Food, Hunger, Water, Agriculture Policy  
Policy & Advocacy Action Team  
May 14, 2020 ◆ 12:00 – 1:30 pm  
Meeting Notes

Facilitator: Lilly Irvin-Vitela, New Mexico First  
Notes: Sharon Berman, New Mexico First

In Attendance:  
• Ellen Buelow, Interfaith Hunger Coalition  
• Rep. Joanne Ferrary, NM Legislature  
• Allison Griffin, Cullari Communications  
• Sherry Hooper, The Food Depot and NM Association of Food Banks  
• Isabelle Jenniches, NM Healthy Soil Working Group  
• Derek Lin, New Mexico Voices for Children  
• Ray Montibon  
• Jonas Moya, New Mexico First  
• Andrea Nash, Roadrunner Food Bank  
• Carlos Navarro, Interfaith Hunger Coalition  
• Tsiporah Nephesh, New Mexico Thrives  
• May Sagbakken, New Mexico Out of School Time and Network  
• Melanie Sanchez Eastwood  
• Mag Strittmatter, Roadrunner Food Bank  
• Brent Van Dyke, National Association of Conservation Districts  
• Emily Wildau, New Mexico Voices for Children

Introductions, Welcome and Context

Lilly facilitated introductions. Then she contextualized the group’s work, offering her time should anyone wish to learn more. Lilly can be reached at lilly@nmfirst.org. She explained that the Food, Ag, Hunger and Water policy workgroup had been meeting since last summer as a group of approximately 80 people representing 20 organizations. They worked together on a policy agenda during the 2020 session. As they came together to debrief about the January session, COVID turned up. The group decided to invite more to the table in an effort to problem-solve together, connect the dots and amplify the government’s efforts as well complementary coordination efforts across NGOs and grassroots organizations. Some of the policy priorities advanced at the last session are still priorities now in terms of moving to eradicate hunger, having healthier food systems and access to water in NM. Lilly also noted that this worked already overlapped with the Food and Ag Policy Council, which is also part of the group. Lilly asked if others in the group since its inception would like to add to that snapshot.

• Carlos noted that working on the policy agenda for the session helped set up the infrastructure to respond to the health emergency. He added that the Interfaith Hunger Coalition, together with Representative Ferrary, wanted to set up an entity within the legislature to directly address hunger issues. The Hunger Caucus gives legislators a chance to mobilize. Representatives Ferrary, Stansbury, Phelps and Dow as well as Senator Padilla have been involved.
• Representative Ferrary added that the Hunger Caucus’s work was complementary to and expanded upon by the Food, Hunger, Ag, Water Policy work. She appreciated the ability to communicate and exchange information between the two entities.

Emergency Relief and Recovery Policy Priorities

Lilly noted that conversations about policy had come up during the last few meetings of the general and specialized action teams. With the special session coming up and the many unknowns about funding, budget and process, the group has adapted and tried to maintain flexibility, knowing that some areas of interest might be addressed as part of relief and recovery efforts during the special session, and other areas might be addressed during the regular session. The group members worked together to create a comprehensive list of policy priorities, including assets and needs in the emergency food sector, nutrition and feeding programs, hunger issues, and healthy and resilient agriculture and food systems in the state. She proposed going through the document with the Policy & Advocacy Workgroup to determine if those attending could or would not be able to get behind the document. The Special Session & FY21 Emergency Relief & Recovery Funding Priorities document is included at the end of these notes for reference.

Priority #1: Address Root Causes of Food Insecurity

Lilly noted that NM First’s policy positions were driven by consensus, and that the policy priorities the group had come up with aligned with NM First Town Hall recommendations, such as the recommendations for around family-friendly economic development policy that came out of NM First’s 2016 Economy Town Hall. Derek and Sherry said they stood behind this policy priority. Tsiporah stated that rejecting a food tax, a tax on nonprofits, and cuts to the SNAP program were important to advocate for during the special session.

