

Food, Hunger, Water, Agriculture Policy
Food Systems Action Team
August 6, 20 ± 3:30pm-5:00pm
Meeting Notes

Facilitator: Lilly Irvin-Vitela, New Mexico First

Note Taker: Xavier Vallejo, New Mexico First

Participants:

- Dan Gerry, Agri-Futures, Los Ranchos
- Zak Barela, NMDA
- Pam Roy, NM Food and Ag Policy Council
- Ron Montibon, The Montibon Company
- Bruce Hinrich, NMSU Cooperative Extension Service
- Brent Van Dyke, NM Association of Conservation Districts
- Emily Arasim, NM Acequia Association

Updates

- We're working on creating a program at CNM for agriculture to promote the industry in NM. CNM may be able to offer some certificates for farming. I think COVID-19 has demonstrated that we really need to build up our farmer population. It would be a joint program with class time and demonstrations in the fields.
- We've been working with a lot of local acequia districts. We've been in contact about drought. It's not a new problem, but it's a hard problem for agricultural workers.
- There has been an announcement for the small business act to help business hardship associated with COVID-19. It is a loan program, not a grant program. NMSU held a conference about selling beef. <https://www.nmda.nmsu.edu/wp-content/uploads/2020/08/NM-Small-Business-Act.pdf>
- Most of the beef processors in the state have been shut down. Have we been creating programs to support beef processing at the local level. It seems like we send out beef to Colorado to be processed and then buy it back for a higher price.
- I know there are some custom processors. More along the lines of the feasibility study, it was for the state inspection and aligned to sit in special program. The state inspection program would help us to keep our beef local, instead of having it go across state lines.
- I'm excited to work on the are program for agencies.
- I'm still working on the groundwork for the ag grant student program. Schools are trying to figure out how to open up. I probably will pick up these conversations next week as people get back into the office. On the food front, one of the issues that has come up, farmers don't often have the time & capacity to do the paperwork associated with grants and certifications. We're trying to figure out a way to get student interns to help with accounting.
- There is going to be a clean produce safety training that is coming up. We had a webinar that gave suggestions for farmers to work through drought, and one other webinar on helping producers sell directly with consumers.
- We're trying to help to fill in the gaps to go straight from farm to producer. The reason folks are going out of state is because we don't have many processors within the state. Most of the custom

processing plans are backlogged. People took advantage of being able to buy directly from producers and backlogged it.

- During the feasibility study, did they look at the feasibility of hiring one inspector for each plant in the state or did they anticipate having one and having them travel from plant to plant to expect.
- Travel gets expensive, so I don't know how much they would actually save there.
- The only update has been regarding the drought. We've been looking into where to store water and how to store the water to support local farmers.
- I heard back about the farmers market association. A project was born from these meetings regarding collective seed purchasing.
- I don't have many updates because I have not really been a part of that process. We've just talked about general food problems.
- According to one of the participants who could not be here today, food produce is moving everywhere in the state. Farmers markets are seeing increased sales due to P-EBT. There are less customers, but more purchases per customer. There has been a lot of media. There have been a lot of challenges for NM farmers to use federal food box program. Is there a local approach we can do?

Local Approaches

- I had a couple of questions for this whole group:
 - Is there already an existing list of local producers? It would be great to buy products, rather than going from grocery store to grocery store?
 - The NM Ag website has a place for local producers to insert their businesses and promote with consumers.
 - Are there any indications that food demand in NM will grow or stay consistent?
 - Recently, there's been a small dip. But a lot of projections are looking at food insecurity increasing. Some people are reaching their cap for claiming unemployment benefits. The uncertainty about how schools will function provides a barrier as to how to address food insecurity through schools.
- Is there a diagram or flow chart of our national food distribution supply chain as it pertains to NM? It would be good to know where all our goods go and where all our pecans go. How does it come back? I haven't found anything in depth.
 - I think the Jeff and the Marketing Division of NMDA would serve as a great resource. A lot of our pecans are going to China. I don't know if those are direct sales. There are large feedlot areas in other states, but less in NM. They tend to be more expensive in NM because we have to import grain supplies. Our Ag Econ department is starting to look at that now, with some work on food chains. The NMSU ACES Atlas is super useful for identifying resources.
- Would it benefit our ranchers to market the local side of things compared to industrial processed goods?
 - I think that's a possibility. I think we're also starting to see those larger companies invest in grass fed. There is room to advertise and grow that market. Much like the organic market with vegetables, it may take longer to prepare those cattle for processing, which means that prices will be different.
- If you were able to see our world move in a direction that's healthier for everybody – If you were going to choose one thing that would have the largest impact.

- I would want to see more direct and circular food chains. I think we also need to get more money into the state through maybe grants or loans. Seems like this is something we will have to do quickly because I don't see things getting better until mid-2021.
- Sometimes it's hard to change behaviors. It seems that a good thing to push for is to educate children through school, so they can go back home and share that information with their parents.
- As the Ogallala Aquifer goes dry, the farmers have a lot of investments on the line and dependent on water access.

Next Steps for Policy

- What are the best next steps for policy?
 - I'm not a tax expert, but I know there are certain taxes that Ag producers are exempt from. We should create incentives to invest in local consumers.
 - Can we create tax breaks to donate to the local emergency food systems? Even though schools will be closed. When we look at emergency market opportunities... There are moving funds that are meant to invest in domestic products, and we're not using it.

Follow Up Actions

- * Facilitator to follow up with the state water engineer*