

**Strengthening and Expanding Food and Nutrition Programs in Santa Fe  
for the City of Santa Fe City Council  
and Community Services**



**Submitted by:  
Members of the Santa Fe Food Policy Council  
and Partner Organizations and Agencies**

**September 28th, 2020**



## **Strengthening and Expanding Food and Nutrition Programs in Santa Fe**

This report was requested by the City of Santa Fe to develop policies and procedures to procure local food for senior and youth programs as well as to report on children's programs community wide. Along with numerous partners, committee members of The Santa Fe City and County Food Policy Council researched these topics and developed a multitude of recommendations and solutions. This report identifies many of the realities of farm to institution challenges and opportunities, especially for food and nutrition programs in the City and County of Santa Fe, and offers recommendations to enhance the efficiency and effectiveness of these programs. A mutually beneficial outcome is to cultivate and expand a viable market which enables local and state commercial exchanges between public institutions and New Mexico's vegetable and fruit growers.

Farm to Table, as the fiscal sponsor of the Santa Fe City and County Food Policy Council (SFFPC), began working with Santa Fe Senior Services, in particular with Gino Rinaldi, City of Santa Fe Senior Services Director to consider options to integrate locally and regionally grown fruits and vegetables into their meal programs. The SFFPC members provided technical assistance on how to procure New Mexico grown produce. The group worked toward three items:

- 1) Developing procedures to integrate local produce into senior meals programs.
- 2) Training food service directors and staff to utilize local products in prepared meals and salad bars.
- 3) Designing a local foods promotion, education, and outreach initiative.

The COVID-19 pandemic interrupted the process and necessitated that Senior Services focus on immediate needs of seniors and program shifts. SFFPC and Senior Services continue to work together and are building on these efforts.

Since the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic, the SFFPC met weekly with key partners to assess food access struggles in the community; help develop a network of public and private individuals to create and bolster emergency feeding programs; participate in distribution plans and facilitate communication among a multitude of organizations and agencies. The SFFPC created two sub-committees to aid in this work: the Food Security Working Group which met semi-weekly from April to late June then reduced meetings as needed and is currently meeting biweekly; and the Food & Nutrition Committee, which has met biweekly since early August.

We want to thank the Santa Fe City Council and Community Services for the opportunity to provide this report and the recommendations. We look forward to the opportunity to work with you all to see the opportunities herein to fruition over time.

Sincerely,

David Sundberg, Chair  
Santa Fe Food Policy Council

Pam Roy, Executive Director  
Farm to Table

## Partners

City of Santa Fe

Santa Fe County

Food Depot, The

YouthWorks!

Santa Fe Public Schools

New Mexico Public Education Department

World Central Kitchen

New Mexico Farmers Marketing Association

Santa Fe Farmers Market Institute

Santa Fe Community Foundation

Presbyterian Health Services

Reunity Resources

Salvation Army

Aging and Long Term Services

Interfaith Shelter

Robert Egger

ESHIP Communities/Forward Cities

Kitchen Angels

Dreamspring

Farm to Table

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## **Santa Fe Food and Nutrition Report and Recommendations**

### **Sept 28th, 2020**

New Mexico is one of the most expansive and least densely populated of the fifty United States. Each year, over 60 million meals are served at state funded, public institutions that teach our children, support our elders and provide for incarcerated juveniles and adults. Federal and state nutrition guidelines dictate that over 102 million servings of fruits and vegetables be served with these meals.

Coined “the public plate” by urban planner Kevin Morgan, these meals are the result of an intricate system of publicly funded procurement, preparation, transportation, and food service across the state.

New Mexico faces a stark paradox: it ranks close to the top of the list nationally in food insecurity - child and senior hunger in particular - while having the second fastest growing senior population in the country. Prior to the pandemic, one in nine people and one in six children in Santa Fe county experienced hunger. With the pandemic, hunger has grown: one in six people and one in three children suffer from hunger. In conjunction, about one-third of our population suffers from obesity and numerous diet-related chronic diseases. Statewide public meal programs provide critical nutrition to approximately 340,000 students K-12, and more than 55,000 seniors. In the City of Santa Fe, more than 5,000 seniors are served 160,000 meals annually, including over 100,000 since COVID-19. Part of the required nutrition on every plate focuses on fruits and vegetables. These feeding programs create significant opportunities for those fruits and vegetables to be provided by New Mexico growers.

In order to initiate real change legislators, nonprofits and nutrition advocates have worked over the past decade to create opportunities for schools and senior meal programs to purchase New Mexico grown fruits and vegetables. In 2018 and 2019, 87 school districts purchased over \$1.15 million annually of New Mexico grown produce, using an average of 15 percent of their fruit and vegetables budgets to “buy local.” In 2017, the New Mexico Public Education Department (NMPED) created a permanent “farm to school” New Mexico Grown School Meal Program with more than 70 food safety certified farmers and vendors. The program works with partner organizations and multiple agencies to help coordinate sales of local fruits and vegetables into schools.

