

POLICY EDUCATION BRIEFING

ON BEHALF OF NEW MEXICO'S SMALL SCALE CREAMERIES & DAIRIES



An Educational Framework for Supporting
Rural Agribusiness and Dairy Diversity Across Our State

PREPARED BY THE NEW MEXICO CHEESE GUILD FOR THE ECONOMIC & RURAL DEVELOPMENT & POLICY COMMITTEE

THE NEW MEXICO CHEESE GUILD

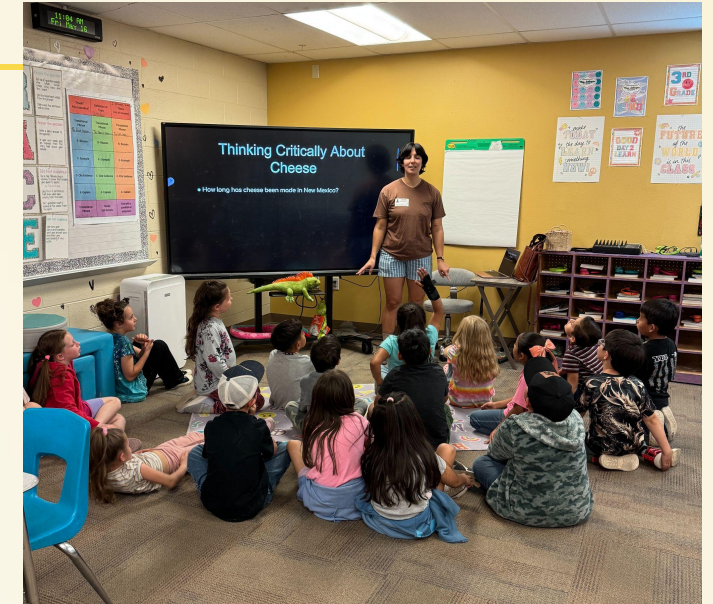
Operating as a dedicated 501(c)(3) non-profit organization focused on public and producer education—delivering accessible flavor perception workshops, cheesemaking classes, technical expertise, and consumer outreach to strengthen New Mexico's local dairy ecosystem.

NMCG GOALS

- **Empower Local Producers:** Elevate NM's small scale dairy community through technical education, advocacy, micro-grants, and raising public awareness.
- **Build Regional Terroir:** Protect and promote Southwestern flavors through community education and supporting small-batch and farmstead dairy practices.
- **Expand Food Literacy:** Connect communities to local dairy production via K-12 flavor science lessons, educational film screenings, and other events.

WHO IS NMCG?

- **Producer & Retailer Representation:** Proudly represents 20+ active artisan producers across New Mexico, spanning micro-dairies & farmstead cheesemakers, as well as both of New Mexico's cut-to-order cheese retailers.
- **Diverse Board Leadership:** Our Board of Directors brings together a broad coalition of industry voices, including:
 - Goat, Sheep, & Cow Dairy Owners
 - Farmstead Cheesemakers & Value-Added Processors
 - Cheese Shop Owners
 - Local Food System Advocates & Culinary Professionals
 - Researchers and Scientists
 - Industry Journalists



NM CHEESE GUILD 501(C)3 NON PROFIT

EDUCATORS NOT LOBBYISTS

Disclosure: NM Cheese Guild is an IRS-registered non-profit, and thus operates under strict advocacy spending parameters.

- **Lobbying Limit:** Less than 20% of our annual budget is allocated to direct legislative lobbying. (Last year we were fully volunteer, in FY 27 we will start paying a part time Executive Director; our revenue derives from grants, cheesemaking classes, and fundraisers.)
- **Fact-Based Focus:** We are here today to highlight community impacts, agricultural science, and other states' frameworks.
- **Non-Partisan Mandate:** We are not here to provide any direct calls to "vote yes" or "vote no" on specific active bills and we have no allegiance with any political party.

TOPICS OF CONSIDERATION

Today we present critical small scale dairy issues in New Mexico's rural economy, highlighting how peer states resolve similar concerns:

Land Stewardship: Prescribed brush remediation incentives for goat and sheep grazing.

Direct Farm Sales (Study Needed): Cottage dairy/creamery rule modernization for on-site farm sales.

Organic Certification & Funding: Establish & incentivize organic dairy production to backfill loss from the feds.

