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**Executive budget recommendation includes investments in
hunger initiatives, economy, preparedness**

*Proposed budget includes funding increase of over \$3.8 million for agriculture
department*

LAS CRUCES – Gov. Michelle Lujan Grisham’s proposed executive budget recommendation includes increased funding for several initiatives related to the agriculture economy, emergency preparedness and the state’s hunger initiative.

The budget recommendation includes an increase of over \$2.8 million for hunger initiatives and \$1 million for the New Mexico Department of Agriculture (NMDA) State Chemist Laboratory, emergency preparedness, in-state meat processing and marketing, economic development operations and promotional events/activities, as well as other agriculture-related projects.

The hunger initiative includes a Farm to Foodbank/Gleaning Program, which is a new competitive grant for producers, food businesses, ranchers and hunger relief organizations working to eliminate food waste on farms. The initiative also includes the Double Up Food Bucks program, which doubles the value of federal nutrition assistance spent at participating farmers’ markets, farm stands, mobile markets and grocery stores, helping New Mexicans bring home more locally-grown fruits and vegetables.

New Mexico Agriculture Secretary Jeff Witte said it is imperative the agency focuses on the local economy and emergency preparedness in order to serve the constituents of New Mexico.

“It’s all about building the economy right here in New Mexico, including value-added agriculture and home-grown products, as well as being properly prepared in the event of an emergency,” said Witte. “Preparedness is always a priority, but the pandemic has taught us that we especially need to be properly prepared to get food to those in need during an emergency.”

Some of the proposed funding will enhance the Southwest Border Food Protection and Emergency Preparedness Center at New Mexico State University. NMDA is a constitutional agency organized under the New Mexico State University Board of Regents.

Through training, collaboration and critical preparedness activities, funding for emergency preparedness will help ensure response readiness in the event of threats such as agro-terrorism, foreign animal diseases and natural hazards.

The state chemist laboratory also plays a large role in preparedness. As an International Organization for Standardization (ISO) accredited laboratory, the lab has met specific criteria to qualify as an accredited testing lab, within a scope that includes chemical and biological methods for testing animal feed. The accreditation demonstrates the lab's capacity to deliver reliable results. Although the lab's ISO 17025: 2017 accreditation specifically relates to animal feed, the lab follows the same quality management system when testing all products, including commercial fertilizers and commercial pesticides. Proposed funding will be used for increased regulatory sampling costs and accreditation costs of running a lab of this scale in an effort to ensure the safety of New Mexico citizens through quick and accurate laboratory analysis.

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