

PRESS RELEASE

NEW MEXICO LAND CONSERVANCY

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PRIME FARMLAND AND SCENIC OPEN SPACE PROTECTED IN CORRALES

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Today the New Mexico Land Conservancy (NMLC) a statewide land trust organization based in Santa Fe, announced that over the past week it has completed four conservation easements, protecting over 28 acres of prime farmland and scenic open space within the Village of Corrales in Sandoval County.

The conservation easements were purchased with funding provided by a \$1.15 million federal grant from the U.S. Natural Resources Conservation Service awarded to the Village of Corrales through the Farm and Ranch Lands Protection Program and matched by the Village through its Farmland Preservation Program with funds from voter approved general obligation bonds.

Conservation easements are voluntary, legal agreements that permanently restrict development of private lands to protect their conservation values while permitting compatible forms of land use such as farming and livestock grazing. The purchase of conservation easements, also known as the purchase of development rights, benefits landowners by providing them with direct cash payments for the development rights associated with their lands, but allowing them to retain and use the easement-encumbered land for agricultural purposes.

“By purchasing development rights, states, counties and local communities can ensure that productive land, wildlife habitat and scenic open space is never lost to development and that the traditional agricultural heritage and quality of life is maintained,” said Scott Wilber, New Mexico Land Conservancy, Director of Conservation.

“This is a great program, a win-win for everyone,” noted Gary Kanin, the mayor of Corrales. “Farmland preservation is important to the rural character of Corrales and has strong community support. Voters approved using village funds for the purchase of development rights program last year with an approval by 83% of the voters.”

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In explaining why she opted to sell an easement over 6.3 acres of her land in Corrales through the Corrales Farmland Preservation Program, 91-year old Dorothy Smith cautioned, “There’s no turning back when you turn farms into subdivisions. People have got to start thinking about saving farmland now. When you look back at all the farmland that has been lost to houses, you realize that you’ve got to do more with what you have.”

Alan Minge, who sold an easement on his 2.38 acres of farmland next to the historic Casa San Ysidro Museum, which he also helped create, said “The farmland program will greatly enhance the entire community and Corrales is to be commended for supporting it.” He also noted that Albuquerque Museum officials had expressed an interest in seeing land adjacent to Casa San Ysidro remain in traditional agriculture. “There was always the thought in everybody’s mind that those fields would make an excellent place for continuing traditional farming. I think the museum would like to have an area to demonstrate traditional farming to visitors. I hope it will continue to enhance the community for ages to come.”

When asked why they agreed to sell an easement over their two acres of farmland, Jack and Shirley Kendall, noted that they consider preserving their land as their legacy to the community. The Kendall’s will continue to grow grapes and operate a raptor rehabilitation facility on the property.

In addition to these three projects, New Mexico Land Conservancy worked with the Trust for Public Land to complete the purchase of an easement on 18 acres of the Trees of Corrales property owned by the Koontz family. Situated at the north entrance the Village, the Trees of Corrales property is one of the largest remaining agricultural properties in the Village and provides stunning views of the Rio Grande Bosque and the Sandia Mountains to visitors entering the village from Rio Rancho.

The Village of Corrales established the Corrales Farmland Preservation Program in 2000 to provide incentives for landowners to protect their land from development and preserve open space. The program is implemented by the Corrales Farmland Preservation Committee, which is comprised of seven volunteer citizens and overseen by the village Planning and Zoning Administrator. According to Wayne Kirkby, the current Committee Chair, “The mission of the program is to preserve and protect the farmland, open space and viewsheds of the Village of Corrales. This includes pursuing the acquisition of conservation easements, supporting the economics of farms and agricultural businesses and perpetuating the rural character of Corrales.”

“Hopefully the successful completion of these projects will encourage landowners in Corrales to consider donating or selling conservation easements in Corrales as well as in other important agricultural communities throughout the state,” said Wilber. “Funding for the purchase of development rights programs is difficult to come by, but hopefully other communities will look at what Corrales has managed to achieve and explore developing their own programs.” Wilber added, “It will also be important for the state to recognize the importance of farmland preservation and consider creating permanent funding sources that can be used to attract and leverage funding through currently available federal Farm Bill programs.” Wilber noted that the conservation community in New Mexico is currently looking at options for creating a statewide Conservation Funding Initiative.

According to the American Farmland Trust, approximately 40,000 acres of agricultural lands are converted to developed uses in New Mexico each year. While farmland protection through the use of donated conservation easements and purchase of development programs is fairly new concept in New Mexico, over two million acres of farmland have been preserved using these techniques over the past 25 years nationwide.

Completion of the projects in Corrales was made possible through the collaboration of New Mexico Land Conservancy, the Village of Corrales, the Corrales Farmland Preservation Committee, the Trust for Public Land, and the U.S. Natural Resources Conservation Service. As the holder of the easements acquired, New Mexico Land Conservancy is ultimately responsible for their monitoring and enforcement.

New Mexico Land Conservancy’s mission is to preserve New Mexico’s land heritage by protecting productive agricultural lands, key wildlife habitat and scenic open space. New Mexico Land Conservancy currently holds conservation easements over approximately 48,000 acres of land

throughout New Mexico. They can be contacted at (505) 986-3801 or visit www.nmlandconservancy.org for further information.

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