

Food & Hunger Food, Hunger, Water, Agriculture Policy – Food Systems Action Team
4.30.20 ♦ 3:30 – 5:00 pm
Meeting Notes

Facilitator: Lilly Irvin-Vitela, New Mexico First

Notes: Sharon Berman, New Mexico First

In Attendance:

- Jonas Moya, New Mexico First
- Melanie Sanchez Eastwood, New Mexico First
- Dan Gerry, Village of Los Ranchos Agri-Futures
- Sarah Cobb, Village of Los Ranchos
- Zoey Fink, National Young Farmers Coalition
- Roy Montibon, Agri-Futures, San Miguel Co. community service groups
- Paula Garcia, NM Acequia Association
- Representative Melanie Stansbury, NM Legislature
- Pam Roy, Farm to Table NM, NM Food & Ag Policy Council, Santa Fe City and County Food Policy Council
- Brent Van Dyke, National Association of Conservation Districts
- Marshall Wilson, NMDA

Dan: I've been working with the Los Ranchos Agri-Futures Project, partnering with Lauren Goldstein from NMSU.

Pam: I'm the Director for our Farm to table and the co-ordinator for the New Mexico Food and Agriculture Policy Council, as well as the Santa Fe City and County Food Policy Council.

Jonas: I'm with New Mexico First. I'm excited to be a part of the conversation. I'm leading leading some of our work that we've been doing on the Ag Resiliency project.

Zoey: I'm with the National Young Farmers Coalition and our state campaign organizer. And the other part of my time I manage a couple different farm sites with my husband Carlos, between Bernalillo County and Socorro County.

Roy: I'm working with the Agri-futures group and I'm also a couple of committees with the Los Ranchos group, and I'm also working with a set of community service organizations out in Las Vegas and San Miguel County who have various kinds of specific needs. Looking for ways to assist getting food from farmers to people who need it, and so that we don't have food waste and people who are hungry can actually eat good, healthy produce.

Sarah: I'm working with Roy and Dan on the aligning our agri-futures for the Village of los Ranchos. We sent around a covered 19 kind of a triage survey to help give us a sense of what farmers needs might be and trying to align farmers with potential volunteers. So we're in the process of collecting that the results of that survey now

Paula: Most of what we do at the NM Acequia Association is land and water rights advocacy. But in with the pandemic, we're taking a greater role and trying to be supportive of strengthening the local food system by supporting farmers. We have a collaboration that started on this on this call a week ago exactly, to do some co-operative seed bank for farmers, and that is underway. We've conducted a survey. I can update you on that more later with them, if anyone is here from the farmer's markets. I've also been reaching out to some of the health councils to get a feeling for how the local food relief efforts are going in distributing food to low-income families. We also have a farmer training program, and we're encouraging the farmers in our network to grow extra, to be able to



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give away later in the season. We're very interested in what's happening with the upcoming legislative session. So looking forward to that conversation today.

Updates

Lilly: Helga from Agri-Cultura Network had raised questions for clarification about social distancing and its impact on folks doing value-added ag and distribution. Patty Keane from the Governor's Office shared back some comprehensive information that explained that some of those interpretations that had been made were overly restricted and there were additional details. I shared that information back out with everyone on this distribution list. We also posted it on our [COVID-19 website](#). It would be under [this action team](#). So, if you want something as a handy reference, you can certainly go to the website if you'd like. Or if you're on information overload and you just want us to resend something, feel free to ask anybody on our team and we are happy to do that. The message is that, yes, Ag is an essential service and, yes, the safety of workers is of the utmost importance.

Lilly: Paula did some foreshadowing for us on some of the work that's been going on related to seed supply. I also wanted to give a shout out to NMDA and NMSU for helping problem-solve to address the seed supply issue. We found the nimblest response was through nonprofits.

