can keep the water in the community.

Northern New Mexico Garden. Photo by Marisela Chavez, courtsey of Taos Land Trust.

So we're saying how are we going to create this situation so that these kids aren't just cleaning the acequia because they make fifty dollars? Show up at eight o'clock, work an eight hour day of cleaning the acequias and make fifty dollars. And so, we have a lot of young people that come because they know that they can make a few hundred bucks in the spring by cleaning all the acequias in town. But we wanted to give them an understanding that acequias have been cleaned this way for eleven thousand years, all the way back to the Middle East. And I've cleaned acequias where I thought I was in the Middle East. It was at least as hot, and they were working me at least as hard.

To give that connection, that cultural perspective, let me outline the goals of our project.

The first goal is to mentor a future generation of farmers and ranchers. We have mentors in Mora, Antonio Medina and Marino Rivera. With them we've threshed wheat, we've made chicos, we plowed the land. We have a mentor in Embudo, Eremita and Margaret Campos. They are often at the Farmers Market if you visit in Santa Fé. They are showing the kids production aspects, greenhouses, how to market produce. And I'm a mentor in Taos. My agricultural situation is based on seed production and the conservation of landraces. I'm always looking for seeds. If you've got any seeds, let me know, old seeds.

Then we bring on mentors in a case-by-case basis. Celestino's dad showed us how to extract honey, and we're looking at other mentors to show us how to prune trees. All the agricultural things. We're following the seasonal calendar, trying to do one activity a month. Everything from cleaning acequias, preparing the land, planting, irrigating, weeding, harvesting, preparing the harvest.

But it's not just about the work. We're learning about technology, and we're documenting this process by taking pictures. We produce a radio show called *Que vivan las acequias.* It's ... has anybody ever heard it, KRZA? Excellent.

We also create digital storytelling pieces. We're actually going to show you [some] of those pieces in a minute. And we're trying to encourage them in other realms of the arts.

I learned from Estevan Arellano that agriculture used to be a thing of the intellectuals, the philosophers, the poets, the musicians. And at some point in history, when the Moors got kicked out of the Iberian peninsula, agriculture became something of the stereotypical lower class or that's what the poor people do and proper people don't get their hands dirty, so to speak. This is a stereotype that has stuck with us to this day. But actually, the roots of agriculture are something that are very noble and very respected. And we need to go back to that. So we're trying to introduce them to writing, to poetry, to other aspects where they can express their connection to the land that isn't just hoeing weeds. Because we want that balance.

And then the third part of our goal is to build relationships. I don't know if any of you have heard of this Seed Sovereignty Declaration that we are creating with the Native Americans, with the Traditional Native American Farmers Association. We're trying to build relationships, both with the youth within their communities, across communities with each other,

and network out to other communities. And it just so happened that this aspect of the goal turned out that we started working with the Traditional Native American Farmers Association trying to protect our native seeds and make sure that we don't get contaminated.

And we're also addressing the animal cloning issues. We don't feel that's appropriate to what we would like to see in food production.

So we've gotten some coverage on this, but this is really to illustrate that the youth are our seeds, again. What kind of future, or what kind of conditions are we creating for them to germinate into the future. So this is what we are trying to do.

R. J Chavez speaking at The Quivira Coalition's 2007 Annual Conference. Photo by Gene Peach.

A lot of people think the youth are lazy, or they are not interested. That's a stereotype. And what do you call that, adultism or youthism, like racism? You know, we're oppressing our youth by our opinions of them. Without even understanding what's really going on. Because these young people, they want to work. They just sometimes don't know how. Or don't know what to do. So we need people to show them, and not to tell them, well, when I was your age, my dad had me up at four o'clock in the morning, we were hoeing all day and we were tough. That's not how to do it. Sorry to tell you.

Before we go further, I'd like to show you the videos. But for now, I've asked all the youth to say a few more words about how they feel about this program, how they feel about agriculture, and what they think is important.

R.J. Chavez – *I guess what we would want from all of you would probably be support and just everybody kind of working together and helping in their own ways. Basically taking care of your own land and doing what you can there. So once everybody works their own piece of land or whatever and does what they could with that, I think that's how you sustain. You've got to take care of a certain little piece…When everybody is working their own, they get their own, that's how we all bond together, because it strengthens us when everybody is doing their own. But at the same time, we are all doing the same thing, but just on different parts. That's what I think I have to say.*

Celestino Chavez – *I think it's important to keep our traditions alive, to teach people about the acequias, about the matanzas, about having animals like sheep, and to have your own garden. So you won't have to go to the store so often. And also, have your meat so you don't have to buy meat from the store. And I think it's important that all of you know about our traditions.*

Margarita Garcia – *I'm a youth chaperone for this program, and I think that it's so awesome and important because a lot of times we grow up doing some of these things. But we don't realize how important they are, because we don't know what else is really going on in the world. We just live our own lives and go to school or whatever. We really try to teach the kids about other things that are going on, and like the global situation with food and security and how important they are. And just make them feel good about what they know, so that they can always want to know more. I think that this program also just helps us to use our hands and our heart instead of always just using our head. We go to school all day and that's all that we're supposed to do. We're not really allowed to use our heart and our hands, but they are totally part of who we are and I think that it's so important for us to carry on our culture and for us to teach other people. Because in everybody's culture there's really important information that we have to share with one another, because it's survival. Because culture is survival, it's not just like this romantic thing that they*

sing and they dance and da-da-da, it's survival. We had culture because we had to live. And I really hope and I really believe that we're going to come back to this place where we're going to have to just survive, and we're not going to have options of going to the store. We're going to have to know how to grow our food. And I'm pretty excited about that. And I'm just really excited that there's people who know how to do cattle. I went with D.J. when we took some of his cows up to the mountain, and it totally just blew my mind how much work it was, and I just have a completely new respect for the ranchers. Because I grew up on a small little farm where we just use our hands and I don't have animals, and I have this awesome respect. Because I got to be out there all day and chase them and almost got run over by them and all this crazy madness. So this program is awesome because it really just teaches us how interconnected we all are and how we need each other so bad, because we need each other.

Karen Mirabal – *It's tough to follow Margarita after all that. I wanted to talk a little bit about the way in which our program is set up and that it's based on the seasons. You begin to realize days that are celebrated in our culture that you no longer have with you. Wisdom that you no longer have with you. I'm not sitting up here with a lot of pride, because I know that everybody in this room, they don't have to go back that far to find ranchers and farmers in their family. But, I think because of my ancestry, I think that I have the ability and the capability to do anything when it comes to farming and ranching.*

Miguel – I guess D.J. declined to comment, but you will see his video speaks for itself. I wanted to show you a few movies here that I think are exemplary of what we're trying to do and who young people are.

Video: Hello, my name is Angel Martinez. I am a youth member of Sembrando Semillas. In this production, you will see the process we use to prepare for our growing season in Taos. First of all, cleaning the acequia is the most important step to this process. We have to make sure the acequia is clean enough for the water to flow through. This is me and my friends after a hard day of work. In this picture, I am tilling the land to make sure the soil is softer, so plants can grow better in it. Here is my field. And in these few pics you will see some of the vegetables I grew. I am proud to be able to be involved with Sembrando Semillas in keeping the tradition alive within my community. Thank you.

Miguel – I'd like to comment, we've been doing this already two growing seasons, and this is going to be our third. And Angel, his first year, he did his whole land with his shovel. The next year, I told him, I'll come out with my rototiller, we'll till twice as much land. And he said, 'right on'. So after the season, we're talking about it. He said, you know, I appreciate the rototiller, but actually, I think my garden came out better and I got more on less land by working it with the *pala,* the shovel. So he said, thanks, but this next year, I'm going to turn it myself. Let's hear from one of our young ladies.

Video: Sembrando Semillas, planting seeds, by Juanita Garcia. In the Sembrando Semillas project, the one most important thing we are learning is how to plant our own food. One step to planting food is to start off the seeds in small containers. Another step to planting food is to plant the seed directly in the ground at the right time of year. Always make sure to water your crops so that they will grow. When starting off seeds in containers, sometimes it is time-consuming, but you just have to be patient. When planting seeds directly in the ground, it is better if everyone works together to make the job easier and faster. Of course, at the end of a successful planting day, everyone is tired, but we are happy that we accomplished something that would not only make ourselves

Apple orchard. Photo by Dorie Hagler.

proud, but our ancestors proud.

Miguel – You know, just to illustrate, Juanita is supposed to be here right now. But she could not come to this conference because she could not get excused from school because of the standardized testing of *No Child Left The Same*. Or wait, no, how does that go? No Teacher Left Sane, or … No Child Left Untested. Yes, we need to develop outdoor education, but we also have to address these policies that are locking our kids inside those classrooms and not giving them life skills. She would have done great here. She would have learned a hundred times more, interacting with all of you and building up her confidence with all the positive comments than her sitting there filling in the bubbles right now, which is what she's doing. That's disturbing. Another young man.

Margarita Garcia of Sembrando Semillas speaking with a conference attendee during The Quivira Coalition's 2007 Annual Conference. Photo by Gene Peach.

