



Sponsor: Representative Candie Sweetser

Endorsed by the Economic and Rural Development Committee

New Mexico Food and Agriculture Education Grant Program

Throughout New Mexico, students are lacking access to locally grown food, engaging experiential STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering, Math) learning opportunities, and adequate nutrition education. Agriculture presents a unique opportunity for students to achieve deeper STEM learning, and develop readiness for career pathways in the agriculture, food and natural resources job sectors.

The New Mexico Food and Agriculture Policy Council and the *Resilience in NM Ag Project* propose to run legislation to develop **the New Mexico Food and Agriculture Education Grant Program** (“NM Food and Ag Education Grant”). This program would expand the New Mexico Grown Fresh Fruits and Vegetables Program to enable K-12 schools to provide experiential and entrepreneurial learning opportunities in food and agriculture. These programs would broaden students’ professional horizons, reinforce multiple state-required subject areas, and give valuable life lessons on nutrition and health.

What is the NM Food and Ag Education Grant?

Housed in the New Mexico Department of Agriculture, and managed with input from the New Mexico Public Education Department and the New Mexico Department of Health, the NM Food and Ag Education Grant would award funding for the following types of K-12 school programs:

- **Agricultural Education** – School-based farmer/rancher/horticultural training programs and internships, animal husbandry, agricultural technologies (greenhouse construction, aquaponics, etc.). Land-based curriculum that promotes the agricultural trade, as well as local histories and stories. Additionally, programs that encourage student exposure to careers in the agricultural sciences, STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering, Math), and natural resource conservation.
- **School Gardens/Outdoor Classrooms** – Programs that provide opportunities for project-based learning, real-world problem solving, and scientific experimentation through fruit, vegetable and livestock production on school campuses. These programs would include, but are not limited to, educational gardens, school farms, garden to cafeteria program development, social programs for feeding the needy, demonstration gardens, and traditional/indigenous growing methods.
- **Food Education** – Educational programming that promotes healthier food choices and student nutrition and allows student exposure to careers in food science and nutrition. Examples include: cafeteria taste tests, cooking demonstrations, cooking clubs, and any form of nutrition education in the classroom, cafeteria, after-school and summer program settings.

The grant program will support and align with the development of programs that directly relate to state testing and educational standards and benchmarks, including, but not limited to; Common Core, Next Generation Science Standards and STEM. The program requests a \$250,000 appropriation from the legislature for both awards and program operations.

Why do we need the NM Food and Ag Education Grant?

A Food and Ag Education Grant Program could improve STEM education in New Mexico. Leaders across the country are in agreement – experiential learning is key to improving STEM education. Connecting lessons in the classroom to the real world can improve students’ content knowledge, critical thinking skills and motivation. Agriculture is rife with opportunities to explore chemistry, biology, nutrition, climate-science, business, and leadership skills. The Food and Ag Education Grant Program could provide another tool for educators to immerse students in STEM and Core Curriculum subjects, while providing activities that students can look forward to!

A Food and Ag Education Grant Program can support the workforce pipeline. Currently, our state’s agriculture industry lacks a sufficiently trained labor pool. Young people are struggling to break into agriculture, and with most producers nearing retirement, our state needs to invest in the next generation of growers and food-related business professionals now. Currently, many students do not get exposure to agriculture, or view agriculture as a career option. The Food and Ag Education Grant could allow students to see agriculture as an exciting and rewarding job. Programs arising from the grant could also open doors to nutrition and natural resource-related professions.

A Food and Ag Education Grant Program could increase access to nutritious, locally-grown foods and provide education to make healthy choices. Nutrition plays a pivotal role in our lives. It influences all aspects our children’s growth and development, disease prevention, and disease management. However, a fifth of New Mexicans live in poverty, making it difficult to afford healthy foods. Further, diet-related health illnesses such as type 2 diabetes and heart disease are impacting thousands of our residents. Building access to locally grown, fresh foods and raising the next generation of healthy, educated eaters will be mainstays of the NM Food and Ag Education Grant.

New Mexicans have asked for a Food and Ag Education Program!

The NM Food and Ag Education Grant program is a key piece of the NM Food & Agriculture Policy Council’s long-range plan developed in 2014 by stakeholders representing more than 50 organizations and agencies. Additionally, in 2016 over 600 stakeholders across the state voiced concerns that K-12 agricultural education and training programs are decreasing (in meetings held by New Mexico First and NMSU Cooperative Extension Service). As a result, the New Mexico Ag Plan contains recommendations to improve financial and institutional support for K-12 agriculture education programs.

For further information contact:

Pam Roy
NM Food & Agriculture Policy Council
pam@farmotablenm.org
(505) 660-8403

Kelsey Rader
Resilience in NM Ag Project
kelseyr@nmfirst.org
(505) 225-2140 ext. 2