Establishing a State Microbe?: Recognizing New Mexico's unique microbiology, promoting science, destigmatizing mutualistic microbes, and create a sense of state pride.

GOAT & SHEEP GRAZING
AS A WILDFIRE MITIGATION STRATEGY

WHY PRESCRIBED GOAT/SHEEP GRAZING?

The utilization of goats/sheep to manage weeds, clear brush, and mitigate fire risk through targeted grazing practices.

MULTI PURPOSE FOREST MANAGEMENT

- **Fire Fuels Mitigation:** Goat/sheep grazing clears fire fuels that act as a ladder, carrying fire from grasses into larger shrubs and into the tree canopy.
- **Invasive Weed Suppression:** Drought conditions and burn scars from past fires have left New Mexico's wildlands susceptible to the overgrowth of invasive weeds like tumbleweeds. Goats/sheep help eliminate these weeds and allow the native vegetation to flourish.
- **Bring life back into the soil:** Where traditional vegetation management practices like herbicides and heavy machinery can damage the soil and hurt the ecosystem, goats/sheep and their droppings, made from the very weeds they are eliminating, act as natural fertilizers, bringing precious nutrients back into the soil.



INCENTIVIZING WILDFIRE MITIGATION

PRESCRIBED GRAZING INCENTIVES

New Mexico's high-desert ecosystem faces severe wildfire risks. Controlled grazing by small ruminants provides biological fuel reduction.

- 💧 **Modeled After Other Comparable Western States:** California actively funds target-grazing incentives to clear volatile ladder fuels in high-risk zones.
- 🏔️ **NM Relevance:** Sheep and goats navigate rugged desert terrain inaccessible to mechanical clearers.
- ✚ **Ecological Win:** Natural grazing recycles nutrients into dry soil and avoids chemical herbicides.



INCENTIVIZING WILDFIRE MITIGATION

KEY FINANCIAL INCENTIVES ESTABLISHED IN THE STATUTE

- **Infrastructure Funding:** If NM were to explicitly allow grant dollars to cover the high upfront capital costs of targeted grazing, including temporary electric fencing, portable watering facilities, and livestock transportation, we could better utilize this resource and mitigate the extent of future fires.
- **Advance Payments:** When grantees are able to receive a percentage of grant funds in advance rather than strictly operating on a reimbursement model, this would make it far easier for smaller livestock operations to cover immediate startup costs.
- **Expanded Eligibility:** If we classify prescribed grazing as an eligible "fire prevention activity" on par with mechanical clearing this could open up resources for NM goat and sheep owners.



COTTAGE DAIRY & CREAMERY
ON SITE SALES

COTTAGE DAIRY ON-SITE SALES



CURRENT NM LIMITATIONS

Under New Mexico's current Homemade Food Act, temperature-controlled safety foods are excluded from cottage exemptions:

Exclusions: Dairy products like fluid raw milk, cheese, kefir, and butter cannot be produced in small-scale home or micro-dairies for direct sale.

Economic Barrier: Grade A processing facilities require large capital investments, barring entry for small family farms.

Result: More and more micro-dairy and creamery owners are operating under the table, potentially placing New Mexicans at risk and hindering economic growth in rural communities.



PASTEURIZED MILK ORDINANCE

The **Grade A Pasteurized Milk Ordinance** (PMO) is the national sanitary rulebook for milk production.. It was built primarily to regulate liquid drinking milk processed in large, modern, automated industrial facilities.

The Conflict: Non-fluid manufactured dairy products (e.g. hard cheeses, butter, or cultured products (eg yogurt)) use very different traditional processing methods. Expecting a small cheese house or artisanal processor to follow rigid industrial fluid-milk facility rules is often **impractical, cost-prohibitive**, or sometimes **technically incompatible with traditional recipes**.

NM State dairy inspectors are not currently funded to be able to oversee and regulate all of the micro dairies and creameries that exist in the state and thus there is no way of knowing if these unregulated dairies are following basic safety standards.

STATE STATUTE COMPARISON

Core Strategy: Eliminates state-level licensing, inspections, and Grade A facility requirements for direct farm-to-consumer sales, relying on consumer choice or local municipal authority.