Paula: Thank you Lilly, for helping facilitate that conversation around seeds. When we were on this call last week and the week before we learned that we were running into similar issues with regard to seeds – specifically, that smaller or medium sized farms were having difficulty with their seed orders this year. Larger seed companies are prioritizing larger or commercial growers. Farmers are not able to place orders. Both the Farmers' Marketing Association and our association reported the same thing. With the NMFMA we put together a survey to make kind of a wish list. The survey was completed by Monday and the deadline to complete it was Wednesday. It was a quick turnaround because time is off the essence and we wanted to do something that was meaningful and timely for the farmers. We have about 80 responses so far. We're going to meet tomorrow with Eduardo Servin. He's also put the word out to the extension offices to let us know what seed stock they have. We've been getting some interesting messages from around the state about needs like the Navajo Nation and other people willing to donate either money or seed. And I think by tomorrow we'll all have had a chance to review the seed requests to determine next steps. Our goal is to figure out what the need is and get a cooperative seed purchase. There were two major donors. Foundatoinis have pledged support. Thanks to Lilly for facilitating the process. Once we've determined what will be in the order, we'll talk about distribution.

We do have some options. One of the things we're looking at is to work with some of the co-op extension offices to help distribute in their respective counties, possibly engaging local participants in helping to package them if needed. And our organization is also available to help with packaging and distribution.

We had a smaller seed distribution called Semillas Pa' la Gente already, for home and family gardens. We have simple procedures for tracking and inventory. We know the postage rates. We'll have to work out some logistics but there's a lot of enthusiasm and a great amount of need. The survey asked whether people needed seed for the fall and winter. Because if there's a seed supply issue now, there's definitely going to be a need, if not more of a need, in the fall into the winter. I'm really pleased with the kind of teamwork that's happening.

- Lilly: Would you like to share about the info about how folks are irrigating?



- Paula: We did ask in the survey what the water source is, whether they were using wells, irrigation district and acequia. A lot of growers are watering with acequia – more than half of the growers. Another majority of the remainder was using surface water. Very few were using dry land agriculture. Water is clearly a really big issue for farmers and something that we'll all be taking to heart.

Lilly: Thanks for that update, Paula.

Lilly: Another issue is what the relationship is between local food production and emergency food relief issues, both as a systemic solution and the emergency food response sector. Last time we were all together we talked about what CSAs and others doing, is there a way to get boxes at free or reduced price to folks who are in poverty or on a fixed income? There's a beautiful model that's going on and I was excited to learn about the SW Food Hub. Pam knows about this. They are intentionally working with farmers and emergency food sector. There are models that are coming out of NGAs that are powerful and productive. I wanted to give a shout out to the NMFMA who, as emergency food requests have come in, their value chain coordinator has been in charge of getting tens of thousands of pounds of food to tribes, to other specific communities. And what's happening in the NGO is incredible as a complement to what's going on with the state's emergency response efforts. So those are worth highlighting. If anybody else has kind of a specific example or ideas for action, or where we can do a better job of connecting local agriculture to the emergency food sector, I'd love to hear any potential next steps.

- Lilly: Paula, you mentioned earlier that one of the things that you're doing in terms of working with farmers and gardeners is to consider growing extra to share with neighbors, share with family. Those practical, hands-on things that folks can do make a big difference. Do you want to say more about how that's worked before, or how you anticipate networking now?
- Paula: We were going to apply for the USDA food box program, and we were polling our farmers to see if there was interest. There was and it wasn't until late yesterday that we realized that had to be GAT certified, so we're probably not going to do that. We're encouraging people who have CSAs and are accustomed to selling at farmers markets to consider scaling up a little bit so there's a little extra to share with food relief efforts. We've been contemplating a project to determine our small network of farmers from our program have lost any markets because of restaurants and school closures, to see if they have extra that they are not able to sell. We have a small fund we're putting together to buy some of that produce on the very short term to donate to local food banks. It's a very small effort to address the immediate need. If we had something well-coordinated in NM, there should be a way we are able to pay farmers for what they're growing and make that available for local efforts. The USDA farm boxes might work for some who are already GAP certified, but it would be nice to have some other working pool of resources to especially support the small farmers.

