

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Lawmakers blast economic blow to iconic NM chile harvest

Santa Fe, NM - Several lawmakers are calling on the Governor to immediately address worker shortages in New Mexico's iconic chile harvest sector. State Representatives Rebecca Dow (R-Truth or Consequences), Luis Terrazas (R-Silver City), and State Senator Crystal Diamond (R-Elephant Butte) have contacted the Lujan Grisham administration this week to highlight the potentially growing problem that will wreak havoc on the state's chile crop.

"Agriculture in New Mexico is a much larger industry than most expect to see out of our state," said Senator Crystal Diamond. "The ripple effect of worker shortages is not that far off and we will soon begin to see higher markups and potentially shortages if we cannot shift New Mexicans back into the workforce."

The trend nationwide, and within New Mexico, has revealed that the increase in unemployment benefits is the leading cause of labor shortages. Chile harvesters and processors are facing tremendous shortfalls as their harvest season begins this month. The decrease in workforce has the potential to limit chile supply, and increase prices at checkout.

"It is troubling to me that we do not have an effective plan in place for workforce reentry. This is effecting all of us but especially those families and individuals on a fixed income who will feel inflation even more," said Representative Luis Terrazas. "We have known for several months now that supplemental unemployment will end, yet this administration has done too little and acted too late to properly execute a shift back to employment for New Mexicans. Even migrant workers are receiving supplemental income and not returning to work. It is imperative that New Mexicans get back to work."

The lawmakers call out Lujan Grisham's lack of cohesive planning to shift New Mexicans back into the workforce. The Governor has stated that supplemental unemployment will end in the next month, however has not produced effective or timely policies to initiate reentry for many unemployed New Mexicans back into the workforce. Worker shortages abound in many sectors across the state and have been highly covered by media outlets over the past several months.

"Last year we had long lines to purchase food, and this year our farmers are struggling with workforce re-entry," said Representative Rebecca Dow, "New Mexicans are already feeling the cost of inflation at the pump, the cost of food, and other household goods. Every day we wake up to a new story about the economic havoc brought on by COVID and continued by Lujan Grisham."

Senator Crystal Diamond, Representative Rebecca Dow and Representative Luis Terrazas jointly asked the Governor to "not hang these family farmers out to dry and leave our chile to rot on the vine."

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New Mexico State Legislature

STATE CAPITOL
Santa Fe

August 2, 2021

The Honorable Michelle Lujan Grisham
Governor of New Mexico
490 Old Santa Fe Trail, Suite 400
Santa Fe, NM 87501

Dear Governor Lujan Grisham,

I regret to inform you that our state's signature crop is in dire straits.

In recent weeks, numerous Hatch Valley chile farmers have contacted us in urgent need of a solution to our state's ongoing labor shortage. Based on nationwide trends, it is clear that the increased unemployment benefits set in place by the federal government and your administration during the pandemic have exceeded their use and are now the leading cause of labor shortages in virtually every area of our state's economy, including the chile industry.


Red and green chile are the iconic crop of our state and your administration's lackluster response to this problem may cost our state a valuable crop season for these family farms and may drive some out of business altogether. People in Southern New Mexico are witnessing firsthand how the chile industry is becoming a casualty of our flawed supplemental unemployment insurance program. Though the chile farmers of our state may bear the early burden of this labor shortage, it is not long before other agricultural industries feel the effects of this policy.

We continue to hear from administration officials that the supplemental unemployment insurance is set to expire in a month. While that good news will likely lead to a surge in new hiring, it will simply be too late for this year's chile harvest.


We are requesting that your office take immediate action to address the labor shortage currently impacting New Mexico's signature crop. Inaction in this case will have repercussions for the chile industry this year and the small businesses that rely on a strong annual harvest.

Please do not hang these family farmers out to dry and leave our chile to rot on the vine.

Sincerely,


CRYSTAL R. DIAMOND
State Senator
District 35


REBECCA DOW
State Representative
District 38


LUIS M. TERRAZAS
State Representative
District 39