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Agriculture producers encouraged to apply to the Regional Farm to Food Bank Program

Feeding the community can grow agricultural businesses

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LAS CRUCES, N.M. – One in eight New Mexicans experience food insecurity on a daily basis. In an effort to reduce this statistic, the New Mexico Department of Agriculture, the New Mexico Association of Food Banks, The Food Depot and the New Mexico Farmers’ Marketing Association have initiated the Regional Farm to Food Bank Program. This program allows local ranchers, farmers and other food suppliers to receive fair market prices for their products while feeding those in need.

The Regional Farm to Food Bank Program is a result of Governor Michelle Lujan Grisham’s prioritization of food security investments that bolster New Mexico agriculture. Led by the New Mexico Association of Food Banks, the program uses funds from the United States Department of Agriculture to purchase locally-produced foods to help feed those in need. The program strengthens local food systems by offering fair market prices to farmers, ranchers and other food suppliers, while ensuring that New Mexicans who experience food insecurity can access healthy and fresh foods.

“We encourage producers across the state to apply to participate in this program,” said New Mexico Secretary of Agriculture Jeff Witte. “This program will not only give producers a market price for their products, but it will help New Mexicans in need.”

There is no producer that is too small to apply for this program. To participate in the Regional Farm to Food Bank program, producers must be a part of the New Mexico Grown Approved Supplier Program. The Approved Supplier Program allows New

Mexico producers to sell to schools, food banks and other institutions by ensuring their products are safe, traceable and use quality assurance practices.

The Approved Supplier Program is managed by the New Mexico Farmers' Marketing Association on behalf of the state of New Mexico. The Farmers' Marketing Association has worked to strengthen the local food systems by supporting New Mexico agriculture producers and cultivating strong networks for a healthier New Mexico. The association has served as an access point for producers to sell through New Mexico Grown to state agencies and now to food banks.

“New Mexico Farmers' Marketing Association works with approximately 1,000 farmers, ranchers and other food suppliers each year, connecting them to local market opportunities across the state, including through sales at farmers' markets, in grocery stores, to schools and preschools and to senior centers, among other outlets,” said Bryan Crawford-Garrett, Director of Food Systems Initiatives. “The new Regional Farm to Food Bank project provides an incredible new market opportunity for local producers that will provide food bank customers with healthy, local food. It's truly a win-win program that will strengthen the local agricultural economy in New Mexico, while simultaneously helping to address food insecurity.”

There are five regional food bank headquarters: Roadrunner Food Bank (Albuquerque and Las Cruces), The Food Depot (Santa Fe), Food Bank of Eastern New Mexico (Clovis), Community Pantry (Gallup) and Echo Food Bank (Farmington). Within these five headquarters, New Mexico Association of Food Banks distributed 48,375,536 pounds of food in 2022.

Once food has been delivered to these food banks, personnel and volunteers get to work sorting and packaging the food products to the 33 counties across New Mexico. Food is then supplied to free food programs, such as food pantries, schools and community centers. Hunger relief is then provided to tens of thousands of New Mexicans each week.

“New Mexico food banks are excited to work with our partners, New Mexico Grown, New Mexico Department of Agriculture and New Mexico Farmers' Marketing Association on the development of the Regional Farm to Food Bank program,” said Sherry Hooper, New Mexico Association of Food Banks Chairperson. “To address food insecurity, New Mexico food banks provided enough food for more than 40 million meals in 2022. The food banks are challenged in accessing enough food to meet the growing demand for emergency food assistance. They are eager to begin receiving New Mexico-produced food for their hunger-relief efforts.”

Historically, 46% of distributed food from the New Mexico Association of Food Banks has been fruits and vegetables, while 13% has been protein content. The program is hoping to expand to make the program more enticing for animal producers to get more protein added to the food banks' acquisitions.

Suppliers of qualified minimally-processed, value-added food products may also participate. For details regarding what value-added products qualify, or for more

information about the Regional Farm to Food Bank Program, please email Alyssa Pearson, New Mexico Department of Agriculture Ag Marketing Specialist, at apearson@nmda.nmsu.edu or visit the [Regional Farm to Food Bank Program website](#).

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