

Nestled in the mountains of the Sangre de Cristo range is the village of Ojo Sarco. Irrigation canals known as “acequias” bring water from the mountains to the village. We say “Agua es vida” because water is vital for life in the community. My motivation to tend the land stems from a commandment from God to be faithful stewards of the land, my ancestors who passed down this land through the generations, and my desire to help to build up the community. My land ethic is to care for the land that brings the community and our family together.

In Genesis, God commands us to be faithful stewards, to care for the land, and to not exploit it needlessly. One principle for caring for the land is to give the land a year of rest every seventh year. Currently, my family's land is at rest. Often seen on the land are coyotes roaming the land coming and drinking from the natural stream that crosses the land all year. Deer forage food from bushes and find shade under the trees. Birds feast from the capulin, apricot, apple, and plum trees. The gophers eat the roots of the plants. I see the value of the land and the animals that feed off of it.

My family's land has been passed down through many generations, and its maintenance is a core focus of our family. It was my ancestor Mariano Sanchez, a Spanish captain, who petitioned the crown of Spain for the area of Ojo Sarco where there is an azure spring. My ancestors carved acequias along the Sangre de Cristo mountains for the melted snow to flow into the community of Ojo Sarco and bring life—water for the people, animals, and crops produced by the land. The community of Ojo Sarco still benefits from these acequias.

Each year since I was five years old, I have joined my mom and three siblings to participate in the annual “Acequia Limpia,” which is a community effort to clear the acequias so the water flows unimpeded into the community of Ojo Sarco. We work in the cold weather. The work is grueling yet invaluable. Clothed in water boots, a sun hat, and gloves, I pull deeply rooted weeds and cut thick branches that line the sides of the acequia. I clean out the leaves and cut brush from inside the acequias. I mend the walls of the acequias with dirt clods and arrange heavy rocks to prevent erosion on the sides of the acequia.

In early summer, I work with my mom and siblings to irrigate the land with water from the acequia. As the water starts flowing across the land, I listen for water draining into gopher holes

and seal them with shovels full of dirt. I must work efficiently by rerouting any water that is going into the trenches of the land. We guide the water in different directions to water all of the land. I also join the parcientes who gather for the annual meeting to identify needed repairs and improvements to the acequia, water tables, and natural springs. The community of Ojo Sarco and our family have connected through the acequias and caring for the land.

I often think of my ancestors who labored over the land, and I become inspired to labor as hard as they did. My family's tradition is to visit the graves of our ancestors at the cemeterio in Ojo Sarco when we finish the annual limpia and after irrigating. We pay our respects by pulling the weeds and watering the plants in their graves. I am dedicated to caring for the land because it cared for my ancestors.

I value my family's land because it has given me a love for my heritage, respect for the community, and admiration for God's creation. As I step up as part of the next generation of Ojo Sarco, I will continue to be a faithful steward to my family's land, remembering my ancestors and taking care of the land just as it has been done for centuries.