



The Food, Farm, and Hunger Initiative

January 21, 2022

Dear Representatives and Senators,

These are unprecedented times. Even as the pandemic has made the weaknesses and inequities in our food system more evident, it highlighted the strength of New Mexico's food system. The pandemic also revealed the potential to expand food and farming businesses and the agricultural economy while creating greater access to food for those who are vulnerable.

Our local food system is supported by a long tradition of small and mid-sized farms and ranches that are part of the state's agricultural industry that generates billions of dollars in revenue every year, yet 95% of products leave the state. At the same time, hunger and food insecurity have remained persistent challenges in New Mexico for generations.

To address this potential, over 250 New Mexicans came together to work on a large, comprehensive plan to strengthen the connections between food, hunger, and farming in New Mexico. The **Food, Farm, and Hunger Initiative** supports our commitment to fostering a food system that addresses hunger while improving economic resiliency in New Mexico's communities.

The FY23 Executive Budget recommendation includes more than \$24 million – the largest investment increase in food and agriculture in the state's history. It's more urgent than ever for the legislature to fund these essential programs.

We ask that you prioritize the complete Executive Budget recommendation in House Bill 2 as requested for the Food, Farm, and Hunger Initiative. \$14.2 million is included in the Department of Finance and Administration's budget, with another \$200,000 recommended for essential staff positions for the Aging and Long-Term Services Department and Human Services Department. \$10 million is recommended in capital outlay for hunger relief infrastructure improvements.

This effort will benefit hundreds of thousands of New Mexicans through an intergenerational approach that will yield significant economic, health, and environmental benefits. This targeted investment will help expand federal nutrition programs and homegrown programs that work.

The many organizations, individuals, and partner agencies that worked together to create this comprehensive budget package multi-year set of initiatives ask for your full support in making sure this funding request is reflected in the legislative budget.

Please feel free to contact any of us. Several organization's contacts are provided below.

Yours truly, signed:

New Mexico Food & Agriculture Policy Council, Pam Roy, Coordinator, 505-660-8403

NM Farmers' Marketing Association, Denise Miller, Executive Director, 505-699-2064

NM School Nutrition Association, Marie Johnson, President, 505-599-8778

New Mexico Association of Food Banks, Sherry Hooper, President, 505-577-0444

ECHO Food Bank

Food Bank of Eastern New Mexico

Roadrunner Food Bank – Albuquerque

Roadrunner Food Bank – Las Cruces

The Food Depot

Agri-Cultura Network

Agri-Nature Center

Alliance for Local Economic Prosperity

Black Farmers and Ranchers New Mexico

CPLC New Mexico, Inc. & HELP New Mexico, Inc.

Farm to Table

Interfaith Hunger Coalition

La Semilla Food Center

Lutheran Advocacy Ministry - NM

National Latino Farmers and Ranchers Trade Association

National Young Farmers Coalition

New Mexico Appleseed

New Mexico Conference of Churches

New Mexico First

NM Healthy Soil Working Group

Rural Coalition

The Community Pantry and Hope Garden

Wagner Farms

Western Landowners Alliance

The Food, Farm, and Hunger Initiative

BUDGET PRIORITIES

Increase immediate hunger relief efforts for food insecure New Mexicans

- **Senior Food Boxes Program**, which provides an additional 3,025 homebound seniors and adults with disabilities in rural communities with seven meals each month. Recommended funding: **\$692,000** for the *Aging and Long-Term Services Department*.
- **Fruit and Vegetable Prescription Program**, which provides an additional 1,960 individuals in rural communities with weekly vouchers to buy fruits and vegetables from New Mexico producers. Recommended funding: **\$500,000** for the *Department of Health*.
- **Summer and After school Nutrition Support**, which provides start-up and expansion grants to help address child food insecurity during the summer months and at other times when school meals are not available. A minimum of 75 grants will impact 9,975 children. Recommended funding: **\$1.5 million** for the *Early Childhood Education and Care Department*.
- **College Food Security Initiative**, which provides grab and go healthy meals, low cost or free access to campus dining plans, campus food pantries, and/or innovations to food distribution systems to support up to 17,500 food insecure students. Recommended funding: **\$1 million** for the *Higher Education Department*.
- **Meal Gap Funding**, which funds food bank assistance to an additional 127,000 New Mexicans across the state, including children and seniors experiencing food insecurity in high need counties. Recommended funding: **\$5.9 million** for the *Human Services Department*.
- **Mobile Technology for WIC and Seniors Farmers' Market Nutrition Programs**, which funds the purchase of mobile technology for paperless transactions at farmers' markets, farm stands, and grocery stores. 25,000 New Mexicans currently benefit from this program. Recommended funding: **\$108,400** for the *Department of Health*.
- **Double Up Food Bucks**, which provides dollar-for-dollar incentives for more than 46,000 Snap participants to purchase New Mexico-grown fruits and vegetables at grocery stores, farmers' markets, farm stands, and mobile markets. Recommended funding: **\$700,000** for the *New Mexico Department of Agriculture*.

Invest in local producers' ability to support New Mexico's food system

- **New Mexico Grown**, which allows an additional 68,850 New Mexicans to eat locally produced fruits and vegetables, meat, nuts, and other foods in schools, senior centers, and preschools. *Recommended funding: \$400,000 for the Aging and Long-Term Services Department, \$300,000 for the Early Childhood Education and Care Department, and \$800,000 for the Public Education Department.*
- **Healthy Soils Program**, which promotes and supports an additional 64 land management projects that improve the health, yield, and profitability of the soils of the state. *Recommended funding: \$1 million for the New Mexico Department of Agriculture.*
- **Agricultural Workforce Development**, which provides internship opportunities for young and beginning farmers, ranchers, food processors, and other agribusiness professionals. Up to 34 interns will be supported in partnership with community-based organizations. *Recommended funding: \$250,000 for the New Mexico Department of Agriculture.*
- **Approved Supplier Program**, which supports an additional 219 farmers and ranchers selling to schools, senior centers, preschools, grocery stores, and distributors. Retail sales by participating producers increased ten-fold in a 2-year period because of this program. *Recommended funding: \$200,000 for the New Mexico Department of Agriculture.*
- **Farm to Food Bank Program**, which connects communities in need with locally produced fruits and vegetables, meat, nuts, and other foods that would otherwise be wasted. Producers will be reimbursed for the costs involved with harvesting, processing, packaging, and transporting donated foods. *Recommended funding: one-time appropriation of \$500,000 for the New Mexico Department of Agriculture.*

Build the capacity of New Mexico's supply chain

- **Healthy Food Financing Initiative**, which will fund low interest loans and grants to invest in local farmers, food hubs, and grocery stores. Up to \$2 million annually will be matched from the U.S. Treasury. This initiative can support up to 7 projects and more than 100 jobs in the first year of implementation. *Recommended funding: \$250,000 for the Economic Development Department.*
- **Food, Farm, and Hunger Capital Outlay Request**, which invests in infrastructure improvements for New Mexico's food system. Funding priorities include cold storage, transportation, kitchen equipment for preparing and serving meals, and facility renovations. *Recommended funding: \$10 million for the Aging and Long-Term Services Department.*