



# New Mexico Farm Service Agency

## ECP to the Rescue

### *Conservation Program Helps New Mexico Producers Survive 'Flood of the Century'*

(Albuquerque, NM) – November 1, 2007 -- Situated between Polvadera Peak and the Rio Grande River in New Mexico, the Socorro Valley boasts excellent growing conditions for a variety of crops including alfalfa, chile peppers and corn. As expected in high desert country, Socorro Valley agriculture producers are accustomed to the arid climate and annual rainfall amounts that average 9.5 inches. But in the summer of 2006, Mother Nature opened the flood gates – literally. From June 26 to August 16, 2006, the Socorro Valley was inundated with more than seven inches of rain; nearly five inches above normal for that time of year. It was, “The Flood of the Century.”

Record rainfall, record runoff from the mountains and record flooding from the river, devastated much of the valley’s most productive land. Wayne Golliehair’s farm is case in point – some or all of each of his 13 fields totaling more than 800 acres were destroyed.

“I woke up and heard the water coming. I was helpless,” said Golliehair of the floods. “The way the water was moving boulders, they looked like marbles - it’s nothing I would want to relive.”

The Golliehair farm flooded every two weeks leaving behind debris, fence damage and sedimentation of two to four feet in some places. Damage that according to Golliehair could, “shut an operation down and nearly did.” In fact, according to National Agriculture Statistic Service (NASS) reports, alfalfa production alone in Socorro County decreased by 3,000 harvested acres from the 2005 to the 2006 crop year.

“Our alfalfa was destroyed. We lost nearly two cuttings or half of our crop and then alfalfa soot set in from all of the moisture,” said Golliehair. Socorro County producers suffered nearly \$1 million in production losses – an economic catastrophe by all accounts.

If not for the Farm Service Agency’s (FSA) Emergency Conservation Program (ECP), 2006 may have been the last year of production for many in the Socorro Valley. Rehabilitation of Golliehair’s farm alone was estimated at



*Golliehair Farm location - Socorro County, NM*

more than \$100,000. Aside from fence repair and debris removal, Golliehair faced the daunting task of reclaiming his farm ground by removing more than 42 thousand cubic yards of sediment.

In December 2006, FSA allocated \$240,000 in ECP funds to Socorro County. Eligible producers received up to 75 percent cost-share assistance on approved conservation practices including debris removal, fence and irrigation structure restoration as well as grading, shaping and re-leveling farmland.

For alfalfa producers like Golliehair, recovering from the floods meant reestablishing acres upon acres of the perennial crop. At about \$300 per bag for seed, producers expect to get nearly six years of production from each field. After the floods, reestablishing the fields required debris clean-up followed by laser land-leveling; an extensive and costly process.

The road to recovery required fast action by local USDA agencies. In an effort to prevent further production losses, employees from FSA and the Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) stepped up to the plate.

According to Michael Shivers, District Conservationist for the Socorro County NRCS, “We received ECP funding just in time to get technical assistance [surveys] complete before the start of irrigation season.” At times, NRCS had two survey crews operating at the same time.



*Flood waters moved boulders, debris and sediment onto the Golliheair Farm - destroying everything in its path*

Through cooperation and systematic teamwork, FSA and NRCS had Socorro County producers back in their fields and back in business in just a few months. FSA worked tirelessly to process and approve 82 ECP applications and NRCS worked aggressively to assess damages and plan rehabilitation on 68 fields requiring removal of more than 92 thousand cubic yards of sediment and 48 thousand cubic yards of debris moved.

During the interview for this article, the last of the land leveling equipment was leaving the final field on the Golliheair farm.

“It’s been just over one year since the floods, and Socorro County lands are back in full production – that’s the beauty of ECP,” said Robbie Jones, County Executive Director for the Socorro County FSA. For farmers like Golliheair,



*One year after the flood, crops are reestablished on fields once covered with two to four feet of sediment*

recovering from a natural disaster of this magnitude seemed beyond hope.

“I was praying to God to spare my farm, but then I felt guilty because I remembered the people who experienced [Hurricane] Katrina had lost everything and this is just a farm...,” said Golliheair.

But to a farmer... the farm IS everything.

The fast return to production is a testament to the resilience of the Socorro Valley farmers, to their dedication to the land and to the importance of federal farm programs. A rich tradition of production agriculture runs through the Socorro Valley – a way of life that cannot be easily uprooted, not even by a mighty flood.

*- Brenda Carlson, Public Affairs Specialist,  
USDA Farm Service Agency*



*October 2007 - Land-leveling equipment wraps up reclamation of final field on the Golliheair Farm. (L-R) Robbie Jones, Executive Director, FSA, Shannon Golliheair, Ty Cason, Technician, NRCS, Wayne Golliheair*