Video: My name is Toribio Garcia, and these are the steps of how my family makes chicos. Chicos start in the field. First, you pick the corn from the garden and make a pile by the horno. Second, you start the fire in the horno. Third, wait for it to get hot. Fourth, we gather the chicos and toss them in the horno, after we have wet them for steam. We cover the openings as much to make sure there is no heat escaping from the horno. Six, we let the chicos stay in overnight. We take them out and they're golden brown. Seven, the family gets together and strings the chicos. Eight, we hang the strung chicos until they dry. Nine, we get the dried chicos and we take the chicos off the cob. This process is called desgranando. Tenth, this is the finished product. This is how my family eats corn in winter.

Miguel –Thank you. This is another young man, and I'd like to say, this is a fine young man who had to drop out of school. I couldn't stop him. I tried. But the school was not serving his needs. He is a kid who does not have a second thought about working a shovel all day. He loves his acequia. He loves being outside. You are not going to get this kid to sit at a desk and look at a book, and he dropped out. So we are trying to nurture these young people that they can, they can still have a future. Even though they are not institutionalized.

Video: My name is Nicanor Ortega. I am from Arroyo Hondo, I am a member of Sembrando Semillas youth project. I am a parciante on the Acequia Atalaya, which feeds off the Rio Hondo. Acequias have been a very important aspect of my life and my family too. Acequias have been vital to me and my family, my families past, because my grandparents used the acequias to survive. They had acres of delicious vegetables and orchards of fruit. If it weren't for acequias, this lifestyle wouldn't be possible. This is why I'm so thankful acequias have been maintained for so long. Because now I have the opportunity to fulfill my grandparents' dreams. I am now seventeen years old and have a quarter acre garden. Crops I prefer to plant are corn, alverjon [peas], and calabazas. My favorite kind of corn is seed corn. The way I get my seed corn is I plant it and every year for harvest I save the seed and plant it again. One of my favorite crops is alverjon. Here is a picture of me and my friend Mikey planting alverjon before the seasons started. The other crop I grow is calabazas. Calabazas are good

for calabacitas and pumpkin pies. Here is a picture of some pumpkins I grew in Arroyo Hondo. With the help and inspiration of my father and Sembrando Semillas youth project, I still use my acequia and have a part in my grandparents' lifestyle.

Miguel – He insisted that he included Pancho Villa in his presentation. And for the grand finale, D.J. is going to make it as a rancher. But don't be surprised if you see him in Hollywood.

Video: My name is D.J. Duran from Chacon, New Mexico, fifteen years old. I go to West High School in Las Vegas. [voiceover: "Excellent. Could you describe events of today, please?"] We herded cattle to my grandfather's ranch up in the mountains. ["Is this something you have done before?"] Many times, every year. For the last five, six years. ["Excellent. Could you describe the process to us a little bit?"] Just took them out of the fence, walked them on the road, all the way to the property. Took them a little higher so they would start eating in the higher elevations. [Moo, auto sounds, cries of the vaqueros … "Could you describe some of the things that were new or unique this year, as opposed to other years?"] We had a very hard time with our bull. ["And how do you keep that bull under control?"] This time I just rammed him with the four wheeler. ["What is it that's on the seat of your four-wheeler here?"] A whip. ["Can you tell us, how long have you been using this whip, and how does it work."] This particular one I've only had it for a year. I had other ones, they don't last me very long. ["And what's kind of the technique that you use for this whip and why?"] Just hit them with it, make them go, or pop it … ["Wow, that's something I do not want to get hit with. Could you describe what we were trying to do with this little calf named Shorty"]. Just trying to catch him to put him on my lap, because he got tired. And his mom didn't let me. She was very mad about that.

Miguel – So you can see the students are practicing the hands-on agriculture. But because we live in the modern world, we also have to appreciate the fact that there are modern things. And that their peers are appreciating the modern things. And so, we have to give them a taste and an opportunity to excel at those things as well. So that's what we're trying to do is bridge the old with the new, in hopes that they can express themselves so they can spend time with mentors, such as yourselves, and express what they've learned, and hopefully keep this thing going.

And I'm pretty confident that they will, because every time we get into a conversation, they surprise me with what they already know. And I think that's an important point to really emphasize is, the youth of today have, in a lot of cases, even more information than us. That doesn't mean that they're wiser than us. But it means they are already information rich. A lot more than we were when we were their age. We didn't have access to the same kind of information. What they lack is hands-on experience, life experience, and wisdom. And that has to be presented to them and offered to them gently. Because a lot of times we are overbearing. We need to be authorities, but not authoritarian. And I think that's real important.

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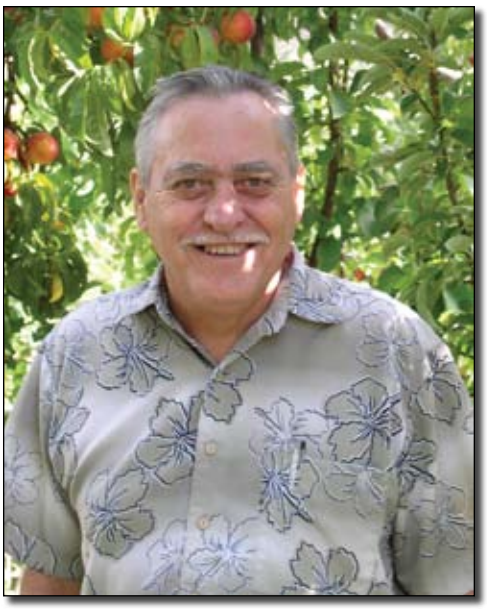
Colloquium

Querencia: The Soul of the Paisano*

by Estevan Arellano



In the old days, people in my village and other villages greeted each other, *"Buenos días le de Dios,"* May God grant you a good day. Then usually, the next question might be, especially if they didn't know the person,*"¿Y su merced?"* And your land grant? People wanted to know where they were from.

I remember my father always asking, "Who's your father?" If he didn't know the father, then he would ask, "Who's your grandfather?" It was not only a way of making conversation, but also of grounding himself. Of wanting to identify with the person he just met. Usually he would say, "I met your father, or grandfather, back in the 30s or 40s, whenever." But immediately he knew something about that person, he was anchored in time and space.

This is what I call *Querencia,* anchored to a certain space, and like the Chinese boxes, you start with the bioregion, in my case the Río Arriba, that space from la Bajada south of Santa Fe to the San Luis Valley in what is today Colorado, but in terms of history and spirit is *"la Nuevo México,"* the other Mexico. That's how the ancients referred to New Mexico in the 1500s.

First, let's define *querencia*, for I have seen several definitions, some which totally miss the mark, I think, and I go back to Covarrubias and his *Tesoro de la Lengua Castellana o Española,* the first dictionary of the Castilian language, published in 1611 in Madrid. He defines "*querencia*," as *"Término de cazadores, es el lugar adonde el animal acude de ordinario, o al pasto o a la dormida,"* a term used by hunters, the place where the animal spends his time, either where he goes to eat or sleep."

The *Diccionario de la Lengua Española de Real Academia Española*, defines "*querencia*" as *"Inclinación o tendencia del hombre y de ciertos animals a volver al sitio en que se han criado o tienen costumber de acudir,"* the inclination or tendency of man and certain animals to return to the site where they were raised or have a tendency of returning to.

For our purpose it also means "affection," "longing," or "favorite place." But it also implies a sense of responsibility to that place, a particular ethic towards the land. It is place that people say, *"conoce como sus manos,"* he knows like his hands.

It is that which gives us a sense of place, that which anchors us to the land, that which makes us a unique people, for it implies a deeply rooted knowledge of place and for that reason we respect our place, for it is our home and we don't want to violate our home in any way. We like it pristine, healthy, productive.

Our philosophy is one borrowed from our Native American brothers, for we are brothers and sisters. We do not inherit the land from our parents, we have it borrowed from our children and grandchildren.

Recently, my first grandchild was born, which means now I have an added burden, to take better care of the land. Now I have to plant new raspberries and other fruits, like I did when my daughter was born and that same year she ate fresh raspberries. That is now my task!

Querencia is a place where one feels safe, a place from which one's strength of character is drawn, where

* This article is a condensed version of a paper presented at our 6th Annual Conference, January 2007.. For the full version see: www.quiviracoalition.org.

one feels at home. Even the bull in the bullring prefers a certain place within the plaza where he fixates his gaze and to where he will retreat once he is wounded to rest and feel safe.

And *querencia* doesn't always imply place, for it can also be a certain time of the day, a certain weather, music, food, taste, smell. As a writer I guess my desire to write is my *querencia*. Even if writing lies, that in literature we call fiction.

Ask yourself: Where do I come from? Where do I feel most at home? Where do I feel most happy and relaxed? What is my ideal writing environment? Where can I write with my full powers? Like my *camarada*, Alberto Lovato would say, *"con mi computadora de leña,"* in front of my antiquated wood fired computer, then he bursts out laughing.

But besides the psychic and physical it also is about the spiritual, it's about the soul, what Dr. Tomás Atencio calls the "ensouled soul."

Sense of Place: The Acequia

What I call *agricultura mixta tradicional mestiza*, and trying to understand as I have been doing for more than 20 years is like unraveling a *trenza* (braid) that has been so tightly knit that we see it more like a *chongo*. This type of agriculture is based on irrigation, dry farming and natural farming but of course the most important element in our three pronged agriculture is the acequia, an Arab word that comes to us from Yemen.

Northen New Mexico Acequia. Photo by Ernie Atencio.

