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Local Agriculture Perspectives in the Middle Rio Grande Valley

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Local Agriculture Perspectives in the Middle Rio Grande Valley

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Socorro Valley Farmer

Land & Water Planning in the Middle Valley

Friday, October 17, 2008 UNM School of Law



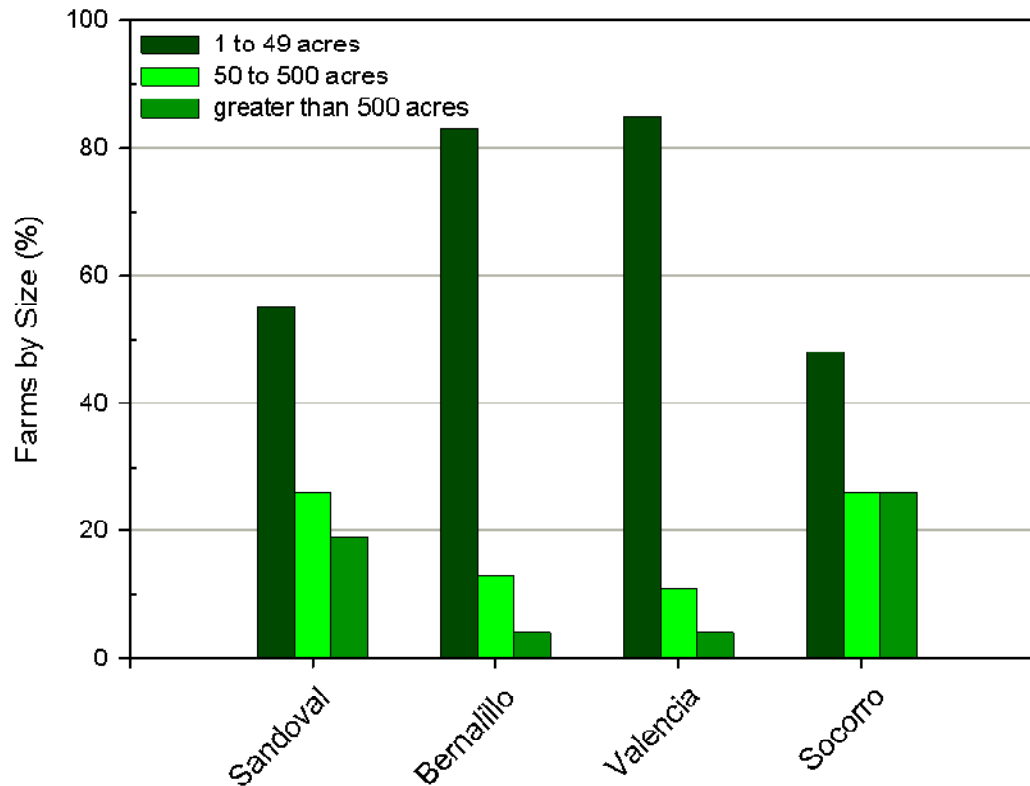
Outline of Talk



- ⌘ Characteristics of agriculture in Middle Rio Grande Valley
- ⌘ Agricultural to Urban Water Transfers
- ⌘ Agricultural Preservation
- ⌘ Rio Grande Agricultural Land Trust

Characteristics of Agriculture in Middle Rio Grande Valley

Figure 1. Farms by size in counties of the Middle Rio Grande Valley. More large farms, greater than 50 acres, operate in Socorro County (U.S.D.A. 2002 Census of Agriculture).



