



Resilience in New Mexico Agriculture Taos Regional Meeting Summary

Introduction

The **Resilience in New Mexico Agriculture** regional meeting in Taos was convened on February 11, 2016. A diverse group of 57 people from nine different counties attended the meeting, including farmers, ranchers, commercial producers and marketers, educators, researchers, financial lenders, grantmakers, government professionals, soil and water experts and advocates.

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*—Many farmers and ranchers are using improved methods of land rehabilitation and restoration. There is more recognition for the value of carbon sequestration in soil and more focus on regenerative agriculture practices.
- *Markets*—There is increased awareness from consumers regarding the connection between their diet and health. Healthy, local food is more valued, especially by young people. This has led to an increase in farmers' markets and more focus on community food systems and food hubs. There is also more institutional support for procuring local produce. Niche markets are more available for the regional and national marketing of New Mexico products. Agriculture tourism is also becoming more popular.
- *Conservation*—There is increased interest by acequia farmers in water conservation. Watershed management and forest restoration is also more prevalent. Natural agriculture practices such as organic production and the use of solar power is on the rise. Land stewardship has been enhanced through the use of more drought resistant crops and less insecticides and pesticides.
- *Industry Support*—Communities and disparate groups within communities are more willing to find ways of working together. The support of local water advisory councils, the USDA Natural Resource Conservation Service, the USDA Good Agricultural Practices audits and the USDA support of new, veteran, minority and women producers is valued. The agriculture tax exemption has motivated some people to get back into agriculture production.
- *Economics*—The price for some agriculture products has risen (e.g., beef). Livestock production is not irrigation dependent, and therefore is a good agriculture choice for the area.
- *Urban Gardening*—There is an increase in urban gardens.

Negative

- *Water*—Access to clean and abundant water will continue to be an important issue. The acequia infrastructure in this region is an important asset and stronger support by both leaders and volunteers are needed. Progress in adjudications,

more certainty regarding water rights and equity in the sales of water rights is also needed. The timeframe for applying and receiving grant funding for water projects is seen as lengthy. More local control of water issues is also being called for.

- *Regulations*—Some federal regulations have decreased access to range land, especially in those areas designated as wilderness and monuments. The National Environmental Policy Act is seen as hampering good land management. The degree of government oversight and bureaucracy is seen as a burden for many producers. Overall, there is a need for policies that are specific to the scale of operation and to the area.
- *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 due to property taxes and the high cost of land and equipment. Fewer young people are moving into rural communities to take over farming and ranching operations. Many young people are not interested in the agriculture and acequia traditions of the area. There is also decreasing focus on agriculture as a career in the public education system.
- *Land Use & Health*—There is continued loss of agriculture land. Higher property taxes are driving farmers off their land, and the high cost of land makes producer revenue unsustainable. Grazing permits are becoming more restrictive. Urbanization in some areas is also diverting land from agriculture use. In addition, the health of land is being damaged by drought, erosion and movement away from traditional methods of land management. Bare land leads to lower water retention, increased loss of soil to wind erosion, and land fragmentation.
- *Economics*—It is becoming more difficult to make a living income as a farmer or rancher or a living wage as an agricultural worker.
- *Markets*—Although growing, access to some local markets (e.g., schools, hospitals, institutions, grocers, restaurants) is still limited.
- *Public Perception*—Media coverage of agriculture issues tends to focus on negative rather than positive events. This can also lead to a misinformed public.
- *Food Waste*—Too much food continues to be wasted.
- *Stakeholder Friction*—There continues to be friction between agriculture and advocate groups. Tension points include the use of genetically modified seeds and the use of antibiotics and pesticides. In addition, small and mid-sized producers believe their needs are overshadowed by attention to the needs of larger commercial producers.
- *Investment*—There is a lack of incentives for agriculture production at the state level.
- *Technology & Methods*—There is a need for increased use of effective traditional methods and increased scientific review of contemporary methods (e.g., pesticides). In addition, there could be broader inclusion of animals and crops that do not rely on irrigation in this region.
- *Climate Change*—Concerns about new climate patterns and the challenge to make adaptive responses continue to add pressure to the agriculture industry.

