



Resilience in New Mexico Agriculture Albuquerque Regional Meeting Summary

Introduction

The **Resilience in New Mexico Agriculture** regional meeting in Albuquerque was convened on January 13, 2016. A diverse group of 60 people from eight different counties attended the meeting, including farmers, ranchers, commercial producers and marketers, educators, researchers, financial lenders, grantmakers, government professionals, soil and water experts, advocates, health professionals, landscapers and media.

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

- *Industry Support*—There is more interest by policymakers and professionals in the government, nonprofit, education and health sectors in working with members of the agriculture industry. Better communication and collaboration among consumers, communities and the industry is also on the rise. A broad range of advocates work to increase access to funding, training, distribution, aggregation and market opportunities and help the state's agriculture economy grow.
- *Technology & Methods*—Many farmers are using improved methods that conserve water, enhance soil health and require less labor. New technology is available to address changes in climate and improve water mapping, monitoring and management. Evolving research in soil biology, soil carbon sequestration and dryland farming are changing some land management practices.
- *Markets*—There is increased awareness, participation and support from consumers regarding the value of local, fresh produce and the connection to people's health. Government programs such as the ability to use SNAP Double Up Food Bucks benefits in farmer's markets and recurring funds appropriated to schools to buy local food expand markets for local producers. Retail grocery stores are beginning to adapt to this trend for local grown produce. In addition, new markets for grass-fed produce, specialty brewers and local wine are more in demand.
- *Conservation*—There is an increase in seed saving and seed exchanges which enhances diversity.
- *Economics*—Some agriculture products are in greater demand and have been able to secure premium pricing.
- *Youth Interest*—There are more efforts to interest youth in agriculture careers. More grant funding for school gardens and mentorship programs have increased youth participation and excitement for the industry. There are increased efforts to provide more information on available resources to new producers.
- *Urban Gardening*—There is an increase in urban gardens, at least for self-sufficient use, as evidenced by community gardens, senior center gardens, school hoop gardens, home gardens and roof top gardens.

Negative

- *Water*— Access to clean and abundant water will continue to be an important issue to both urban and rural dwellers. There is continued friction regarding the allocation of water among municipalities, industries, and the environment. Industry practices (e.g., water-intensive crops, disproportionate water consumption between livestock and plants) and municipal practices (e.g., lack of water reclamation, transfer of water rights) add to this friction.
- *Regulations*—The historical division between individual rights and government control continues. Laws and regulations regarding inconsistent application of property taxes, estate taxes, costs of insurance for workers and food safety laws add to this conflict.
- *Producers & 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. Although youth and returning veterans are interested in the industry, the high start-up cost of land, equipment and infrastructure is a deterrent.
- *Land*—There is a decline in land available for agriculture due to both urban development as well as declining soil health and topsoil loss.
- *Economics*—Local fresh, healthy food is more expensive and the average consumer can be priced out of the market for this produce. However, lower prices can hurt local growers. Exports of products (i.e., beef, fruits, vegetables) can also undercut the prices local producers.
- *Markets*—Although growing, continued access to local markets (e.g., schools, hospitals, institutions, grocers, restaurants) is still limited.
- *Public Perception*—Consumers and policymakers are not fully aware of the importance of the agriculture industry and have misconceptions regarding industry practices.
- *Food Waste*—Too much food continues to be wasted. Organizations that participate in the holistic life-cycle approach to food production and recovery, experience difficulties due to funding needs for labor, trucks and outreach, as well as liability regulations.
- *Group Friction*—There continues to be friction among stakeholder groups connected to (i.e., agriculturists, environmentalists, and consumers) and within (i.e., large, medium and small operators) the agriculture industry. Tension points include protected species, predator reintroductions, use of antibiotics and pesticides, genetically modified seeds and foods, and competition for resources and return on investments).
- *Resources*—Resources that have an impact on the health of the agriculture industry continue to be limited (i.e., cutbacks in vocational agriculture and youth programs in schools, rising college tuition costs, lack of short-term and flexible-schedule classes for continuing education for farmers and ranchers, less government investment in some areas, decreased incentives for farming and ranching).
- *Technology and Methods*—Lack of education on new methods and decreasing diversity of seed and crops inhibits the health of the agriculture industry.
- *Climate Change*—Concerns about a changing climate continue to add pressure to the agriculture industry.

Challenges

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

1. Accurate consumer, policymaker and regulator information and education regarding benefits of local foods, healthy soil practices, and water use and conservation, as well as education for producers regarding consumer demand and start-up operations
2. Barriers to entry making attraction of new producers to the industry more difficult
3. Continued and fair access to water
4. Regulatory climate that is not aligned or supportive of resilient strategies
5. Lack of political will to create a culture of change for policy changes
6. Long-term, collaborative, multi-sector leadership to build out and maintain programs and relevant policies
7. Soil health and topsoil loss
8. Status of the supply chain infrastructure
9. Reducing food and manure waste

Solutions

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

Consumer & Policymaker Education

1. Increase funding for NMSU-Cooperative Extension Service agents to educate youth and adults.
2. Increase media support (i.e., weekly column or agriculture section) for the agriculture industry focusing on positive stories, connections between hunger and health policies, and issues regarding to water and land use.
3. Use social media as an education tool.
4. Sponsor community activities at farmer's markets to provide information on resources.
5. Local food producers in collaboration with farmer's markets could deliver a produce item to each legislative office with a message of importance regarding agriculture policy.
6. Hospitals could give a basket of fresh food with healthy menus, as well as health and resource information to patients who are being discharged.
7. Expand health councils and community health workers.
8. Teach the connection between food and the source of food in the classroom and give fresh food with healthy menus to take home.
9. Provide more funding for school gardens, cooking classes, etc.
10. Provide mentors and internships to new farmers and ranchers.
11. Create an app for technical agriculture information.