Though some of the techniques that the current organic and sustainable agricultural movement are touted as innovative, they have been done by the indigenous people for hundreds of years. Double digging as promoted by the biodynamic practitioners is nothing new to the *chinamperos* of Xochimilco. This September while in Xochimilco doing research on the *chinampas* I noticed a *campesino*, who had never heard of double-digging, turning the black organic soil, with the shovel to about a depth of 24-inches.

It is here then, that the farmer will transplant the tiny plants he grows individually in his *chapínes,* also known more commonly as *almácigos*, or plant nursery. In Latin this idea is known as *"atajo de tierra,"* for it is essentially small beds where plants are grown from seed. The word *almáciga*, or *almácigo*, is also common in northern New Mexico among the older traditional farmers. It comes from the Arab al-maskaba, which means an irrigated piece of land.

But it is not only in the techniques of preparing the soil and plants where we find the Arab influence but also in how the land was divided and appropriated, that is, the *mercedes* or grants of land were very similar to the Arab *alquerías*. And where we see a *merced* composed of both irrigated and non-irrigated lands, we find the same type of land divisions in how the Arabs divided the lands. What we call *ejidos*, or the common lands which are composed of *sierras*, *montes* and *dehesas* (pasture lands), to the Arabs they were known as *mamluka,* or appropriated lands, which would be similar to our *suertes* or irrigated pieces of land.

What provided the intensive agriculture then was the acequia system, which was an elaborate and complex system of managing the water.

Acequias, it is said, are the most democratic institutions in this country, and it's true. When compared with a precinct, an acequia is far more democratic because it represents far less people and the less people, the more democratic an institution

Take for example the acequias within the Embudo land grant. There are two precincts to take care of all the voters during elections, Democrats and Republicans, Greens, Independents, etc., but this same land grant is home to sixteen acequias, most of which are historic acequias; that is, they predate the 1907 water code.

Each acequia, those that have at least four *parciantes* or water-rights owners, must have bylaws, a three member elected commission and a *mayordomo*, who is usually elected by the *parciantes*. Due to people not using their land for agriculture anymore, as the villages are becoming bedroom communities, some acequias have dropped by the wayside. In Embudo, the Acequia de la Nasa, watered with the *sobrante* or excess water of the Acequia Junta y Cienaga, hasn't had water in several years.

But what makes the acequias democratic, more than any other institution, is that they share the water to the last drop. This concept, called *equidad* or equality, comes directly from the *Qur'an*. Under Muslim law, possibly because it evolved in the desert, people must never deny water to another being. To proportion water to other beings including animals and plants is considered a *limosna piadosa* (zakat), a pious charity. This concept has been practiced here forever. My grandfather, I am told (I was born after he died), always had a trough full of water for travelers and their animals. Our people never thought of selling water. The sharing of the water among the acequia and between *parciantes* is known as the r*epartimiento*.

Another aspect of the democracy of water is that it could never be severed from the land because, as the saying goes, *"el agua es la sangre de la tierra,"* water is the blood of the land. And water was always shared based on the amount of land one had; that's where the concept of *peones* (a laborer but also a divison of water) comes in. A *peon* can be broken down to quarters. Usually a quarter *peon* meant the person had one acre of land to irrigate, and it was divided based on the twenty-four hour day. Therefore, a quarter would be six hours, but if the water had to be shared (*repartimiento*), that six hours might equal only fifteen minutes. This also depended on the number of *parciantes* in a particular acequia, but again it was based on the amount of land irrigated by the acequia. Two other concepts besides *repartimiento* enter into making the culture of the acequias so democratic. One applied to food, called *el convite*, from convivium, and the other, to labor, *cooperacion*, cooperation in the true sense of the word, for an acequia is a worker-owned co-op.

In a conversation with a person from the Mondragon Cooperatives in the Basque region of Spain, a man told me, *"no puede haber cooperatives sin cooperacion,"* there can be no cooperative without cooperation, a very simple concept but one so difficult to implement in this country of individualism. And the person in charge of administering the water, making sure everyone had water and didn't abuse it was the *sahib al-saqiya* (the *zabacequia* or *repartidor del agua*), known in New Mexico as the *mayordomo*.

In the Hispano-Muslim world, water does not belong to any one person or institution and has to be shared equally by those who need it. Of course the water was divided based on the amount of water in the river, then according to the amount of land each acequia irrigated, then based on the number of water users in each particular acequia.

An acequia also promotes food democracy based on the concept of *convite*. As my mom would say when she would

Pulling the head gate. Photo by Dorie Hagler.

prepare a special plate, she would tell me to go take a plate to my aunt or some special person, *"dile que aquí le convido aunque sea un poquito,"* tell her that I am sharing even if only a small portion. Probably the ultimate form of the *convite* philosophy was the *"güeso guisandero,"* a bone that was shared in times of very scarce resources to at least give the taste of meat to a gravy or seasoned dish. This bone, it is said, was passed from house to house.

Then, of course, there's the democracy of labor, known as *cooperacion* in the workings of an acequia, whether it's the annual spring cleaning, or after a flood that an acequia needs to be repaired to get water flowing again, or helping out the neighbors during the planting or harvesting. Just as water is shared, so is the labor, and those that have more land need more labor. Some might need help with labor and others might take a plate of food to the workers. This means that when the harvest is in, everyone will also partake of the harvest, whether it's with *chicos* (made of tender corn when it's in the *xilote* stage) made in the *horno*, a piece of meat after the *matanza* (the ritual butchering of an animal) or for Lent, a special bowl of *panocha* (a sweet desert made of ground *harina de trigo enraizada*, dried wheat sprouts).

An acequia, then, is the epitome of democracy, whether it be how the commission and *mayordomo* are elected, based on one vote per person regardless of whether that person has one acre or twenty acres; democracy of food allocation or security where those that have provide for those that don't, and in labor, where everyone cooperates from the spring cleaning to putting away the harvest. Three words that define acequia democracy are *repartimiento, convite* and *cooperacion*. When one of those is lacking, democracy begins to deteriorate.

Sense of Place: The Foods

As a youngster I remember going with my parents to a restaurant in Española that is still there, the Río Grande Café, which used to advertise and still does, it's cuisine as "Spanish Food." Another restaurant opened about three years ago in Hernandez by Socorro Herrera, a favorite local *cantante* (musician), called "Socorro," that also advertises "Spanish Food," but I would never go in there expecting to find paella. But getting back to the Río Grande Café, their menu then as now still features green chile stew, red chile, enchiladas, posole, and typical New Mexico food.

The cuisine then is a mixture of Middle Eastern, Mediterranean and American ingredients and techniques. For example, let's look at the tamal; which is a Mesoamerican invention, though with the introduction of ingredients from the other continent is improved. For what would a tamal be, especially in northern New Mexico, if it didn't have pork and the *masa* (dough) was not prepared with lard or pork fat known as *manteca*. Of course the main ingredient is corn and when it's prepared as nixtamal or corn flour and mixed with *manteca*, it gives the tamal a certain fluffiness it wouldn't have otherwise. Then of course the red chile mixture with pork is what makes the filling so appetizing. Chile is from the Americas but pork of course was introduced from the other side of the Atlantic, as was beef, lamb and goat meat. The tamal is then wrapped in a cornhusk, though it can also be prepared in a banana leaf (bananas were also introduced by Arabs to Spain, then brought to New Spain) and steamed.

But there are other foods that are common in New Mexico, as well as Mexico, Andalucía and the Middle East that are always part of feast days, including Pueblo feasts of northern New Mexico. Here I am referring to *capirotada* or bread pudding, whose main

El Pastor. Photo by Dorie Hagler

ingredients are toasted white bread made from wheat, cheese from cow or goat milk, almonds or walnuts and raisins, which come from grapes. The poet from Baghdad Ziryad introduced these foods to the Iberian Peninsula in the mid-800s, including the use of crystal and the fork. These are all ingredients native to the Mediterranean and Middle East that now have become as much a part of the New Mexico cuisine as tamales.

In conclusion, New Mexican cuisine, agriculture techniques including land division and the appropriation of water resources through the use of acequias, the poetry of the *campesinos*, are all a mixture of many cultures; from India we got the watermelon, from the Middle East the apricot, or *albaricoque* another Arab word, from the Iberian peninsula our meat culture based on domesticated animals and from the Americas the five main ingredients that are central to all New Mexican foods, *maiz*, *chile*, *calabazas*, *frijol* and *tomate*.

Red Canyon Reserve, Quivira's Querencia. Photo by Courtney White.

No wonder our agriculture and our cuisine are known as *la agricultura viajera*, for what would Italy be without tomatoes, Ireland without potatoes, and us without coffee and beer, which incidentally is an Egyptian invention. This is only a very brief overview of our *mestizaje* when it comes to our food, and how we grow our good, our agricultural traditions.

Sense of Place: El Paisano

Mary Austin and her group in Santa Fe with the folk art designation of the 1930s convinced the local population that we were Spanish and we bought her line, that even today in the northern villages, people with Indian features will swear they are indeed Spanish.

Several years back I taught a bilingual creative writing class in Peñasco and in the first class I asked the students what they considered themselves to be, all said Spanish. Simply by looking at their features I knew most, if not all, were mestizos. How could they not be with Picuris Pueblo so close, then the name of the most beautiful peak is known as Jicarita, since the Jicarilla Apaches called that area home for a long time? Then three miles away in Ojito and Chamisal is where Melchor Rodriguez, the Angolan drummer, who came with DeVargas settled and where the Rodriguez' are still a prominent family. The following week they all had different stories, they all admitted, and proudly so, that they had relations in Picuris, also Apache blood; though no one admitted to being mulatto.

