

New Mexico GROWN



For Schools, Early Childhood Education Sites, and Senior Centers

WHO WE ARE

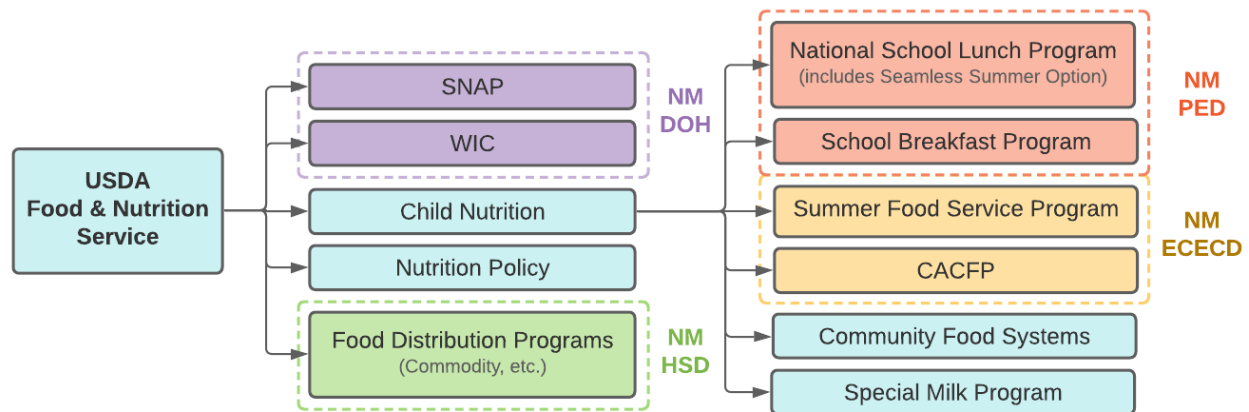
The New Mexico (NM) Grown Interagency Task Force is comprised of five state agency partners who believe local food has the power to transform NM nutrition programs. The Departments of Public Education (PED), Early Childhood Education and Care (ECECD), and Aging and Long-Term Services (ALTSD) administer the state’s nutrition programs and play a key role in shaping NM’s food and agricultural systems. The Departments of Health (DOH) and Agriculture (NMDA) provide guidance on program delivery and implementation. The Office of the Governor supports the creation of a standard system for procuring local produce and food products across all agency nutrition programs. The administrative structure of NM’s child nutrition programs is referenced in Figure 1.



NM school food service staff providing local, nutritious meals during COVID-19

Nutrition programs are a critical component of the state’s response to hunger and poverty and can have a positive impact on food access and health outcomes. The COVID-19 pandemic has highlighted the importance of these programs now more than ever. Because of Task Force members and their partners’ work, 40,757,300 meals have been served to children, families, and older adults in NM since March 2020¹.

Figure 1. Administration of Child Nutrition Programs



*Adult nutrition programs have been omitted from this diagram for clarity and brevity.

**NM Human Services Division (NM HSD) is not currently a taskforce member.

¹ Total meals served from March 1, 2020 to December 1, 2020. Data provided by ALTSD, ECECD, and PED.

WHY WE CARE

The Task Force is committed to ensuring all NM’s nutrition programs have the capacity to source high quality locally grown foods. By making deeper investments in these programs, we can transform food and agricultural systems and increase equitable access to healthy and affordable food, especially for those who rely most on the state’s nutrition programs for consistent and stable meals. Figure 2 displays financial need across NM, measured by the percentage of students receiving free or reduced-price lunch.

NM GROWN PROGRAMS

New Mexico Grown (NM Grown) is a program that serves K-12 students, older adults in senior centers, and early childhood education sites across New Mexico by incentivizing the purchase and distribution of locally grown fruits and vegetables for meal and snack programs. Currently, only ALTSD and PED operate programs with the support of state funding.

NM Grown for School Meals

NM Grown for School Meals was established when the state legislature allocated funding for schools to purchase local produce for meal programs. This was an important step in supporting child nutrition and the local farming economy, but is still not enough to meet demand and create a sustainable and robust Farm to School program in NM.

