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## Augustin Plains Ranch - A Proposal for Rainwater Harvesting Gains Momentum in New Mexico

Drought in New Mexico is nothing new, but in mid-2014, the drought was exceptionally severe. The demand for water in New Mexico exceeds the supply even in the best of times. As a result, leaders and entrepreneurs are always looking for new sources of water to support the state's growing population.

One such project is the Augustin Plains Ranch (APR). Located in west central New Mexico, APR is seeking to develop a sustainable rainwater/aquifer harvesting and transport project that will bring about 54,000 acre-feet of water every year to New Mexico communities in need.

In 2013, The Waite Company (TWC) was hired by the Augustin Plains Ranch (APR) to provide general public relations and media relations services. As part of this ongoing campaign, TWC sought to capitalize on earned media opportunities, including the development of feature stories.

Using our in-house Cision database of reporters and media outlets, TWC monitored editorial calendars to identify opportunities relevant to APR and contact those reporters and publications accordingly. In early 2014, one such publication became interested in the project. Water Conditioning & Purification, a monthly magazine with a circulation audience of about 18,000 water treatment professionals.

WC&P requested that TWC's feature story not only describe the project, but also demonstrate how the water might be used by a business, should it become available. In particular, they were looking for how it would impact a sod or landscaping business.

At the time, TWC was also representing a fertilizer developer and native tree grower from Belen, New Mexico. Soil Secrets, owned by Michael Melendrez, provides organic soil additives to customers that promote healthy tree growth in New Mexico's arid environment. TWC contacted Melendrez and asked if he would be interested in participating in a story that highlighted his business and his opinions on water availability, and he agreed.

Tying the two viewpoints together was a challenge given that neither company was aware of the other prior to the story and did not necessarily want to appear as an advocate for the other. One excerpt from the article that illustrates the wall of separation we built is this: "On the demand side of the New Mexico water equation, Melendrez and countless others push for conservation and more efficient water use and delivery. On the supply side, the race is on to find new sources of water for the growing population centers of the state..."

The result was an originally produced feature story that accurately depicted both viewpoints on water availability, and creatively captured the unique contributions they both make to New Mexico and its water-challenged environment.

"A Proposal for Rainwater Harvesting Gains Momentum in New Mexico" ran in July 2014 and was the most creative and widely read feature story published about the project to date. Both APR and Soil Secrets used the story in company marketing materials and shared the article on their websites and social media outlets.

The story provided key message points to an audience that was relevant to both. Soil Secrets, which runs an aggressive online business, was able to mention its soil fortification products, enzymes, fertilizers, and conditioners to a national audience of 18,000 water leaders.

Readers also learned that APR: "...could provide up to 54,000 acre feet of water for cities, industry, agriculture and the environment. Plans for this project call for collection and isolation of rainwater from the hills that abut the ranch. Instead of evaporating, the water would be collected, diverted and sunk into the ground, recharging the aquifer like a battery."

Both companies expressed great satisfaction with the story.