Zoey: Similar to Paula, we were really excited when we saw the Farmers to Families Program come out and the Food Box program. And then when we realized that you would have to be a GAP certified producer to participate, that eliminated a lot of our members that otherwise, are poised to be able to start selling to a program and building boxes like that quite gracefully. Hopefully USDA will think about smaller diversified producers next time they try to put together a program like that. We've seen a huge demand for CSAs, so a lot of farmers have been shifting toward selling through that model through aggregated CSAs like NM Harvest and Squash Blossom and La Cosecha, as well as



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starting additional on-farm CSAs. I think, again, echoing what Paula said about the importance of if we are trying to connect farmers with food banks and initiatives, to make sure they're getting paid a fair price for their product.

- Lilly: On the food bank side, historically, they're able to access produce well below the market rate because they're able to get second from grocery stores. We've seen tribal governments and meals programs reaching out and looking to make a connection, and there's been some matchmaking going on with the Farmers Marketing Association and folks. Pam had mentioned ways local farmers were responding to emergency food relief. Zoey, could you give us some highlights about what it means to be GAP certified and why that's such a barrier, so when we do advocacy work, we can be good allies.
- Zoey: it's just another pile of paperwork that farmers have to do. A lot of growers in ABQ and Santa Fe are following GAP practices in
- Paula: The hard part is the paperwork because GAP requires you wash your produce in three compartments, sinks and things like that, but the paperwork seems to be the big impediment to being certified.

Lilly – There are a couple of other kinds of follow up actions we share together. One that we started was a survey we had done.

Jonas: Thank you to everyone who participated in and shared the survey link. We had over 70 responses. It was a very short survey with open-ended questions about challenges producers are facing on the ground. We're doing an analysis and we'll have that report out shortly.

Lilly: anything else about food production needs and opportunities that we might be coordinating around tighter?

Roy M: Every region of the state is different. What we've identified about San Miguel and surrounding counties is that we have a lot of ranchers and comparatively few produce growers. Part of the challenge for us is getting fresh produce to the people who need it. Las Vegas is the economic hub for five surrounding counties. If anybody on this call or know someone who might have ideas. It's a two part question. One is who do we buy produce from, and the second is how do we transport the produce to Las Vegas and San Miguel County.

Lilly: It's a good point and this is not necessarily the whole solution, but **do connect with Michael, the value chain coordinator at the Farmers Marketing Association.** He's been doing a really nice job connecting producers to area where food is needed. I know others are doing the same thing. Paula, do you have options about practical and helpful ideas?

Paula: This is my region and I agree. Vegas is our home town even though we're from Mora. That's where we go to the movies and get groceries. I agree that Michael at the NMFMA is great at making those connections. I think most of the farmers that have enough volume to sell and donate are also participants in the farmers' markets. They're from neighboring counties in some cases. The big issue you mentioned is meat processing. There's going to be a new meat processing facility. In our county there is a group of young ranchers who are social media savvy. They started a Facebook group called Mora Valley Grass Fed Beef. It's a network, not a co-op. They're putting it out there. We don't have meat processing here so we have to send it far away to somewhere like Raton or Colorado. So what local farmers are doing is selling fractions of the steers or heifers that are ready to butcher. That kind of thing is going on and is directed specifically to consumers. If there was a coordinated fund and cold storage, if some of that could be purchased for food relief or sale at local markets - there's a missing infrastructure in between. The consumers have



to have a lot of coolers until you get home. There's no reason there's anybody in this region should be buying meat at the store. In the past people were taking the cattle to auctions in Clayton. Because of the prices there's no incentive at all and people are trying to sell their meat locally.

Lilly: Marshall, could you share what the Secretary said on this morning's call?

Marshall: He said we are working with several of the processors throughout the state and looking at the requirements that USDA is needing to get additional slaughter and packing facilities stood up. **I can circle back with him and see what he's thinking about.**

Lilly: That would be great. There are efforts in the works to do more meat processing and packaging here in NM.

