



# Resilience in New Mexico Agriculture Farmington Regional Meeting Summary

## Introduction

The **Resilience in New Mexico Agriculture** regional meeting in Farmington was convened on March 2, 2016. A diverse group of 47 people from six 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*—There have been advancements in hybrid technology for improving agricultural productivity to meet increasing demand for food grains. Farmers and ranchers also have easier access to information on best practices, through technology. Better land management practices, such as holistic and organic ranching, have also improved the health of soil and rangeland. There has also been an increase in native seed banks to protect seed integrity. Negative trends such as higher healthcare costs and a perceived lower quality of life, seem to be driving the need for agriculture solutions that are more efficient and sustainable.
- *Local & Niche Markets*—Overall, there is increased awareness of where food comes from, a return to native diets of healthy, fresh food, and a push for local food systems. This has increased consumer demand for locally grown foods and expanded local markets such as cooperatives, farmers' markets and farm to school programs. There is also increased demand for organic meat produce which has allowed smaller-scale ranchers to promote New Mexico products in niche markets and reach consumers through internet sales.
- *Conservation*—There is more general awareness of how water is used and the need for conservation.
- *Industry Support*—There seems to be more planning and coordination among the food, health and transportation systems. Increased lobbying to elected officials for the needs of the agriculture industry is also occurring.
- *Economics*—Some produce prices are higher, especially beef, and some production costs are lower, such as fuel and fertilizer.
- *Youth Interest*—There has been renewed interest and more organization support for youth who are interested in staying engaged with agriculture.
- *Food Safety*—It is easier to trace where food comes from.
- *Family Gardening*—More families are gardening and growing food for their own consumption.

## Negative

- *Water*—There are greater demands on limited water. There is a lack of state funding for water planning and management which leaves the agriculture industry vulnerable. There is also a lack of government funding support for better irrigation systems. Water is being contaminated by other industries and through government mismanagement. Water rights are being purchased by municipalities and counties and diverted from agriculture for urban development.
- *Regulations*—Both federal and state regulations are seen as rigid and make agricultural costs higher and investments uncertain (e.g., worker's compensation taxes, taxes on tools, equipment, stock and land, restrictions from the Endangered Species Act, and the uncertainty of grazing rights).
- *Producers & Succession*—Farmers and ranchers are aging, and there is a decline in family farms. Some land parcels which have been divided among family members for generations, are now too small to support a viable farming or ranching operation. Some traditional ways of life are already lost (e.g., sheep herding). Student loan debt, the rising costs of living, and the price of land drive young farmers away from the industry. Startup costs make it more difficult for new producers to compete with established producers. Overall, there are not enough new producers to meet the gap.
- *Land*—The multi-generational break up of family farms has led to land that is no longer viable for production due to the size of the parcel or condition of the soil. Some land has been harmed from chemical fertilizers and pesticides. The encroachment of urban areas has led to the diversion of agriculture land to residential use.
- *Economics*—Access to sustainable opportunities and the availability of affordable financing has added to the instability of a farming and ranching lifestyle.
- *Investment*—There is lack of investment in local infrastructure such as storage, inspection and distribution.
- *Workforce*—There is more limited availability of those who are willing to work in the agriculture industry.
- *Markets*—Local markets are decreasing for mid-sized producers.
- *Stakeholder Friction*—The promotion of individualism and decline of community collaboration threatens agriculture. There is continued friction between environmental and agricultural groups.
- *Public Perception*—There is negative publicity and some misinformation regarding agriculture industry.
- *Education*—There is a decrease in agriculture programs in the public schools.
- *Food Safety*—There is an increase of food contamination and product recalls.
- *Pollination*—Pollinators are declining.