Producers & Succession

12. Make agriculture part of the K-12 curriculum.
13. Incorporate agriculture and food/nutrition as part of the STEM curriculum in schools.
14. Increase investment in local programs such as FFA, 4-H and Farm to School.
15. Pay farmers and ranchers to be involved in education and outreach (e.g. supervise school garden).
16. Give school credit for practical experience on a farm.
17. Provide financial support for school field trips to local farms.
18. Use animals and honey bees to encourage youth interest in agriculture.
19. Provide mentors (youth will relate to a person more than an organization).
20. Connect farmers to markets beyond farmer's markets (e.g., schools, retirement homes, etc.).
21. Build a local food entrepreneur incubator for starting up local food businesses.
22. Develop accelerator models to create new start-ups to address community needs and issues.
23. Use best practice models.

Water & Soil

24. Mandate tracking of water use not just withdrawals.
25. Clarify the legal parameters of "use it or lose it"
26. Improve the information available on water leasing.
27. Define the environment as a beneficial use of water.
28. Conduct a study on water rights and alternatives to prior appropriation practices from other states.
29. Address the adjudication process.
30. Conduct additional groundwater mapping.
31. Change water storage practices (e.g., develop shallow and deep aquifer ground water storage, both within the agriculture and water reservoir systems)
32. Transition from reliance on snowpack and increase water production through monsoonal rains, while managing floods.
33. Reconnect the water flows in rivers and arroyos to flood plains.
34. Support watershed-scale restoration and management.
35. Better manage rangelands.
36. Conduct satellite monitoring of rangeland coverage.

37. Improve water conservation and inhibit evaporation within the agriculture system by providing incentives to use resilient practices to improve soil health (i.e., cover crops, rotate crops, no-till farming, green manure, development of organic matter, etc.)
38. Conduct a study of heirloom crops and crop biodiversity in order to respond to local climate conditions.
39. Provide incentives for drought tolerant crops and disincentives for high-water use crops.
40. Increase value-added production.
41. Provide compensation for organic farming and carbon sequestration which conserves water and improves the environment.
42. Shift incentives from fossil fuels.
43. Provide education regarding meat consumption.
44. Agree on and apply the best science available.

Regulatory & Business Climate

45. Organize at the local city and county level to focus on zoning regulations that protect food production.
46. Provide more advocacy training to agriculture stakeholders.
47. Encourage more participation in NM Food and Agriculture Policy and Health Policy Councils.
48. Decrease zoning impediments to urban farming.

Political Will

49. Engage and educate voters, communities and political leaders.
50. Elect agriculture-friendly leaders.
51. Provide data and information.
52. Extend definition of agricultural value beyond purely monetary value.
53. Support organizations that can influence political will (e.g., bureaus, policy councils, agencies, cooperatives, etc.).
54. Increase local food purchasing by political agencies for meetings, luncheons, etc. and advertise where the food comes from at the meetings.
55. Increase awareness of how agriculture concerns relate to various agencies and departments.

Leadership

56. Use NMSU-Cooperative Extension Service to guide state support.
57. Support regional food and agriculture councils and collaborate through periodic state-level meetings.
58. Provide incentives for participation, measurement and validation of success.
59. Fund existing efforts to support training, youth, and industry strategic planning.

Supply Chain

60. Establish food cooperatives where producers deliver their products to a single distributor who then delivers the products to various markets in the area for a percentage of the produce price.
61. Establish more community supported agriculture groups, food hubs, and cooperatives.
62. Provide more education about value-added programs (e.g., Global Animal Partnership certification).
63. Follow up with the "Farm to Table/Food and Agriculture Policy Council's Strategic Plan for NM Grown Fresh Fruits & Vegetables for School Meals" initiative.

Food & Manure Waste

64. Change the regulations and illustrate the economic opportunity of food recovery.
65. Replicate existing models.
66. Establish cooperation among grocery stores, restaurants, farmer's markets, food banks, shelters, etc.
67. Establish city/county compost facilities.
68. Develop green waste landscapes.
69. Use front-end menu planning to shift to consumer demand while still maintain a focus on health food.
70. Use research, science and market incentives to decrease manure waste.
71. Educate consumers and policymakers regarding the food cycle and prioritize food production for people in relation to animals and waste.

Meeting Demographics

Stakeholder Groups	# Participants	Counties	# Participants
Advocacy	9	Bernalillo	31
Commercial Production & Marketing	1	Catron	1
Education & Research	17	Dona Ana	2
Farming/Ranching	8	Sandoval	9
Financial Lending & Grantmaking	4	Santa Fe	10
Government Support & Regulation	8	Sierra	1
Soil & Water	3	Torrance	3
Health	3	Valencia	3
Landscape Architecture	1		
Media	1		
Staff (NMF)	5		