



Resilience in New Mexico Agriculture Roswell Regional Meeting Summary

Introduction

The **Resilience in New Mexico Agriculture** regional meeting in Roswell was convened on December 2, 2015. A diverse group of 48 people from twelve different counties attended the meeting, including farmers, ranchers, commercial producers and marketers, educators, researchers, financial lenders, grantmakers, government professionals, and soil and water experts.

The purpose of the meeting was to elicit input from key stakeholders on the trends having the most significant impact on the agriculture industry, as well as challenges and potential solutions. These ideas will contribute to the industry and stakeholder research that will result in a long-term plan for a robust food and agriculture system in New Mexico.

Throughout the meeting participants worked in table groups to discuss the following trends, challenges and solutions. Once information is gathered from all the regional meetings, it will be synthesized and potentially verified.

Trends

Participants were asked to identify key trends that are having an impact (either positive or negative) on the agriculture industry, in general. The trends represent individual opinions of participants in attendance at this meeting and not necessarily the group as a whole.

Positive

- *Technology*—Due to better research, chemistry, seed traits, irrigation and precision equipment, technology is helping the industry be cleaner, safer and more efficient.
- *Markets*—Consumers, especially the millennial generation, are becoming more aware of the need for healthier food that is grown locally, opening up potential new markets for producers.
- *Conservation*—As producers become more sensitive to the costs of water, fuel and transportation, they are adopting more efficient and effective practices that lead to better conservation of water and land, as well as better yields.

Negative

- *Water*—Viable access to water will continue to be uncertain for the industry as precipitation levels decrease, water rights are diverted to non-agricultural use, legal settlements remain unresolved, and more effective water management practices are ignored.
- *Regulations*—Government regulations at all levels regarding taxes, wages, workman's compensation, insurance, food safety and the environment continue to increase costs for industry stakeholders.
- *Succession*—As the current generation of producers retire, the next generation of producers will find it more difficult to remain in or return to the industry due to the economy of scale needed to be a viable business, inheritance taxes, lack of access to capital funding, as well as long and short-term lending constraints. This trend will also increase the diversion of agricultural land and water rights to non-agriculture use as producers retire without having a successor.
- *Land*—Encroachment of agricultural land by urban areas, the sell-off of land and water rights to the oil industry and developers, diversion of land to alternative energy generation, and land degradation due to brush and invasive species leads to higher water and land prices and higher legal risk due to lawsuits.
- *Workforce*—There are decreasing numbers of managers and laborers with an agriculture education and background, creating an inconsistent and less qualified workforce for the industry.

- *Economics*—Rising production and processing costs and flat or decreasing commodity prices endanger the industry’s economic viability. Small farm and ranch operators find it more difficult to compete with larger corporate operations.
- *Public Perception*—The general public and media is not fully aware of the importance of the agriculture industry and have misconceptions regarding industry practices and food safety (e.g., genetically modified foods).
- *Markets*—Lack of access to consistent markets for crops is increasingly problematic for small producers.
- *Alternative Energy*—The expansion of solar arrays and wind turbines is having an impact on the industry due to diversion of land for energy generation, land damage from accidents (e.g., fires, lubrication spills), as well as impact on bird migration and possible impact on weather patterns.
- *Pollination*—Pollinating insects continue to decrease in health and numbers, which threatens agriculture production.

Challenges

These trends lead to a number of challenges which were prioritized by the participants.

1. Continued access to water
2. Regulatory over-reach and interference
3. Accurate public information regarding food and the agriculture industry
4. Active engagement from stakeholders in policy change for the industry
5. Consistent access to markets which generate a viable return on investment
6. Barriers to entry making succession planning more difficult
7. Public perception of the industry
8. Cost of government policies to small farm and ranch operators

Other challenges mentioned by participants, include:

- Urbanization and other diversions of agricultural land
- Access to qualified technical assistance from government agencies and universities
- Lack of long-term tax incentive programs
- Inadequate transportation infrastructure
- Economies of scale needed for operations
- Lack of rural representation in the state legislature
- Immigration reform
- Adequate and consistent work force
- Apathy within the industry
- Right to farm resistance
- Worker’s compensation costs
- Misconceptions regarding genetically modified foods
- Cost of fuel for transporting produce outside of local areas

Solutions

Given the challenges, participants were asked to recommend potential solutions that would make the most positive difference in the industry.

Water

1. Ensure water policy becomes the number one issue for political candidates.
2. Mandate that municipalities conserve more water and provide incentives to reclaim and reuse water at least three times.
3. Lobby to secure additional funding to improve water planning, monitoring, conservation and management.
4. Expand the list of beneficial use of water to include “in-stream”.
5. Embrace weather modification through conservation, cloud seeding, shade balls, etc.
6. Maintain current water rights and improve enforcement of forfeiture laws.

Regulations & Business Climate

7. Change government policies that negatively impact the industry.
8. Build support for the right to farm by improving the perception of the industry through a well-known spokesperson.
9. Improve the business climate for the industry by reducing regulations, improving permitting time, etc.
10. Improve succession planning for the next generation by removing barriers.

Public Education

11. Provide public education about food and agriculture from early childhood through college.
12. Invest more funding in education.
13. Ensure technology literacy for all generations.
14. Increase industry involvement in education by removing the barriers to the classrooms that agriculture educators encounter.

Industry Stakeholder Engagement

15. Encourage individuals to get involved in industry issues and have a voice in the decisions at every level, local through federal.
16. Build a unified voice with a broad view for the industry.

Local Food Policy & Markets

17. Invest more to feed New Mexicans first.
18. Ensure access to local markets so that schools, hospitals and restaurants have access to local produce.

Public Perception

19. Invest in a well-coordinated public relations campaign, targeting both students and adults, to promote the importance of the industry and correct misconceptions/misinformation about industry practices.
20. Educate policymakers about the industry, its issues and opportunities, through NM Ag True Tours and other strategies.

Research

21. Invest additional funds for research in agriculture, technology, marketing, etc.

Meeting Demographics

Stakeholder Groups	# Participants	Counties	# Participants
Commercial Production & Marketing	2	Bernalillo	1
Education & Research	9	Chaves	9
Farming/Ranching	20	Curry	1
Financial Lending & Grantmaking	2	De Baca	5
Government Support & Regulation	10	Dona Ana	1
Soil & Water	2	Eddy	9
Staff (NMF)	3	Lea	4
		Lincoln	4
		Otero	1
		Roosevelt	8
		Sandoval	2
		Santa Fe	3