



# Resilience in New Mexico Agriculture Silver City Regional Meeting Summary

## Introduction

The **Resilience in New Mexico Agriculture** regional meeting in Silver City was convened on January 15, 2016. A diverse group of 41 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 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

- *Technology & Methods*—Due to improved tractors, harvesters, and irrigation systems, many farmers and ranchers are reducing their production time and costs and producing more diverse and affordable products. Science advances such as geographic information systems and plant genetics are also contributing to more sustainable economics.
- *Markets*—Increased demand for locally grown food and locally prepared food has expanded local markets for producers (i.e., restaurants, retail stores, farmer’s markets). With the legalization of medical cannabis, more edibles are being processed which has created a niche market opportunity.
- *Conservation*—There is increased emphasis on agriculture practices that conserve water and maintain healthy soil and rangeland.
- *Industry Support*—The agriculture industry is seeing increased support from communities, as well as local, state and federal funding for the implementation of best practices. There has been an increase in USDA resources to stimulate local economies and Farm Credit programs to support young farmers.
- *Economics*—The agriculture industry has seen growth in demand for dairy, pecan and chili products which has increased profit potential for these producers. Improvements in transportation infrastructure has also helped decrease costs.
- *Population*—The population of the world is increasing and will need the products of the agriculture industry.
- *Food Safety and Waste*—Food safety has been improved through efforts to insure food can be traced to its source, and food waste has been reduced through the acceptance of using “ugly fruit” and community composting.

### Negative

- *Water*—Access to clean and abundant water will continue to be uncertain for the industry due to the diversion of water from agriculture use, cities and counties purchasing agriculture land and water rights and the conflicts among urban dwellers, agriculturists and environmentalists over the use of the Gila River. Opportunities for producing low water crops (e.g., hemp) are being overlooked.

- *Regulations*—Members of the agriculture industry perceive many regulations as interfering with growth and return on investments (e.g., worker minimum wage, worker’s compensation insurance, trade policies with international trade partners, environmental protections, school regulations that ignore seasonal produce and restrict access to local markets, and the Food Safety Modification Act that restricts the sale of home-processed goods). The inconsistent application of regulations is also a concern (e.g., pollution of water by mines).
- *Producers & Succession*—More producers are needed to keep up with production demand. Many farmers and ranchers are retiring or going out of business for economic reasons. The next generation is losing interest in the industry and facing very steep barriers to entry.
- *Land*—Agriculture land is decreasing due to the impact of regulations, costs and prohibitive barriers to start-up businesses. The diversion of land to cities, counties and developers is also a factor (e.g., loss of water rights, lawsuits by neighboring subdivision residents).
- *Economics*—The rising costs for land and fewer options for access to capital is becoming a challenge for producers.
- *Markets*—Many local producers lack access to local buyers (e.g., institutional purchasing practices in schools are restrictive). Due to the lack of inspectors, cattle markets are moving farther away, increasing costs to ranchers.
- *Public Perception*—Negative media coverage and social media misinformation on food facts are creating a disconnect between consumers and producers.
- *Workforce*—Many agricultural laborers are seasonal and there has been a decrease in available labor. This also has an economic impact on communities as the unemployment rate is often higher than reported.
- *Import/Export Policies*—More food processing is done overseas which affects the local workforce. Also, supply infrastructure is non-existent in some rural areas.
- *Food Waste*—Overstocking in grocery stores and inefficient, cruel conditions in poultry and livestock operations lead to food waste.
- *Group Friction*—There is friction between large and small producers.

## Challenges

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

1. Regulatory over-reach and interference
2. Consistent availability of qualified labor
3. Support of policymakers, particularly at the state level
4. Continued access to water
5. Production costs, especially for small producers (e.g., land, labor, infrastructure)
6. Education and retention of the next generation in agriculture
7. Engaging and motivating people to advocate for change
8. Adequate infrastructure and technology incentives

## Solutions

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

### Regulatory & Business Climate

1. Educate policymakers and voters on agriculture issues.
2. Increase advocacy with legislators.
3. Curb the use of lobbyists.
4. Ensure agriculture industry representation in policymaking groups.
5. Freeze regulations until current ones are implemented.
6. Ensure the funding of mandates.
7. Give more control to the local and state levels.
8. Require counties to collaborate and not duplicate efforts.
9. Resolve immigration issues.

### Workforce

10. Increase mechanization and plant genetics.
11. Increase funds for agriculture continuing education and retrain unemployed workers who are currently on welfare.
12. Revive the cultural reconnection to the industry.
13. Establish a guest worker program.
14. Increase agriculture training for youth.
15. Fund implementation of solutions.

### Policymaker Education

16. Support Ag Day during the legislative session.
17. Encourage the NM Department of Agriculture to arrange meetings between legislators and all levels of producers.
18. Sponsor tours to agriculture operations.
19. Organize dinners on farms and ranches to discuss industry regulations, challenges and successes.

### Water

20. Encourage water retention and collection by individuals, as well as at the industry and statewide levels (e.g., home-based collection, dam building, multiple reservoirs and holding ponds).
21. Clarify regulations on who can buy water rights, how water can be collected and where water can/cannot be distributed (The example used was efforts by an overseas buyer to purchase water rights in the area and sell it on the open market to the highest bidder).
22. Provide economic incentives to retain, conserve and collect water (e.g., installing low-flow toilets).
23. Re-establish the acequia systems in this area and ensure they are functional and maintained.
24. Encourage more efficient irrigation practices.
25. Retain soil via composting, amendments and green housing.

### Producers & Succession

26. Increase the industry's presence in early childhood education.
27. Increase the exposure of the agriculture industry in K-12 classrooms (e.g., Home Economics, FFA).
28. Provide more hands-on, agriculture-related learning in the school curriculum (e.g., math, science).
29. Increase career and trade- oriented focus in schools.
30. Increase work study programs (e.g., get youth more involved in producing food).
31. Reduce the stigma of "staying close to home."
32. Provide tax credit incentives to help keep farms in the family.
33. Support groups organize social interactions which will encourage youth to learn more about agriculture.
34. Find the most appropriate groups that can pull industry sectors together.

### Advocacy

35. Increase public events in parks, home & garden expos and farmer's markets.
36. Encourage media coverage of agriculture issues.
37. Use social media to engage youth.
38. Provide incentives for school programs.
39. Provide education on food production.
40. Serve healthier foods in schools.

### Production Costs, Technology & Methods

41. Educate producers regarding irrigation systems innovations and subsidize their transition to better equipment and methods.
42. Increase the level of government outreach regarding support programs.
43. Continue grant funding for conservation methods.
44. Continue USDA-Farm Service Agency loans for equipment.
45. Support conversion to solar/wind power through tax credits and loans, and prevent power companies from restricting access to the power grid or making access cost prohibitive.

## Meeting Demographics

<b>Stakeholder Groups</b>	<b># Participants</b>	<b>Counties</b>	<b># Participants</b>
Advocacy	2	Bernalillo	2
Commercial Production & Marketing	2	Dona Ana	3
Education & Research	8	Grant	20
Farming/Ranching	18	Hidalgo	3
Financial Lending & Grantmaking	1	Luna	9
Government Support & Regulation	3	Sandoval	2
Health	3	Santa Fe	1
Media	1	Other	1
Staff (NMF)	3		