Pam: What is also exciting in thinking about the potential. We ended up having to slow things down as COVID came on board. There's been a real interest in the last couple of years in moving beef and other meats into our public institutions. Exactly two years ago, we conducted a meeting in the Roswell area, with ranchers, school districts and the USA beef processing facility just outside of Roswell. That has really ramped up. We were going to host that same meeting with ranchers and schools a couple weeks ago but weren't able to do it. There's also a group in Rio Arriba County that is interested in collectively working together on figuring out the institutional sales. The barrier has always been the price point. But some of the ranchers are really finding that they can get closer to that because a lot of beef that goes into the school meal programs is USDA donated meats. We may see that part of the system being challenged at this point. The beef issue is ramping up in a lot of different ways. It's a solid market, and it's one to consider in this whole conversation around meat.

- Jonas: As we start looking into having more local beef processing plants, one thing to think about is making sure the quality of the cattle and the types of cuts are consistent to that of the markets. So understanding that there needs to be a wide range of different meats. That's another major challenge we haven't addressed yet. One of my jobs is working out of Santa Teresa which is the largest cattle importation state in the U.S. on the Mexico border. I purchase cattle on behalf of other people. I do custom order buying and I also do some livestock inspecting when needed. I've been engaged in the industry for a long time.

Lilly: I wanted to do a quick connecting the dots from several recent advocacy conversations about timing and the special session and where there are windows of opportunity for influence. Brent, you brought up trying to practice democratically and maintain open meeting requirements and not let our democratic institutions wither on the vine. I can resend the work that the NM Foundation on Open Government did with the Attorney General's office. There were some conversations about going into the special session, and what the role of the community would be in that. I know that legislative council and leadership are trying to figure out how to hold the session given the need to keep everyone safe and healthy. We've heard that there may be as much as a billion dollar loss in revenue to the state's income due to lost oil and gas revenue. There are federal relief packages that could add as much as 40% to our state income. And in the press there has been communication that, when it comes to budget, everything is on the table. That presents us with interesting things to consider in terms of advocacy efforts and collective efforts around resilient agriculture and healthy food systems. Rep. Stansbury was able to join an advocacy conversation early today. I sent an email out about it. Here are some opportunities and guidance for action.



- One is, our legislators are trying to work on a set of guiding principles to inform, to give a framework, for looking at budget questions. If you have solutions or specific suggestions for policy, you can share them with Rep. Stansbury (Melanie.Stansbury@nmlegis.gov).
- One of the things that helped us all be so successful together during the session was having coordinated policy asks. The way NM First is thinking about those policy asks are four-fold:
 - The needs around emergency food relief
 - The needs around healthy local food systems and resilient agriculture
 - Water issues – infrastructure, quality and access
 - Good governance and ethics issues to make sure that in our need to respond we don't forget other things
 - We're also thinking, with other stakeholders about health and education
- With other stakeholders we're thinking about health and education. But when it comes to food, hunger, ag and water, we would love to work with you and others to come up with finite policy asks and and to think about what's really needed to address the key issues folks have been working on. As you think about that, what bubbles up for you as an obvious ask in the legislative session? One that came up in a previous conversation was that our food banks in NM are experiencing huge increases in demand and huge decreases in accessible, affordable food. In the last 37 days, the Roadrunner Food Bank has spent over \$1.2 million in purchase food, and the Food Depot \$450,000. I haven't heard back from other food banks and the pantries yet. When the food banks look at the variables that go onto their overall asks (taking into consideration food purchasing, safety and transportation), they're looking at somewhere between a 10-15 million dollar ask just to keep up with the needs that are emerging now. And we haven't reached the peak demand for emergency food services. Are there other things in the food, hunger, water space that come to mind for folks as policy asks?

Pam: I think it would be incredible to put together something that speaks to our whole food and agriculture system. The more we build it here in NM, the more we mitigate the challenges we have now. It's happening. Not only these calls, but other calls as well. Our policy makers are going to have to squeeze everything out of the budget. **If we can propose what we could do to shift how we invest as a state in economic development and labor as part of our food system.** That's a big ask for our legislators. I feel like they're going to feel pressured to take a bunch of things out of the budget. **If we can work towards proposing something now about the future, while tackling immediate emergencies at hand, and express why that's going to help and what it's going to do to change our situation.** So if we find ourselves in a similar situation down the road we'll be taking even better care of ourselves.

