

## Value-added agriculture offers small agribusinesses additional income potential

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Instead of limiting themselves to only growing food crops, an increasing number of northern New Mexican farmers and growers are embracing the concept of value-added agriculture by creating marketable end-user products from their raw commodities in order to earn a larger share of the nation's and globe's available food dollars.

Rather than wheat, think flour or pasta, for example. Instead of corn and wheat starches, think biodegradable plastics.

“Las Nueve Niñas Winery is a perfect example of value-added agriculture in northern New Mexico,” the Mora County Entrepreneurial Network’s Roger Gonzales said. “Las Nueve Niñas is located about eight miles north of Mora and not only grows wonderful grapes but also makes a variety of delicious wines.”

The Mora County Entrepreneurial Network is part of Los Alamos Connect, the principal economic development investment of Los Alamos National Security, LLC, the company that manages Los Alamos National Laboratory. Network facilitators like Gonzales provide resources, coaching and encouragement to local entrepreneurs under the guidance of the Regional Development Corporation in Española.

“New Mexico has produced wine since 1629, beginning with the Spanish missionaries,” Gonzales noted.

## From vineyard to wine

Samuel Aragón tends the Las Nueve Niñas Winery’s vineyards with the help of his three sons—Sam, Alonzo and Mariano—and their families. Samuel is a retired state employee, but the sons still have full-time careers in Albuquerque in addition to building the Las Nueve Niñas family business.

Together, the Aragón family creates tasty wines like Riesling, La Doña Tules Sweet Red, Tempranillo and Capulin (chokecherry wine).

Samuel learned wine-making from his father, Secundino Aragón, and the family has added to its wine-making expertise by participating in on-campus workshops and classes at places like the University of California-Davis, Washington State University and Colorado State University; taking online wine-making courses; and visiting wine shows and vineyards throughout New Mexico and Colorado.

“Since it takes three to four years to grow mature grapes, we’ve been purchasing grapes from other vineyards like a lot of wineries do,” Samuel Aragón explained.

“But this year we’ll finally be able to harvest at least some of our own. Our vineyard’s sunbaked soils and 7,600-foot elevation on the eastern slopes of the Sangre de Cristo Mountains provide fertile ground for the grapes.”

Yet the owners of Las Nueve Niñas Winery—named for Samuel Aragón’s nine grandchildren—like the idea of supporting the northern New Mexico economy by continuing to buy fruit, including wild-harvested chokecherries, from their neighbors near and far.

“There is a lot of hard work behind every bottle of wine we sell,” Samuel Aragón said.

“But my family loves good wine, and we enjoy sharing it. Perhaps more importantly, we love working as a community. Families from as far away as Chama, Taos and Peñasco are excited to have their produce play a vital part in this state’s continuing, and expanding, wine-making tradition.”

*For more information on Los Alamos Connect and additional economic development programs for northern New Mexico, check out the [Regional Development Corporation](#) website or go directly to [Los Alamos Connect](#). To learn more about the Aragón family’s vineyard and winery, visit the [Las Nueve Niñas Winery](#) web page.*

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*Community Connections* features news and opportunities that grow out of the Laboratory’s Good Neighbor Pledge: “To partner with our neighbors on strengthening math and science learning, diversifying the economy and expanding community giving in northern New Mexico.”

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