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May 13, 2021

Food Protection Alliance Celebrates 10th Anniversary
Free conference focused on food safety issues in New Mexico

LAS CRUCES – The New Mexico Food Protection Alliance Conference celebrated its 10th anniversary on May 11-12. The event is hosted annually by the Southwest Border Food Protection & Emergency Preparedness Center (Center) and is a platform for communication and information exchange on food safety issues in New Mexico. Attendees learn the importance of the role of regulatory agencies in the disciplines of food safety, food defense and food security. Attendees included New Mexico food safety professionals from both public and private sectors. This year’s conference was delivered in an online format as a virtual two-day meeting due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

The conference’s 10-year existence is a testament to the importance of the event, as well as the importance of the role that the Center serves in the state. The Center was founded in 2005 as the result of a collaboration between New Mexico State University (NMSU), the NMSU College of Agricultural, Consumer and Environmental Sciences, the Cooperative Extension Service and the New Mexico Department of Agriculture (NMDA). This partnership has flourished, and it is critical to protecting the food supply chain within the state.

“New Mexico has a unique partnership dedicated to agriculture and food defense,” said New Mexico Secretary of Agriculture Jeff Witte. “The Center has been a model to deliver effective training and response programs for the agriculture and food sector. This is especially important with New Mexico’s interstate transportation system and proximity to an international border. Our partnership with Mexico is a very important part of both countries’ agriculture and food protection system.”

The New Mexico Food Protection Alliance Conference has served as an embodiment for the mission and values of the Center and furthered the goal of building relationships between regulatory agencies and the private sector for the sake of food protection in New Mexico in the process. The connections formed among all parties involved in the event are truly what makes the conference so effective and has only heightened its relevance for the past decade.

Tom Dean and Marshal Wilson serve as co-directors of the Center. Dean said building networks is key when it comes to food safety.

“The Southwest Border Food Protection & Emergency Preparedness Center takes pride in building networks and relationships that help address critical issues in an emergency,” said Dean. “For the past 10 years, the Food Alliance meetings have been a great way to foster these networks.”

NMDA takes pride in its role in serving and educating the state in the food industry – and as an extension – its role in the Food Protection Alliance Conference. NMDA is just one of the agencies that plays a key role in furthering the advancement of the Center and its mission.

Witte said partnerships are key to effective coordination to assure the food supply remains safe.

“Ten years ago, we created the Food Protection Alliance to bring local, state, federal and tribal agencies – along with industry partners – together for the first time,” said Witte. “This increased communication and coordination among all who have a responsibility to ensure a safe food supply. Communities that train together respond together. Our partnerships increase our capacity to respond to foodborne illness and recall events and protect New Mexicans.”

For more information about the Center and the New Mexico Food Protection Alliance Conference, visit <https://aces.nmsu.edu/preparedness/index.html>.

The New Mexico Department of Agriculture benefits the public by promoting the viability and advancement of New Mexico agriculture and affiliated industries. The agency promotes a fair marketplace, food protection, marketing, and economic development; supports the beneficial use and conservation of natural resources; and works cooperatively with the public and private sectors. For grant cycles beginning in 2019, the agency has administered over \$1.5 million in funds to support agriculture initiatives in the state through the Specialty Crop Block Grant Program and Healthy Soil Program combined.

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Cutline: The 10th Annual New Mexico Food Protection Alliance Conference took place May 11-12. The event is celebrating a decade of uniting professionals in the food safety industry within the state.