Since I am a descendent of the Martín-Serrano clan, I've always known I had Indian blood and my father never denied where he came from. Since very young I knew that my grandmother, whom I never knew, had relations in Picuris and he would always say that his "*bizabuela Albinita era apache pura*;" she lived to be 105 years old. And of course he always said, "*nosotros somos mexicanos*," and his best friend, Filogoño, laughing out loud in a scruffy voice, would say, "*yo no celebro el 4 de Julio, al cabo que ni americano soy.*"

When we examine closely our agricultural past, we come to understand how mixed our language, our techniques, our concepts regarding land and water are. In terms of Castilian influence there is very little; it is mostly Roman and Arab, what came from the Iberian Peninsula. Then from Mesoamerica the Tlaxcalteca influence is now barely coming to light and we have always known about the Pueblo influence but somehow that has also been left out of the history books.

"*Agarra la pala y haz un tapanco en la cequiecita*."

The above sentence is very simple, yet when broken down, it tells us a lot about our language and who we are. Here we see the influence from different cultures, yet everyone in northern New Mexico that is a mestizo would understand. The basic structure is Spanish, and

all the words are part of the Spanish language now, but when we start looking at the origin of the words we find out that though *pala*, or shovel today, is a latin word that is a Jewish verb, which means to separate.

Then *tapanco* is a word our ancestors picked up on their travels up the Camino Real, meaning a heap or pile, from the Nahuatl *tlapantli*. *Cequiecita* is from acequia (as-saqiya), meaning that which gives water; an Arab word I have traced back to Yemen.

Even the word *agarrar* has its roots in the Arab, for it comes from *garrar*, or how a raptor curves its claws to grasp something. In that short sentence we two words that originally came from the Arabic, one with Latin and Jewish roots and one from Mesoamerica.

And teachers and even Spanish professors tell us that our language is not valid; to the point that we even make fun of it ourselves, referring to it as "*mocho*," mutilated, castrated, hypocritical, butt end. Then we don't know why our kids don't want to speak in Spanish. Instead we should emphasize the richness of our language. I am very proud of my language, I used it in a conversation with the Prince of Asturias and he understood me and so did the audience at the Casa de las Americas in Madrid; two weeks ago I used the same language at a roundtable at the Museo de Antropología in Mexico City and I was understood.

Why anybody that is native of New Mexico would claim to be pure Spaniard is beyond me. Not even those that were born in Spain would claim to be "pure" Spaniards for they understand the history of Spain very well. Try telling a Basque that he is a Spaniard and you'll see the response he gets. Or tell a Catalán that he is a Spaniard and the same will happen, or a Gallego or someone from Andalucía.

Only in America do we tend to homogenize everyone and make them a Smith or a Jones and turn our cuisine into mash potatoes, what a friend from Sevilla called, "*una cultura decafinada*," or a decaffeinated culture.

But in addressing each other, we don't refer to ourselves as mestizos, we know what we are. Neither do we say, "*¿quehubo Indo-hispano?* We only use that term when writing down who we are. Nor do we refer to each other as "*español,*" or "*mexicano*," though we might say we are "*nuevomexicanos*;" but the endearing term we use is "*paisa*," or "*paisano*," as in Countryman.

Borrowing from my friend Gary Nabhan, quoting from a piece he wrote: "The chef then put his hand on my shoulder, and warmly greeted me. "*Mahlhabba! Eres paisano?*" I was stunned for a moment. I understood the Arab greeting, *mahlhabba*, but what about him asking me if I was a *paisano*. A peasant? A tiller of the soil? A roadrunner? Then it came to me: a countryman. Are you a fellow countryman? So very far from the motherland, a chance encounter with some distant kin…"

That's how we feel when we encounter a fellow New Mexican far from home, regardless of whether he is from Alcalde, Truchas, Mora, Tierra Amarilla, Embudo, when we encounter a *paisano* it's like coming home. Even if you had never met this person, there is something that tells you he is kin and before you know you are having a beer, and talking about how long it's been since you had a good red chile stew. . .

Querencia then is the ethic behind how we look at the land and water, and when you love something with so much heart, *con tanto corazón*, then you are going to take care of it. As musician Cipriano Vigil from Chamisal says in his song, that to me is about *querencia*,

"Nuevo México lindo y Querido
Si me llego a morir navegando
Estira tus ala a traeme aquí"

New Mexico beautiful and loved
If I should die while traveling
Stretch out your wings and bring me back

Even in death we want to return home to our *querencia*, the place where our soul can rest in peace; that's what every *paisano* yearns for. At least a small plot of land where your bones and soul can rest in peace, "*si quiera un pedacito de tierra donde cae muerto*." We always want to make sure the cycle is complete, "*del lugar que me vio nacer hasta el llegar a descansar en el llano de las Calaveras, de donde le chiflan a uno las Calaveras*."

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A View from the Field

A Young Cowhand on the Rio Grande

by Vanessa Prileson

Why would a girl raised in suburban Tucson, Arizona want to make a career in ranching while ranch children are leaving the business? Am I nuts? Family, professors and friends told me ranching is no longer a viable profession. I decided to find out for myself. I hoped to learn if there were ways to make ranching a livable profession again. I want ranchers to be able to make their living off their land by exploring progressive ranch management. My goal is to run a ranch, regardless of whether I own it. I want people to believe ranching is possible.

Family day trips throughout southeastern Arizona triggered my passion for ranching. While my parents visited wineries, I patted horses over the fence and dreamed about herding cattle over desert grasslands. How could I live this dream? Furthermore, could I handle the realities of ranching? By being open to avenues that involve learning what makes ranching a more viable livelihood. For the past seven months I have been working as an intern/apprentice with George Whitten and Julie Sullivan on their grass-fed, organic cattle ranch in the San Luis Valley of southern Colorado.

Nothing in my college classes prepared me for the realities of ranching. What the wonderful topics of rangeland science and economics did do was encourage me to find ways to make ranching work.

As I finish my internship, I remember the real aspects of ranching: moving electric fence in below-zero temperatures freezing my fingers; yanking sweet-smelling, moldy bales of hay off the soggy ground and watching the rotted twine snap and the bale break loose; jamming the old truck into four-wheel drive in the middle of a snow bank, and through it all, watching animals thrive and suffer as I learn to take care of them.

Nothing in my college classes prepared me for the realities of ranching. What the wonderful topics of rangeland science and economics did do was encourage me to find ways to make ranching work. Without those lectures, field trips, dedicated professors and family excursions, I may never have been motivated to experience ranching.

As I entered high school, I started paying attention to vanishing ranchland in the southwest. For an economics class project, I deduced a more viable way of ranching would be if cattle were raised solely on rangeland forages, and the grain-finishing process was eliminated. This way, most of the returns would go directly to ranchers.

With this realization I wanted to bring agricultural producers and conservationists together to cooperate on how to produce healthy meat and maintain thriving ecosystems. I carried my theory of raising grass-fed beef with me to Oregon State University, even though grain-finished beef production was taught in my university classes. One particular rangeland ecology field trip to Doc and Connie Hatfield's ranch in eastern Oregon was a turning point for me; Doc and Connie showed that raising beef in an unconventional way, such as without hormones or antibiotics, was possible and profitable.

This knowledge combined with rangeland ecology and agricultural economics classes drove me to experience grass-fed beef ranching and determine its viability.

Lessons Learned

In 2005, I discovered George Whitten and Julie Sullivan's internship on the Quivira Coalition's website. The position had already been filled for that summer, so I lined up an internship at the Lasater Ranch for my first introduction to grass-fed beef production and marketing. I began my internship with George and Julie on the San Juan Ranch in the fall of 2006, after my graduation.

Upon arriving at the ranch, I met George, Julie, their two beloved border collies, Chico and Zeke, and their three cats. I shared with them that my main goals were to learn how to run this type of ranch and discover whether I could make a living at it some day. I feel that George and Julie have done everything they could to help me succeed, including involving me in how they use the Holistic Management decision making framework to move toward their own goals.

For example, a large part of George and Julie's goal is to ranch as sustainably as possible and reduce the amount of fossil fuel used by modifying the way cattle are fed in the winter. Hay is cut and piled in the field rather than stacked and baled, so the tractor is not needed to feed hay during the winter months. This modification is one way ranching could be made more viable.

Another sustainable method George and Julie practice is marketing their beef to local communities as well as making it reasonable for the average person to purchase, creating healthy economies.

I was involved in all daily ranch chores and planning the ranch's future. Being included in everything was effective and exciting in learning how important decisions are made on the ranch. If I were only included in the physical work such as moving cows, loading hay, and moving fence, I would have only become good at following directions. I would not have become better at determining when to move cattle, how much hay to feed, which marketing techniques work, and most importantly, I would not have truly understood the interrelation of the animals, people and land surrounding the ranch.

Some obstacles came up for me while being involved with everything on the ranch. It was inevitable that I got caught in the middle of personal struggles, family disagreements and issues. It was difficult at times to plan days off and I had to adapt to sharing much of my space. Sometimes it was hard to be away from my friends and the activities I was involved in during

Vanessa riding with the herd.

college. But I reminded myself frequently why I willingly chose to live without some of the amenities of a young person's lifestyle, if only temporarily, so that I could learn what it takes to make a living as a grass-fed beef rancher.