Priority #2: Strengthen Food and Water Relief and Recovery

Lilly asked about the current funding for food banks and the emergency sector as well as likely additional investments responding to demand.

• Mag noted that just over $1.2 million comes from NM Human Service and is divided among the five food banks, allowing them to access produce inexpensively and leverage their relationships with Feeding America and partnerships with other entities to cover freight cost.
• Mag added that as a collective they are anticipating demand and expect to see a disrupted state for months or years ahead with respect to separation of employment that many had already experienced. She added that as the economy started to open up again, the food banks predicted an amplification of food insecurity across the state.
• Mag noted that the second bullet of Priority #2 is about requesting additional dollars from the state to fortify and strengthen the five food banks so they can answer the call. She pointed out that food banks source and secure food and make sure the food is sent out to their partners. There needs to be more emphasis around allocation of funds to acquire food, because over the last 6 weeks since COVID began affecting the state,
there has been as much as a 40% drop in the amount of donated food into the food banks. This requires seeking other channels to find food.

- Lilly thanked Mag for explaining the food banks’ situation. She added that when Mag talked about the five food banks, she was including the 500 food pantries, food closet, etc. the food banks provide for throughout the state.
- Lilly asked if there was opposition or concern about this segment of the document. There were no comments.

Lilly noted that more data was needed regarding the need around water relief and recovery. She said the group had learned from action teams, the state EOC and rural and tribal communities that not only are there drinking water access issues, there were also ongoing, long time issues around water infrastructure. Lilly added that the Tribal Infrastructure Fund and Water Trust Fund were important mechanisms to which to provide resources. NM communities were struggling to access water for drinking, bathing and for livestock.

Lilly mentioned the 2020 legislation providing $650,000 to eliminate co-payments for breakfast and lunch in school. She added that there had been discussion about expanding universal free school breakfast and lunches, and also expanding universal free breakfasts and lunches through summer meal programs. She asked May if she was aware of the data, how much was spent or how many meals had been distributed since the beginning of COVID-q9.

- May replied that Appleseed would have that information. She noted that they are working to make sure meals are disseminated through after school and summer learning programs because “about 140,000 children going home hungry every day.” Schools were giving children two or three breakfasts because they didn’t have dinner, she added. This was exacerbated during longer school breaks. May emphasized the importance of informing legislators of the federal program through CYFD and PED providing for the 3rd meal. “Many districts are not taking advantage of it.”
- May said the NM Out of Time School Network was concerned there will be a huge hunger issue in NM families. She suggested that they could work with Appleseed to suggest specific language.
- May noted that the normal summer meal program usually takes place in parks and libraries which are county and city facilities. They were wondering where that expansion was going to happen. She said that the grab and go meals program was working beautifully right now. She added that PED is doing a survey to determine how many districts were going to continue with it. The districts were not mandated by the state to continue this program, leaving the decision to local school authorities. The NM Out of Time School Network believed that this issue needed to be a lift lifted to a policy level.
- Lilly asked if folks were comfortable with her circling back with Appleseed, or if there were concerns. There were no concerns.

