



November 3rd, 2020

Re: Requesting Your Support for and expansion of the NM Grown Fruits and Vegetables for School, Senior and Early Childhood Meal Programs; Double Up Food Bucks (SNAP) Expansion; Healthy Food Financing Initiative; and, Soil Health and Conservation Programs

Dear Honorable Economic and Rural Development Interim Committee Members:

On behalf of the **New Mexico Food and Agriculture Policy Council, Farm to Table, NM Farmers' Marketing Association, La Semilla Food Center, Agricultura Cooperative Network, Center for Health Innovations, and Farm to Table**, we are requesting the Economic and Rural Development Interim Committee's support for the following programs in the Legislative Budget:

Healthy Food Financing Initiative (HFFI):

(administered by Economic Development Department): The HFFI is an effective, viable, and economically sustainable solution to bring locally grown food and jobs into underserved communities without sufficient access to affordable, nutritious foods. The fund is a combination of public and private dollars that can achieve multiple goals: reducing health disparities, improving the health of families and children, creating quality jobs, and stimulating long-term local economic development in low-income communities. The HFFI can leverage \$2 million in federal funds annually.

Double Up Food Bucks Program:

(administered by the NM Department of Agriculture) **\$500,000** recurring to expand the Double Up Food Bucks Program that doubles SNAP (Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program) dollars when purchasing NM grown at participating farmers' markets, roadside stands, and 29 grocery stores including 21 Lowes. The recurring funds will leverage \$7.5 million in federal funding through the 4-year USDA NIFA grant (FY2022-2025) and \$19.4M in total economic impact.

NM Grown for School Meals:

(administered by the NM Public Education Nutrition and Wellness Department): Retain **\$400,000** in recurring funds to continue expansion for the program. The Legislative incentive is helping school districts learn how to purchase local produce and build it into their budgets. In 2019-20 schools purchased \$1.15+ million.

Purchase NM Grown Fruits and Vegetables for a Senior Citizen Meals Program

(administered by Aging and Long-Term Service Department): **\$100,000** for city, county, tribal, and non-profit administered NM senior centers to be able to purchase NM grown fruits and vegetables for their meal programs. New in 2019, this program needs time to get off the ground like the PED initiative that is highly successful. This would serve seniors across the state and create a new economic market for farmers.

NM Grown for Early Childhood Food & Nutrition Programs:

(administered by Early Childhood Department): **\$100,000** for Early Childhood food and nutrition programs to be able to purchase NM grown fruits and vegetables for their meal programs such as summer meal programs and the Child and Adult Care Food Program.

Healthy Soil Program:

(Administered by the NM Department of Agriculture) Maintain **\$227,000** in recurring funds in the NM Department of Agriculture budget to incentivize farming and ranching systems that improve the health, yield and profitability of the soils of the state. Funds support project grants for farmers and ranchers, program administration, education and outreach. Demand for the Healthy Soil Program has been strong, far exceeding available state funding, which is being matched with federal funds from USDA NRCS.

These programs will: enhance children's diets while promoting healthier lifestyles and increasing academic achievement; increase access to New Mexico-grown fruits and vegetables for seniors; develop an agricultural workforce; provide soil health training and technical assistance to farmers and ranchers; and, strengthen New Mexico's farming economy and rural sectors by expanding market opportunities for farmers.

Please feel free to call us if you have any questions. I can be reached at 505-660-8403.

Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,



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