## Challenges

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

1. Protecting the quality and supply of essential resources such as water, soil and land
2. Continued communication and education for the general public and current and future agriculturalists
3. Regulatory over-reach and interference
4. Economic viability for small producers
5. Aging population of farmers and ranchers and the transition to the next generation
6. Access to affordable land for agricultural use
7. Local food system demand and support
8. Availability of labor for the agriculture industry

## Solutions

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

### Natural Resources

1. Educate producers on best practices.
2. Provide access to funding sources.
3. Continue water monitoring.
4. Invest in irrigation infrastructure (i.e., modernization and upgrades).
5. Practice holistic watershed management.
6. Establish an equipment lending system.
7. Utilize labor saving equipment.
8. Build soil health and organic matter to address a warming climate, water scarcity and sustainability.
9. Provide tax incentives for appropriate land stewardship.

### Communication & Education

10. Increase the use of responsible, social media.
11. Establish a clearinghouse for information.
12. Conduct field tours, education events and mobile workshops.

### Regulatory & Business Climate

13. Review and amend legislation and regulations that inhibit agriculture growth (e.g., forest management productive use regulations, state taxes on small farmers for agriculture production inputs).
14. Transfer land management from federal to the state and local level.
15. Increase the number of farmers and ranchers who are elected at the state level.
16. Build more public awareness regarding agricultural practices.
17. Support more research of best practices that show how to support the land, as well as protect rare species (e.g., feed wildlife as well as cattle, engage in rare plant cohabitation, use proper grazing techniques)
18. Index capital gains and estate taxes to inflation.
19. Set up estate trusts.

### Support for Small Producers

20. Establish a “buy NM first” program.
21. Build partnerships with buyers.
22. Provide education on business and contingency planning.
23. Reform the tax code.
24. Abolish inheritance and estate taxes or exempt agriculture from these taxes.
25. Deregulate farm credit.
26. Reform the qualification requirements for loans.
27. Encourage government-subsidized loans that have lower interest rates.
28. Encourage government-insured loans.
29. Provide incentives and subsidies to small producers.

### Producers & Succession

30. Work with higher education institutions and community colleges to increase youth interest in agriculture.
31. Provide grants and affordable loans to new farmers for both startup and operating costs.
32. Require a lower loan down payment with submission of a good business plan.
33. Support farm camps and youth clubs like “catch a heifer club” or “garden, cook and eat”
34. Incorporate agriculture issues into the social studies school curriculum (e.g., geography, government, history and economics).
35. Establish a youth-to-youth mentorship program.
36. Develop internet agriculture apps to attract youth interest.

### Land Affordability

37. Develop vision, goals, objectives and reward system on the importance of agriculture to society and follow through with the plan.
38. Establish a long-range plan for agriculture versus residential land use.
39. Restrict selling agriculture land for residential use.
40. Re-evaluate water allocation and distribution.
41. Increase efforts to communicate available land-lease and rent-toward-purchase strategies.
42. Partner with the public sector to conserve land affordability (e.g., create conservation easements or incentives for keeping water on land).
43. Provide education on land and water use.
44. Follow through on conservation efforts.
45. Continue and extend efforts to eliminate invasive plants that deplete water supply.

### Local Farming & Food Systems

46. Study local food systems to identify gaps and needs.
47. Establish food hub centers and distribution locations.
48. Increase support for local markets.
49. Encourage agriculture tourism.
50. Support supplemental programs for healthy local foods.
51. Educate the labor force of young farmers.
52. Educate consumers on the value of local foods.

### Workforce

53. Connect with faith-based and student organizations for volunteers.
54. Use the foodbank model (i.e., families help with the harvest in exchange for fresh food).

### Meeting Demographics

Stakeholder Groups	# Participants	Counties	# Participants
Advocacy	4	Bernalillo	4
Commercial Production & Marketing	2	Dona Ana	1
Education & Research	3	McKinley	1
Farming/Ranching	23	San Juan	36
Financial Lending & Grantmaking	1	Sandoval	2
Government Support & Regulation	9	Santa Fe	3
Soil & Water	2		
Staff (NMF)	3		