Santa Fe Public Schools purchased approximately \$80,000 in New Mexico produce in 2018-19 and has one of the more advanced procurement systems in the country including partnering with NMPED to create a multi-year universal bid with farmers that helps to mitigate risk for both the school district and farmers.

In 2019, the state legislature provided \$50,000 to pilot a New Mexico Grown for Senior Meals Program. Three counties (Sandoval, Socorro, and San Juan) representing 15 senior centers participated from January through June of 2020 despite COVID-19 affecting the whole program. Approximately 127,500 meals were served (congregate, curbside, and home deliveries) from February through June utilizing select New Mexico grown produce.

With lessons learned through the pandemic, the City of Santa Fe Senior Services found that curbside meal access and home delivery created more distribution opportunities. Curbside may continue beyond pandemic as an additional way to provide access. The City Senior Services has seen a significant increase in participation due to curbside. This will likely mean that the City Senior Services will have served an additional 40,000 meals in 2020-2021. The City of Santa Fe has been very supportive of meeting the challenges of providing food in the times of COVID-19.

This report identifies three sectors of the local food economy which, with appropriate adaptation and support could lead to better nutrition, greater food security and sustainable job growth in the community. Food & Nutrition Programs, Local Procurement and Food Production & Infrastructure are the three sectors highlighted below for recommendations and actions toward solutions.

## **Food & Nutrition Programs Recommendations**

### **What are the Issues/Problems?**

Children's access to school meals is limited by a complex funding formula, previous years' participation numbers, which have dropped significantly due to COVID-19 closing schools and youth programs and inadequate reimbursement to schools and other feeding programs for provided meals. Santa Fe Public Schools are at 77% free and reduced lunches, considered high poverty level by Free or Reduced-Price Lunch standards, which illustrates the need for better access for students.

Complicated Federal requirements for the food contents of school meals do not reflect tastes of this population. The milk requirement, for example, is a waste of resources as few public school students will drink milk. Short lunch periods with recess immediately following lunch minimize meal intake and increase waste - an adverse effect on student nutrition and health.

The State anti-donation clause is unclear and can create a barrier to public/private partnerships at local and state levels. State policy makers, led by Senator Gerald Ortiz y Pino, formed a committee to review the anti-donation clause and provide recommendations toward revisions that could be beneficial in creating more effective food access across public and private sector partnerships.

State and National rules and requirements tied to funding for food in Senior Centers, Public Schools, and supplementary after school programs disallow funds to be used to feed anyone other than the targeted group, which results in reduced participation in individual programs. Many Seniors are raising and caring for their grandchildren yet are not allowed to bring them to Senior Centers for meals or to share in meals and food provided by Senior Programs. Similarly, food distribution and feeding programs targeting school-aged children may not be provided for adult or infant family members.

### **Recommendations**

#### **A. School Meals Programs:**

1. Encourage the Federal government to extend COVID-19 waivers, which allowed for alternate feeding sites and delivery systems, multiple meals served per pick up/delivery and provided for more flexibility in feeding programs.
2. Support and expand the coordination of after school, supper, and summer meal programs and public/private sector partnerships with a focus on programs that emphasize healthy made from scratch meals.
3. Provide universal free lunches and breakfasts in the schools eliminating the need for complex rules and barriers.
4. Propose the requirements for school meals be the same as those for summer meals, which are more palatable to students and simpler to provide with available produce and food choices.
5. Schedule recess before lunch and extend lunch period to 30 minutes.

#### **B. Senior Meals Programs:**

1. Research possibility of use of Area Agency on Aging (AAA) funds expanded to provide flexible meal service in conjunction with other City and County programs.
2. Identify gaps in our senior programs to connect seniors with appropriate services, especially with congregational meals during non-COVID-19 times to provide social interaction and nutritious food.
3. Allow for greater flexibility in the budgeting process to differentiate between various programs such as transportation vs. food and applying Federal/State/local dollars to the programs.

C. Intergenerational Meals:

1. Identify locations and funding sources, which would allow families to access feeding programs currently reserved for specific demographic populations.
2. Develop joint use agreements at City, County and State levels to allow the use of buildings and kitchen facilities for intergenerational feeding programs by multiple agencies.
3. Advocate at the State and Federal levels for more flexibility in meal program access and funding rules.

## **Actions to Support Solutions**

A. School Meals Programs:

1. Advocate to State and Federal Legislators for universal free school lunches and breakfasts.
2. Explore developing a state administrative agency that establishes school meal requirements, which are regionally appropriate; identify a champion and legislative advocate to move it forward.
3. Recommend policy to schedule recess before lunch and a 30-minute lunch period, present to SFPS Superintendent Garcia and SFPS Board President.

