

**LEGISLATIVE EDUCATION STUDY COMMITTEE  
BILL ANALYSIS**

**Bill Number:** SB 237

**52nd Legislature, 1st Session, 2015**

**Tracking Number:** .198136.1

**Short Title:** Local Produce in School Lunches

**Sponsor(s):** Senators Sue Wilson Beffort and Pete Campos

**Analyst:** James Ball

**Date:** February 4, 2015

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**Bill Summary:**

SB 237 makes an appropriation for the New Mexico Department of Agriculture (NMDA) to expand its program providing locally grown fresh fruits and vegetables for public school lunch programs in north-central and south-central school districts in areas with farmer training programs.

**Fiscal Impact:**

\$160,000 is appropriated from the General Fund to the Board of Regents of New Mexico State University (NMSU) for expenditure in FY 16 and subsequent fiscal years. Unexpended or unencumbered funds shall not revert to the General Fund.

**Substantive Issues:**

According to NMSU, SB 237 would support communities that have self-identified the need to train farmers on how to grow and sell produce to their local public school districts. Current and potential program participants can be, but are not limited to:

- owners of small plots of land they wish to put into agricultural production;
- young farmers;
- youth at risk;
- retirees; and
- veterans.

NMSU also notes that clarification is needed regarding the definition of “farmer training programs” to clearly understand who would be eligible to supply fresh fruits and vegetables to school districts in the north-central and south-central parts of the state.

**Background:**

During the 2014 interim, the Legislative Education Study Committee (LESC) heard testimony from several sources about school nutrition programs.

- The Executive Director, Farm to Table, provided an overview of the New Mexico-grown Fresh Fruits and Vegetables for School Meals program, which is currently in its second year of operation.

- According to this testimony, the program has provided New Mexico-grown produce to approximately 146,000 students from 2012 to 2014, and over 300,000 pounds of fresh fruits and vegetables have been sold to schools throughout the state. The program is serving 45 school districts during school year 2014-2015, and the requests for funding have exceeded the funding made available by the Legislature. The testimony also emphasized that the program serves as an economic driver by helping to connect local growers to a new market of public schools in their area. For some school districts that are unable to connect with a local farmer for fresh fruits and vegetables, Farm to Table utilizes the Food and Nutrition Services Bureau of the Human Services Department to help distribute produce in those areas.
- This testimony further emphasized the need to distribute funding for the program earlier in the fiscal year. Because the purpose of the program is to put fresh fruits and vegetables on the plates of New Mexico children, funding needs to align with the New Mexico growing season in order to ensure the quality and freshness of the produce. In addition, having the funding available to school districts earlier will help farmers in the planning and harvesting of their crops.
- The Assistant Director for School Food Service, Santa Fe Public Schools, testified that students know the difference between fresh, locally grown foods and other foods that come from a distributor.
- Testimony by the President, Los de Mora Local Growers' Cooperative, Inc., outlined the history of the program.
  - Noting that traditional value chains in agriculture rely on selling at local farmers' markets and canning any remaining food items, this testimony emphasized that the New Mexico-grown Fresh Fruits and Vegetables for School Meals program allows local growers to engage in dialogue with school district officials and plan in advance of the growing season.
  - This testimony added that farmers are willing to accept lower prices from schools than from farmers' markets because they view the program as an opportunity to invest in future customers, and they value showing children the importance of agriculture in local communities.

According to the Department of Health (DOH), replacing foods of high calories per weight of food with foods of lower energy density, such as fruits and vegetables, can be an important part of weight management strategy. Only 23.8 percent of New Mexico middle and high school students eat the recommended level of at least five fruits and vegetables a day. Further, the prevalence of obesity continues to increase and occur at younger ages. In 2013, 27.7 percent of kindergarteners and 34.7 percent of New Mexico third graders were either overweight or obese. DOH further states that farm-to-school programs may increase fruit and vegetable purchases and intake when produce was included in a school salad bar or part of the meal selection during the school day.

### **Committee Referrals:**

SEC/SFC

### **Related Bills:**

HB 96 *NM Grown Produce for School Meals*

HB 231 *Expand NM-Grown Produce in School Lunches (Identical)*