Being a ranch intern requires me to be steady, dependable, be myself, be open to new ideas and be there when ranching is fun, and when it's not.

I learned there is no visible line that separates working and living for a rancher; the combination is what creates the life a rancher seeks. Supper may be ready, but you might still be out walking through the cow herd checking for cows calving or giving a calf yogurt to settle an upset stomach. I realized I have to love this lifestyle to be happy making a living off a ranch.

March snowstorm. "Driving on ice is a lot like cattle ranching: if you don't plan ahead, you could have a wreck", Vanessa Prileson.

One chore this winter was to move electric fence every day to give the cows their ration of hay piles. I had thought this would be easy, but it was harder than I thought! First, I moved fast through crusty snow to pull electric fence posts out of frozen ground and move them until the cattle received enough piles for that day. Second, I tried to prevent 70 sassy yearling heifers from running over the downed polywire in their eagerness for piles. Third, I pounded new holes in the frozen ground to shove the posts in, and fourth, narrowly avoided getting shocked by the fence in the process. 'Just moving the fence' often consumed an entire morning!

When not floundering in the snow chasing heifers, I helped calculate grazing plans for the dormant and growing seasons. I learned what an Animal Day per Acre can look like on arid grasslands rather than in college textbooks and how much this can vary even within a few hundred feet.

After implementing a grazing plan, I realized it is far more than making a chart and moving fence; a good grazing plan, like a marketing plan, requires careful thinking and planning ahead. Plans A through Z are necessary because Plans A, B and C can fall through quickly. I recall one winter night when George slowed the car down a quarter of a mile before the stop sign because the roads were icy. Then it hit me. Driving on ice is a lot like cattle ranching; if you don't plan ahead you could have a wreck.

Every day requires teamwork, everything from washing dishes, cleaning the house, cooking and being friends after a long day of yelling at each other during cattle work. Each day brings unexpected crises or blessings in the ranching world, causing a roller-coaster of feelings.

Ranching is not solely difficult physical and mental work; the ups and downs of it are your life. As an intern, I am part of a ranching family and agricultural community; it is an amazing place because everyone around me has a similar lifestyle and understands it is well worth while.

I see now how much mental and physical work it is to raise cattle in general, let alone organic and grass-fed. It takes self-discipline and enthusiasm. I understand how difficult it is to make financial ends meet even when the most well-intended ecological and economical decisions are made. It is important for me to experience and observe these actualities so that I can better plan my future and know which questions to ask. Do I want my own ranch or to manage one for somebody else? What kind of operation would I want?

Tomorrow

Living off agriculture in today's society takes forward-thinking, creative minds. I hope to be one of those progressive thinkers and promote sustainable agriculture to the point where people want to go into agriculture for a career because they know they can make a living and benefit the land.

Combining rangeland ecology, beef marketing and raising livestock gets me excited. Raising cattle in a way that is healthy for the land motivates me. I love to market grass-fed meat and communicate to people how it is raised. With these passions in mind, I want to maintain a strong connection to agriculture throughout my life.

Within the next few years I want to (1) travel the world while observing ranch and land management in different cultures; (2) manage a grass-fed ranch in another country; (3) create buying clubs to market grass-fed beef; (4) play a role in rangeland restoration using livestock as a primary tool; (5) become part of the public land management force to conserve and manage natural resources, and finally, get young people more involved in agriculture by managing ranch camps or setting up internship programs.

Working on the Empirita Ranch southeast of Tucson during the summers in high school was good preparation for my ranching internships later on. Interning after college is a valuable transition period because I am learning if ranching is the career I want. It also provides me with ideas for other agricultural careers. I highly recommend a similar route for young people interested in interning on ranches or farms.

I also recommend being financially prepared with saved money so all energy can be focused on your internship. The experience is priceless, but everyone has expenses.

I decided to take a job with the Forest Service following my internship. Although the job will not include managing a ranch, it includes managing land, people and animals in ways that aim to conserve natural resources.

When I have a down day, my friends remind me that not everyone gets an opportunity to work on a ranch. My family, which is not agriculturally inclined at all, enjoys hearing my horse and cattle stories. I would love to see the mortified look on my grandmother's face when I tell her that the dried polka dots on my cowboy hat are blood spatters from dehorning a yearling heifer, or my dad wince when I tell him I castrated a bull calf during branding.

My grandfather used to sing me the "I'm an old cow hand from the Rio Grande" song as a joke when I was little. Now I can tell him what it's like to be a young cow hand on the Rio Grande!

It heartens me to see George and Julie and other ranchers finding ways to make ranching truly sustainable or as sustainable as they can get in today's society. Someday I hope young people will be encouraged to follow their agricultural dreams and claim ranching as a noble profession. I know now it is possible, though not easy, to make a living ranching and that someday I can do it. This is the answer I've been looking for.

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Photos courtesy of Vanessa Prileson.

The Break of Day

The Next Generation of Conservation: a Rough Draft

by Courtney White

In 2006, we became ranchers – not in theory, but in practice.

On June 3rd, forty-nine heifers were delivered to The Quivira Coalition's ranch on the 36,000-acre Valle Grande allotment, on the Santa Fe National Forest, atop Rowe Mesa, south of Pecos, New Mexico. They were the first installment of what would become a 124-head herd of heifers, plus three Corriente bulls, all owned by The Quivira Coalition, all under the 'Valle Grande' brand. They were sold to us by ranchers Jack and Pat Hagelstein, who were perhaps as intrigued (and surprised) by our foray into the livestock business as we were.

Becoming livestock owners was part of our new business plan for the Rowe Mesa Grassbank (1). Knowing that the grant funding was about to end, we developed a plan that emphasized lowering costs, raising earned income, improving land health, conducting education, and turning a profit if possible (all revenue generated from the cattle is plowed back into operations, including conservation and educational activities).

In other words, the new plan meant running the allotment like a for-profit ranch.

It also meant rethinking the Grassbank itself, as well as redefining our relationship with our partners – the US Forest Service, the Northern New Mexico Stockmans' Association, and the Extension Service. If the old model had to change, so did expectations. In the end, we decided to fold the Grassbank into overall ranch goals – a portion of the allotment's AUMs would be set aside as a Grassbank 'reserve' to be employed when ecological and economic conditions were favorable.

One unexpected bonus of the new plan was the discovery of a local market for our pasture-raised beef. In the fall, we sold six animals to residents of Santa Fe and served a portion of the meat at our Annual Conference in 2007 to rave reviews.

In other words, we also became local food producers.

Frankly, if you had told me a decade ago that I would one day be producing beef from my own ranch I simply would not have believed you. For this former backpacker and Sierra Club activist, the prospect of becoming one of *them*, no matter how sympathetic I felt about ranchers, was simply too much of a stretch. Furthermore, the idea that *conservation* could be actually advanced by livestock management and local food production, as we are trying to do, would have been, well, unthinkable ten years ago.

But it's not unthinkable any longer. In fact, when discussing the ranch in my lectures around the region today I state simply that The Quivira Coalition is "a conservation organization that manages cattle for land health and profit."

For a simple statement, I think it says a lot about both the past and the future.

Changing Times

Most nonprofit organizations, like most businesses, must adapt to changing ideas, technologies and values in the broader society or risk losing their effectiveness in their particular 'marketplace.' This rule doesn't apply to everyone – for some organizations the underlying need for their charitable contribution, such as feeding the homeless or helping the disadvantaged, remains

constant despite 'changing times.' But for many the challenge is to keep up with events in a rapidly evolving world.

This is particularly true for nonprofits which have a conservation or environmental focus. That's because environmental challenges at regional and even global scales are evolving at a rapid rate as we move deeper into the 21st century, requiring new thinking, new strategies, and new goals. What worked even a decade ago may not be sufficient anymore.

For example, a review of Charles Wilkinson's classic book Crossing the Next Meridian: Land, Water, and the Future West, which was published in 1994, reveals that the major challenge for conservationists nearly twenty years ago was grappling with the legacy of the "lords of yesterday" – the laws, customs, and policies created in the wake of the West's vigorous frontier era.

These "lords" include the 1872 Mining Act, which encouraged a firesale of public lands to mining interests, the 1902 Newlands Act, which inaugurated an era of frenzied dam building, the implementation of the 'Western Range' idea in 1905 (and the follow-up 1932 Taylor Grazing Act) which institutionalized livestock interests on public land, as well as various timber, homestead, and water laws and regulations.

By the late 1980s, Wilkinson argues, these "lords" were out of-kilter with the times, resulting in a great deal of conflict. From the 'timber wars' of the Northwest, the 'grazing wars' of the Southwest, the 'wolf wars' of the northern Rockies, and the clashes over endangered species everywhere, the struggle between the "old" West and the "new" had kicked into high gear.

For nonprofit conservation organizations of the era, their mission seemed relatively straightforward: fight *for* wilderness areas and national parks and *against* the lords of yesterday. On the economic side, they touted the tonic of increased recreation and tourism for the region whose mostly unquestioned benefits were blossoming at the time of the publication of Wilkinson's book.

