



NEW MEXICO FIRST
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4.2.20 Food and Hunger Covid-19- Local Food Production

Meeting Notes

Facilitating: Lilly Irvin-Vitela, NM First

In attendance:

- Sharon Berman, NM First (notetaking)
- Bryan Crawford-Garrett, Thornburg Foundation
- Paula Garcia, NM Acequia Association
- Zoey Fink, National Young Farmers Coalition
- Patty Keane, Governor's office
- Emily Arasim (NM Acequia Association)
- Serafina Lombardi, NM Acequia Association
- Denise Miller, NM Farmers' Marketing Association
- Jonas Moya, NM First
- Jason New, NMDA
- Mike Venticinque, NM Farmers' Marketing Association
- Pam Roy, Farm to Table and NM Food and Agriculture Policy Council
- Bonnie Thornton, Agri-cultura Network
- Brent VanDyke – NM Association of Conservation Districts

Context:

1. Last summer, Representative Melanie Stansbury brought together broad range of stakeholders healthier food system and eradicate hunger, focus on data informed decisions, Resilience in Agriculture, and promoting policies that addressed the needs of people of low income. Members included those from policy makers, faith communities, agriculture, advocacy, and research. As we were planning to reconvene to debrief on the 2020 session and regroup, we realized that there were urgent needs to address and many of the participants in the Food, Hunger, and Ag Workgroup were important people to engage in a coordinated response. So, the group pivoted to help meet those urgent needs due to covid, especially regarding food systems and emergency food response. We highlighted five main areas to focus on, in terms of coordination:
 1. Communication
 - a. communication around emergency food needs not coordinated statewide. We want to know about the strategies you're using.
 - b. Back-end support getting smart people around the table, and connecting the dots
 - c. Funding – getting message out about what the funding needs are to donors inside and outside the state
 2. Funding
 - a. Both encouraging individual donations to food banks and pantries
 - b. Plus, figuring out how to deploy rapid response funding cross NM through our state's philanthropic infrastructure especially as it related to food and water and sustaining food systems
 3. Volunteers/Labor

- a. There's a 20% drop in folks doing emergency food distribution because they need more people power. The majority of the time the volunteers are elders, who are at greater risk right now.
 - b. Health and safety for food banks and food usage sites are having a hard time accessing adequate equipment, including safety equipment, cleaning supplies and boxes for giving out food in boxes rather than the open, farmers-market style they used previously
 - c. Security needs have arisen as people are stressed, scared, and hungry
4. Supply chain with Food and Water
 - a. Local programs doing grassroots response to get food to people. They need access to healthier food, boxes/bags, PPE, cleaning supplies, and information about safety protocols
 - b. Institutional buying is challenging and Patty Keane at the Governor's Office is helping to coordinate a response.
 5. Advocacy.
 - a. Anticipating \$1 billion dollar decrease in revenue due to lowered oil prices. Going into the emergency session we need to work together to prioritize. You're all welcomed to any of that work and especially related to supply chain issues

Q: What are you seeing and hearing in terms of solutions?

- Denise: Emergency food to me makes me think of the food banks and the systems in place that regularly deal with it. The NM Farmers' Marketing Association's work is around supporting farmers' markets as they get ready to open for the season. On the institutional side with senior centers and schools, we've been working directly with Pam for the senior centers. We had already been trying to move wholesale food to the senior centers. It's a matter of the centers identifying what food they're looking for so we and Pam can figure out what needs to go where.
 - Mike: we started working with partners pre-covid. When covid started, we began concentrating on shelf-stable items. Sandoval and Socorro Co. are getting staples such as pinto beans and posole. We're using distributors and trying to work with available farmers for fresh produce. I think that's the way to go right now because the **distributors go to many locations, which could spread covid**. We're getting farmers to do central drops and distribute from there, which has really been working.
 - Lilly – You're working with counties to have the shelf-stable drop off and working with farmers for fresh produce.
 - Pam: What a team effort! Several things have been working for us – maybe even beyond immediate need. The funding part is a big issue. Aging and Longterm Services has three county contracts. We did trial run in November. and December. Lessons learned: we're out of pinto beans in the state. There is a nation-wide shortage this year.
 - The Farmers' Market Nutrition Program had some funds left. Martin at Aging & Longterm Services worked directly with farmers. They applied for federal dollars to be an agency who can actually buy – 3 weeks ago they couldn't do that, but now they can!
 - Denise: the schools are continuing to purchase, in varying degrees. Kendal Chavez at PED is going to be conducting an official survey with food service providers. Some districts are buying local as they always have. Others are not currently buying local (Santa Fe) when they previously had. We're trying to help coordinate. We are trying to do the matchmaking.
- Zoey: Young farmers are really dependent on farmers' markets and restaurant sales. There has been a lot of energy around CSAs in the last few weeks. There has been a huge demand in Bernalillo County. It's spring: Nobody has pinto beans. They've gone through the winter and don't have the shelf-stable products yet. The CSA model is working well for people. NM CSA is doing a great job increasing their home delivery system and working with farmers who want to move their product.
 - Example: Better Together is a pilot project of 42 families, to look at safely scaling in the time of covid.

