



ERNIE ATENCIO

Promoting local food through conservation

"I am protecting these acres as a gift to our ancestors, remembering and honoring all the hard work they put into this land. ... We think productive agricultural land will be needed in the future to feed people." —Crestina Trujillo Armstrong

These prophetic words, honoring the past while peering into the future, are from 1999. At the time, before the local food movement had become popular, Crestina and her brother, José León Trujillo, placed a conservation easement on 37.5 acres of irrigated San Cristóbal farmland that has been in their family for many generations. They saw the importance of protecting land for food production, for the essential sustenance the earth provides, and not just for pretty views.

Since then, the local food movement has taken off, farmers markets and other local innovations — like the Mobile Matanza — are thriving and we have come to recognize that our scarce irrigated farmland is one of the most important assets we have in northern New Mexico.

But in this region, which has known how to feed itself for centuries, it's really nothing new. Thanks to millennia of Pueblo stewardship and a few hundred years of Indo-Hispano acequias and farming, we still have very productive agricultural lands and rich agricultural wisdom.

But those lands are also at greatest risk of development, because that's where we all want to build our homes.

Nowadays, protecting productive farmland and ranchland is one of Taos Land Trust's highest priorities. And Crestina is very involved as our current board president.

Crestina and her husband Jim raise goats, sheep and cattle for milk and meat; keep chickens for eggs; have about a million raucous ducks and geese; graze a few horses; and tend a huge vegetable garden in serious need of weeding, but still very productive.

The conservation easement does not restrict any of those farming activities and allows for necessary fencing for rotational grazing and other agricultural buildings, along with the two homes already on the property. But any new homes for kids and grandkids will have to be built in the drier piñón and juniper sections of the land, off the irrigated portion and off the easement.

That part is to grow food.

Growing more of our food locally means that it's fresher and healthier, we're probably not going to have massive salmonella outbreaks and we can make our carbon footprint much smaller if we don't rely so much on fossil fuels to transport our foods around the planet. With the long agricultural tradition in this region, we will be ready for that day when we start running out of fossil fuels.

The other great benefit of growing food locally is that it encourages land conservation. As a friend likes to say, "asphalt is your last crop."

Taos Land Trust is celebrating the land and local foods (and raising money for land conservation) with a gourmet Harvest Dinner at Doc Martin's Restaurant in the Taos Inn, Thursday, Oct. 14 at 7 p.m. The menu features a variety of locally grown delicacies, each course accompanied by a special wine.

Tickets are \$100 each and only 80 will be sold, so contact the Taos Land Trust office soon to reserve your seat.

Ernie Atencio is executive director of the Taos Land Trust. Reach him at ernie@taoslandtrust.org or (575) 751-3138, or visit www.taoslandtrust.org.