- Pam: We've been collectively advocated for federal funding. In statute, there is a lot of funding right now for food & ag initiatives. We've worked on that for a very long time, and we need to bring more of those dollars home and they are very targeted at our food and agriculture and natural resources systems. That's a real goal, to bring more investment to the state. And we have to show how that will work.

Sarah: There was a lot of excitement about the food box program for farmers, to compensate farmers and connect them with people in need. We took this question of potential partnership to the Storehouse. We realized that it was really beyond us and we couldn't pursue it. I am wondering whether the state could pick up this potential partnership in some way. Clearly the GAP certification is a barrier to building this relationship in the state. We want to support



quality and best practices. But is there a way to compensate farmers and also get food to food pantries and food banks?

Lilly: This opportunity was almost but not quite right for NM. Here are some of the suggestions for action steps that came up on a previous call.

- One is as relief efforts are coming down, if they can come down in the form of grants, not loans. That makes a huge impact in terms of equity.
 - And when grants are released, that there is sufficient time to respond
- When grants are released they are simplified, not cumbersome
 - NM Philanthropy has done a beautiful job of turning grant applications into a very simple process for COVID-19. And that's meant that money has been able to move out quickly in terms of actual relief. That same thinking can be applied. So what's the opportunity of action?
- Please reach out to the federal delegation. Tell them, thank you so much for thinking about healthy local food systems and agriculture and water.
 - And as folks are deciding how to deploy those resources, to remove barriers by going for grants instead of loans.
 - Make those grants something that a normal human being can address, not only grant writers.
 - We might also include in that ask money for technical assistance to help people get through that process (state and/or federal) because it's super cumbersome. Getting GAP certified is a paperwork nightmare.
- Another action piece: if you have ideas about budget principles, get it in an email to Rep. Stansbury. She's part of a legislative workgroup.
 - Outline specific policy ideas and note whether they are budget or policy-related.
- Follow up with the Speakers office and Majority Leader to let them know that we respect and appreciate them coming together, and their need to be safe. And, we need a way to be engaged in that process.
 - We're working around a joint statement around that and we'll share it out. If you have an opportunity as an organization or individual to sign on, we'll encourage you to do that. We hope to get that out by the middle of next week.

Pam: There are a lot of us advocating at the federal level to make sure that that the immediate packages/programs are accessible to small scale or underserved. USDA is not circling around in a very clear way. They are not focused on those kinds of areas. We need to still advocate for that. The rule-making is in process but they have not sent it to OMB. We still have time to advocate for that. I will put out an action alert and will send it to Lilly to share out if you're not on our Food and Ag Policy Council List. But to Sarah's point, some of these immediate programs are not set up for a lot of people in New Mexico. Access is really difficult, and there was discussion about ways to send these funds to states. We'll be thinking about the programs that are out there right now that have some deadlines, that can help us build out our own initiatives. We've been putting them on our website and the NM First website has them as well. Both/And. the immediate things are going to be tough unless we say we need them to be really clarified, and they need to come home to us. And that is separate from the special session of the state.

Dan: How do we help people going to growers markets, may have excess product, and be compensated for that. Imagine a tent being set up at the farmers' market where instead of taking your stuff back and dumping it into the



compose pile, you put it into a basket and get a small amount of payment that the Storehouse is willing to pay. But there's not a system set up with Roadrunner Food Bank because they're our aggregator for surplus food. The Storehouse would be the pantry where people would come and shop. So understanding the whole system is a big part of this as well as knowing the main players. The ideas are really helpful. But I think it's on this group to be able to advocate for those things by having a vision of a sustainable network that supports local growers.