COMPLETE DEREGULATION/ LOCAL FOOD SOVEREIGNTY MODELS

- **Wyoming:** Comprehensive state-level exemption via the Food Freedom Act for on-farm sales and direct delivery.
- **Maine:** Local home-rule model via the Food Sovereignty Act, allowing individual municipalities to pass local exemption ordinances.
- **Alaska & Connecticut** - Tier 1: sales of raw milk and raw milk products direct to consumer and to retail; registration, sanitation and labeling requirements. Tier 2: herdshares distributing raw milk and raw milk products; unregulate



MICRO-HERD & VOLUME-CAPPED EXEMPTIONS (UNLICENSED) MODELS

Core Strategy: Exempts micro-scale homestead operations from commercial dairy plant permits by placing explicit legal ceilings on animal counts or monthly gallon volumes.

- **Oregon:** Capped by animal counts (3 cows, 9 goats, or 9 sheep) for unlicensed on-farm sales.
- **Iowa:** Capped by animal counts (10 lactating animals) with mandatory animal health testing and warning labels.
- **Arkansas:** Capped by monthly volume (500 gallons/month) allowing on-farm sales, delivery, and farmers' markets.
- **Kansas:** On-farm point-of-sale exemption relying on standardized warning signage rather than state permits

STATE STATUTE COMPARISON



SPECIALIZED STATE PERMITTING & HEALTH OVERSIGHT MODELS

Core Strategy: Creates a dedicated direct-to-consumer raw milk permit administered by state health or agriculture departments, waiving heavy commercial plant standards while requiring active pathogen testing and sanitation standards.

- **Texas:** Specialized Grade A Raw Milk Permit allowing on-farm sales and direct producer delivery under state health department oversight.
- **Georgia:** Direct-to-consumer raw dairy license administered by the Department of Agriculture requiring routine pathogen screening.



TIERED REGULATORY & VALUE-ADDED PRODUCT MODELS

Core Strategy: Establishes progressive regulatory tiers based on volume/scale, while explicitly legalizing non-fluid, value-added raw dairy products (e.g., butter, yogurt, kefir).

- **Utah:** Two-tier system establishing a Tier 1 homestead exemption (120 gal/month) alongside a Tier 2 permitted micro-dairy license.
- **New Hampshire:** Tier 1: licensed sales of raw milk and raw milk products in retail store and direct to consumers. Tier 2: sales of up to 20 gallons as either raw milk or raw milk products
- **Vermont:** Tiered volume framework exempting small micro-dairies from commercial pasteurization requirements while explicitly permitting raw fluid milk and raw value-added cultured products (yogurt, kefir, butter, aged cheeses).

ESTABLISH A STAKEHOLDER TASK FORCE?

Core Objectives: Assess the feasibility of allowing onsite dairy and dairy product sales, while:

- maintaining public health (eg preventing and reducing foodborne illnesses)
- driving rural economic development by building a strong sense of terroir (taste of place) and supporting our local agricultural producers.

Purpose: Study the current small scale raw milk and dairy landscape in New Mexico, evaluate regulatory models (such as multi-tier and value-added frameworks), and issue formal legislative recommendations.

Stakeholders: Bring together the NM Cheese Guild (minimum 3 producers), Raw Milk Institute, Weston A. Price Foundation, Farm to Consumer Legal Defense Fund, NM Department of Ag (Dairy Inspector), NM Department of Health (infectious Disease), NM Livestock Board, Dairy Producers of New Mexico, Growers Market Association, Restaurant Association, Culinary Incubators (eg Street Food Institute, Three Sisters Kitchen) and any other stakeholders as deemed appropriate.

ORGANIC DAIRY INCENTIVES

ORGANIC DAIRY: DRIVING ECONOMIC GROWTH IN RURAL NM

TAMI WILLIAMS - TUCUMCARI

“Each farmer should be able to offer someone raw milk without going to jail over it. Each farmer should also be held accountable for said milk - this could include facing temporary sales bans if someone gets sick, and agreeing to regular equipment inspections. To make safety affordable and practical, the state should offer grants for on-farm testing equipment so farmers can test their milk locally rather than relying on distant labs or slow mail.”

PROTECTING OUR DAIRY SECTOR AMID FEDERAL FUNDING ROLLBACKS

Recent rollbacks in USDA transition grants and climate-smart funding leave local producers with severe capital shortfalls.

