

# The connections between land, people

*"You cannot save the land apart from the people or the people apart from the land. To save either you must save both."*

—Wendell Berry

**I** work in land conservation, but I'm an anthropologist. What does the study of cultures have to do with land? Everything.

I spend a lot of time in wild and remote places, but the truth is I have always really been interested in what is called "human ecology" — how people adapt to living in those wild environments, how we learn to steward our natural resources, how that persistent connection between land and culture survives. For all that, I had to go to the other side of the planet to learn to appreciate the unique land-culture connection right here in Northern New Mexico.

I spent a summer in Ladakh, India, living in a Buddhist village at 13,000 feet elevation on the high-and-dry Tibetan Plateau. It was there, walking along a babbling irrigation ditch one day, that the sound of that water and the smells and sights of an agricultural village transported me back to another village — Dixon — where I lived when I was young. That was the epiphany that brought me back home.

And it turns out the irrigation ditch connection with Northern New Mexico is real. I learned later that the acequia tradition here in our part of the world has its roots in the Indus Valley not far from where I was in Ladakh.

It made its way over many centuries from village to village, across arid regions through Persia, North Africa, Spain, then here to the New World. One-hundred-and-eighty degrees away on the opposite side of the planet.

I had all that in mind when I started working for Taos Land Trust, thinking that permanent land conservation could help sustain that essential

## FOR THE LAND



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link between land and culture, healthy ecosystems and healthy communities. I soon learned that there is only so much we can do with conservation easements and land trust tools and that we needed to create other incentives to keep people living prosperous and happy lives on the land.

So was born De la Tierra a la Cosecha (From Earth to Harvest), in partnership with the Taos County Economic Development Corporation and the Taos Valley Acequia Association. As one part of Taos Land Trust's land conservation work, this project promotes profitable family farming and ranching and local foods, which in turn helps sustain beautiful, open agricultural lands and the land-based culture unique to this region.

This weekend De la Tierra is sponsoring a free public forum called "Connecting Meat Producers to the Food System" to help livestock growers build strong and sustainable operations and to connect those producers of healthy, locally-grown meat with local consumers.

The forum includes a variety of presentations (including my talk on conservation easements), demonstrations, hands-on activities and really good food. It takes place at the TCEDC Business Park, 1021 Salazar Road, Friday (Feb. 26), noon to 5 p.m., and Saturday (Feb. 27), 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. Call 758-8731 to RSVP or for more information.

It's all about the land. And it's all about people.