B. Senior Meals Programs:

1. Work to engage isolated seniors and provide opportunities for social engagement and food access.
2. Work with State and Federal Legislators and administrative managers to explore adapting AAA funding and spending rules to allow for more flexibility.

C. Intergenerational Meals:

1. Examine Colorado report on interagency feeding program cooperation to determine if such a plan is feasible in New Mexico. [http://bestpractices.nokidhungry.org/sites/default/files/feeding-older--younger-americans-summer-meals-case-study\\_0.pdf](http://bestpractices.nokidhungry.org/sites/default/files/feeding-older--younger-americans-summer-meals-case-study_0.pdf)
2. Policy changes within City and County to establish joint use agreements allowing multiple agencies and organizations to use buildings and kitchens for feeding programs

## **Local Procurement for Youth & Elder Meal Programs Recommendations**

### **What are the Issues/Problems?**

Food procurement happens at all levels of government and is regulated at the local, tribal, state and federal levels. Within the guidance of the State Procurement Code, local municipalities can and do set their own procurement regulations. These regulations provide oversight to food purchasing for federally regulated meal programs such as senior meal programs, schools, and summer meals that utilize federal nutrition standards for reimbursement of meals.

Typically, Food Service Directors (FSD) set up contracts with national distributors for the bulk of their annual purchasing. Municipalities can purchase locally grown and raised foods for their meal programs by setting up farmers/vendors in the same way as they would set up any vendor. To buy locally, FSDs face challenges of additional paperwork to add multiple vendors and smaller scale operations, procurement thresholds, and finding appropriate vendors to meet their meal needs. The New Mexico Public Education Department's Farm to School Program and partner organizations and agencies provide FSD trainings, food safety trainings and planning for both farmers/vendors and FSDs, guidance documents, and a list of approved vendors for FSDs to purchase from called the New Mexico Grown Approved Supplier Program.

## Recommendations

### A. Change Through Resolution or Legislation:

1. Support that local food procurement guidelines be set at the local level, i.e., cities, counties and tribal government to provide Food Service Directors/Meal Providers (FSD's) with the flexibility for production planning commitments with farmers during winter months or one year in advance.
2. Simplify state level procurement process for locally grown produce that is purchased by public institutions and remove bureaucratic stipulations related to bidding that are not relevant to oversight and accountability of fresh produce purchases by institutions.
3. Remove application/qualification barriers that food service providers face when applying for federal, state, and local funding sources or programs that enhance their ability to purchase and utilize local food as integral meal components to their institutional menu.

### B. Administrative Oversight of Procurement Rules/Guidelines:

1. Encourage timely funding from federal, state, and local municipalities funding sources to Food Service Directors/Meal Providers and thereby to farmers to alleviate cash flow barriers.
2. Modify/Support bidding systems to be responsive and effective for Food Service Directors' local food needs, local farmers capacity, seasonality, and local/state procurement/budgetary accountability (
4. Activate an institution's ability to use small/micro purchase thresholds (align state and local purchasing thresholds and requirements) to be able to make timely and repetitive purchases of local produce as it becomes available.
5. Encourage and align piggybacking within and across institutions: include ability of any local institution to piggyback on qualified farm vendors through or with other institutions.
6. Fully utilize or develop institutional cooperative purchasing strategies for local food across local or regional institutions. Institutions (as localized or statewide) need to determine shared and consistent criteria and develop local capacity to verify produce is locally grown, meets quality standards & specifications, and meets minimal food safety/traceability requirements.
7. Institutions need to develop simple and reliable accounting systems to verify that local procurement meets purchasing goals: i.e., local produce payments go to local growers. Following the NM Public Education Department's New Mexico Approved Supplier Program will enable agencies, senior services, schools, early childhood agencies, summer meal programs, and intergenerational meal programs, to purchase from a verified list of growers that have participated in food safety training protocols and are considered viable entities. Working with approved vendors and multi-agency support, assists food service directors on managing menus and budgets.

## Actions to Support Solutions

### A. Change Through Resolution or Legislation:

1. Through a resolution, advocate for flexibility in senior meal programs and offer the ability to provide fresh, New Mexico produce and protein (dairy and meat) boxes instead of, or in addition to, prepared meals. Include this option as a reimbursable meal.
2. Simplify applications and web-based platforms and timely assistance to fill out applications; announce application openings with ample lead time; and qualify and award applicants in a timely fashion.

### B. Administrative Oversight of Procurement Rules/Guidelines:

1. Using the local preference rule, City and County leadership should encourage departments and

agencies to buy local products.