- Bonnie – At Agri-cultura we’re seeing a lot of demand, and **one roadblock is that we operate out of an incubator and they can only have 5 people in the building.** There’s an employee there, and 2 people in the kitchen, and we can only have 1 person processing produce in the building. We’re trying to figure out how to process product going into the future.
- Paula – The NM Acequia Association deals with a lot of **subsistence farmers, some of whom are being impacted by the lack of school markets.** In Northern NM, they have been impacted. A lot of them plant early in the year to supply greens to the schools.

[Note – there was a technical glitch and the group had to re-join the meeting.]

- Serafina –We couldn’t do our big seed exchange this year. However, we just announced today that we are sending out seeds to encourage people to cultivate their gardens, for both physical and mental health. If you’re not on the list, please let me know.
 - [“Semillas pa’ la Gente”](#) – is a network of people exchanging stories and experiences.
 - We’re exploring working with food banks.
- Brent – In most of the conservation districts, there’s a limit on number of people who can be in buildings. They are trying to use safe distancing.
 - It’s challenging to meet and adhere to the Open Meetings Act. Many people aren’t set up to participate in online conferencing. We have to abide by the Open Meeting Act because we’re part of the government. That’s a challenge in NM and nationally.
 - **Lilly offered to put everyone in touch with Melanie Majors at NM Foundation for Open Government, for ideas about best practices.**
- Jonas: We need to be thinking about the **commodity market** and how things function there. There’s activities on the **milk side** – schools have closed, and supplies are changing. And understanding the **protein market** is important as well.
 - Lilly – ranchers are having a hard time **getting access to hay**, due to travel restrictions and remoteness. Shout out to Secretary Witte. He responded to my email when I asked him for information about getting food to livestock in remote and Tribal locations (Navajo). He was able to pass on information that locals didn’t have access to. However, feed is scarce due to the time of year and transportation barriers and travel restrictions. Part of the distribution is happening at some of the Chapter Houses. Though we’re hearing that Chapter Houses have been temporarily shuttered due to health/safety concerns.
- Jason. At NMDA we have an EOC meeting every other day that I sit in on that we address as a marketing division. Secretary Witte asked that I sit in and monitor this meeting and report back to him on the issues this group is discussing.
 - We’ve been able to find some feed suppliers although it’s low. What they do have in stock may not be of the quality people need.
 - Pinto beans – we’ve been scouring locally and nationally.
 - Beef – we had a conference call with Environmental and USDA to see about waivers on inspections so people could process ranch-raised beef to get it to the people. It didn’t go that well – they’re not willing to give any exceptions at this point. In the perfect, optimal setting it will take 90 days for people to get USDA certified.

- Patty: Here's how the process is going to work: If there are agencies or communities who need food, that request should go to the county emergency manager. Then, that manager is going to send that request to the EOC, after which the EOC will get it to whichever agency needs to address it. **We should have that list and that communication for everyone on Tuesday**, so we make sure the requests are all going to the right place, we are able to track them. It will give us a better sense of what is happening at the county level. The queue will help see if there's a localized solution that may be faster than the state.
 - We want you to think of what resources are available in each county, and identify experts in each county.
 - Patty added that they were waiting for guidance from Sec. Trujillo on protocol with the tribes. She emphasized that making sure you go through that process, starting with the county emergency manager, is very important. **Patty invited people to copy the Governor's office on their communication:**
 - If it is food related, copy Patty Keane at patty.keane@state.nm.us.
 - If it is shelter related, copy Ane Romero at ane.romero@state.nm.us.
- Pam: Farm to Table and NM Food and Agriculture Policy Council are looking at the local beef market, building more local opportunities in schools and senior centers. We really look forward to learning more, best ways to approach that at this point in time as well as moving forward.
 - Also, **there are major challenges around leafy greens and things that we can't package, and/or are not as durable in institutional purchasing for senior centers and schools.** We're trying to figure out other market options. It's a critical time to do that and it's going to be difficult.
 - We are looking at setting the stage for what we can plan for in the growing season. We need to mix and match market access and marketability.
 - In Santa Fe, we're doing a mapping project. It's a resource for those working at a local level. Farmers, distributors, value chain, processing, etc. could use it. The GIS person has offered to map those things out. We can visualize cross points and gaps and use it as a tool. I think we could use this tool on the county level, not only immediately but also into the future.
- Jonas: We might want to consider inviting someone to speak to the group about credit and loans. A lot of producers, ranchers and farmers are thinking about taking on credit and new operations loans. But because of the pandemic, banks are being careful about lending and ag lending, especially to new farmers and ranchers. As a group maybe we can discuss how to support those new farmers and ranchers.

Next Steps

Meeting frequency and time:

- The group agreed to meet every other week, same day of the week and time of day. Lilly commented that making the commitment to each other that all communicate with each other when something is coming down the pipeline was important – as well as being discerning about what is truly an emergency or can wait until the regularly scheduled meeting. **The next meeting will take place on April 16th from 3-4 pm.**
- Lilly thanked the group and reminded them to:
 - share meeting information with others, and let her know if there are others should be on this call. She'll make sure they get an invitation lilly@nmfirst.org
 - remember Patty's advice to reach out to the emergency manager at the county level.