

# DEPARTMENT of the INTERIOR

news release

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## NAVAJO IRRIGATION PROJECT WILL BEGIN OPERATION IN BICENTENNIAL YEAR

The greening of 9,320 acres of arid land in northwest New Mexico will be a part of the Navajo Indian Tribe's celebration of the American Bicentennial Year. Federal funds totalling \$2 million have been made immediately available to assist with on-farm development costs to make possible a March 1976 beginning of operations for the Navajo Irrigation Project. The project will ultimately include more than 110,000 acres.

The economic impact on the tribe will be dramatic. Total revenues from the agricultural enterprise, when all associated businesses and services are included, have been estimated at about \$150 million annually when the project is completed.

It is expected that alfalfa will be grown on about 40 percent of the acreage on the project at all stages of development. Corn will account for approximately 30 percent of the planted acreage, while sugar beets will account for about one-fifth. Vegetables and potatoes will be produced on the remaining 10 percent. These figures are based on an analysis of the economic and production potential of the lands done by the New Mexico State University.

The project will be administered as a tribal enterprise, rather than following an individual entrepreneurship approach.

Other enterprise activities are expected to be generated by the project. A vegetable processing plant is considered feasible and livestock operations will almost certainly be developed to utilize the feed grains and roughages developed on the project.

The New Mexico State University analysis indicated that the project could support a dairy operation of more than 1,100 cows and an egg production enterprise of 300,000 layers. A backgrounding feedlot of 5,000 head capacity and a finishing feedlot of 15,000 head minimum size were also considered highly feasible. Swine production was also considered an attractive alternative since the Four Corners region is a pork deficit area producing less than 25 percent of total consumption needs.

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Water for the project will be diverted from storage in the Navajo Reservoir about 35 miles northeast of Farmington, New Mexico and delivered to the project through a system of tunnels, siphons, open concrete-lined canals and pipelines. The main canal is 47 miles in length. About 100 miles of intermediate canals and laterals, plus a very complex system of pipe lines, are also included in the project design.

The enabling legislation, passed in 1962, provided an authorized ceiling for construction costs of \$135 million -- which subsequent legislation raised to \$206 million based on 1970 prices. An estimate based on 1972 prices, however, indicated that the construction costs would exceed \$280 million.

The project lands are located on a high plateau with elevations ranging from 5,400 feet above sea level to 6,480. The entire project area lies within San Juan County, south of the San Juan River. About half the land lies off the reservation, but these lands have been or will be acquired to be held by the United States in trust for the Navajo Tribe.

The Bureau of Reclamation in the Department of the Interior is responsible for the design and construction of the major works of the project, using funds appropriated to the Bureau of Indian Affairs.

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