PED administers NM Grown and has created a comprehensive system for schools to apply for and utilize the funding. Allocation of funding is based on pupil count, staff capacity and readiness, wellness policy integration, and percentage of students eligible for free and reduced-price lunch. Funding provides schools with the financial support necessary to cover the costs associated with purchasing local produce not covered by federal United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) reimbursements.

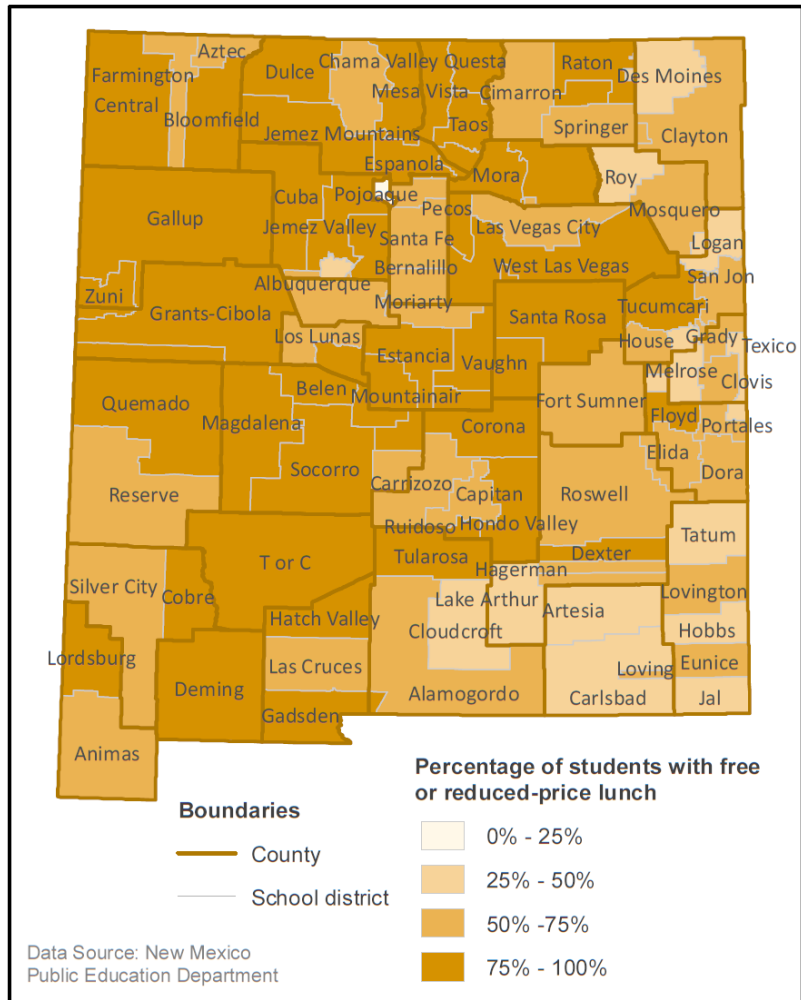


Figure 2. Percentage of students receiving free or reduced-price lunch in school districts (School Year 19-20)

New Mexico schools and school districts believe in local purchasing. Schools and school districts spent \$1,042,364 on local fruits and vegetables in School Year (SY) 2019-2020, surpassing the program allotment of \$450,000². In SY 2019-2020, awarded schools and districts spent 95% of allocated funds³. As of December 31, 2020, schools spent 47% of funds awarded for SY 2020-2021⁴. With more investment from the state legislature, the amount spent on local produce in NM Grown programs will increase.

Table 1. NM Grown for School Meals: Funding and Reach²

	SY 2019-2020	SY 2020-2021
Funds invested in local produce by grantees	\$1,042,364	
Funds awarded	\$450,000	\$332,200
Funds awarded per student	\$2.63	\$1.81 <i>(projected)</i>
Funds requested	\$682,263	\$578,500
Percentage of school produce budget spent on local foods	22%	
Grantee schools and school districts	58	54
School sites		514
Students served school meals with local produce	171,000	183,318 <i>(projected)</i>

NM Grown for Senior Meals

NM's older adult population is projected to be one of the fastest growing populations in the nation. Access to fresh fruits and vegetables can help prevent chronic disease in older adults. Additionally, this growing population represents an important market for local farmers. The NM Grown for Senior Meals was established to integrate local produce into senior meal programs and link farmers to senior centers. In 2019 the state legislature appropriated \$50,000 to fund a pilot project procuring local produce for senior meals in three counties. The project successfully served approximately 102,000 meals with local produce to seniors.

