

Closing New Mexico's Food Gap

Building the health and wealth of New Mexicans



Legislative Sponsor: Representative Brian Moore

The Manny Herrera Access to Healthy Foods Act will provide \$10 million for economic development activities that will increase the number of New Mexicans who will have access to healthy food, especially in rural and under-served urban communities, create new jobs, and promote the development of new and expanded food businesses.

Like other Americans, New Mexicans are facing a growing crisis from obesity and diabetes that if not reversed, threatens to make this generation of young people the first in our history to have a lower life expectancy than their parents. One cause of this problem is not having convenient access to healthy and affordable food outlets. *Research has shown that, in general, the greater distance that one must travel to reach a high quality food store, such as a supermarket, the fewer servings of fresh fruits and vegetables they will eat.* And the further that people must travel to purchase their food, the further their dollars will travel from their community. The more that local money can be reinvested in local goods and services, the stronger local economies will become.

The lack of healthy food in sparsely settled rural areas and lower income urban communities cannot be solved by the private market alone. Like any industry, food stores are in business to make money and will migrate to areas where the profit potential is greatest. In order to ensure that every New Mexican has adequate access to healthy and affordable food, the public sector must invest responsibly in well-run food businesses. A public-private partnership such as this will expand and create businesses, promote local prosperity, and make healthy food available to all.

We know that:

- Most people do not eat the recommended five servings a day of fresh fruits and vegetables, and that the actual cost of produce has risen as much as 40% over 15 years
- Obesity and diabetes are costing New Mexico an astounding \$324 million per year
- NM does not currently have a full-line grocery wholesaler for independent food stores which increases the cost of food and distance it must travel
- According to the Rural Sociological Society, NM has 12 non-metro counties with low-food access (50% of residents must go more than 10 miles to a food store) and 6 counties that are considered “food deserts” (100% of the residents more than 10 miles)
- A New Mexico 2006 market basket comparison found that food in smaller rural stores is as much as 70% more expensive than the same food purchased in large, metro-area supermarkets, and that the availability of fresh produce is considerably less
- To increase the consumption of healthy food, the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation has recommended that governments create economic stimulus programs and public-private partnerships to promote the creation and expansion of retail grocery operations
- Since the creation of the Fresh Food Financing Initiative in Pennsylvania in 2005, state funds, which have leveraged as much in private funds, have produced one million square feet of new retail food space and 2,500 new jobs in both urban and rural communities
- Modest investments of private and public funds have developed a new supermarket on the Jicarilla Apache Nation in Dulce and a co-op food store in Dixon.