

Food, Hunger, Water, Agriculture Policy Workgroup
Food Systems Action Team
10.15.20 ♦ 3:30 – 5:00 pm
Meeting Notes

Facilitator: Lilly Irvin-Vitela, New Mexico First

Notes: Sharon Berman, New Mexico First

In Attendance:

- Dan Gerry, AgriFutures
- Emily Arasim, NM Acequia Association
- Denise Miller, NM Farmers' Marketing Association
- Roy Montibon, the Montibon Company
- Christina Morris, NM Dept. of Health
- Jason New, NMDA
- Erin Ortigoza, Forward Cities
- Karen Plawecki, NMSU Extension
- Eric Renz-Whitmore, Forward Cities
- Erika Robers, NM First
- Pam Roy, Farm to Table, NM Food & Ag Policy
- Michael Venticinque, NM Farmers' Marketing Association

l) Check In: For you, what is at the heart of the intersection of food, hunger, water and ag?

- a) Relationship, relationship, relationship.
- b) Our farmers. They are the backbone of what we do.
- c) Aside from shelter, this has all the things people need in order to live. Essential to human existence and who we are as a people.
- d) When we talk about a food system, it's a system. It takes all of us to make it work: the community, the farmers, the land and the water, and the relationships.
- e) It's about more than survival. A nation that is as blessed as we are with natural resources, there's something wrong if there is so much food insecurity.
- f) A body of needs and systems. I would add the circulation, healthy circulatory system. Feeding it all.
- g) Water. Our bodies are a majority water. We can't grow food without it. Water is life. Mother Earth, Water, Father Sky.
- h) The balance of all of the above. It's essential to systemic health.
- i) Some of our systems are not working very well during COVID. Organization is at the heart of it. How do we create new farmers, how do we transport food to them
- j) The family farm, the small businesses that make up our industry. The word "heart" caught my eye, and I think it's the human element. The volunteers, and people who take on leadership roles to address these topics.
- k) generational land-based peoples at the heart. They are the only reason we have healthy land and water, traditions and water.
- l) It's not just survival – it's also thriving.
- m) Time.

II) Increase Coordination and Capacity for Ag Resilience Value Chain and COVID Food Systems Action Teams

- a) Erika reminded the group that there was a request to merge the Policy Workgroup's Food Systems Action Team with the Agricultural Resilience Value Chain Action Team. Lilly added that we had been asked to put the possibility forward to both groups – there are overlapping issues that are short-term, mid-term and long-term implications.
- b) The group took a poll, agreed to merge, and decided to meet once a month. People opted to meet when the Value Chain group was scheduled to meet. The next meeting of the Value Chain will take place at 1:00 pm on October 21st, and will be the first meeting with the newly combined groups. Erika will send the meeting schedule out to everyone, and will also send them a calendar invite. If you have any questions, please contact Erika at erika@nmfirst.org.

III) Updates:

- a) Seed supply project. Lilly noted that the NM Acequia Association took the lead on implementation in the spring. Emily had just completed a report and gave an update. They surveyed farmers about the seeds they needed to keep up their operations back in the spring. Seed suppliers were shutting down orders unless you were a large scale grower. "We all came together to compile the orders and put in one big order that could be expedited." They provided seeds to 45 medium scale farmers, as well as different collectives. It was a bumpy and difficult process. It takes a lot of work to figure out exactly who needs what and how much. There was a lot of data compilation, and significant effort put into working with seed supplier. The bulk orders were backed up and they were rushing to get the seeds into farmers' hands. There was a narrow window of time to get seeds to the farmers in time. They recently convened to talk about lessons learned. Working with a supplier outside the state even with a good company is challenging. Buying seeds in bulk is much cheaper. Small farmers pay much more than their larger scale counterparts.
 - 1) Lilly gave a shout out to the NM Acequia Association and asked Emily to give context about their work with seeds. Emily said Executive Director Paula Garcia wasn't able to join today. We all started out as a coalition getting seeds out in April. The Acequia Association had already been distributing small packets of seeds to families and community members through their small-scale seed sharing program Semillas pa' la Gente.
 - 2) Denise said they couldn't have done it without the Acequia Association. "Emily stepped in when we were overloaded with database information."
 - 3) Lilly acknowledged NMDA for weighing in and helping connect the dots, as well as NMSU Cooperative Extension and Master Gardeners.
- b) NMFMA SNAP Double Up Food Bucks report. Denise said the program is beneficial to helping SNAP participants across the state stretch their food budgets when they need it most. It provides a dollar-for-dollar match when purchasing NM-grown produce. She said that sales have been up by 60%, some of which is due to the P-EBT. There also was marketing as well as getting food into local grocery stores. A total of 21 Lowe's stores now participate. All the rest of the Lowe's stores just came onboard, so there is new access in rural areas around the state. Denise said they were getting ready to write their next federal grant and will be asking for increased funding, which will require a larger match. The program will leverage \$7.6 million over the next 4 years.