Priority #3: Invest in Local Food Systems & Resilient Local Agriculture

- Lilly noted that Bruce Hinrichs from NMSU had been on multiple calls and reminded group members that leading edge research into hands-on practices was supported by Cooperative Extension and the Ag Experimentation Stations. This supports the policy priority in the first bullet regarding investing in infrastructure that’s critical to local food.
• The second bullet, Lilly continued, was regarding maintaining and expanding investment through Aging and Long Term Services (ALTs) to support the purchase of NM-grown fruits and vegetables for senior programs.
  o Rep. Ferrary noted that ALTs was putting more food out through senior centers, and would be relieving Casa de Peregrinos of some of that work, demonstrating cooperation.
  o Lilly replied that the on-the-ground coordination was heartening.
• The subsequent bullet was regarding maintaining the PED’s $400,000 commitment for the New Mexico Grown Produce for Schools. “That’s getting healthy local food to school age, children and doing it in a way that’s good for folks who need healthy food and also good for producers of that food.”
• Lilly invited Isabelle, who was attending this group for the first time but who was a long time member of the NM Food and Ag policy Council, to address the Healthy Soil segment in the bullet covering the two NMDA-funded programs.
  o Isabelle noted that the Healthy Soil Working program was run in part through the Soil and Water Conservation Districts and that including it with the other program in the same budget made perfect sense. She noted that NM had a very fragile and inefficient food system that needed to change into a local food system that’s much more resilient. Isabelle added that a food system based on soil health leaves farmers and ranchers with better profit, and the food would be more nutritious as well.
  o Brent noted that the $200K was an appropriation to help make sure that the 47 conservation districts located in every county and in most communities in NM have operational money as a quasi-part of the government. He added that their major intent was to leverage federal and state dollars with private dollars to get more boots on the ground.
  o Lilly: this is a beautiful example of how our package is both looking at immediate relief because that’s real and needs to happen, and also foundational to recovery.
  o May wondered if there were designated individuals, or a task force at the state level focusing on alleviating hunger this summer, and who was coordinating to make sure there was a state plan.
  o Lilly noted that as an NGO, she wasn’t a spokesperson for the state, but she would share what she had noticed, and would let others weigh in. She noted that with the Governor had shown a commitment pre-COVID to childhood hunger in NM. She added that there had been a call to action across the Cabinet and all the departments and there has been real leadership. Lilly noted that she was not aware of one master comprehensive plan. She noted that the Food, Hunger, Water and Ag Policy Workgroup has been “committed to trying to address this in a comprehensive, cross sector way,” informed by data as well as wisdom from the ground up, from community, in thinking about policy.
  o Carlos noted that the Governor had appointed Patty Keane to coordinate hunger efforts within the Executive Branch, and that everyone in the group had been working closely with Patty.

• Lilly noted that the next component in the policy priorities document was a modest but meaningful investment in the NM local food and farming systems to support part of the coordination piece of the Double Up Food Bucks Program.
• The next bullet addressed investing $100K through the Department of Health for the Senior Farmer’s Market Nutrition Program, to support coordination of the program.
• Investing in the Department of Agriculture to strengthen capacity for beef inspection and processing was the next bullet. Lilly noted that NM First had conducted a survey of ag producers when COVID first hit to get a sense of how they were impacted by the pandemic. She said they noticed that healthy protein in the supply chain was
very volatile, and the need for access to protein was a real challenge, without having beef inspection and packaging.

- Jonas noted that there was interest in the NM cattle industry to increase the amount of cattle being processed in NM. He noted that some factors needed to be addressed, such as the right kind of cattle, strong enough markets to support processing cattle and making sure producers use the processing facilities.
- Lilly noted that experts would need to weigh in to calculate the actually dollar amount.
- Rep. Ferrary emphasized the need for more border Inspectors at the Santa Teresa Entry for produce from Mexico for food banks.
- Mag said the Port of Columbus should be included in that request, due to its recent expansion.
- There was a discussion about with whom the inspectors would be affiliated, and Mag said they would be with USDA.
- Lilly noted that there was a talent pipeline issue. She let Rep. Ferrary and Mag know that she and Jonas would circle back with them to get the ask right.

- Lilly commented that the final bullet came in response to what was a well-intended federal policy but not a many as might have benefited were doing so in NM. The USDA Food Bucks Program required GAP certification. Lilly noted that she had been informed that to become GAP certified requires piles of paperwork. Folks were using safe and healthy practices but were not getting certified, so they were not eligible to apply for the USDA program. If there was an effort that was a match for New Mexico producers that looked at Health and safety standards, in a way that wasn’t it didn’t require the same mountains of paperwork there was some promise for producers. The idea was to invest in a Food Bucks program through NMDA that would provide grants to farmers, ranchers, food hubs and CSAs and would be more inclusive than the federal effort was.

