

Healthy Kids, Healthy Economy

New Mexico-grown produce for school meals



Legislative Sponsors: Representative Rhonda King & Senator Pete Campos

\$1.44 million for fresh, New Mexico-grown fruits and vegetables will encourage our state's young people to develop a lifetime of healthy eating habits, strengthen our farm and ranch economies, preserve our environment, and reduce the cost of treating diet-related illnesses.

The threat to the future health of our children from a poor diet has never been greater. Like other children across America, the percentage of New Mexico's children who are obese and overweight (24 percent of the state's high school students) is growing. According to the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation, the risk of being diagnosed with type 2 diabetes is now 30 percent for boys, 40 percent for girls, and even higher for Hispanic and Native American children. Unfortunately, only a quarter of children ages 2 to 11 even consume three servings of vegetables a day.

If we don't reverse these risks by improving our young people's diets, we are in danger of raising the first generation of American children with a lower life expectancy than their parents.

There is a solution. We know that healthy eating habits formed during childhood decrease the risk of chronic disease. We also know that children will increase their consumption of fresh fruits and vegetables when those foods are available, affordable, and tasty. Our five-year goal, therefore, is to turn back the rising tide of poor diet by serving at least one additional serving of fruit or vegetable per school day to every New Mexico student. And to strengthen our farming communities and increase farmer incomes, we will purchase that food from New Mexico farmers.

We know that:

- Over 212,000 NM children participate in the free or reduced-price school meal program
- Lower income children like these eat less produce due in part to its relatively high price—fresh fruits and vegetables have increased by 40 percent in the last 15 years compared to a 20 percent decrease for high sugar and fat snack foods
- Schools receive a federal reimbursement for food equal to only \$1 per meal
- When combined with the high level of food inflation of 5 percent, schools cannot afford to purchase additional quantities of healthy food
- Obesity currently costs New Mexico an additional \$324 million for health care
- Lifetime medical costs are \$10,000 higher for the moderately obese than for individuals at a healthy weight
- The less distance that food must travel, the less carbon emissions – NM food going to NM students reduces global warming
- A survey of 150 NM farmers found that 64 percent would like to sell to schools; the same survey also found that schools representing 185,000 NM school children would like to buy from local farmers
- If every NM consumer purchased only 15 percent of their food from the state's farmers and ranchers, it would increase annual farm income by \$392 million.
- The 2007 Legislature allocated \$85,000 to Albuquerque Valley schools which purchased NM apples, melons, and carrots for 6,000 school children.