2. Qualify farm vendors for multiple years, include multiple vendors per term of award, include ability to “piggyback” on qualifying bids with other local institutions, and if the bid is awarded to a Food Service Management Company (FSMC); require that a minimum percentage of produce must be sourced locally; include timely payments to farm vendors upon delivery.
3. Require city procurement agencies to give a five percent preference to local New Mexico vendors/farmers.
4. Simplify bid procedures to allow Food Service Directors to purchase from multiple vendors/farmers using the NM Public Education Department's New Mexico Approved Supplier Program for verification.
5. Piggyback on the Santa Fe Public Schools Food Service bid, when appropriate, for early childhood education, intergenerational, summer, and senior meal programs.

## **Food Production & Infrastructure Recommendations**

### **What are the Issues/Problems?**

New Mexican farmers and ranchers sold over \$3.1 billion in agricultural products in 2017. 1% of those sales came from 78% of the state's farms, providing less than \$10k each in sales to nearly 20k farms. 70% of New Mexico farms reported losses in 2017. To further exacerbate the problem, New Mexico exports 97% of its grown/raised products while importing 90% (\$6.5B) of its food for consumption. Lack of internal infrastructure prohibits farmers from selling more directly (and profitably) to institutions, processors and retail consumers. School departments receive “brown box” commodities as well as Federal dollars to spend on commodities annually; in addition to these supplemental foods, they benefit from the USDA/Department of Defense Fresh Fruits and Vegetables Program, titled “DOD Fresh,” which allows for the purchase of fresh produce for meals programs. Most of the dollars spent on these programs leave NM to buy whole foods and contract for processed foods with external companies. The lack of refrigerated and freezer storage prohibits emergency feeding programs from distributing fresh produce and proteins to underserved communities.

The effects of COVID-19 on the national and international food systems revealed their fragility, leaving store shelves empty and New Mexicans, especially those already living on the edge, struggling to find food. Food Banks also struggled to find food for distribution from the lack of product available, yet regional partner organizations scrambled to connect farmers directly with food banks to supply shipments of the limited resources available. Youth and Senior feeding programs, closed for months to in-person meal service, needed to adapt to providing shelf-stable delivered and curbside meals.

Therefore, in order to reduce levels of food insecurity, augment farmers' incomes, reduce environmental impact of agriculture and food distribution, create good-paying manufacturing jobs, engender local food production, provide nutritious foods to our most vulnerable populations, reduce reliance on a national food chain and buffet against the effects of COVID-19 and other pandemics and disasters, New Mexico needs to invest in regional food production, aggregation, processing, storage, distribution, workforce/farm training, and a more localized Value Chain.

### **Recommendations**

- A. Assess and bolster existing resources and infrastructure within the local/regional food system:
  1. Need a better understanding of what resources exist for food storage and transportation across sectors of government, for-profit and non-profit entities.



2. Need to capitalize on the resources in existence as well as develop strategically placed new infrastructure to facilitate efficiencies in growing, harvesting, transporting, and storing NM raised foods.
  3. Need a coordinated network of refrigerated storage and transportation for use by emergency feeding programs, food service providers, and food producers.
- B. Encourage and support development, construction and expansion of new farming, distribution and food aggregation and processing infrastructure:
1. Santa Fe needs a regional Food Hub to aggregate, store, process, package, and distribute regionally raised foods.
  2. New Mexico needs greater capacity to process raw products into value-added foods, especially those used in institutional feeding programs to utilize the resources available within the state rather than exporting them for processing in other states.
  3. Survey institutions to evaluate the current and potential demand for value added / processed foods.
- C. Develop and support workforce training and agricultural education programs:
1. Need to engage programs and resources that support birth to career initiatives.
  2. Support marginalized community members such as those with drug and alcohol abuse issues, indigent communities, veterans, and minorities with targeted training programs.
  3. Need to avail the community of the significant intellectual resources available within the region and encourage those with technical, scientific, and operation experience to focus on solving the food crisis.

## **Actions to support solutions**

- A. Assess and bolster existing resources and infrastructure within the local/regional food system:
1. Assess what assets are available within government agencies for food transportation and storage then identify potentialities for transporting, backhauling, and storing local foods both fresh and value-added.
  2. Institute a GIS survey then develop a web-based program to track hauling routes and storage sites to create efficiencies in the food distribution network.
- B. Encourage and support development, construction, and expansion of new farming, distribution and food aggregation and processing infrastructure:
1. Invest in infrastructure that enables better access to government-owned property for investors and entrepreneurs to open and expand food processing facilities.
  2. Support development of a regional Food Hub. Santa Fe needs a regional Food Hub to aggregate, store, process, package, and distribute regionally raised foods in order to provide for sufficient supply of local food to meet the increasing demand for local food, including institutional-scale buyers.
- C. Develop and support workforce training and agricultural education programs:
1. Support workforce and economic development within the food system in partnership with existing programs such as YouthWorks, Make Santa Fe, and City Entrepreneurship Program. Align local efforts with state programs.
  2. Support local and regional farm businesses as part of an urban and peri-urban initiative.