

ANALYSIS OF GANADOS DEL VALLE

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Ganados del Valle (Livestock Growers of the Valley) is located in Los Ojos, a mountain village in Río Arriba County, northern New Mexico. The county is about the same size as Connecticut and Rhode Island; the majority of the sparse population are Hispanos/as and Native Americans.

Background

Native American communities in this region go back as far as AD 800. In the early 1600s, Spanish and Mexican settlers arrived and developed an agro-pastoral economy based on horses, cattle and the hardy, long-wool Churro sheep, well-suited to this mountainous region and arid climate (Sargent et al. 1991, 197). Spain and later Mexico issued land grants to settlers, and designated large areas to be held in common for pasture, timber, hunting and other community uses. In 1848, the United States took over New Mexico under the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo that concluded the Mexican-American war. Contrary to provisions of the treaty, Anglo property law was imposed on the traditional pattern of cooperative land tenure. Court orders and barbed wire fences enforced individual ownership. Local farmers lost millions of acres of communal and private land through fraud, swindling, lawyers' fees and outright sales (Pulido 1993, 127). Settlers had pooled their flocks and herds for grazing, using high mountain meadows in the summer and lower river valleys in the winter. This sustainable system was disrupted when Anglo Americans fenced off common lands. Incomers also introduced commercial livestock production for sale outside the area. As villagers lost communal lands, their small plots on the valley floors became seriously overgrazed.

State and federal planning policies encouraged tourism in northern New Mexico, which has scenic, recreational and cultural resources. In some villages where resorts competed for land and scarce water supplies, residents began to search for alternatives. A state economic development agency supported a private development proposal to create a downhill ski resort bordering on the headwaters of the Brazos River (near the southwest of Chama valley). Long-time residents opposed it as environmentally unsound and culturally inappropriate. It would create low-wage seasonal jobs and would not enhance the self-reliance or economic sustainability of the region. It would raise land values, divert precious water from agricultural use, and increase the likelihood of water pollution.

Community Goals

Opposition to the ski resort generated community goals for appropriate and sustainable economic development that would

- employ the cultural skills and resources of the region
- expand business and professional opportunities for local people

- provide year-round jobs
- respect the physical constraints of the environment

In 1980, with help from students and faculty at the Design Planning and Assistance Center (UNM), the village of Chama conducted surveys, held community meetings, and sent out mass mailings over a 6-month period to generate an alternative plan for the area rather than one based on tourism. Among the goals were “developing a community economy based on the use of local, natural, and cultural resources without ruining the environment or harming the people; increasing job and income opportunities for women and young people... and evaluating the practicality of a locally based wool processing and weaving industry” (Sargent et al. 1991, 199).

Residents’ Definition of the Situation

1. Poverty and lack of control over prevailing economic conditions. Northern Río Arriba country was one of the poorest in the nation (Sargent et al. 1991, 196). Agriculture no longer provided an adequate livelihood due to the lack of a land base, extremely small land holdings, land speculation, competing land uses, and Hispanos’ non-market attitudes towards resources (Pulido 1993, 128).
2. Erosion of traditional cultural practices.
3. Threats to physical environment, especially control of land and water for agriculture. Incomers had appropriated traditional lands, despite provisions of the earlier land grants.
4. Tourism leads to land speculation and low-paying seasonal jobs.
5. Loss of young people who move to urban areas for education and to find work.
6. Geographical isolation.

Available Resources

1. Local people’s skills and knowledge (e.g. sheep herding & breeding, weaving, living on the land in this harsh region).
2. Cultural values (e.g. community cooperation, love of the land, valuing the natural world).
3. Residents’ willingness to learn new skills (e.g. business, quality control, marketing).
4. Local leadership – visionary as well as rooted in community values and ways of life (especially María Varela, community organizer/planner; Antonio Manzanares, sheep herder and former teacher; and Guercindo Salazar, school teacher and part-time rancher (Jackson 1991; Pulido 1993).
5. Outside experts committed to working with local people and to serve their agenda (e.g. professional weaver Rachael Brown; Prof. Lyle McNeal, expert on Churro sheep; Ms. Foundation economic development program; consultants who gave advice on wool washing and dyeing).
6. Underused old buildings.

Outcomes

Ganados del Valle was established in March 1983 as a private, non-profit economic development corporation, with committees to work on different aspects and a revolving

loan fund. It was a non-profit organization so as to attract funding and investment from philanthropic sources (e.g. progressive foundations, churches and concerned individuals). By 1991 it had 55 member families, 9 directors, and 5 staff. Four viable enterprises had created 35 new jobs:

- Tierra Wools (1983), a hand spinning and weaving cooperative (employed 24 women);
- Pastores Lamb (1988), a sheep growers' association marketing organic lamb (15 growers);
- Rio Arriba Wool Washing Plant (1989), a custom service for local and regionally grown wool (2 jobs); and
- Los Ojos Feed and General Store (1990), a family business incubator marketing locally produced and handcrafted items (2 jobs) (Sargent et al. 1991, 196-97).