Local incentives are needed to bridge funding gaps and protect regional food security:

- Fund local cold-chain logistics and processing to keep value-add dollars in New Mexico.
- Leverage state procurement (schools, state facilities) to guarantee reliable market demand.

State incentives turn a federal setback into a New Mexico economic advantage.

ORGANIC DAIRY: DRIVING ECONOMIC GROWTH IN RURAL NM

ECONOMIC BENEFITS

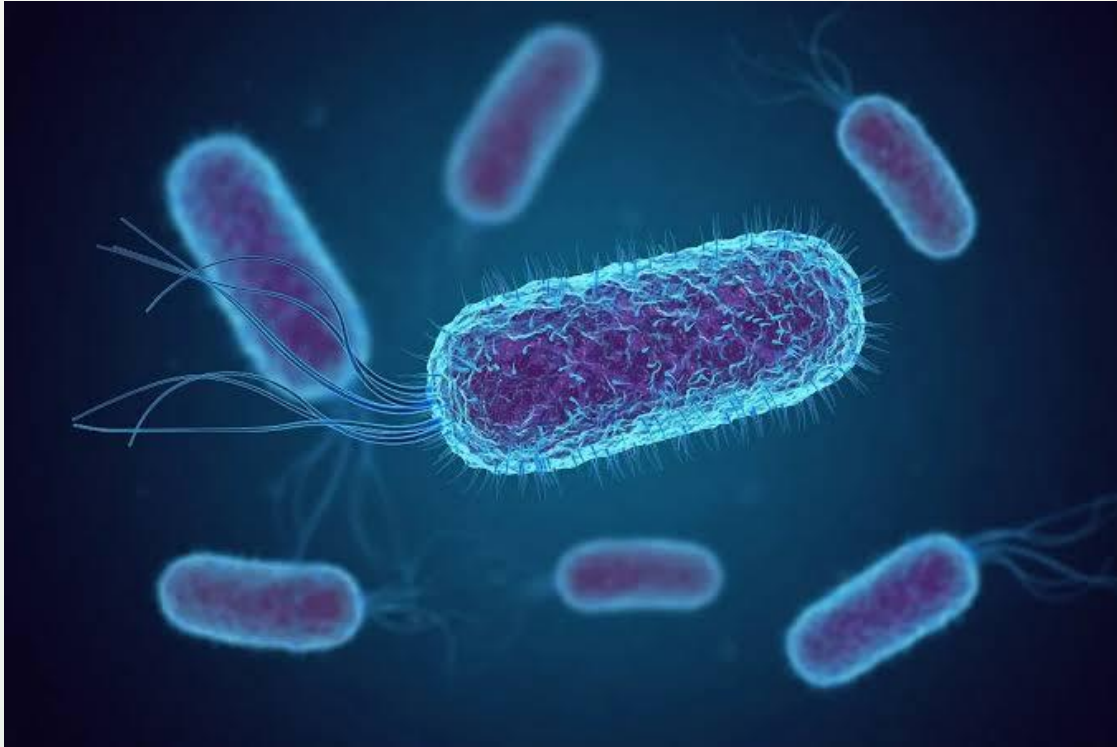
- **Preserving Family Farms:** Keeps generational wealth local; organic farms rely heavily on regional feed, equipment, and labor.
- **Higher Profit Margins:** Shields local producers from volatile conventional milk prices through stable premium markets.
- **Environmental Infrastructure:** Mandated pasture grazing improves soil health, protects groundwater, and builds drought resilience.
- **The Transition Hurdle:** The 3-year organic conversion carries high costs and lower yields before premium prices kick in.

HIGH RETURN ON INVESTMENT

- Every dollar kept in local agriculture recirculates up to 2 times in rural economies through local feed, veterinary care, and equipment suppliers.
- Healthy, pasture-grazed soils store significantly more water—reducing irrigation demands during severe drought cycles.
- Neighboring states are expanding their processing capacity; keeping value-added processing in-state stops New Mexico dollars from crossing state lines.
- Smart state incentives anchor job growth, secure our food supply, and keep New Mexico agricultural wealth in New Mexico.

STATE MICROBE

WHY DOESN'T NM HAVE A STATE MICROBE?