This mission gave rise to a very effective and appropriate type of advocacy-based conservation organization, sometimes called the 'watchdog' model. It also encouraged a preservationist strategy – buy it, save it – among another breed of nonprofits. Together, the 'fight it, buy it' counterpunch to the "lords of yesterday" netted significant results, including a raft of important federal laws, many of which unquestionably improved the quality-of-life for wildlife and humans alike.

Fast forward to 2007, however, and both the problems and the cures of the American West as identified in 'Crossing to the Next Meridian' seem out-of-date.

For example, Wilkinson makes little or no reference to global climate change, restoration, collaboration, the rise of watershed groups, the expansion of local food markets, or the dynamic energy of agro-ecology, though he does identify the outlines of the progressive ranching movement. Similarly, there is little mention of the downside to a tourism-based economy, including the damage wide-spread sprawl would soon do to communities of people and wildlife.

Rounding up cattle on our Valle Grande Ranch, Fall 2006.

He does talk about sustainability – much in the news these days – and concludes his book with a call for 'sustainable development' in the West, though the main mechanism he proposes for achieving it is the planning and zoning toolbox. Presciently, he speculates that the journey to a sustainable West will be a long one.

However, saying that Wilkinson's analysis is out-of-date is not to be construed as a criticism of the author. He neglects these important developments partly because they were beyond the scope of his project but mostly because they had not yet popped onto the "radar screen" of western activists and observers at the time. Nor is it a suggestion that some "lords of yesterday" – such as the massive expansion of destructive oil-and-gas development going on currently – don't require a fight. And protecting critical places through purchase or easement is still an important chore.

But Wilkinson's book illustrates how much has changed in less than twenty years – and raises a serious question about whether the "fight it, buy it" paradigm can be as effective in the 21st century as it was in the 20th.

Bill Zeedyk discusses how a post vane protects an eroding bank on Comanche Creek in the Valle Vidal of Carson National Forest, July 2007. Photo by Courtney White.

Today, for example, the challenges confronting us include rapid land fragmentation, the deleterious effects of climate change, the expansion of destructive industrial agricultural practices, the consequences of population pressures, burgeoning "over-recreation" on public land, a dissolving bond between nature and members of the next generation, and the effect of all of the above on biodiversity.

And as we get farther into the 21st century, these trends may very well be augmented by a general sustainability crisis, including rising turbulence in the energy sector, which, according to the recent United Nations Millennium Ecosystem Assessment (2), could very easily lead to a "diminishment in human well-being" worldwide.

In other words, for conservation to continue to be effective, fighting the "lords of yesterday" is not nearly as important as is preparing for the Age of Consequences now unfolding all around us. To be successful today requires a new type of conservation organization, I've come to believe. That's because *reversing the decline in ecosystem services on which human well-being depends will ultimately prove to be the primary mission of conservation in the 21st century.*

This is a very different concern from those that dominated the 20th century and requires a very different type of conservation response. Fortunately, there have been plenty of hopeful responses already, including the development of progressive land management methods, restoration of land health, production of local food and energy, expansion of watershed-based democratic collaboratives, and the exploration of regenerative economic strategies, albeit on small scales so far.

As a consequence of these hopeful developments, I believe we're beginning to see the outline of a new type of conservation organization to meet these new opportunities.

New Model

Whether by design or happenstance, I believe The Quivira Coalition has evolved into a rough draft of this new type of conservation organization.

From the beginning we've focused on pragmatic solutions to pressing problems that have, at their heart, a concern for the improvement of human well-being. This explains why we focused on progressive livestock management in the early years, why we embraced the restoration strategies of Bill Zeedyk when we came across them, why we published a book on ranch road repair, why we conduct workshops on water harvesting, why we started the New Ranch Network, why we adopted the principles of land health over the traditional focus on preservation, and why we are currently searching for ways to make conservation no longer a 'subsidized' activity.

It also explains, in short, why we became ranchers.

It's all about relationships – between people, between people and land, and between ecological processes. As Wendell Berry, among many others, has repeatedly pointed out, the bond between people, food, land, and biodiversity is insoluble – or should be anyway. Unfortunately, during the 20th century we did considerable damage to this bond, thanks in large part to industrialism, with the result that human well-being (not to mention the state of nature in general) has suffered as a consequence. The job now is to mend these relationships and try to make them healthy again.

This is precisely what 'The New Ranchers' have been doing for years – strengthening fundamental relationships, including the critical link between grass and sunlight.

This fact raises a critical question: shouldn't conservationists aim at a similar goal? If the economic and environmental challenges of the unfolding Age of Consequences require that ranchers become more like conservationists, then shouldn't it logically follow that conservationists become more like ranchers?

Maybe that's what the Radical Center is ultimately all about.

If this is true, then it might be worthwhile to sketch out what this new model of conservation looks like from our experience.

I believe this new model has at least three core elements; (1) the diffusion of knowledge and innovation; (2) the improvement of land health; and (3) the employment of 'conservation with a business plan.'

Each tackles an important challenge in the Age of Consequences. First, since the difficulties confronting us are truly epic there needs to be a determined effort to seek out ideas and practices that work and to share them widely. For example, I believe that a great deal of positive heat is being generated at the nexus of agriculture and ecology today by a number of farms, ranches, businesses and other organizations with possibly profound benefits for human well-being. Sharing these practices, some of which are old traditions that are now being rediscovered, such as herding, is critical to their adoption.

If the economic and environmental challenges of the unfolding Age of Consequences require that ranchers become more like conservationists, then shouldn't it logically follow that conservationists become more like ranchers?

Second, we can reverse the decline in ecosystem services by *actually doing it*. That means managing land, conducting restoration projects, getting people involved in demonstration projects, encouraging land literacy, producing local food ourselves, and a hundred other acts of land health improvement. The toolbox is large and well developed now – what we lack now is leadership primarily; and that's where a conservation organization can make a big difference.

Third, it has to be about jobs and paychecks, both for the agro and the eco sides of the work. In other words, conservation needs to have a business plan. It needs to generate revenue to support the enterprise and do so with as little subsidy as possible. Counting on government grants, private philanthropy or some other form of subvention will not (and has not) create the scale of conservation action that is required to reverse the degradation of ecosystems worldwide. However, by following the lead of profitable and sustainable farms and ranches, conservation organizations can very well have their healthy land and eat it too.

Taken together, the goal of this new model is

resilience (3), both economic and ecologic. Specifically, it aims to rebuild a community's capacity to respond to change – an aim that will become increasingly important as the Age of Consequences unfolds. It operates on a simple but radical philosophy: that *all natural landscapes must now be actively managed*. Some may need more management than others depending on the level of resilience required. But the point is – ***it ain't your grandparent's planet anymore.***

If we are truly worried about the well-being of our children and the generations of children to follow, as we say we are, we had better get to work – and that means stewardship.

Resilience, I see now, undergirds all that we do at The Quivira Coalition. We've been in the knowledge collection and dissemination business right from the start. We've labored hard to build stronger relationships between ranchers, conservationists, scientists, and public land managers for years. All our demonstration projects have had one goal: to improve land health. And now with the Valle Grande Ranch, and our involvement in the Valles Caldera National Preserve, we have an important opportunity to manage land and produce food. Hopefully, we'll make a profit at it too.

For a guy who spent his youth hiking and camping, this is new territory for me. I shouldn't be surprised, I guess; after all, one of the historical meanings of the word *Quivira* was 'unknown land.' It's just when I picked the name a decade ago, I had no idea that I would be heading out into the wilderness myself.

And what a fascinating landscape it is turning out to be.

1. For more information see 'Grassbank 2.0' published in on our web site at www.quiviracoalition.org.
2. A summary of the UN's Millenium Ecosystem Assessment, which can be found at http://www.unfoundation.org/features/millennium_ecosystem_assessment.asp
3. For more information I recommend Resilience Thinking: Sustaining Ecosystems and People in a Changing World by Brian Walker and David Salt (Island Press, 2006). It needs to be reversed in Malta – and not just Malta. It needs to be reversed all over the 21st century.

Richard Heinberg's article can be read at: http://www.richardheinberg.com/museletter/175

Additional information on peak oil can be found at: http://www.energybulletin.net

Nabhan & Meter's article can be found in Journal 29 at www.quiviracoalition.org.

Research

Rancher Demographics, Socioeconomic Pressures, and the Challenge of Meeting Conservation Goals

by Dr. Mark Brunson and Dr. Lynn Huntsinger

Working ranches are often promoted as means of private rangeland conservation because they can safeguard ecosystem services, protect open space, and maintain cultural values. Yet many people feel ranching is threatened by economic forces, the aging of ranchers, and a lack of heirs willing to manage an inherited ranch. We synthesized results of our studies and those of other researchers to consider this question: Are there likely to be enough ranchers to achieve rangeland conservation through private ownership? Our findings suggest that ranching is not as threatened as many think. However the "typical" ranchers of the future may be less likely to own the ranch they manage, and less likely to use the ranch primarily for livestock production.

Introduction

Well-managed ranches can safeguard rangeland ecosystem services, protect open space, and maintain an American heritage while sustaining local property tax revenue and agricultural economies (Knight et al. 2002; Huntsinger and Hopkinson 1993). Accordingly the ranch conservation idea has been embraced not only by the livestock industry but also by conservationists – including many members of The Quivira Coalition.