Challenges

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

1. Secure water rights and continued access to water that is well managed and affordable
2. Barriers to entry making attraction of new producers to the industry more difficult
3. Consumer, policymaker and media education regarding the importance of agriculture, the value of sustainable living, climate change, food safety/diversity and water economics, as well as education for producers regarding marketing and business management
4. Programs and markets that ensure more revenue to crop and livestock producers, especially small producers, and more affordable food for consumers
5. Strengthening the interface between economics and ecology to reclaim, restore and keep farm and range land healthy and in production, as well as ensuring a positive impact on the economics of farming and ranching (i.e., support regenerative practices that result in living wages)
6. A shift in agricultural production to crops, livestock and practices that are adaptable to a changing climate
7. Collaboration to ensure industry stakeholders speak with a united voice
8. Regulations that do not add to production costs (e.g., worker's compensation insurance) or uncertainty for investments in agriculture operations (e.g., permitting time)

Solutions

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

Water

1. Pass legislation that securely attaches water rights to the land.
2. Improve the distribution infrastructure for water.
3. Educate the general public regarding the value of acequias, the need for irrigation, and how this practice replenishes our natural resources.
4. Support water harvesting, passive water storage, roof catchment and water banking benefits.
5. Restore wetland and grass land environments.
6. Encourage sustainable land practices for healthy range management.
7. Provide incentives for proactive land conservation practices.
8. Pass legislation that enables county assessors to protect green belts for proactive land management.

Producers & Succession

9. Involve parents and their children in agriculture workshops, farm days, farm tours and summer camps.
10. Provide funding for young people in agriculture.
11. Protect agriculture land and water.
12. Develop and expand markets to strengthen the economic base for agriculture.
13. Support practices that keep land and water healthy.

Consumer, Policymaker & Industry Education

14. Make better use of social media to communicate about agriculture and the importance of preserving an agriculture economy.
15. Establish a Habitat for Humanity-like program for farms to provide hands-on education for community members.
16. Engage community members in agriculture issues through buyers like Whole Foods Markets and other retail grocers.
17. Build a base of advocates for agriculture to ensure stakeholders get a fair share of government funding.
18. Connect agriculture producers with decision-makers.
19. Provide more information regarding land leasing opportunities and land that has become available for purchase.
20. Connect returning veterans with agriculture opportunities.
21. Increase agriculture-related jobs available in the Cooperative Extension Service and government agencies.
22. Make better use of existing education groups and tools (e.g., Future Farmers of America, 4H, Cooperative Extension Service, NM Range Camp, Google Earth).
23. Adopt agriculture education standards in K-12 schools.
24. Connect agriculture education to STEM funding.
25. Connect local agriculture stakeholders with school children.
26. Provide support for youth studying agriculture in colleges.
27. Establish a program based on the AmeriCorps model for agriculture.
28. Allow juvenile offenders to complete their community service on farms.

Support for Small Producers

29. Provide support for agriculture graduates to help with startup costs for equipment and supplies.
30. Forgive student loans for agriculture graduates who become farmers and ranchers.
31. Provide mentors.
32. Encourage more meat processing operations in the state.
33. Develop tax policies that will level the economic playing field for all producers, regardless of scale.
34. Restructure insurance requirements (e.g., business-transportation, worker's compensation, liability).
35. Advertise the connection between health and nutrition in retail grocers.
36. Fund local food cooperatives and other agriculture stakeholder collaborations.
37. Support Community Supported Agriculture, Farmers' Markets, Farm to Table, and SNAP/EBT programs.

Economics & Ecology:

38. Structure a way to compensate farmers and ranchers for the full scope of ecological benefits and services they provide to society (i.e., land management practices that keeps the land healthy and productive, supports wildlife and pollinators, produces clean water and air).
39. Reclaim land through better practices that fits the ecology of the area.
40. Reduce bare land to increase its value, production and economic benefits.
41. Fund farmers and ranchers that provide food and habitat to endangered and reintroduced species, which then protects crops and livestock from predators.
42. Use integrated and holistic methods for land planning (e.g., grazing where applicable, seasonal extension, density clustering, dry land farming).

Shift in Production

43. Increase funding to the Cooperative Extension Service to educate the public regarding production practices.
44. Build bridges among cultural, traditional and new innovative practices, and create opportunities for dialogue that are issue-specific and action-oriented.
45. Use cooperative business models.
46. Identify and support leaders who are good communicators.

United Industry Voice

47. Build collaborations within existing industry sectors.
48. Improve and regionalize outreach and education.
49. Make better use of technology (e.g., televised meetings, internet, YouTube).

Regulatory & Business Climate

50. Simplify and streamline permitting and other regulatory processes.
51. Create interagency communication protocols.
52. Create an ombudsmen or agent position to help interpret polices and regulations and facilitate the processes.
53. Allow more state and less federal control.
54. Track and communicate farming and ranching bills during the legislative sessions.
55. Create coalitions and boards with a common goal to influence policymakers.

Meeting Demographics

Stakeholder Groups	# Participants	Counties	# Participants
Advocacy	4	Bernalillo	5
Commercial Production & Marketing	2	Colfax	4
Education & Research	9	Dona Ana	1
Farming/Ranching	21	Mora	1
Financial Lending & Grantmaking	4	Rio Arriba	6
Government Support & Regulation	7	Sandoval	1
Soil & Water	5	Santa Fe	11
Staff (NMF)	3	Taos	27
Other	2	Valencia	1