Escherichia coli

E. coli could be a strong contender for the NM state microbe. While most people only know about the strain that causes diarrhea, there are others that serve as the primary workhorse of biotechnology: essential to molecular genetics and life-saving discoveries like insulin. Naming it New Mexico's state microbe would celebrate our growing biotech sector, honor the science that tames "scary" bacteria, and give our state a clever, scientifically grounded symbol of resilience and utility.

Microbes shape our world, yet public perception remains largely defined by fear; a stigma only amplified in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Establishing an official State Microbe offers a powerful opportunity to shift the narrative, celebrating the essential, mutualistic microbes that power our soils, ferment our traditional foods, and sustain human health.

Passed

- [Oregon](#) (*Saccharomyces cerevisiae* / Brewer's Yeast)
- [New Jersey](#) (*Streptomyces griseus*) Medical treatment for TB
- [Illinois](#) (*Penicillium rubens*) More efficient antibiotics

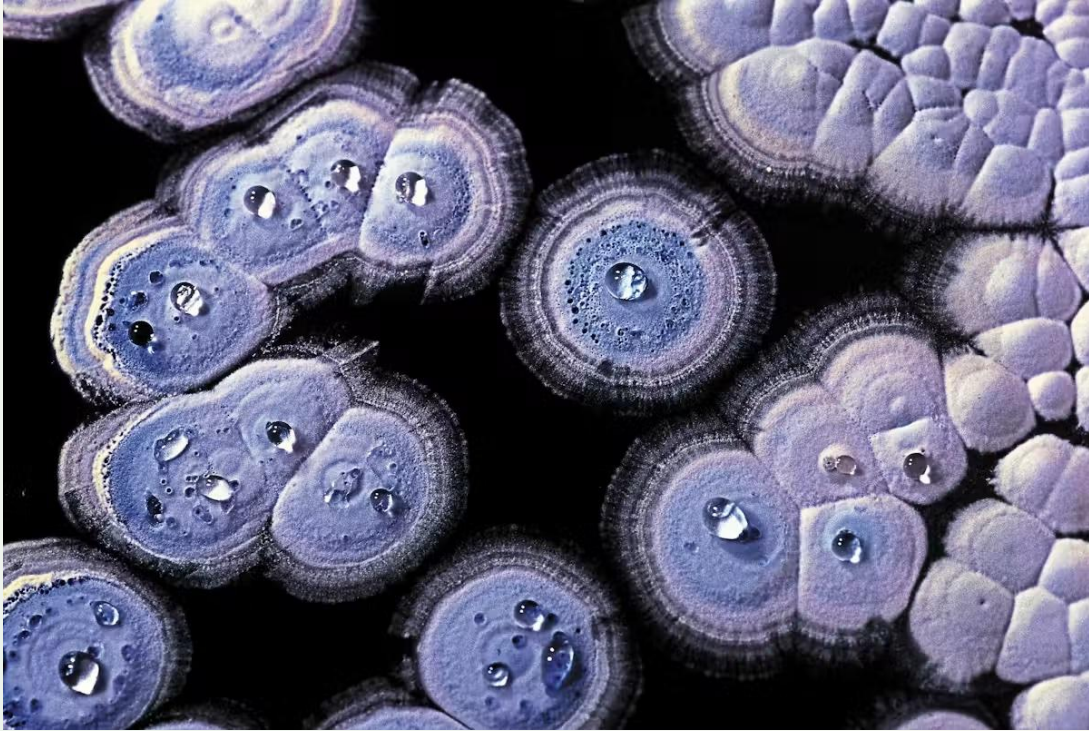
Pending

- [Wisconsin](#) (*Lactococcus lactis*)
- [Hawaii](#) (*Aliivibrio fischeri* vs. *Flavobacterium akiainvibens*)

To bring this initiative to life, we are proud to partner with a distinguished team of microbiologists from the University of New Mexico (UNM), Santa Fe Community College (SFCC), and (hopefully) New Mexico State University (NMSU).