Numerous efforts are being made to protect working ranches via land trusts, conservation group ownership, government-funded open space compensation, and so on. All assume that if economic and policy conditions are right, there will be a supply of working ranchers who are willing and able to meet the challenge of "saving" the West. Yet even as the concept of "working landscapes" becomes widespread (Silbert et al. 2006, Barry and Huntsinger 2002), we hear that ranchers are aging, land-rich and cash-poor, and that the ranching enterprise is becoming less and less economically viable. This raises an important question: Will there be enough ranchers around to work the western ecosystems we cherish?

Based on an extensive literature review and our experience studying human aspects of rangeland management, in this article we identify and discuss factors that will affect the achievement of a conservation vision through private ranch ownership. The challenges of passing ranches from one generation to another are only part of the story; to achieve the conservation potential of working landscapes it is equally critical to consider who ranchers are, what their goals are, and what they do.

Conversion of Ranchland to Other Uses

The threat posed to rangelands by exurban population growth is real, although the imminence of that threat varies greatly across the West. Non-metropolitan population growth in western states was three times that in the rest of the U.S. in 1990-97 (Cromartie and Wardwell 1999). Such growth takes two forms, both of which affect ranches: urban fringe

development, which occurs when residential densities increase at the periphery of metropolitan areas and is driven mainly by persons who seek more rural lifestyles while maintaining access to urban jobs and/or services; and amenity development, in highly scenic settings where in-migration has shifted rural economies and policy priorities away from extractive industries such as ranching or mining toward an emphasis on the preservation of environmental amenities.

Ranches are converted to subdivisions when three conditions exist: Nearby scenic amenities and/or employment opportunities make the land attractive to in-migrants or absentee owners, there are no zoning restrictions on the land, and the current owners, for whatever reason, choose to sell. If the ranch has become economically unsustainable, the family wants or needs to move, the heirs don't want to ranch, or if the family needs funds, selling the ranch makes sense, especially when land prices are high. While we know that this is not uncommon in the West, it is difficult to determine what proportion of the conversion described in the previous paragraph represented a loss of working ranches.

The fragmentation and development of ranch lands means that ecosystem services like viewshed and provision of extensive wildlife habitat are lost. Ironically many such developments attemp to draw on the appeal of the word "ranch to potential buyers.

The most comprehensive studies of ranch conversion to date are by geographer Hannah Gosnell and her colleagues (Gosnell et al. 2006, 2007; Gosnell and Travis 2005), who tracked sales of ranches covering 400 ac. or more in the 10-county Greater Yellowstone region of Wyoming, Montana and Idaho between 1990 and 2001. The turnover rate is significant: Nearly one-fourth (23%) of large agricultural operations in the Yellowstone region changed hands during the study period, covering 22% of the private land acreage. Yet this percentage may not be unusually high. Haggerty (2004) explored ranch ownership change in a single southwest Montana valley from 1936-2002 and found that the average amount of acreage changing hands ranged from 22% to 33% per decade. The more noteworthy trend in her findings is that the proportion of within-family transactions was considerably greater in the first half of the study period than the last.

In the Yellowstone region, Gosnell et al. (2006) found that just a quarter of the ranches sold were purchased by "traditional" full-time ranchers. Nearly half (46%) went to amenity buyers or part-time ranchers, who also are likely to retain the land as some form of working landscape. About 20% of ranches went to developers or investors – the buyers most likely to convert a ranch to other uses. There was considerable variation by county. For example, in southwest Montana amenity buyers acquired 60% or more of the ranch land sold in Park (Livingston) and Madison (Ennis, Virginia City) counties adjacent to Yellowstone National Park, but less than 15% in Stillwater (Columbus) or Carbon (Red Lodge) counties to the east. On a much largerscale, Shumway and Otterstrom (2001) found that about 20% of western counties remain dominated by agricultural uses including ranching. Generally those counties are in locations like eastern Colorado, Montana, and New Mexico, farther from the areas most attractive to exurban migrants.

Once subdivided or purchased for development, former ranches may be used for grazing while owners wait to be able to build, often for years or decades. While these lands may function as the equivalent of ranches for purposes of open space or wildlife corridors, they are in effect already lost, and may also suffer from a lack of management (e.g., if owners do not control invasive weeds). Ranchers leasing these lands for grazing are aware that this part of their forage base is temporary at best. Recent surveys in California found that most ranchers leased some private land in order to support a herd larger than they could carry solely on their own land, but most also stated there

was not enough of such land to go around, and that it was gradually being lost as parcels were developed (Sulak and Huntsinger 2007, 2002).

Is the Rancher Population Replacing Itself?

A fundamental assumption of ranch conservation is that that ranchers (or their heirs) will remain on the land if given the chance. This assumption bears closer scrutiny. A factor that may suggest otherwise is rancher demographics. Huntsinger et al. (2007) found that the average age of a California rancher was 59. Peterson and Coppock (2001) reported that 37 percent of the Utah livestock producers they surveyed were 66 years or older, and 28 percent of federal grazing permittees and 51 percent of ranchers operating solely on private land planned to retire within five years. While "retirement" for a rancher may not mean complete extraction from the operation – ranchers often intend to live out their days in a ranch residence while turning over day-to-day operations to a younger relative – this may account for some of the ranch turnover found by Gosnell et al. (2006) and seems to suggest that the supply of ranchers is dwindling.

In studies in California and Colorado the lack of an heir was the primary reason ranchers felt they might need to sell their properties (Sulak and Huntsinger 2002; Rowe et al. 2001). This concern about a lack of heirs prompted the focus on intergenerational transfer as the theme for Quivira's 2007 Annual Conference and of this issue of the Journal. Still, it is unclear that the preponderance of aging ranchers means fewer young people are entering the population. Huntsinger et al. (2007) found no significant difference in the average age of California ranchers between 1985 and 2004. Even if the anecdotal evidence is correct and the average age is rising, it may simply mean that ranchers, like the rest of us, live longer these days, raising the average age even as new ranchers continue to enter the occupation. Moreover, data from surveys may overestimate age; they tend to go to the person who holds the ranch deed because that's the name available to the researcher, even if that person no longer makes the ranch's daily business decisions. A study of Scottish farmers found that the age of a "primary decision-maker" was less useful for predicting decisions about the farm than an index of the ages of the various people working there (Burton 2006). No such index exists for western U.S. ranchers, so in fact we do not know how rancher age structure might affect the viability of range livestock production as an economic activity.

What we do know is that ranchers are powerfully motivated to stay in ranching, even to the point of using outside income to support their ranch. Gentner and Tanaka (2002) reported that about half of grazing permittees surveyed in the West significantly supplemented ranch income with outside funds. This is not a new circumstance: in a study conducted nearly 40 years ago, Smith and Martin (1972) found that ranchers regularly operate at small margins that would send other business owners into different occupations. They suggested this is because ranches function not only as "production units," bringing income to a household in exchange for goods, but also as "consumption units" providing intangible but valuable benefits to owner-residents.

Recreational riding, hunting, bird watching, home stays and other marketable activities offer ranchers a chance to add new sources of income, but also mean new and different environmental management challenges, as well as a need for new kinds of business, marketing and people management skills.

The Generation-Innovation Connection

Many ranchers not only resist selling but take business and personal risks in order to sustain their operations so they can pass the land on to future generations, and maintain ranches their families may have shepherded for generations (Wulfhorst et al.

2006). The power of inter-generational obligation is strong, and operates both forward and backward – i.e., people feel an obligation to stay in ranching out of loyalty to their forebears, and in hopes of providing a legacy to their heirs. This can be clearly seen in studies of innovation adoption among ranchers. Given the difficulty of making a living at ranching, ranchers who wish to remain on the land must be willing to make management changes in response to changing social, political, economic and environmental conditions. In some areas innovation rates can be quite high – for example, 74% of ranchers in a western Colorado survey reported making some sort of management change in the previous five years (Kennedy and Brunson 2007). The Colorado ranchers were more likely to make such changes if they had larger operations and if the ranch was their primary income source. This is important because the need to change is also greatest for this group, as part-time or amenity ranchers may feel less pressured to sell if they suffer poor economic results

Mike and Sally Gale raise grass-fed beef and organic heirloom apples and offer Plein Air art workshops in Marin County, California. They returned to the family ranch from successful professional careers, restoring the buildings and changing grazing, marketing and production practices.

Innovation is more likely when ranchers believe another member of the family will take over the operation when they retire (Kennedy and Brunson 2007; Didier and Brunson 2004). It is also more likely when the ranch has been in the same family for multiple generations, and owners feel a sense of obligation to one's predecessors to sustain the ranch (Didier and Brunson 2004). Unfortunately the reverse is also true: a sense of foreboding about the future viability of a ranch tends to discourage innovation, thus reducing the sustainability of the operation and increasing the likelihood that it won't survive the current generation. For example, Peterson and Coppock (2001) found that 70 percent of public land permittees and 90 percent of private land ranchers had adopted passive, "wait-and-see" management strategies rather than taking steps to improve the viability of their operations. This passivity was strongly associated with an intention to retire soon and a pessimistic view of the future of range livestock production.

