NEW MEXICO COULD GAIN ECONOMICALLY BY BUILDING SOIL HEALTH AND FEEDING ITS OWN PEOPLE.

June 2020
NM Healthy Soil Working Group
Policy Recommendations in response to
New Mexico Farm & Food Economy
An Economic Analysis of our Agriculture & Food System
by the Crossroads Resource Center

GOALS

Recommendations address the long standing economic, environmental and social fallout in New Mexico agriculture through policies that advance self-determination and soil health, with the following goals:

- Advance public health and food security in response to COVID 19 and for long-term;
- Create prosperity and jobs in agriculture, spurring local economic development;
- Honor farmers and ranchers and their adoption of healthy soil principles;
- Develop greater water retention, climate leadership and ecological well being;
- Embrace social equity, including by engaging diverse and frontline communities in policymaking, to achieve the vast multicultural potential of the Land of Enchantment.
1. Maintain and expand investment in the Healthy Soil Program administered by the New Mexico Department of Agriculture to accelerate application of healthy soil principles in large and small scale agriculture alike and advance current Healthy Soil Act language to:

   (a) “promote and support farming and ranching systems ... to improve the health, yield and profitability of the soils of the state;”

   (b) “support the emerging market for food grown in New Mexico under management for healthy soils;” and

   (c) prioritize to “benefit economically or socially disadvantaged communities.”

2. Establish local and regional food hubs and processing facilities to foster the emerging market for healthy, locally produced foods, spur economic gains, and achieve import replacement. Reinstate state inspection for on-farm and mobile meat processing units.

3. Ramp up the statewide marketing campaign encouraging residents to purchase food grown in New Mexico. Boost the “Elevate New Mexico Agriculture $5 at a Time” initiative so people all around the state know how and where to get locally produced food and are encouraged to buy foods grown in-state.

4. Advance self sufficiency and food security in NM while respecting our state’s many cultures and traditions. Involve, educate and support all NM residents, especially marginalized communities, in growing their own food through home, community and school gardening as well as rural and urban farming. Concrete steps include a) expanding Soil and Water Conservation Districts’ (SWCDs) equipment lending programs; and b) offering gardening and nutrition classes at food banks.

5. Protect essential workers, including those on farms and in food processing, ensuring healthy working and housing conditions to keep workers safe and our food supply steady.

POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

BACKGROUND

Applying healthy soil principles on working lands leads to greater producer profitability, long term stability and rural prosperity. According to recent case studies by the American Farmland Trust farms get more than $3 back for every $1 invested in soil health. In addition, building soil results in benefits for public health, the environment, water security and resiliency that are needed now more than ever.

New Mexico currently imports 95% of our food from out of state, while exporting 97% of all NM grown products. Eating food grown in-state under management for healthy soil shortens vulnerable supply chains, reaps benefits for our local economies, and fosters public and ecological health.

If each New Mexico resident purchased merely $5 of food each week directly from a New Mexico farm or ranch, our producers would earn $544 million per year. This is more than current total net cash income of all NM farmers and ranchers combined.

The COVID crisis has laid bare the need for greater food security, especially in communities of color including New Mexico’s tribal communities. In the 1940s, home gardeners grew 40 percent of the nation’s food, which demonstrates enormous, untapped potential for greater self sufficiency.
POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

6. Ensure access to vital resources such as healthy food, clean water, electricity and internet, as well as seeds and affordable farmland, for all New Mexicans, prioritizing tribal communities, other communities of color and rural areas.

7. Expand local markets for NM agriculture while helping to feed the growing number of families in need by a) rapidly scaling up the use of local farm products at food banks and establishing a statewide Farm to Food Bank Program; b) making public school food services available year round to children and families in need, sourcing the food from New Mexico farms and ranches that manage for healthy soil; c) increase and incentivize farmer and rancher direct marketing to CSAs, food coops and beyond; d) expanding the Double Up Food Bucks program which enables low income residents to double their purchasing power when shopping at farmers markets; and e) bringing farmers markets into every county in NM.

8. Establish a New Mexico public bank that principally supports New Mexico’s producers and consumers in the pursuit of soil stewardship, providing low interest loans to farmers and ranchers and creating investment streams in the marketplace to help regenerate New Mexico’s agriculture.

9. Procure more agricultural resources and supplies in-state. For example, encourage the growing of feed in-state with attention to soil health methods.

10. Set state guidelines to implement food waste salvage and composting programs, including home composting, in all New Mexico counties to divert organic materials from landfills. Streamline regulation of commercial composting facilities to stimulate the sector and establish exemptions for artisan-scale and on-farm composting operations.

BACKGROUND

COVID-19 mortality and infection rates are disproportionately much higher among Native Americans and communities of color, exposing systemic inequities, supply chain gaps in our food system and basic infrastructure needs especially in New Mexico’s tribal areas.

In response to COVID 19, the American Friends Service Committee in New Mexico established a Farm to Food Bank program³, which could be expanded upon or serve as a model. Similar programs already exist in Maine (Mainers feeding Mainers⁴) and Vermont (Vermonters feeding Vermonters⁵).

North Dakota’s 100 year old public bank⁷ provides a successful model for creating economic stimulus, jobs, accountability, and society advancement.

One of the biggest expenses for livestock producers is the cost of feed, which is predominantly sourced out-of-state, hindering New Mexico’s farm economy. Management for soil health can increase production of higher quality forage on rangelands, significantly reducing the reliance on imported feed.

Compost can greatly boost soil health and local economies while lowering methane emissions in landfills. Supply has been unable to keep up with demand, especially with the recent surge in home gardening. While purchasing compost is a major expense for New Mexico farmers, on-farm composting presents a low-cost alternative with multiple co-benefits.
REFERENCES

• [1] New Mexico Farm & Food Economy, Crossroads Resource Center June 2020

• [2] Soil Health Case Studies, American Farmland Trust
  https://farmland.org/soil-health-case-studies/


  https://mainefoodstrategy.org/the-framework/case-studies/mainers-feeding-mainers

• [5] Vermon ters feeding Vermonters
  https://www.vtfoodbank.org/gather-food/vermonters-feeding-vermonters

• [6] Elevate New Mexico Agriculture $5 at a Time
  https://tradition.nmda.nmsu.edu

• [7] North Dakota Public Bank

ABOUT THE HEALTHY SOIL WORKING GROUP

Formed in the fall of 2018, the Working Group succeeded in passing the NM Healthy Soil Act by assembling an extensive coalition of hundreds of food and agriculture related organizations, farms and ranches, consumers, health practitioners and environmental groups. We are committed to the success of the state’s farmers and ranchers, knowing that building soil health creates co-benefits including rural and state economic gains, water availability and quality, more nutrient dense food leading to better public health, carbon drawdown and other key ecological services. Contact us: info@nmhealthysoil.org