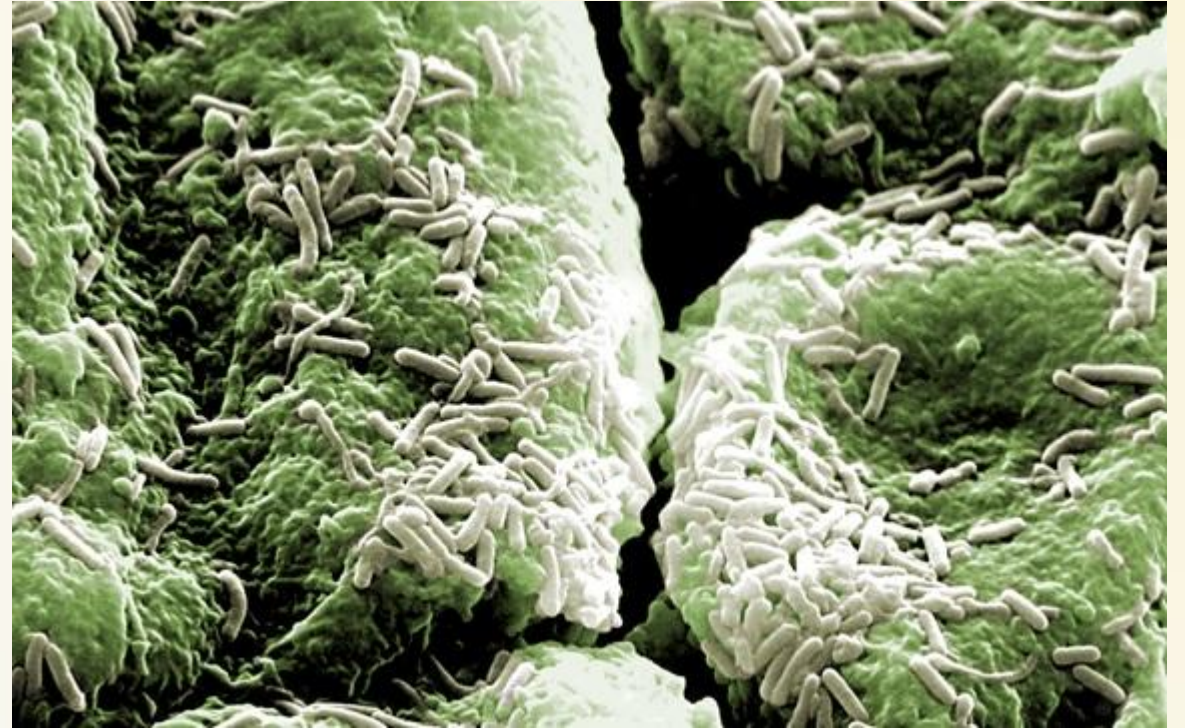
This effort aims to inspire K-12 STEM education and foster public appreciation for invisible ecosystems.

WHY DOESN'T NM HAVE A STATE MICROBE?



Streptomyces

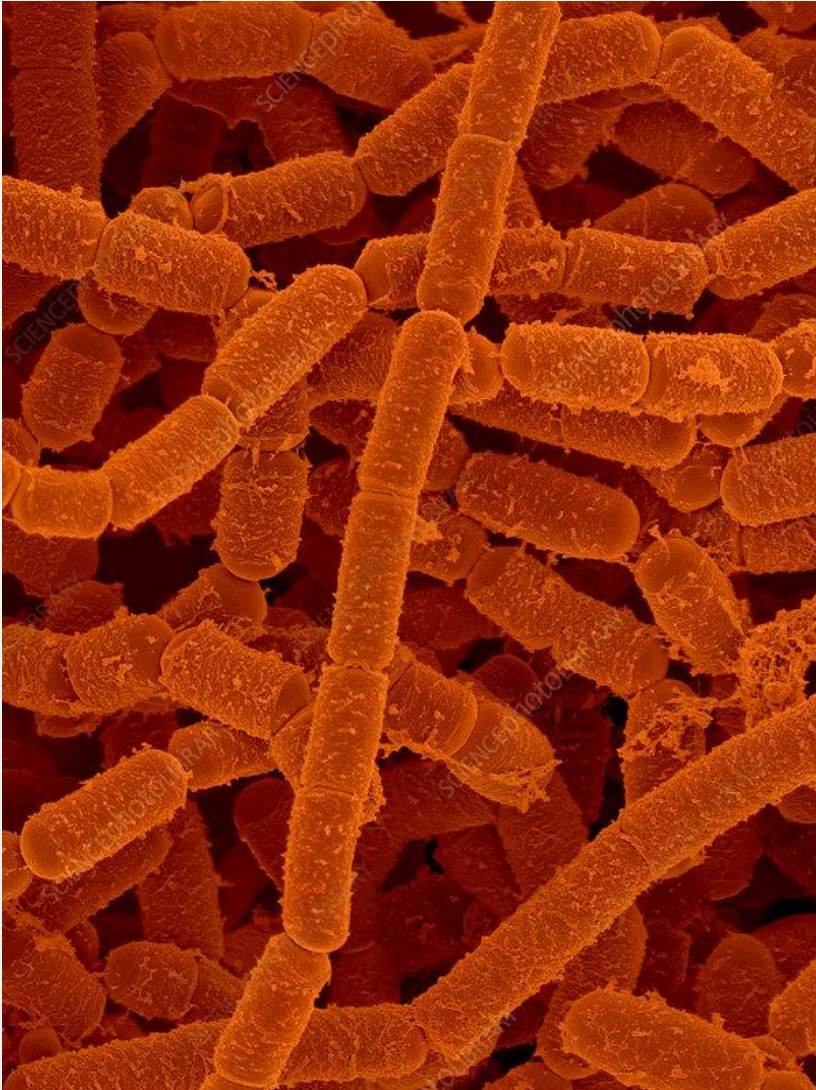
Beyond its humble home in dry earth, *Streptomyces* is a prime candidate for New Mexico's state microbe. These beneficial soil bacteria produce geosmin: the organic compound that, when mixed with the resinous oils of desert creosote, creates petrichor, the iconic and beloved smell of rain on desert soil. *Streptomyces* species are ecological powerhouses that enrich arid soils and have supplied humanity with most of its lifesaving medical antibiotics. Naming *Streptomyces* New Mexico's state microbe would honor our unique desert ecosystem, celebrate soil health, and give our state a fragrant, scientifically rich symbol of vitality and renewal.



