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**11th annual New Mexico Food Protection Alliance Conference
focuses on post-pandemic challenges**
Aug. 23 event held in Albuquerque

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ALBUQUERQUE, N.M. – The New Mexico Food Protection Alliance Conference celebrated its 11th anniversary with its first in-person conference in two years. This conference is hosted annually by the New Mexico State University (NMSU) Southwest Border Food Protection and Emergency Preparedness Center (the Center) and this year emphasized recovery and assistance in a post-COVID-19 world. Attendees included New Mexico food safety professionals from both private and public sectors. The event was organized into a single-day eight-hour session on Aug. 23 in the Bernalillo County 4-H Center in Albuquerque, New Mexico.

The Center was founded in 2005 as a collaboration between the NMSU College of Agricultural, Consumer and Environmental Sciences, Cooperative Extension Service, and the New Mexico Department of Agriculture (NMDA). The Center has thrived in recent years by providing training for farmers, dairy and livestock producers, public health officials and the public, and was a center for help during the COVID-19 pandemic.

“The Center has been a model to deliver effective training and response programs for the agriculture and food sector,” said New Mexico Secretary of Agriculture Jeff Witte. “Especially during the last few years, the Center was able to assist agriculturists and citizens in New Mexico get through the pandemic.”

As the world continues to move forward, the effects from the pandemic are still being felt. The Center places keeping the food supply for consumers in New Mexico a top priority. However, the factors affecting the supply chain are not local as they were in the pre-pandemic society, as global disruptions are disturbing the New Mexico food supply chain.

The conference included agency updates from the New Mexico Environment Department, New Mexico Department of Health, NMDA and others, regarding what they are doing to recover post-COVID-19 and what the food industries have been doing to manage the long-lasting effects of the supply chain disturbances. To enhance food safety, Tom Dean, Extension Southwest District Director and co-director of the Center, said partners across the state provide educational programs to producers that have been beneficial in keeping quality teaching material and top quality programs available during these difficult times.

“Working with the Food Safety Modernization Act regulations, the Center provides needed certification programs for our producers to ensure that they meet the regulatory requirements,” said Dean. “With that, it is important for New Mexico to work with the support of the Western Regional Center to Enhance Food Safety to provide updated material that makes the educational programs of top quality. I like to eat, as does everyone else, so NMSU is working with our partners across the west to provide quality certification programs that keep producers supplying a safe food supply.”

Speakers at the conference also discussed managing stress, food supply and security in New Mexico and the effects and protections against large fires in New Mexico. Marshal Wilson, co-director of the Center, said this year has been a challenge with the two largest fires in the history of the state of New Mexico.

“The agriculture industry is no stranger to natural disasters or supply chain disruptions, but the events of 2020-2022, which include COVID-19 and the largest two fires in New Mexico history, have shown how important it is to be prepared when these events occur,” Wilson said. “At this year’s conference, we were able to explain events in the past, so that we will be better prepared for emergencies in the future.”

For more information regarding the Center, please visit the [NMSU website](#).

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Cutline: The 11th annual New Mexico Food Protection Alliance Conference was held on Aug. 23 at the Bernalillo County 4-H Center in Albuquerque, New Mexico. This year's conference focused on COVID-19 recovery and supply chain management.