



Resilience in New Mexico Agriculture Tucumcari Regional Meeting Summary

Introduction

The **Resilience in New Mexico Agriculture** regional meeting in Tucumcari was convened on March 9, 2016. A diverse group of 61 people from twelve 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*—New technologies are contributing to better water and land conservation, expanded production options and effective marketing efforts. New drip irrigation conserves water and protects land. Improved water metering creates better accountability for water use. Drought resistant plants, aquaculture, hydroponics and greenhouse growing provide production options. Through the internet, producers have increased access to information including competitive data, performance analysis and more direct marketing contact with consumers.
- *Markets*—There is growing consumer demand for meat products that are grown without antibiotics or growth hormones (e.g., grass-fed cattle and lean beef) which expand market opportunities. Some New Mexico products are becoming nationally recognized, such as hatch chilies. New international markets, like China, have opened up to beef exports from the United States. Ag-tourism has also shown growth. This increased demand for products can translate into increased profits for producers.
- *Population Growth*—World population continues to grow which can increase demand, open new markets, and lead to better profits for producers. An abundant, economical food supply can help consumers (less expensive prices) and producers (better profit margins), if food policy can be updated and balanced.
- *Industry Support*—There is better public awareness of the good stewardship practices of landowners and more recognition of agriculture's value to the state's economy and culture. A bigger presence of elected officials from rural counties who understand the agriculture industry helps protect the industry in New Mexico (e.g., strengthening of the Right to Farm Act).
- *Conservation*—There is a greater awareness of soil health and more conscious use of water.
- *Economics*—Prices of livestock prices have increased.
- *Transportation*—There have been some improvements in transporting goods and services which have benefited producers.
- *Youth Interest*—Some youth have shown a greater interest in learning about agriculture.

- *Urban Gardening*—There is more interest in urban agriculture in some communities.
- *Renewable Energy*—Wind farms are being perceived as the highest and best use of land in some areas.

Negative

- *Water*—Expedited, long-term planning is needed.
- *Regulations*—There is too much interference and oversight of the industry by the government. The regulatory process is cumbersome and creates financial burdens, as well as an uncertain business climate for investments. There seems to be a lack of understanding in congress and the state legislature about current industry issues. Regulations are not updated to fit new industry situations. The cost of some regulations are having a detrimental impact on small rural communities. The regulations mentioned most often include workers' compensation, the Waters of the US clean water rule, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife rules, the Environmental Protection Agency clean-air and endangered species regulations and the U.S. Bureau of Land Management plans.
- *Producers & Succession*—The number of young people returning to the land is decreasing. Even those who inherit land have difficulty making a living due to the tax burden, healthcare requirements, fuel costs, etc. The capital required is high and access to financing is difficult (i.e., can't purchase land without cattle for collateral and vice versa). Land prices are too high for new producers to set up operations.
- *Economics*—There seems to be an overall decline in the economies of many rural communities. Food policies that balance the needs of both consumers and producers could help.
- *Supply Chain Infrastructure*—The availability of U.S. Department of Agriculture meat inspectors and local meat processors are insufficient to facilitate in-state, retail sales. Cattle and grain products have to be transported out-of-state, and therefore have increased production costs. This supply chain infrastructure limits the ability to expand farming and ranching operations. Access to markets is also difficult for smaller farmers and ranchers.
- *Public Perception*—The general public has a limited awareness of the difficulty and risk involved in agriculture and the profitability of farming and ranching operations. Misconceptions and negative perceptions (e.g., use of hormones and antibiotics) can have a serious impact on the industry.
- *Education*—The public education system is not supporting the needs of the industry for an educated workforce (i.e., science, research skills, business skills, vocational education, etc.). Schools have cut enrichment programs, sometimes based on misconceptions (e.g., school administrator stopped field trips to dairies because he thought it was traumatic for children to see cows connected to milking machines). The general public needs to learn about where food comes from and its nutritional value (i.e., gluten is not bad for everyone).
- *Workforce*—Farmers often have to work at other jobs during the week and then farm on weekends. It has become more difficult to find workers who are both qualified and willing to farm. Tighter border control has also limited available labor.
- *Import/Export Policies*—International trade policies have hampered the ability of our producers to compete effectively.
- *Technology & Methods*—More innovation and options are needed, especially for water conservation (e.g., mitigate tank evaporation) and renewable energy generation (e.g., better infrastructure and expanded transmission).
- *Climate Change*—There is increasing uncertainty of weather patterns.
- *Stakeholder Friction*—The population shift from rural to urban areas seems to have widened the gap between urban and rural communities, creating a lack of support to build cooperative solutions to challenges. There continues to be friction between the agriculture industry and environmental and animal rights groups.