NM Grown Approved Supplier Program

The NM Grown Approved Supplier Program assures that local produce sold to schools, senior centers, and early childhood education sites is safe, traceable, and originates from a garden or farm meeting current food safety practices. Designed to grow and diversify the base of small-scale producers selling to these institutions, the Approved Supplier Program provides an alternate pathway for producers traditionally marginalized by the process and costs associated with third party food safety certification.



² Data source: PED.

³ Data made available from PED's Operating and Budget Management System.

⁴ This is a normal expenditure rate, as larger districts do not typically request reimbursement until the end of the school year. Data made available from PED's Operating and Budget Management System.

CHALLENGES

Administration and bureaucracy:

1. Collaboration between legislators, advocates, and agencies is limited, resulting in food and nutrition policies that are difficult to implement because they do not consider existing reimbursement structures.
2. Agencies and program operators that administer meal programs have different procurement policies, which inhibit the ability of schools, senior centers, and early childhood education sites to purchase local. Additionally, the variance in local, state, and federal procurement policies prevent seamless purchasing relationships between farmers and potential buyers.
3. Without a uniform NM Grown program that ties agencies and program operators together, additional capacity, resources, and leadership are needed at all levels for administration and implementation.



Financial constraints:

1. Current NM Grown allocation is insufficient to meet school and senior center demand and does not provide for local procurement within early childhood education sites.
2. The reimbursement structure for nutrition programs has not kept up with the costs of inflation, leading to lower quality meals and other challenges. The USDA reimburses nutrition programs on a per-meal basis. After labor, equipment, facilities, and other expenses, there is an average of \$1.50-\$1.75 per meal for food costs⁵. In the absence of additional local or state funding, an increasing number of nutrition programs lower costs by purchasing cheap, low quality food, reducing staff positions, or transitioning to privatized programs.⁶ Additionally, because NM Grown funding provides reimbursement for meal costs only, agencies and nutrition programs absorb all other costs, exacerbating financial challenges and limiting innovation.

⁵ This is a national statistic using National School Lunch Program data from School Year 2018-2019.

⁶ This is national data from the USDA Economic Research Service.

OUR VISION

We envision a strong collaboration among state agencies and local providers to integrate fresh NM Grown foods into all state nutrition programs using a standard system that seamlessly supports local purchasing for schools, senior centers, and early childhood education sites.

The following Task Force priorities align with this vision and will be piloted by July 2021:

1. Expand NM Grown from school systems into senior centers and early childhood education sites by partnering with agencies administering state nutrition programs (ALTSD, ECECD, and PED).
2. Strategically use state and federal funding sources to pilot comprehensive initiatives in rural, tribal, and frontier senior centers and early childhood education sites where Farm to School capacity already exists.
3. Develop a state recognition program to highlight and evaluate innovative NM Grown practices in schools, senior centers, and early childhood education sites.
4. Adapt NM Grown to meet the needs of summer meal programs, take advantage of the summer growing season, and encourage earlier, more consistent purchasing patterns across institutions.

To accomplish our priorities, we will:

1. Identify and address procurement barriers prohibiting schools, early childhood education sites, and senior centers from purchasing local foods.
2. Adopt one streamlined system to train, certify, and onboard vendors for all institutional buyers⁷.