Ganados' Enterprises Step-by-step

1. At the outset, the group identified and started to address the three most urgent needs of local sheep growers: reducing loss by predators, finding better markets for lamb, and obtaining higher wool prices. Even before formally setting up the organization, they introduced two livestock guard dogs to control predators (from contacts with New England Farm Center) and learned about a phone auction for lamb (through a sheep growers' coop in the Pacific Northwest). Local growers received 7.5 cents more per pound through the phone auction than paid by local markets.

2. A wool committee invited a professional weaver and hand spinner from Taos, Rachael Brown, to evaluate their wool and to teach spinning and weaving. She was hired to hold weekly classes for a year covering production, quality control pricing, and marketing. During this time, the only store left in the village was going out of business. Ganados authorized fundraising for the down payment for this historic building and **Tierra Wools**, a weaving cooperative, opened for business with a loan from Ganados to finance start-up costs (Sargent et al. 1991, 203). Tierra Wools spun off from Ganados in 1996 as a worker-owned company with more than \$500,000 in annual revenues (Valdez 2001). Pastores Collections, an outgrowth of Tierra Wools that makes wool-filled bedding, was expected to spin off as a worker owned company in 2003 (Valdez 2001).

3. Ganados started a revolving loan fund in 1983 with a \$5,000 grant; plus another \$20,000 grant in 1984.

4. **Pastores Lamb** started selling in fall of 1989. Lamb production was expanding and growers needed better markets. Ganados hired a marketing specialist and test-marketed Churro lamb to Santa Fe restaurants, hotels, and individuals. In 1990, Pastores Lamb received certification as an organic lamb producer.

5. **Rio Arriba Wool Washing Plant** opened in 1990. As Tierra Wools expanded, they needed a more efficient way to wash the wool, which was previously washed in home washing machines. Ganados' board members discussed the issue with Dr. Lyle

McNeal, Professor of Animal Sciences at Utah State University and director of the Navajo Churro sheep project. They gathered a design team comprising weavers, growers, a local machinist, and Dr. McNeal to retrofit an intermediate-level wool washer that used biodegradable cleaners and was energy efficient. Public and private donors provided support for space renovations, equipment and training costs (Ganados brochure).

6. ***The Feed and General Store*** opened in 1990. Its two goals were to slow the outflow of dollars from the local economy, and to incubate family-based economic activity such as foods, quilts, woodcarving, and other folk art. In 1988, grants of \$80,000 to the loan fund assisted in purchase and start-up for the general store. This included small loans to artisans to buy equipment and materials. It also provided technical assistance for product development, pricing, and packaging. The store includes a coffee shop, a book department, and a feed store. It does mail order through a gift catalog. By 1994, the store sold the work of more than 100 local artisans, food growers, bakers and wildcrafters; and 80 percent of store costs supported by sales.

7. ***Otra Vuelta*** was founded in 1994. It reclaims used tires from landfills, backyards, creeks and businesses and makes rubber mats.

By 2002, plans for expansion involved a commercial kitchen for lease by the hour for people who want to produce prepared foods for sale.

Programs and Funds

Agricultural support programs have helped small growers overcome disadvantages of small economies of scale. Members own expensive breeding rams in common, for example, and growers pool their flocks during the breeding season. Cooperative grazing pools flocks under one shepherd, with members sharing payment for this service.

The Livestock Shares Program enables growers to increase their flock by “borrowing” lambs from Ganados; for each year of participation the grower is assessed one lamb to be returned.

Technical Assistance. Members were able to learn more about marketing, product design, management, business finance, and livestock management through workshops, classes and consultations.

The Ganados Loan Fund makes loans to members and the Ganados enterprises for equipment (e.g. looms, computers, livestock), to start businesses or improve productivity. The fund was started with grants and donations. A modest interest rate revolves back into the fund. Loan repayments are designed to fit the cash flow of the borrower.

Ganados College Program. Ganados’ work-based college program has offered classes on book keeping, creative writing, design, animal husbandry, and weaving; some of this

has earned credits towards an AA degree. Continuing education helps participants obtain post-secondary certificates and degrees in business, art, and agriculture.

The Ganados del Valle Scholarship Fund supports local high school graduates who want to continue their education in agriculture or related fields. ***The Manual A. Varela Scholarship Fund*** supports members and local residents to enroll in courses.

The Milagro Fund supports small cooperative projects in other rural NM communities. Film director Robert Redford gave Ganados the rights to organize the premiere of *The Milagro Beanfield War*; proceeds created the Milagro Fund (Jackson 1991, 40).

The Milagro Land Fund. Ganados' vision is to restore the commons and sustainable grazing practices through a land trust that will acquire grazing lands and development rights.

Summer Arts Program, designed for local children, provides teaching in traditional arts and crafts and offers the opportunity for children to sell their work through the store. The money from these sales was theirs to keep.

