



# Resilience in New Mexico Agriculture

## Abiquiu Regional Meeting

### Summary

#### Introduction

The **Resilience in New Mexico Agriculture** regional meeting in Abiquiu was convened on February 10, 2016. A diverse group of 39 people from six different counties attended the meeting, including farmers, ranchers, educators, researchers, financial lenders, grantmakers, government professionals 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*—There is better understanding of water conservation and use, as well as improved technology for water conservation and production (e.g., water desalinization). More farmers are adopting new water irrigation technology. In addition, there are more options available at a lower cost.
- *Markets*—Consumers are becoming more health conscious as they see the connection between food and diseases like diabetes. There is more interest in buying local foods. More progressive policies like the SNAP Double-up Food Bucks have helped expand the market for healthy fruits and vegetables from local farms at farmers' markets. Farmers also have more marketing access to schools. More food hubs are also being established. Lastly, there is increased use of plants for medicine and overall health.
- *Land*—In this region there is a strong culture of farming, and this is receiving more cultural awareness and acceptance. There is more recognition of historical land use and the need for preservation and remediation.
- *Industry Support*—There is more communication and collaboration among government agencies, producers and young people (e.g., more access to resources and education).
- *Economics*—The price of some commodities have improved (e.g., cattle).
- *Youth Interest*—There seems to be more interest by youth in agriculture. Some see the industry as part of STEM education (especially the science aspect). Some are interested in more natural, organic, small-scale production.
- *Local Producers*—More extended families, women and retirees are getting involved with agriculture production, some for the first time. There is also more collaboration regarding practices and products to make their operations viable.

## Negative

- *Water*—There is concern regarding the certainty of a consistent water supply without contamination. The recurring droughts, major forest fires and slow-moving adjudications create uncertainty and inhibits investments. Water scarcity causes changes in crops and contributes to more fallow land.
- *Bureaucracy & Regulations*—Due to the multiple-use restrictions of the U.S. Forest Service and Bureau of Land Management, there are fewer permits for sheep and cattle grazing available. Increased recreation land use is crowding out agricultural land use. Producers also experience difficulty in engaging in programs like Farm to Table or Farm to School due to the regulations. Federal polices like the Endangered Species Act and the Food Safety Modernization Act make production more expensive. The number of requests for water efficiency projects seem to be overwhelming USDA Natural Resource Conservation Service staff and funding resources.
- *Producers & Succession*—The agriculture workforce is aging. Producer retirement and a lack of interest from youth will result in a decrease in family-owned and mid-sized farms and in a loss of traditional and culture knowledge and practices. The economies of scale needed to generate a viable economic return make it difficult to expand an operation or startup a new operation. Land and capital costs are high and resources for support are limited.
- *Land*—Land is being diverted from agriculture use through federal policies and urban expansion. The agriculture culture and traditions of Native Americans and Hispanics are being lost. Some agriculture land has been divided among family descendants in plots too small for viable operations. Some water rights have been lost. Land, even without dwellings, is being priced at high prices, and finding land for leasing is also expensive.
- *Economics*—Production costs are high and the returns are low for many producers. There is increased competition for limited funding.
- *Markets*—Markets for local foods are still limited, especially in schools, hospitals and other institutions.
- *Workforce*—Finding reliable labor to cultivate and harvest high value crops is becoming more difficult. Many members of the workforce no long see agriculture as a viable career and leave the industry for higher paying jobs elsewhere.
- *Climate Change*—The weather pattern in the region has changed, resulting in a shorter growing season.
- *Food Waste*—Some products (e.g., apples) are not marketable due to the USDA grading system and the Good Agriculture Practice certification requirements. This leads to unnecessary food waste.
- *Public Perception*—Some members of the general public have a negative view of agriculture due to genetically modified produce and the use of steroids and antibiotics in livestock.
- *Group Friction*—There is an impression that environmental groups are working against traditional farmers. In addition, there seems to be unequal influence among the different sectors of the industry.