- Sarah: As Chuck and Dan and myself and some individuals at Storehouse discussed, it became clear that the Storehouse doesn't have the financial capacity to compensate farmers. I think the conversation could be with Roadrunner, whether they envision a program at some point where they could compensate farmers. I don't know who to address this question to at Roadrunner. I think the Storehouse was going to talk to Roadrunner about this possibility, but **it might be good if the question came from beyond the Storehouse.**
- Lilly: Sarah, I think your point is well taken, and these conversations have been had with Roadrunner. Part of the issue is that they're looking for value, variety and volume and aren't always able to match that with local producers. And so it's kind of it's been kind of a disconnect not because there's anything against local. It's just that they're dealing with such large volumes that especially in a crisis that's hard to coordinate. At The Pantry, like Echo or even smaller pantry levels, those matches have been made. And that's where philanthropy has really stepped in. Thornburgh Foundation has provided some small grant opportunities to the New Mexico Farmers Marketing Association, where there's been a combination of donation and purchasing local ag to get that out around relief efforts. Some relief efforts have funding. They're not expecting everything to be free, but if they can get more volume so they can get more people fed, it makes a huge difference. That's an opportunity as well. If you all have some solutions and some producers who are ready to go, and you need introductions to philanthropy, we are meeting with them weekly. I'm more than happy to make introduction. Set out how many people you are hoping to serve, and how much it costs. Make a nitty gritty in terms of what's your ask and I'm willing to put that on the whole good ag philanthropy table as well as do some individual follow-through and try to grease the wheel a little more. That's not the whole solution. There are some policy solutions, but in the short term, for urgent situations, philanthropy is nimbler than government.
- Sarah: I love the agility options we have when we have private grant money. The trick will be to coordinate with the Storehouse. We need to find willing and cooperative farmers.
- Lilly: Michael from NMFMA would be helpful in connecting. And there are folks who are set up and are already working cooperatively and collectively to meet those volume requirements.

Roy: Do you think legislators would be open to ideas about how to use money more effectively in order to help farmers and producers? So they don't say "Here are some grants!" that are then so complicated nobody can fill them out. There may be ways to bring more money to NM for agriculture.

- Lilly: I think that makes really good sense.
- Sarah: I think that constituent input is definitely important and relevant. From a federal perspective we would work with the staff. Roy, were you thinking about state or federal?
- Roy: It could be either. The GAP paperwork seems onerous enough that farmers don't do it, even though they actually comply with the practices. Could we bring it up with Ben Ray Lujan or his office? There are major problems with grants.com. If you're a farmer and trying to get a grant it's a total nightmare.



- Sarah: That's a huge ask and a feeling we all share but it's going to be hard to get traction with the office. Maybe we take USDA, just one federal agency that's most relevant for us and figure out who are our points of contact within the local offices that we can direct farmers to? The local USDAs are really good about helping farmers. They will walk through the grant step by step. That's what I would do, find local point of contact, get them on this call and say, our farmers need an access point and are you that person? Can a farmer go to your office? Let's hold USDA's feet to the fire and see who our points of contact are and get those names out to the farmers. Dan: wouldn't that be county extension?
- Sarah: Yes - and John Garlisch is visible. The question is who else is out there that we can point to that we can call in for direct input.
- Lilly: Terry is no longer with USDA and is at the Grants Collective. They have offered through the organization to help with technical assistance. I'm not sure what the fee is. I also know that Olivia Roanhorse with Roanhorse Consulting has worked with a number of folks who are willing to do some pro bono grant writing or grant technical assistance. She has included that on a map on The Roanhorse Consulting website. We'll put Olivia's email in our notes. olivia@roanhorseconsulting.com

Sarah: Do we have contacts with the Rural Development Office?

- Lilly: I don't have one off the top of my head to call – but if you have a suggestion, we can follow up or otherwise we can do some research. It could be useful to have them on the call.
- Sarah: Terry was so accessible. I don't know who farmers would go to if there was a grant opportunity they could try to access.
- Lilly: Dan, will you follow up with John to learn more about the infrastructure and support at NMSU, and Sarah, will you follow up with Terry?
- Sarah: Sure.

Lilly: There are institutional responses, grassroots responses and relational responses. It's going to take all of that to leverage in the resources we need to deal with the staggering need and fundamental structure issues in NM.

Next Steps:

- Getting a letter out to folks with a good governance plea
- Continue to work with broader coalition of folks in food hunger ag water workgroup on policy asks
- Keep folks informed with what's going on regarding seeds supply issues and questions that have arisen around how value-added producers as well as distributors function in this environment. We'll be sharing those survey results.

Meeting Recording



Please contact Sharon Berman at sharon@nmfirst.org if we missed or misunderstood anything in these notes.