



Office of the Governor

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Governor launches wage supplement program to support chile crop

SANTA FE – Gov. Michelle Lujan Grisham on Thursday announced the state of New Mexico will commit \$5 million to pilot a wage supplement program for the chile industry amid concerns about a labor shortage that could impact the 2021 production of the state’s signature crop.

The Chile Labor Incentive Program, to be administered by the New Mexico Department of Agriculture, will provide funding to chile growers, labor contractors and processors on a first-come, first-served basis to supplement the wages of existing and prospective workers as well as incentivize hiring and retention.

Chile growers, labor contractors and processors may use what incentive funds they receive through NMDA to enhance wages for laborers up to a maximum of \$19.50 an hour.

The New Mexico Chile Association reports the average wage paid to laborers currently is approximately \$15 an hour. A May 2021 report from the U.S. Department of Agriculture showed farmers paying an average wage of \$15.23 an hour.

Funding will come from the state’s share of federal stimulus distributed through the American Rescue Plan.

“New Mexico chile is beloved the world over, and of course at dinner tables on every street in every community in our state,” said **Gov. Lujan Grisham**. “It is an all-important symbol of New Mexican agriculture and commerce. I will do everything in my power to support the industry in their efforts to harvest and process a successful 2021 crop. Our economic recovery depends on thriving industries in every corner of New Mexico. We have committed substantial state resources to support that recovery and those industries, and chile will be no exception.”

“It has been my pleasure to meet with chile industry officials in recent weeks on the governor’s behalf to discuss short-term and long-term solutions to labor issues,” said **Lt. Gov. Howie Morales**. “I hope we can continue to work on how to address this concern going forward so that New Mexico chile can continue to be the best in the world.”

“I look forward to working with industry partners to successfully carry out the governor’s vision for these funds and this support,” said state **Agriculture Secretary Jeff Witte**. “My agency and the chile industry have a productive working relationship, and we believe we have come up

with a strategy together that will make a positive difference and contribute to a successful harvest. Information about the program can be found on our website at www.nmda.nmsu.edu.”

The New Mexico Chile Association reports the industry may currently be short up to 1,350 seasonal employees. Agricultural labor shortages are a persistent industry issue in New Mexico and beyond.

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