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Meet the Modern Farmer: Emigdio Ballon

By [Jessica Leigh Hester](#) on July 16, 2015
Photograph by [Michael Lundgren](#)



Tesuque Agricultural Initiative *Tesuque, New Mexico*

The Native Americans of the Tesuque Pueblo have farmed in the same New Mexico valley since at least the 1300s. But by the time Emigdio Ballon arrived to head their newly formed agricultural initiative, a decade ago, alfalfa had taken the place of traditional corn, beans, and squash. “The goal,” explains Ballon, himself an Inca from Bolivia, “was to have the pueblo return to its roots as an independent, sustainable community.”

“We now have close to 75 acres cultivated with edible crops and two 1,500-square-foot hoop houses,” he says. All of the produce is distributed free of charge to the pueblo’s senior citizens and schoolchildren. To generate a little income, the farm also grows echinacea and other medicinal herbs for health-supplement companies in Santa Fe, as well as tobacco, which is sold to other nearby tribes for ceremonial use.

Though the Pueblo is not yet fully self-sufficient—many of its 500 residents have jobs in Santa Fe or nearby Los Alamos—Ballon is encouraged by the growing interest in farming among the younger generation. “We set aside a community plot for anyone who wants to farm, and the teenagers go out to help their grandfathers. As indigenous people, farming is our heritage. It’s an honor to keep that going.”



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