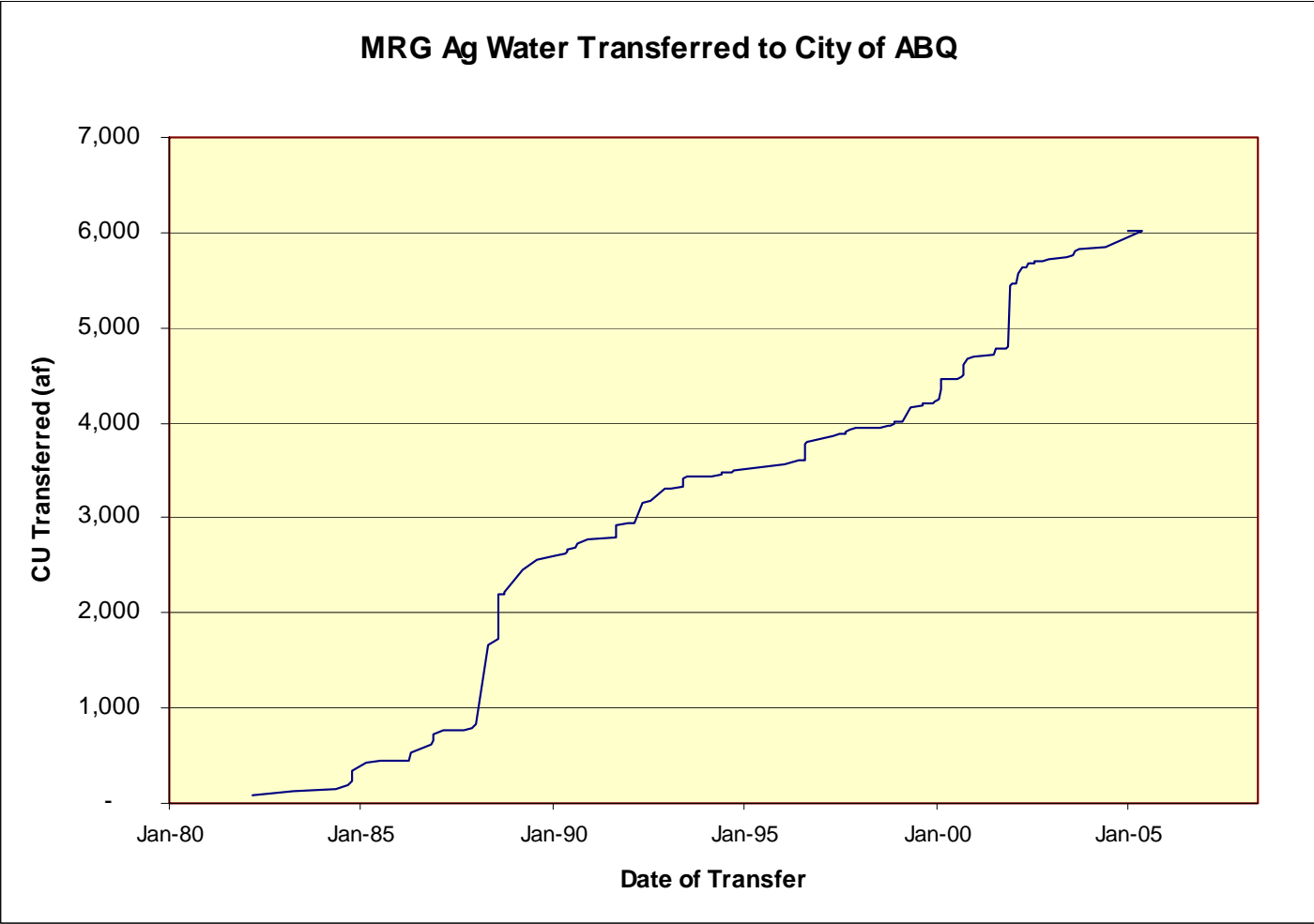


Ag Production



- ⌘ Approximately 90% hay, grain, and grass forage, primarily alfalfa
- ⌘ Permanent pasture, feed corn
- ⌘ Chile and other row crops (less than 1%) vegetables for farmer's markets and farm stands

Agricultural to Urban Water Transfers



What happens to Ag Land

- ⌘ Business as usual – lease water from MRGCD water bank
- ⌘ Fallow – Invasive species move in using at least if not more water than ag
- ⌘ Subdivisions – may use as much water as ag
 - ☑ Domestic water wells
 - ☑ Higher density subdivisions $\frac{1}{4}$ acre to $\frac{1}{6}$ acre lots (1/2 AF/A per household)

Side by Side: Ag Land With & Without Water Rights



More Former Farmland



Farmers Attitudes regarding land and water



- ⌘ Farmer Interviews for a qualitative study commissioned by Atalaya Institute “Middle Rio Grande Farmers & Water Rights” prepared by Mark Bockley and Alan Hamilton (assisted by me)
- ⌘ Bottom Line “Water Belongs to the Land”

Others Impacts of Ag to Urban Water Transfers



⌘ Other Agriculture

⌘ Wildlife corridors

⌘ Open space

⌘ Cultural Integrity of rural MRG valley

⌘ Groundwater recharge along Rio Grande Corridor





Farmland Loss is Serious



- ⌘ Demographic studies indicate population in the West will grow by 50 million by 2050, resulting in 25 million acres being converted to residential and commercial development
- ⌘ According to American Farmland Trust over 1.2 million acres of ag lands lost annually
- ⌘ NM is one of fastest growing states, population projected to grow by 30% over next 25 years

Farmland Loss is Serious in Middle Rio Grande Valley



Going, Going, Gone ...?



Bosque Farms, 1974



Bosque Farms, 1992

Options for Ag Preservation



⌘ Zoning?

⌘ Right-to-farm ordinances

⌘ TDR programs, cluster development, ...?

⌘ Incentives to keep water rights on ag lands

⌘ Other policies favorable to ag producers

⌘ Conservation Easements

Rio Grande Agricultural Land Trust



- ⌘ Non-profit organization started in 1998, by a group of farmers in Socorro County
- ⌘ Mission: Preserve agricultural lands, wildlife habitat, open space, and traditional communities through the use of voluntary Conservation Easements to be held in trust.

Conservation Easements



- ⌘ Conservation Easements (CEs) are voluntary perpetuity deed restrictions limiting a landowner's right to develop all or part of a land parcel
- ⌘ landowners receive financial benefits when conveying a CE
 - ☑ Federal and state income taxes
 - ☑ Estate taxes
 - ☑ Recent state and federal (2007) legislation increases incentives for working agricultural lands

Socorro – Valencia County USDA-FRPP Projects



⌘ Purchase of Development Right

- ☑ Federal Farm and Ranch Land Protection Program (FRPP) requires a 50% non-federal match
- ☑ Corrales bond has provided matching funds
- ☑ NM does not receive much from this program since we have not had a state ag preservation program

State Initiatives



⌘ Land Wildlife and Clean Energy (LWCE)

- ☑ effort originated through Governor's office in 2005
- ☑ \$5M appropriated for wildlife habitat conservation pilot program, administered by Dept . Of Game & Fish/Game Commission
- ☑ \$3.5 M appropriated in 2007 for conservation of farm and ranchland, habitat and watershed protection and outdoor recreation, administered by NM Energy and Mineral & Natural Resources Dept.
- ☑ \$1.5 M appropriated in 2008

NM Tax Credit Transfer- (Land Conservation Incentives Act)



- ⌘ With the donation of a conservation easement a landowner can receive a tax credit of 50% of the CE value up to \$250,000 per taxpayer/year
- ⌘ 20 year carry forward on the credit
- ⌘ Approved tax credit can be sold to an entity with a tax liability in increments of \$10,000 or more

Questions?

⌘...?