Pessimism about that future often flows from a belief that non-ranching citizens are hostile to ranchers and ranching. In a survey of California ranchers in areas undergoing rapid exurban development (Liffman et al. 2000), a majority reported "society's hostility to ranching" as a reason to quit the business. To be sure, opponents of cattle grazing can be highly vocal, and they have seen some recent success in efforts to block projects that would increase forage for livestock on national forests and BLM lands. Accordingly pro-grazing interests often use the rhetoric of a "profession and tradition under siege" in order to mobilize forces in support of ranching. Such language can be self-defeating if it leads to pessimism, but it can also be helpful when it spurs innovation. One of the common motivations for Utah's most innovative ranchers was a desire to prove to "the public" that ranching can be done in an environmentally sound manner (Didier and Brunson 2004).

Yet it's not clear that society is hostile to ranching at all. For example, a spring 2006 survey of Colorado residents (Hull et al. 2006) found that three-fourths felt agriculture was very important to the quality of life in the state, and 78 percent agreed that ranchers with permits to graze on public lands treat the land appropriately. A growing public interest in range-fed meats, fueled by concerns about the safety and quality of mass produced food, may lead to the development of markets that can help the ranch bottom line. This doesn't mean citizens view every aspect of ranching positively. Public land grazing has been found to interfere with citizens' enjoyment of outdoor recreation experiences (Brunson and Gilbert 2003) although this effect depends to some extent on the type and designation of land where grazing occurs. Other impacts

of ranching that cause negative impressions among neighbors include odors, cattle trespass on neighbors' properties, and automobile accidents on open range (Ellickson 1991).

Pressures to Sell

The motivation to keep ranching cannot be taken for granted. Ranchers often forego alternative investments at great opportunity cost, recouping some or all only when the ranch is sold in a development- or amenity-driven market (Hargreave 1993). Having substantial equity tied up in land that can only be cashed out when it is sold for other uses is hardly a scenario for sustainability. Psychological pressure to sell may increase if sale value continues to appreciate while profit margins remain low, as is typically the case (Tanaka et al. 2005).

This ranch in Marin County advertises a crossing for threatened red-legged frogs, *Rana aurora draytonii*. Red-legged frogs have been found to be highly compatible with stockponds in California if the ponds are managed to exclude predators, like bullfrogs. Incentives for wildlife friendly management are offered in some counties through cooperative efforts of counties, ranchers and wildlife agencies in an effort to make having a special status species an opportunity insetad of a cost for ranchers.

And when development proceeds in an area, the cost-benefit ratio for remaining ranchers changes – not only because the sale value keeps rising, but also because ranching becomes more difficult. Moving livestock to public grazing allotments has become harder in some locations as development and highways block or reduce access to traditional travel routes. A recent study found that California ranchers in a matrix of subdivided lands and leased pastures were less likely to control yellow starthistle because they assume weeds on adjacent lands will remain uncontrolled (Neill et al. 2007). In another California study, ranchers in urbanizing areas were more likely than their more rural counterparts to accept that their ranches would eventually become developed (Liffmann et al. 2000), perhaps recognizing that the pressures and temptations that come with urbanization become irresistible beyond a certain "tipping point" when the loss of infrastructure, forage, and community support can make ranching seem nearly impossible.

Similarly, concerns about continued access to public lands can lead ranchers to cross the tipping point. Coppock and Birkenfeld (1999) found that restrictions to public land use were perceived to be the greatest threat to ranching in Utah. Case studies of public land ranchers in California (Sulak et al. 2007; Sulak and Huntsinger 2002) estimated that on average nearly half of ranch income was attributable to having access to public leases—even though the ranchers were in very different areas and leasing from very different agencies. One-third stated that if they were to lose their public land allotments, they would have to sell their ranches because the overall ranching operation would no longer be viable.

Part of the Problem … and the Solution?

An irony of the ranch conservation movement is that some of the strongest support comes from people identified as "the problem" – i.e., new owners themselves. Thus it is not helpful to create conditions that are hostile to non-traditional owners. The cultural amenity provided by working ranches can be as much of a draw for a displaced urbanite who migrates to a New West county as the region's endless vistas, rugged mountains, and teeming trout streams (Riebsame et al. 1997). New migrants for whom ranching culture is an attractant have an incentive to find ways to maintain ranches as viable entities in their localities. This helps explain the recent success of efforts to maintain aesthetically pleasing viewsheds. Nearly 1,000 state and local governments nationwide held open-space referenda between 1998 and 2003, with about 80 percent passing (Kotchen and Powers 2006). Fully 43% of the 11.8 million acres conserved by land trusts through 2005 were located in western states; a majority of that acreage was grazed (Land Trust Alliance 2006). Because proximity to healthy public lands is also a major reason to migrate to the rural West, new residents also may be convinced of the need to protect ranches because they buffer public lands from development and/or high-intensity land uses that would clash more severely with wildlife,

scenery, recreation, and management practices (Talbert et al. 2007).

Gosnell et al. (2006) suggested that a shift to ranch ownership by amenity buyers could change "power relations" between public managers and private ranchers in the Yellowstone region as amenity owners with greater resources than traditional ranchers interact with public land agencies. Property turnover, new kinds of owners, and changing land uses may challenge the formation of long-term relationships and trust. Differences of opinion may become more common within the ranching community as some amenity owners maintain grazing on their properties but reject traditional ranch practices like predator control or some forms of vegetation management. Yet while this would complicate relationships within the ranching community, the land itself would function largely as would a traditional ranch.

Conclusions: Tomorrow's Ranchers

Most U.S. ranchers today live on the ranch with their families, where they can enjoy living amid nature, working with animals, and raising a family in an atmosphere of autonomy and variety (Huntsinger et al. 2004). This group will continue to be important to ranching in the future. However, our studies suggest that we can expect more part-time livestock operators and amenity owners in the future. For example, a study of California rangeland owners found a significant increase from 1985-2004 in the number of ranchers who manage primarily for natural beauty and lifestyle values, and a decline in those managing primarily for a family business (Huntsinger et al. 2007). Hobby ranches, historically looked down upon for economic and cultural reasons, may be transformed into the "conservation" ranch of the new West.

Again, this is not really new. Smith and Martin (1972) concluded more than 30 years ago that if a rancher's children did not want to take over the ranch, "the ranch will most likely be taken over by an investor who is not significantly dependent on the local community for his economic livelihood," (p. 224). From our point of view this trend seems more important than ever. The ranchers of the next generation could increasingly be the lessees, managers, or caretakers of ranch properties owned by those with the capital to buy them. Whether amenity owners hire professional managers or maintain the livestock enterprise will depend on a number of factors, including whether their desire to own a ranch is at least partly to be a "rancher."

Ranching in the West has always attracted a diverse set of owners, from European nobility in the 19th century to hardscrabble pioneers to the businesspeople and "trophy ranchers" of today. If anything, that diversity is likely to increase in the years to come, and with diversity will come new challenges in communication and cooperation. It seems that there are enough people willing to be ranchers if given the opportunity. However, our definition of "rancher" will need to expand to bring more people into the circle of those committed to working, and conserving, western landscapes.

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Photos for this article are courtesy of Lynn Huntsinger.

An Idaho ranch name acknowledges the unavoidable truth about ranch prices: they far exceed production value. This has major implications for current and future generations of ranch owners. It will shape the kinds of people that own ranches, what they do on their ranches and ultimately the sustainability of ranching as we know it.

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Letter to the Editor:

Dear Courtney,

When we had our public conversation at the Quivira Coalition's Annual Conference in January, somebody in the audience wanted to know what I would say to a young person who wanted to go into ranching or farming. I don't remember exactly what I said, but I believe I spoke of the problems and difficulties that I associate with that intention. I spoke, or should have spoken, of the dangers of inexperience, and of the impossibility now, in many places, of paying for land by farming or ranching. I hope I said that if you buy agricultural land now, and if you are not wealthy, then you should have and keep a well-paying job in town. I hope I said that if you buy a farm or ranch now, and if you have no sound experience of farming and ranching, you will need experienced neighbors who are willing to teach you and show you how. I believe I said that I have written many letters, telling people not to give up a lucrative job in order to buy land and try to live from it.

Since the conference, I have heard that a number of people thought my response was pessimistic and discouraging. That they could have thought so is completely understandable to me. They could also have accused me of contradicting myself- for don't I think, and haven't I said, that we need more young people in farming and ranching?

Yes, I have said that. But I have never said or implied that getting them there can be a simple matter. We don't need more young people going broke on farms and ranches. And we don't want young people to learn to use the land by trial and error, when we know the tuition may be paid in soil loss or other bad results.

Buying land and using it, in short, involves some real dangers, and some discouragement is therefore in order. I don't for a moment believe that young people who are determined to try ranching or farming will be stopped by anything that could be said to them by me. Nevertheless, I know the dangers, which are easy enough to learn, and I know that the question asked at the meeting puts me under a heavy burden of responsibility. Though I don't think I can stop determined young people from running the risks, I am obliged to see if I can cause them to be thoughtful and a little cautious.

So if you're going to buy land in spite of hell (and I could hardly sympathize more), then at least figure out what it will cost you in interest by the time you get it paid for, and at least make sure you have a reasonable chance of paying for it. If you plan to use the land you buy, and you don't know the place well, and if you are inexperienced, then at least make sure you have ready access to good advice; get to know your neighbors, help them in return for their help, listen to them, make use of their experience.

I believe that some groups already are helping young people to find apprenticeships or jobs with experienced older people. This is a good service, and more is needed. We also need ways to help young people to acquire land, but that will be more difficult and will take longer. I hope to be surprised by how soon it happens.

Your friend,
Wendell Berry

Photo by Gene Peach.

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