

Food, Hunger, Water, Agriculture Policy
Food Systems Action Team
5.14.20 ♦ 3:30 – 5:00 pm
Meeting Notes

Facilitator: Lilly Irvin-Vitela, New Mexico First

Notes: Sharon Berman, New Mexico First

In Attendance:

- Sarah Cobb, Village of Los Ranchos Ag Committee
- Bryan Crawford-Garrett, Thornburg Foundation
- Tyler Eshleman, NM Coalition to Enhance Working Lands
- Helga Garcia Garza, Agri-Cultura Network and La Cosecha
- Dan Gerry, Village of Los Ranchos Agri-future Project
- Roy Montibon, The Montibon company
- Jonas Moya, New Mexico First
- Jason New, NMDA
- Pam Roy, Farm to Table, NM Agriculture and Food Policy Council
- Melanie Sanchez Eastwood, New Mexico First
- Brent Van Dyke, NM Association of Conservation Districts
- Michael Venticinque, New Mexico Farmers Marketing Association

Updates

Lilly updated the group on the seed project - that in response to difficulties small to mid-sized producers were having procuring seeds, a small workgroup came together, including members from this group NMDA, NMSU and others, and put out a small survey. 85 folks representing over 140 farmers and gardeners responded. The group got with funders so they could make a seed purchase. The Acequia Association worked with the New Mexico Farmers Marketing Association to order, repackage and distribute seed in time for the spring planting. They were still looking for three different kinds of beans and were having a hard time finding a distributor. Lilly noted that the NM Acequia Association was working on democratizing seed and getting it into folks' hands in an affordable way, such as producing our own seed supply, as is legal and possible to do.

Melanie said that the report is on the New Mexico First website, <http://www.nmfirst.org>, click on the "Library" tab, then "2020" and scroll to "Farmer and Rancher Ag COVID-19 Survey, 2020" (or click [here](#)). Jonas thanked everyone who took the time to fill out the survey, and encouraged everyone to read it. Lilly noted that the storytelling and peoples' experiences, while unattributed, are communicated in their own words. She highlighted a few findings: over half of the people who responded confirmed there were changes that they were making in their farming/ranching practices as a result of COVID-19 and related public health policies; and 41% of folks said they were figuring out creative ways to respond to the emergency food need. Even in difficult times, folks are stepping up to help their neighbors.



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Please contact Sharon Berman at sharon@nmfirst.org if we missed or misunderstood anything in these notes.

Lilly went on to say that the recommendations wrote themselves because the ideas came up multiple times from different people. There were implications for policy, and also recommendations for systems change and collaboration that doesn't require legislative or executive level work. Some of the recommendations included:

- The importance of using federal and state revenue to bolster the agricultural industry
- Relief opportunities are made more accessible to NM agriculture when they are deployed via grants rather than loans.
- Grant opportunities should have reasonable timelines, be accompanied by significant technical assistance, and have the minimal application and reporting burden to meet the need for mutual accountability, data sharing, and thoughtful analysis of emerging industry trends.
- Meat inspection and meat processing facilities
- Support and invest in innovations in producers, value-added production, marketing and distribution of fresh produce and shelf stable produce directly to consumers, institutional purchasing within governments at all levels within the state, and through market development in Nm to achieve stable local food systems.

Pam commented that the devil is in the details. Regarding loans and grants to farmers she said, one of the questions that recently was posed by numerous farmers on the Navajo Nation was, "If I apply for those grants, are they taxable?" She added that especially related to the opportunities for COVID relief it was important for it to be clear enough for people to trust and want to apply for them. Pam added that the recommendations reiterate the importance of the programs that already exist, the conservation programs and value-added producer grants. She noted that a lot of RFAs were coming out with immediate deadlines that focus on food systems and value chain, and we need to keep working long-term to help people access those resources.

Jason noted that there is a lot of interest in the beef supply chain and the issue of grants vs. loans. His team is on the phone quite a bit with ag producers and processors about what programs are out there and available, and whether it's USDA or FDA. They are asking when they do get up and running if they will be able to repay that loan. Jason noted that people were trying to figure out a way to get more value added on meat. He heard there was a possibility of a bill being introduced in the special session of a shares program being introduced similar to Wyoming. He went on to explain that a shares program was roughly a situation in which a group of people can go in together and buy shares of an animal from a rancher. The shares workaround makes it more legitimate and folks were looking at that and implications associated with it. **Jason said he hoped to be able to give the group more insight soon.**

- Jason noted that they recently learned the state of Utah was able to get a big chunk of CARES Act funding, and through their special session were able to allocate the funds through their department of agriculture through one of their commissions as agricultural grants to the tune of \$20 million in grants.