Lactobacillus pentosus

Lactobacillus pentosus is a living link across ancient trade routes, connecting the indigenous peoples of Mexico and the American Southwest. This resilient microbe drives the traditional fermentation of native corn and agave into sacred, nourishing beverages like tesgüino and pulque. Crafting rich flavors and probiotics while preserving vital nutrients, *L. pentosus* showcases the sophisticated biotechnology of early indigenous brewers. Recognizing this powerful microbe honors deep cultural heritage, ancient trade networks, and the timeless art of desert fermentation.

WHY DOESN'T NEW MEXICO HAVE A STATE MICROBE?



Paenibacillus sp. LC231

Deep beneath New Mexico in Lechuguilla Cave, at Carlsbad Caverns *Paenibacillus* LC231 slept in complete isolation for over four million years, pristine and untouched by human hands. Yet when [scientists discovered this ancient bacterium](#) in 2012, they found it was naturally resistant to nearly all modern clinical antibiotics. By proving that antibiotic resistance is an ancient survival mechanism rather than a purely modern phenomenon, *Paenibacillus* LC231 revolutionized evolutionary medicine. Celebrating this subterranean marvel honors New Mexico's world-renowned national parks and highlights our state's impact on global medical science.

ECONOMIC IMPACT

Goat & Sheep Grazing Incentives: Protects state infrastructure and agricultural land by reducing wildfire fuel load, lowering emergency management costs, and generating revenue through sustainable vegetation management and fiber/meat production.

Cottage Dairy & Creamery Study: Unlocks high-margin direct-to-consumer revenue streams for rural micro-farms, keeping capital in local communities while diversifying New Mexico's value-added dairy economy. This type of vertical integration better positions small family farms to grow in a sustainable way.

Organic Dairy Production Incentives: Captures growing premium market share (metro-area restaurants), supports soil health, and keeps New Mexico dairies competitive and resilient against volatile national commodity pricing.

Establishing a State Microbe: Boosts New Mexico's biotech identity, drives K-12 STEM engagement, and elevates the scientific narrative surrounding our agricultural and fermented food sectors.

ECONOMIC IMPACT

From fire mitigation to small-scale creameries, empowering our small scale dairy producers creates jobs, builds regional resilience, and puts New Mexico at the forefront of culinary tourism and sustainable agriculture.

NEW MEXICO CHEESE GUILD

CULTIVATING SMALL DAIRY & CREAMERY ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

An educated approach to food policy fosters ecological restoration, protects regional culinary identity, and secures sustainable growth for New Mexico's small family farms.



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Visit our Turquoise Food Trailer
Starting in Spring '27!