Principles of Sustainable Development in Ganados del Valle

Sargent et al. (1991, 207-12) identify four principles of sustainable development practiced by Ganados del Valle.

1. Emphasizing Human Development

Ganados recognized that human development is a long-term, labor-intensive process. They sought consultants who were successful entrepreneurs, understood the market, had respect for and wanted to build on cultural skills in collaborative teaching, and with expertise or willingness to find technical solutions fitting the scale of operations and resources available (Sargent et al. 1991, 207). The emphasis was on training and support programs that integrate traditional skills with modern business techniques. Later, local people became their own experts, teaching others from the village and surrounding region. Advanced weavers took apprentices. They organized college credit through UNM for Tierra Wools' own course. They emphasized professional development for members.

2. Local Control of Resources

Ganados created a local market for weavings and organic lamb. In 1986, members helped the county government to strengthen subdivision regulations aimed at conserving agricultural land and water resources. Adequate summer grazing is essential for the expansion of flocks. Ganados has been involved in negotiating for use of state-owned forestlands currently used for hunting, administered by the NM Department of Game and Fish, and part of the long-disputed common lands of the land grant (Jackson p. 41). Ganados proposed a research project to explore the positive effects of grazing as a management tool for wildlife habitat. They resorted to direct action and moved flocks onto a Wildlife area when NM Department of Game and Fish refused. This is a key issue for reliable planning, future expansion, and sustainability.

3. Increasing Internal Investment

Loan funds provide seed capital and the livestock shares program increase agricultural activity. The Feed and General Store keeps dollars in the local economy.

4. Changing economic and social structures to increase opportunity and reduce dependency

The group found a broader market for lamb, reorganized production, and learned new skills. Members and residents began to see “what they can do for themselves, what women can do in business, the economic value of small family farms and traditional cultural activities” (Sargent et al. 1991, 211).

Factors Responsible for Success

1. The vision, commitment, and hard work of those involved.
2. Ganados is run by and for the community and is based on community institutions and culture. This includes women’s responsibility for childcare and housekeeping, which has led to flexible work schedules, opportunities for home weaving, and informal child care at work (Pulido 1993, 129). Ganados is cooperatively oriented, building on a long tradition of collaborative, communal undertakings. Working together with sheep or weaving has enhanced community solidarity and strength (Pulido 1993, 130-31).
3. Ganados del Valle is a non-profit business incubator. It has been very successful in raising grant money to subsidize research and development such as product development, packaging, promotion, market testing, and on-the-job training. Arlene Valdez, Executive Director, says that rural enterprise development in the US will never be successful unless these needs are subsidized as low-income families cannot support these expensive, yet essential steps (Valdez 2001).
4. Finding niche markets for high-end goods; popularity of “southwest” design motifs; interest in Rio Grande weaving tradition; concern for organic meat.
5. Member-owners make decisions on a consensus basis. Through ongoing discussion they have tried a variety of work practices to find the best fit. They have been flexible, growing and learning step-by-step.
6. The enterprises have also created openings for individuals to grow and develop. Some women started as weaving apprentices, graduated to become weavers, maybe moved into the position of production manager or teacher. Bookkeepers got interested in weaving and started to learn (Ochoa 1998, 7). Peer training was an intentional aspect of Tierra Wools. The curriculum initially developed for Tierra Wools was their property to use with future students, which gradually made them independent of Rachel Brown (Ochoa 1998, 5).
7. Developing alliances with other rural communities wanting to create self-sustaining economies.

Difficulties and Obstacles

1. Hesitation of many local families to join Ganados in the beginning due to the failure of previous cooperative efforts (Pulido 1993, 128).
2. Need to expand permanent summer grazing. Opposition from environmentalists (many from outside the area) who emphasize wildlife preservation rather than sustainability that includes local people remains unresolved.
3. Need to balance women's traditional responsibilities for housekeeping and childcare with work outside the home. Until 1992, young children were permitted to spend the day with their mothers at the weaving studio but member-owners decided to stop this. The growing numbers constituted a danger in the too-small space (Ochoa 1998, 9).
4. Tierra Wools dominated women's economic activity. To be a member, a woman had to commit to working certain hours on a regular basis. This tended to cut out many of the older women who had done some weaving as a hobby.
5. Learning unfamiliar skills and ways of thinking (e.g. book-keeping, marketing etc.). Member-owners said it was often difficult to learn on-the-job; need to be paid for job training (Ochoa 1998, 10).
6. Finding markets for high-end products. Otra Vuelta, for example, cannot compete with low costs for imported mats. Product prices must also give a "fair" wage to producers (labor allowance as part of selling price—Ochoa 1998, 11).
7. Need to increase winter sales. Sales in most of the businesses tend to be seasonal (spring and summer), linked to the tourist season. Increased emphasis on mail order and web-based sales may offset this to provide income year round.

Sources

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Organizational Websites

Ganados del Valle: www.ganados.org

Tierra Wools: www.handweavers.com