



Resilience in New Mexico Agriculture Shiprock Regional Meeting Summary

Introduction

The **Resilience in New Mexico Agriculture** regional meeting in Shiprock was convened on March 4, 2016. A group of 25 people from five different counties attended the meeting, including farmers, ranchers, educators, researchers, government professionals, financial lenders, grantmakers, advocates 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, especially in tribal communities. 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 have improved their management of water and land resources (e.g., drip irrigation).
- *Markets*—Access to local markets have increased due to farm to school initiatives.
- *Food Sovereignty*—There is increased interest in traditional agricultural practices and a return to traditional foods to address contemporary health problems. People are more conscious of health and the benefits of fresh, organic local food. More community members are getting involved in food production and preservation.
- *Industry Support*—Navajo Nation laws are favorable to producers, as profits are not taxed. In addition, farmers are more open to sharing their farming practices. The cooperative extension service is also supporting farming and ranching.
- *Youth Interest*—Some youth are getting more involved in agriculture. Elders are more involved in showing youth how to garden and eat healthy. Through hands-on field trips, youth can see the cycle of life in action.
- *Local Producers*—A local, sustainable farming movement is gaining momentum.
- *Water*—The Navajo Nation controls water that can be used for agriculture.

Negative

- *Water*—The San Juan River and other water sources are affected by industrial pollution.
- *Bureaucracy & Regulations*—The number of agencies involved, the gatekeepers, and the complex requirements hold back progress. Both tribal and state regulations and policies interfere with farming and ranching. There is limited communication and cohesive action from chapter and federal government officials.
- *Producers & Succession*—Not enough youth are actively engaged with agriculture. Traditional knowledge is not being passed down from one generation to the next.
- *Land*—Many land lots are too small to be profitable. Some land has been abandoned or has not been properly maintained (e.g., over-grazing, bare ground). Land use permits are difficult to obtain.

- *Economics*—Many farmers lack access to capital for equipment, seeds, etc. Small producers have difficulty paying off loans and interest. There are limited local sources for equipment repairs.
- *Education*—There are not enough venues for training youth who are interested in agriculture.
- *Public Perception*—The public has a false and negative impression of beef production practices.
- *Climate Change*—Land is drying out due to warming climate patterns.

Challenges

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

1. Fair distribution of water rights and use, including agricultural, municipal and other industrial uses
2. More youth involvement in farming and ranching in order to continue our cultural traditions, knowledge and legacy
3. Proper utilization of water and land resources
4. Access to needed resources (e.g., capital, land, labor) to successfully engage in farming and ranching
5. Support for local producers to increase the availability of fresh, local foods
6. Increased land acreage devoted to farming to increase profits so that producers can have a debt-free lifestyle

Solutions

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

Water Resources

1. Connect farmers with water that has no impediments in order to increase the land available for agriculture production.
2. Communicate how to improve water utilization.
3. Provide water quality data to the federal and Navajo farm boards on a regular basis.
4. Utilize our natural resources to lower the cost of living for farmers.
5. Promote new technologies and practices that use our existing natural resources (e.g., mulching).
6. Educate ourselves and the community.
7. Make the community a priority for tribal members' financially.

Youth Interest

8. Support and expand existing programs (i.e., 4H, FFA).
9. Encourage "little ones" to play in the dirt and plant something.
10. Sponsor weekend workshops for youth with hands-on projects (e.g., grow flowers for Mother's Day).
11. Organize summer youth camps.

Financial Resources

12. Promote resource fairs to share information and assistance in applying for financial resources.

Local Producers & Local Food

13. Form a multi-stakeholder working group to develop solutions for increasing the number of local producers and access to local foods.
14. Develop an independent group, outside Navajo Tribal Council, to help lobby for support of small farmers.

Land Resources

15. Consolidate fields that are adjacent, as well as expand easements and access points.
16. Streamline methods for utilizing water and land acreage in the most beneficial way.
17. Use economic data to promote the transition to producing traditional foods.
18. Provide a realistic picture of farm profitability.

Meeting Demographics

Stakeholder Groups	# Participants	Counties	# Participants
Advocacy	2	Bernalillo	1
Education & Research	6	Dona Ana	2
Farming/Ranching	11	McKinley	6
Financial Lending & Grantmaking	1	San Juan	14
Government Support & Regulation	2	Sandoval	1
Media	1	Other	1
Staff (NMF)	2		