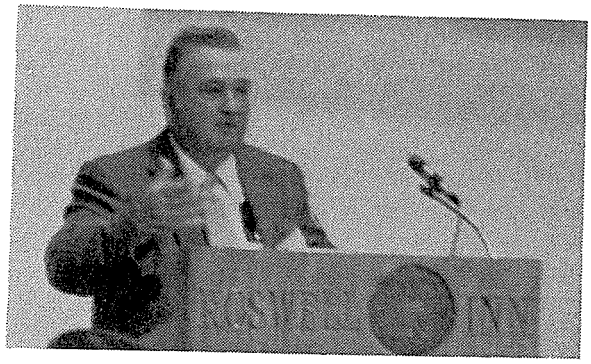
Jake West, farmer and Pecos Valley native, recently retired after thirty years with the Agricultural Stabilization and Conservation Service. He served as director of the Fort Sumner Irrigation District for eight years. West was president of the Rotary Club and is active in both the Rotary Club and Chamber of Commerce.



FORT SUMNER IRRIGATION DISTRICT

Jake West
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During my 30 years with the Agricultural Stabilization and Conservation Service (ASCS), we had very good cooperation with the farmers in the Fort Sumner Irrigation District (FSID). The farmers used the Agricultural Conservation Program, a cost share program, to level land, put in irrigation lined ditches, underground pipes, and metal gates. All these practices were performed to conserve the water and protect the soil from erosion and, of course, cut down on pollution. Some of the work accomplishments made in the district include:

1) approximately 90 percent of all fields in the district have been bench leveled and most of them leveled on a two-tenths fall per 100 feet slope
2) concrete ditches and laterals have been lined with help from the Bureau of Reclamation
3) nearly 110,000 feet of canals have been lined
4) farmers, on their own or with the help of the ASCS, lined 255,000 feet of field ditches
5) fifty-nine thousand feet of underground irrigation pipelines were installed

Approximately 35,000 feet of unlined ditches remain and six miles of the main canal have not been lined.

The Fort Sumner project is located in De Baca County on the east side of the river. It is served by a concrete diversion dam with necessary canals and laterals. The Fort Sumner Irrigation District includes 10,000 acres of which 6,500 acres are classified as arable. Some of the project lands were first put under irrigation by the military as early as 1863. The Mescalero Apaches and the Navajos were brought by Kit Carson to the Bosque Redondo Indian Reservation. The main canal we use today was dug with pick and shovel by the Indians. In 1868, a treaty was signed allowing the Indians to go back to their present reservations. At that same time, Lucien B. Maxwell, the land baron of the Maxwell land grant in northern New Mexico, sold the grant and moved to Fort Sumner bringing 35 families with him. He set up his headquarters at the old military post. Some of the land owned by those families have been irrigated continually through the years. The remaining land owned by the Maxwell families sold in 1981.

The Fort Sumner Irrigation District was formed in 1919 to purchase the works from the original development company. The water rights called for all flow of the Pecos River up to 100 cubic feet-per-second (cfs) during the irrigation season, March 1 through October 31, plus two short winter runs, thus providing a diversion of 3.36 acre-feet per acre in normal seasons for the 6,500 irrigable land.

Water was diverted from the river by temporary brush and dirt dams until 1934. The district then rehabilitated and built a concrete diversion dam. Portions of this dam washed out in the flood of 1941. I remember hauling brush and helping to fill in the dam with brush and dirt. In 1946, the Bureau of Reclamation came in, did a study, and obtained $60,000 from the legislature to make emergency repairs in case of failure. On July 29, 1949, the 81st Congress passed Public Law 192 giving the Secretary of Interior authority to rehabilitate the Fort Sumner Irrigation District.

The project's water supply is obtained by direct diversion of the natural flows from the Pecos River. The diversion is accomplished through a dam located 3 miles northwest of Fort Sumner, and the runoff from 4,950 square miles of drainage area above the diversion dam averaging about 47,000 acre-feet per annum. There are no storage facilities on the project.

Irrigation is the project's only purpose. The project was rehabilitated in 1950 and 1951 with the construction of a new diversion dam, concrete lining of 2 7/10 miles of the main canal and 8 miles of the highline canal. A new hydraulic turbine pumping plant that lifted 20 cfs from the main canal to the highline canal was constructed. All the ditches and drains were cleaned. Drainage areas were also extended. When I was a kid, a lot of the land couldn't be farmed due to subbing caused by the poor drainage system. The problem happened every year. I think all irrigation projects throughout the history of mankind have failed at some point on account of the salt buildup. About ten years ago, the Soil Conservation Service through the RC&D project with the help of the State Engineer and Four Corners, concrete lined four miles of the main canal in the lower end of the project.

The major crops produced in the district currently are alfalfa, wheat, corn, oats, milo, fruits, vegetables, and nuts. Livestock are also raised. Construction began on Sumner Dam in 1935 and was completed in 1937. It was thought to take 17 years to fill the dam. As chance would have it, they had a flood right away and I think the dam was filled in about 17 days. The flood nearly washed the dam away. I remember visiting the site of Sumner Dam in 1935 with my dad. All that was there were 55-gallon barrels and two 2x12 lumber on top for walkways across the river. My dad also took us to Roswell once to see an artesian well that was flowing 2500 gallons of water a minute. We sure wished we had that on our farm.

Building Sumner Dam has helped our district in a number of ways. The water is measured at Puerto de Luna, the measuring station located north of Sumner Dam, and then released in an average flow for the next two weeks. That provides a constant flow, whereas before, the amount released was up and down depending on whatever the river was producing. River water upstream from Santa Rosa Dam tests 9 parts salt per million. Springs below Santa Rosa Dam produce approximately 44 cubic feet per second and test 1900 parts per million.

The major disadvantage is silt from Sumner Lake when water is low and Carlsbad Irrigation District makes a release. Silt has filled our Diversion Dam and is a real problem in canals, laterals, and farm ditches. Several times the Fort Sumner Irrigation District has had to discontinue our release of irrigation water until the silt situation has cleared up.

I looked in the Encyclopedia Britannica and water was defined as "a disc-chemical compound having the form H_20, is one of the most abundant widely distributed and essential substance on the surface of the earth. It occurs in nature in solid, liquid, and gaseous states of ice, snow, water and steam or water vapor, respectively. Water is a necessary constituent in the cells of all animal and vegetable tissues and in many crystals or minerals."