## Challenges

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

1. Continued access to the natural resources vital to agriculture (i.e., water, land and native seed sovereignty)
2. Access to economic resources for small-scale producers
3. Legislative policies that are supportive of agriculture
4. Regulatory oversight that is not unduly burdensome and costly
5. Reducing barriers to market entry
6. Adapting to a changing climate and its impacts (e.g., drought, wild fires, water scarcity)
7. Education for youth, producers and the public regarding the importance of agriculture and the need to keep the industry viable for all
8. Developing healthy local food systems
9. Engaging the next generation in agriculture careers with access to capital, land and knowledge

## Solutions

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

### Natural Resources

1. Complete adjudications and ensure a higher allocation of water is available for agricultural use via legislation.
2. Ensure water rights are attached to land.
3. Encourage the adoption of better irrigation systems.
4. Encourage the use of systems that recycle water.
5. Protect watersheds.
6. Develop better polices to protect water quality.
7. Improve groundwater quality via technology.
8. Improve soil health to maximize water retention.
9. Improve environmental testing.
10. Require the efficient use of water in both urban and rural areas.

### Small-scale Production Support

11. Improve marketing of New Mexico specific or heritage products.
12. Provide education and startup funding for new agribusinesses.
13. Provide education for beginning farmers.
14. Provide education regarding the most viable crops for production and distribution (i.e., match demand with supply).
15. Provide a tax credit for investing in a farmer.

### Legislative & Regulatory Support

16. Require the federal government to mitigate the impacts of unfunded mandates.
17. Connect agriculture stakeholders with policymakers to discuss the negative impacts of legislation and regulations and address unintended consequences.
18. Make the state water plan the launching point for addressing state and federal policies that impact producers.
19. Bring agriculture stakeholders together at the local level.
20. Encourage compromise among grassroots' and special interest organizations.
21. Ensure broader access to information to increase awareness of resources (e.g., low interest loans).
22. Revise policies and regulations to help small producers compete.
23. Provide technical assistance to small farmers (e.g., labeling, marketing).

### Producers & Succession

24. Publicize funding and subsidy sources.
25. Increase gap loans and grants.
26. Match mentors who can transfer their knowledge to young farmers.
27. Develop a clearing house for uncultivated lands and connect farmers to landowners.
28. Compensate agriculturalists to keep the "commons" and act as stewards of natural resources.
29. Expand opportunities for all producers, regardless of scale.

### Climate Change

30. Provide funding to help farmers deal with the effects of climate change.
31. Bring market innovations to scale to help mitigate extreme losses from weather (e.g., Community Supported Agriculture).
32. Educate community members on how they can help.
33. Encourage everyone to anticipate and plan for change.

### Education & Youth Engagement

34. Review what is working in other states.
35. Increase public funding for agriculture programs in public schools.
36. Make an agriculture class mandatory in public schools.
37. Incorporate life labs and gardens, taught by those involved in agriculture, in elementary schools.
38. Increase vocational agriculture programs in high schools.
39. Incorporate agriculture into the STEM curriculum.
40. Provide a diverse, updated curriculum applicable to today's youth.
41. Incorporate experiential learning and integrate historical and cultural knowledge.
42. Teach self-sustainability to youth.
43. Provide mentorship programs.
44. Provide beginning farmer and rancher grants.

### Local Food Systems

45. Fund the development of local food systems and home-based industries.
46. Provide mentors and incentive programs.
47. Develop cooperatives and cost shares.
48. Educate state legislators to increase communication and collaboration.
49. Leverage existing programs at the local, state and federal levels.

### Meeting Demographics

Stakeholder Groups	# Participants	Counties	# Participants
Advocacy	2	Bernalillo	1
Education & Research	15	Dona Ana	2
Farming/Ranching	11	Rio Arriba	16
Financial Lending & Grantmaking	4	San Miguel	2
Government Support & Regulation	4	Sandoval	4
Staff (NMF)	3	Santa Fe	8
		Unknown	6