- 1) Dan said the Los Ranchos farmers market will be starting it next year.
 - 2) Lilly asked Denise if she would like to give a heads up about policy. Denise said the strategies are moving, and they are doing foundational work with the NM Food and Ag Policy Council, NM First, Rep Stansbury, Rep Armstrong, The Legislative Finance Committee, NMDA and more, making sure the LFC understands the program. They will be creating a fact sheet and a sign on letter. Denise hoped they could get on the Governor's call.
- c) Cold Storage. Erin gave some background – they have an initiative for the ESHIP/Rio Grande communities, piloting the ecosystem building process. The initiative is funded by the Kaufman Foundation. In NM they have a specialized focus on 5 urban and rural counties in central and northern NM (Bernalillo, Sandoval, Santa Fe, Rio Arriba and Los Alamos counties). They are looking at infrastructural pieces and gaps in value chain – how and where the food is moving, and not moving, and how to think about leveraging the emergency response beyond the pandemic. They took on the refrigeration and freezer storage piece. They created a survey to discover, among other things, if there is interest in cross-sector, or program-to program collaboration. Their survey concentrated on the nonprofit and for-profit groups that were strongly engaged in the COVID response. Questions included asking how much storage they had before and during COVID. The survey is out through next week. So far, they have a 50% response rate. They'll follow up with those who have indicated an interest in doing so, and will discuss if there is an ability to lease more space.
- 1) Results of survey will be ready in November as part of a food policy and marketing expo. Several groups involved – Food and Ag Policy Council, Barelmas group and more. Erin said, "This is an invite to all of you." They are planning to have expo-type/virtual breakout space. It's a business fair. The platform is held by the Santa Fe New Mexican, which sublets it. They would be sharing out the data during that time.
 - 2) Roy wondered how economic development was going to encourage entrepreneurs. Erin replied that there is business support for startups but maybe there is less of that backend support for farmers. She added that it looked like there would be opportunities between incubators and farmers. She is north of Santa Fe.
 - 3) Denise said, "This shows why these meetings are important – we all try to keep abreast of what's going on. This is how we communicate regularly and broadly." She added that NMFMA, PED, Farm to Table will be offering a lot of farmer trainings.
 - 4) Erin and Denise agreed to follow up with each other off-line.
 - 5) Christina wondered: how are you exploring how land is being used, and how do you know if the land has been contaminated? What does the regenerative economy principle look like? When we talk about our economy and our food, and we talk about the heart of it, where are the principles at the heart of it?
<https://capitalinstitute.org/8-principles-regenerative-economy/>
 - Lilly encouraged the group to remember that part of our value chain is our relationship with our natural resources.
- d) Farm to Food Box – New Federal Funding
- 1) Denise said that it is a commodity program and while they have offered their support to shamrock to find local produce, it isn't a good fit for the work most partners are involved with. Michael said he worked with 3 different people putting in bids to focus on what to put in the box, including cheeses from Tucumcari. Not one NM company was involved. He reached out to Shamrock but there was no response.



The federal program to help NM is not investing in our local food system. Pam said last night on the news on Channel 7 they spoke about the program. It would be interesting to find out where they got their information. They called it fresh produce and food box. They really made it sound like there was fresh produce. They gave a shout out to Roadrunner and Food Depot. It was curious where the news station got the information. Michael – there may be produce in it, it's just not NM> Falling short on allowing New Mexicans to help New Mexicans. Lilly: all of those things really matter.

e) General Update

- 1) Pam gave NMFMA and partners a shout out on the regional food systems grant. It's a brand new program and a big deal. New Mexico's application was top notch. She thanked NMDA for the USDA grant that was approved. Only 6 states were awarded. "We are bringing dollars home." Denise added that the San Juan County group got a promotion grant.

IV) Next Steps

- a) Send comments
- b) Next meeting date – next Thursday, October 22.
- c) Reminder: no meetings on holidays, including end of December (Dec. 14-31)