Challenges

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

1. Continued access to water
2. Regulatory over-reach and interference
3. Accurate information and education regarding food, health and the agriculture industry
4. Transfer of land and operations to the next generation
5. Improved supply chain infrastructure to reduce costs and expand markets
6. Viability and sustainability of rural communities
7. Ensuring educated and responsible human resources in rural communities
8. Fair prices for commodity products
9. Stakeholder friction within the agriculture industry

Solutions

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

Water

1. Address water issues in a systemic, coordinated way.
2. Engage in long-term water planning.
3. Protect senior water rights.
4. Complete the water adjudication process.
5. Complete 3-D aquifer mapping.
6. Pursue interstate regional agreements on the use of aquifer water.
7. Develop an economically viable way of using brackish water.
8. Educate producers about the existing legal options for water leasing.
9. Be willing to innovate and utilize the new technologies that are available.
10. Subsidize the costs of installing and repairing modernized water systems.
11. Meter at the well pivot.
12. Recycle wastewater.

Regulatory & Business Climate

13. Move water regulations from the federal to the state level.
14. Approve renewable energy projects legislatively.
15. Remove barriers (e.g., right of way) to expanding transmission lines.
16. Remove the executive order that allows special interest groups to be reimbursed for attorney fees (i.e., Equal Access to Justice Act) when they are fighting the federal government.
17. Require government agencies (e.g., U.S. Fish & Wildlife, U.S. Bureau of Land Management) to clearly and timely notify conservation districts, elected officials, permittees and private landowners of changes in management and conservation practices.
18. Eliminate the ability of the Environmental Protection Agency to create regulations that address one environmental concern that overreaches into other industry segments.
19. Minimize the authority of the Environmental Protection Agency to implement policies and regulations on issues that have not been scientifically proven.
20. Use the power of the agriculture community to influence industry regulations.
21. Encourage agriculture producers and organizations, at all levels, to be engaged and to advocate for positive policies through legislative action.
22. Change U.S. senatorial representation to reflect agricultural interests.
23. Address apathy.

Youth, Consumer and Policymaker Education

24. Implement school enrichment programs.
25. Support student organizations such as 4H and Future Farmers of America.
26. Teach agriculture in school classrooms.
27. Educate the general public, anti-agriculture groups and youth through the use broadcast and social media.
28. Create a ranch kitchen television program to educate consumers about health and nutrition.
29. Create a TED talk program on multi-generational farming and ranching families.
30. Create a farming and ranching Story Corp application.
31. Educate elected officials, at the state and federal levels, on agricultural issues in order to support their ability to implement favorable policies.

Producers & Succession

32. Eliminate inheritance taxes.
33. Provide a capital gains tax break when producers sell their operations to new farmers.
34. Encourage and communicate rent-to-own options.
35. Encourage producers to create estate and succession plans.

Supply Chain

36. Support the establishment of small-scale processing plants and transporters that will transport livestock to market in smaller increments (i.e., 20 head).
37. Collaborate on how to produce quantities that can be transported economically (e.g., use the coop model).
38. Streamline the opening of processing plants and increase the number of inspectors by moving the responsibility from the federal to the state level.
39. Hire more state or federal inspectors for meat products.
40. Use the franchise model to process and inspect all products at once.
41. Provide incentives to support next-generation entrepreneurs who are willing to create processing businesses.
42. Increase local grain storage and recycle to feed.
43. Use social media to help brand New Mexico products.
44. Expand into new product areas (i.e., jerky) to diversify producer operations.
45. Encourage large agriculture corporations, like John Deere, to sponsor and fund national commercials to promote beef products.
46. Encourage the Farm Bureau and Angus Association to host and fund creative programs on ranches for urban dwellers in order to educate consumers and promote/market ranch products.
47. Organize ranchers to collaboratively influence our congressional delegation.

Rural Community Viability & Resources

48. Increase transparency in the legislative process.
49. Insure equal representation in the legislature.
50. Recognize the value of rural communities
51. Recognize the values available in rural areas that are not financial.
52. Support renewable energy (e.g., wind) as an economic development strategy for rural communities.
53. Support the National Young Farmers Coalition in sending interns to train on local farms.
54. Enhance the ability of rural communities to recruit and retain trained individuals in the occupations needed.

Fair Prices

55. Establish value-added opportunities.
56. Expand opportunities in the United States and abroad.
57. Increase niche market opportunities.
58. Promote New Mexico branded products.

Industry Infighting

59. Encourage all to get behind the one goal of promoting New Mexico products.
60. Work together to influence public perception.
61. Think in a unified way.
62. Be supportive of individual efforts.

Meeting Demographics

Stakeholder Groups	# Participants	Counties	# Participants
Advocacy	1	Bernalillo	4
Commercial Production & Marketing	4	Colfax	1
Education & Research	10	Curry	10
Farming/Ranching	26	Dona Ana	2
Financial Lending & Grantmaking	4	Guadalupe	3
Government Support & Regulation	12	Harding	8
Soil & Water	1	Quay	25
Staff (NMF)	3	Roosevelt	1
		Sandoval	2
		Santa Fe	2
		Torrance	1
		Union	2