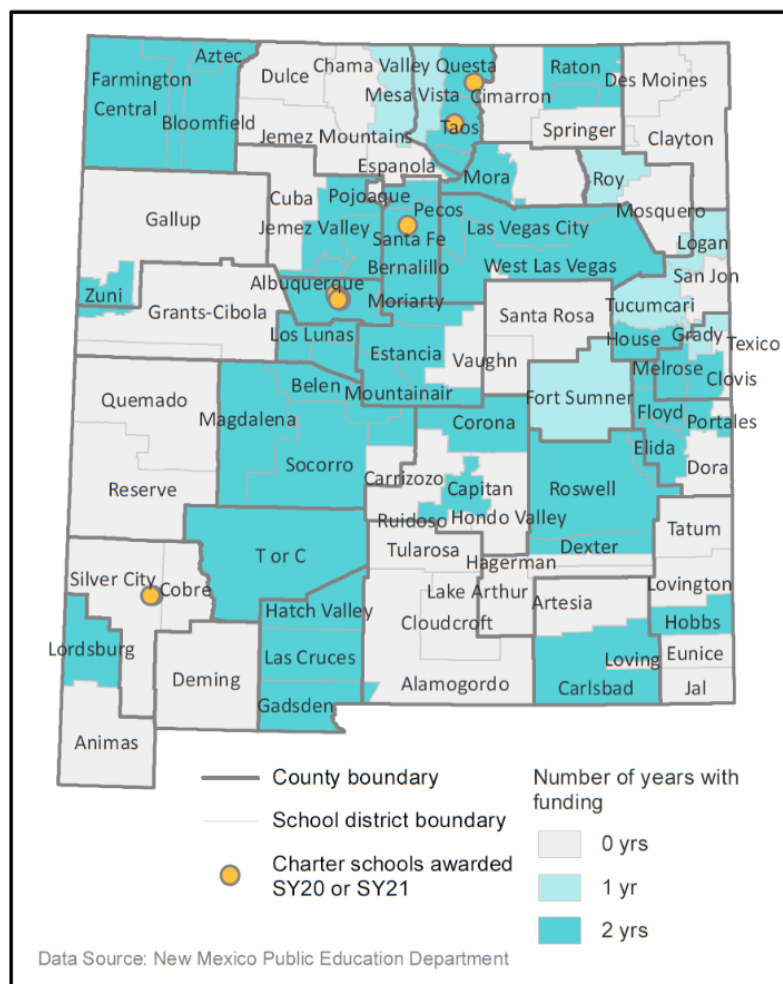


Figure 3. School districts and charter schools funded by NM Grown in SY20 or SY21

⁷ PED piloted the [New Mexico Grown Approved Supplier Program](#) in School Year 2019-2020 for schools and districts accessing state funds through the agency's program.

3. Collaborate with the Task Force to foster local procurement by providing training and networking opportunities to all institutional directors, managers, buyers, and frontline staff.
4. Prioritize data collection and evaluation across all efforts, and develop systems that capture, aggregate, and analyze purchasing information from participating schools, early childhood education sites, and senior centers.
5. Develop communication strategies for use across all member agencies to increase awareness and interest in Farm to Institution including website information, training opportunities, resources, and statewide NM Grown recognition program.

OUR ASK

The magnitude of cross-sector partnerships at the community, non-profit, agency, legislative, and executive levels is remarkable and exciting. While there is interest in expanding the NM Grown program, there is an information gap between advocates and agencies administering meal programs. This limits the ability of NM Grown to evolve alongside state policy initiatives that can impact healthy food access.

To effectively advance our vision, we ask state leaders to:

1. **Collaborate with the Task Force** on issues that interface with local food integration in schools, senior centers, and early childhood education sites. Agencies that administer the state’s nutrition programs are experts in this area and we recommend advocates consult with the appropriate agencies prior to legislative requests.
2. **Prioritize stable, long-term funding** for NM Grown implementation across agencies in future legislative requests to address the budget constraints of the state’s nutrition programs. Because the scope of financial resources currently available to these programs is minimal, this investment will go a long way to ensuring healthier meals for all participants⁸.
3. **Integrate the state’s nutrition programs** into all education and health equity initiatives. Historically, nutrition programs have operated in isolation from educational activities in NM’s schools and early childhood education sites, limiting agencies’ capacity to create healthy environments for NM’s students.

New Mexico Grown Interagency Task Force, January 2021. For additional information about this brief, or to follow up with a member of the task force, please contact nmgrown@state.nm.us. For more information about NM Grown, visit: <https://webnew.ped.state.nm.us/bureaus/student-success-wellness/nutrition/farm-to-school/>.



⁸ Many states invest in nutrition programs through per-meal subsidies: California’s investment is \$0.24 per meal, Michigan’s is \$0.10 per meal, and Oregon’s is \$0.07 per meal. All examples leverage state funding to fulfill specific values, ranging from nutrition guidelines to local purchasing.