Lilly said that one of the ideas that has been bubbling up but doesn't have a price tag associated with it is a bridge between the USDA food box grant and thinking about a version of that that is a better fit for NM. The GAP certification requirements was a barrier to some NM producers. She wondered if Jason had heard about the possibility of NM using CARES money to do a similar program in NM but without the GAP certification requirement. Jason said he didn't think they were there yet, and wasn't sure if it would be heard during the special session, of if the state's laws and policies would allow it in our state.



Tyler said that they had noticed the same sorts of needs others had identified, and that they want to help make sure that people know what's available, and what is and specifically available to them. He noted that there is a plethora of resources and it can be overwhelming. They are working on interpreting or translating some of the language of the grants and opportunities so they are more readable and digestible early on. Tyler told Jason he would like to connect. He said they were looking into creating a newsletter or online platform where folks can access a list or a specific document that will help people understand if they qualify or are eligible for a particular opportunity, as well as supplying technical assistance at some level. Another idea they had was for a hot line concept where they can ask basic questions. Tyler's email is coordinator@nmcewl.org.

Dan noted that he had spent 3 hours one afternoon looking at some grants and it got really confusing really quickly. He confirmed that a searchable index would be helpful. He thanked Lilly for recommending Olivia Roanhorse's organization who had put him in touch with a public health professor who is relocating to Albuquerque. Dan said he had a call with her the next day to look at the Urban Innovation Grant from USDA, that could be a nice extension grant for what they were already doing around community agriculture in the Corrales and Los Ranchos communities. He added that there was a July 6 deadline.

Pam: Pam noted that the Urban Ag grant was a brand new program and she was excited to hear Dan say they were considering applying. She told Tyler and Jason that the FSA (Farm Service Agency) would be the go-to agency for application; however, this hadn't traditionally been FSA's role, so she recommended reaching out personally to them.

Jason confirmed that there had been a tremendous amount of information flowing out really fast and that they struggle to keep up with everything. They made a concerted effort to summarize the COVID assistance programs related to food and agriculture on the NMDA website. He said everyone at the office was spending nights and weekends familiarizing themselves with the programs related to food. Jason said they hoped to post information on their website in the next week or so. He told Tyler he'd like to talk to him about possibly joining forces. jnew@nmda.nmsu.edu. Tyler said he looked forward to connecting.

Lilly acknowledged the good thinking about sharing information to busy folks who are thinking about applying but who aren't necessarily experienced or trained grant writers.

Bryan: It's been summed up pretty well. The NM Coalition to Enhance Working Lands have started to do some groundwork in response to the overwhelming amount of information out there. He added he was pleased to hear what the NMDA was doing on the front end, what the Coalition was doing and about the possibility of them coordinating together.

Roy said that he, Dan and Sarah were part of a Los Ranchos committee and had a general idea of involving students from community colleges and universities in a program that would give them real world experience while helping farmers and agriculturalists go after grants. He had spoken to Lauren at NMSU and Sarah talked to Sec. Witte to look at the feasibility of the idea and find out whether or not this is already being done. Roy added that the concept originated from an idea to not just get bunch of grant writers together but to raise up a generation of grant writers in New Mexico. He noted that this was something that could help during the pandemic and beyond. He acknowledged Lilly's idea in a separate conversation that one approach might be to team up expert grant writers and



students, pair them up to assist farmers and ranchers, etc. to work on a grant. Roy said he had a ping in to Sen. Pete Campos to discuss it. He added that there was a lot of strong interest and was optimistic that if they could make it happen it would benefit the state in the present and in the long run.

Sarah asked the group if they knew of resources already engaged in grant training. “Do any of you know of groups already doing this, or institutions already doing this?”

- Bryan wondered if Sarah had connected with the Grant Collective and Terry Bruenner. Sarah said they were connecting the next morning. Do they offer grant assistance for free, or is there a fee? I can ask Terry. Roy noted that the Grant Plant had been mentioned as well.

Mike said that the final seed order numbers were turned in and Paula and Emily were taking the lead on placing getting the orders. He added that he was able to get 10-12 pounds of chile seeds of assorted flavors and varieties. He predicted the farmers would be grateful to receive the seeds.