Next Steps
Lilly wondered if the group could go back to their teams and ask if the policy priorities doc was something they wanted to sign onto. Mag, Brent, Carlos, Ellen, Emily, Isabelle and May all agreed that they would either take it back to their teams or help finesse the language. Lilly said she would circle back with Sherry. Roy noted that he was working with a couple different groups and would get the word out to Lilly by the end of the following day. Tsiporah also said she could make that deadline.
Lilly said that she would send a corrected version to the group in the next hour, and she would be in contact with Appleseed. She thanked the group, noting it was helpful to hear more and make sure everyone was on the same page with all the different policy priorities.
Food, Hunger, Water, & Agriculture Policy Workgroup
Special Session & FY21
Emergency Relief & Recovery Funding Priorities

Objectives
Our goal is to advance public policy to alleviate food and water insecurity, create resilient food systems and focus support on critical needs as New Mexico moves forward with legislative and executive pandemic relief and recovery efforts.

Policy Workgroup Members
The Food, Hunger, Water and Agriculture Policy Workgroup is made up of a group of bi-partisan policy makers, agricultural producers, the emergency food sector, faith leaders, researchers/academics, and public policy advocates. While participants come from many different communities and professions across New Mexico and have many different life experiences, there is a shared belief that addressing water and food insecurity and strengthening local food systems requires working together. For questions about these priorities or for introductions to workgroup members, please contact Lilly Irwin-Viteala at lilly@nmfirst.org.

Cross-sector Approach
- New Mexico has the highest child hunger rates in the nation. 1 in 4 children in New Mexico are struggling with hunger. Our elders are not faring much better. (1)
- From late March through April 2020, the two largest food banks in New Mexico spent $1.2M and $450K on purchased food to respond to the increasing demand for support from the emergency food sector. (2)
- A significant majority of New Mexico’s counties have food insecurity rates greater than the national average (3)
- Most families participating in SNAP in New Mexico have 1 or more household members that are employed; (4)
- In one week in March 2020 alone, there were 17K new unemployment claims in New Mexico (5)
- While agriculture is a major economic driver in the state, over 96% of the food New Mexicans consume comes from out of state, and nearly all food produced in New Mexico leaves the state. A stronger local food system would simultaneously help combat food insecurity and hunger while keeping more dollars in our local communities. (6)

Rates of food insecurity and hunger in New Mexico reflect multiple systems failures. Therefore, our policy priorities are to:
1) Use data to inform decision-making
2) Promote local food systems and agricultural resilience
3) Increase the monthly food budget for families of low-income
4) Use an equity lens to make sure that the needs of all are considered within the context of community and culture.

Invest in Local Food Systems & Resilient Local Agriculture
- Maintain NMSU base funding for Cooperative Extension for $13,635,000 and for Agricultural Experimentation Stations for $15,147,900 to provide support, leading-edge information, and technical assistance to agricultural producers.
- Maintain and expand investment to $500K in ALTSD to support the Purchase of NM Grown Fruits and Vegetables for Senior Meals Programs.
- Maintain $400K commitment in PED budget for NM Grown Produce for School Meals.
- Maintain $227K in NMDA for the Healthy Soil program and maintain $200K in NMDA for Soil and Water Conservation Districts.
- Protect $150K for program support to NMDA to develop New Mexico Local Food and Farming Systems incouraging value chain coordination and food safety systems that Support the SNAP Double Up Food Bucks program and local producer sales to retail and institutional outlets.
- Invest $100K in DOH for the Senior Farmers’ Market Nutrition Program.
- Invest in the Department of Agriculture to strengthen capacity in NM related to Beef Inspection and Processing to get more protein into the local food supply.
- Invest available 2020 CARES Act relief in NMDA to provide grants to farmers, ranchers, food hubs, and CSAs for a New Mexico Food Resilience Program that is more inclusive than the Federal effort and links to hunger relief efforts.

2 Report from Roadrunner Food Bank and The Food Depot. April 2020
5 NM First, Agriculture Resilience Backgrounder