- Regarding senior programs, he said, “We’re eating up all the money.” He added they were working on getting the food safety trainings online. Lilly noted that the NM Farmers’ Marketing Association was playing many roles, not the least of which was matchmaker between agriculturalists and communities, organizations and individuals who need access to food.
- Mike added that he had connected more farmers with NM Harvest, working with Ian Colburn to get food to a co-op in the east mountains. He added, “the CSA thing has just exploded.” He went on to say that they have been working with NMDA on getting food boxes available to the Navajo Nation. He said he was asked to connect farmers to donate product to a homeless shelter and abuse victim shelter.

Roy commented that he was also involved in a group in San Miguel County, in Las Vegas, with El Commodore and their senior center and Meals for Wheels program. He said the demand had doubled in San Miguel county in the past 30 days and he expected it to double again. He asked the group to it in the back of their minds, and asked that people contact him if they have thoughts. roy@montibon.com, 505-454-9330.

- Mike told Roy that he hadn’t forgotten about them, was working with Amy Whitfield and had a couple growers willing to sell in the San Miguel area, and that they should have some relief there very soon. Mike’s info: 505-448-2891, michaelfventicinque@gmail.com.

Lilly reminded the group that as they do work in community, if they know of urgent or emergency food needs to make sure to alert the county emergency manager or tribal liaisons working as part of the EOC (emergency operations command). New Mexico First has a link on its COVID-19 website at the top of the Resources Tab - [Emergency Response Managers Contact Information- all counties, pueblo/tribal areas](#). Lilly added that the response tends to be a combination of government and NGOs to get folks’ needs met.

Policy updates

Lilly gave folks a quick tour of the emerging policy priorities. She invited those belonging to an organization that was able to sign on and endorse or support policy recommendations to consider signing on. Lilly said she would be happy to answer questions. Lilly reminded those on the call that the Food, Hunger, Water, Ag Policy Workgroup from had bipartisan participation, from the emergency food sector, folks from ag, faith leaders, researchers, academics and



public policy folks. policy expertise. Lilly commented that together the group could take more comprehensive approaches to alleviate hunger and strengthen our food system. The group discussed the policy priorities, which were broken down into three main categories:¹

- Addressing root causes of food insecurity, such as taxation, administration of public benefits, federal level policies. The focus was on NM policy, however.
- Strengthening food and water relief and recovery. This includes an ask to invest \$12.5 million for the emergency food sector, and protection of resources that were allocated in February for shelf-stable food for food banks.
- Invest in Local Food systems & Resilient Local Agriculture

Lilly invited Jonas to speak on beef processing. Jonas emphasized that both beef processing and ag expansion could present possibilities to create and expand jobs

Roy commented that before COVID-19, there had been some discussion about funding value added production in the estate before things get shipped out of the state, in terms of replacing certain types of crops for higher value crops such as barley. He asked if the end user initiatives were still in place. Jonas replied that he hadn't heard much about it except in the southern part of the state where the pecans and salsa industry was continuing. He thought there could be an opportunity to expand and develop adding those value-added crops to farmer's operations.

Helga emphasized the importance of keeping access equitable. She noted that they had been working on getting produce into Dollar General stores, adding that in some rural communities those are the only avenue for groceries. She thought there was a need to work on getting value-added production accepted as part of Double Up Food Bucks. Helga added that they had spoken with Congresswoman Deb Haaland about the crucial need to bring it into retail, and keeping it within the distribution of their nonprofit and CSAs. She went on to say that in terms of economic impact, it was an important step and we need to keep it in the conversation and make it a reality.

- Lilly asked Helga if there were federal or state opportunities or actions that the group should be thinking about in its shared policy work in the special or regular sessions. Helga said they had been working with the NRDC (National Resources Defense Council), who had been research for them. She said there was precedence in other states.

Lilly added that if anyone had questions, comments and wanted to talk more, to contact her at 505-234-0694. She also offered to connect folks to experts. She added that the group was looking for organizations to sign on their support. They hoped to send it by the end of the day that Friday or first thing next Monday to legislators and the Governor's office. She thanked the group and said she was thankful that they were working together and part of this coalition.

¹ The final draft of the document can be downloaded [here](#).

A few notes from the group chat:

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Seeds Still Needed:

NOT requested as specifically organic...

- 20 lb bolita
- 15 lb pinto
- 24 lb potato

Requested as ORGANIC (maybe we need to call them and confirm if locally/non-chemically grown is enough)...

- 6 lb bolita
- 21.5 lb pinto
- 33 lb potato

Jason New, NMDA

Thanks, I'll relay this info to Katie Laney at our Feed, Seed and Fertilizer program to see if she can help find a supply source.



Please contact Sharon Berman at sharon@nmfirst.org if we missed or misunderstood anything in these notes.