

Closing New Mexico's Food Gap

Building the Health and Wealth of New Mexicans



The Governor-appointed NM Food Gap Task Force and the NM Food and Agriculture Policy Council request \$200,000 for pilot projects that will address food retail, storage, and distribution needs in rural and underserved communities. These projects will help to promote the expansion and creation of local food businesses that provide jobs, keep money in the local economy and ensure that that food stores, schools, senior centers, and other outlets throughout the state are able to serve and sell fresh, healthy, and affordable foods to all New Mexicans.

The Need:

New Mexicans are facing the growing crisis presented by 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 important cause of this problem is that many New Mexicans, particularly in rural areas, lack access to healthy and affordable food outlets. Research has shown that the farther one must travel to reach a supermarket, the fewer servings of fresh fruits and vegetables they will eat, and the higher their chances of suffering from diabetes and heart disease. Similarly, the further people have to travel to purchase their food, the farther their dollars will travel from their community.

The Solution:

Promote community health and wealth by investing in New Mexican food production, storage, distribution and retail businesses. Provide technical assistance and financing options that help store owners and public food service institutions provide fresh, affordable foods to their communities.

Potential projects could include:

- ⇒ Assisting store owners to obtain energy efficient refrigeration equipment and create incentives for stores to promote healthy products.
- ⇒ Investing in cold storage facilities on school grounds for use by local farmers and school food service.
- ⇒ Assisting existing locally-owned distributors to expand routes while maintaining cost effectiveness through utilization of alternative energy sources.

Rural Food Store



Urban Food Store



The Numbers:

- ⇒ New Mexico is ranked **49th** in the nation for food security.
- ⇒ **1 in 3** of NM counties classified as having "low food access."
- ⇒ Rural NM families travel up to **140 miles** round-trip to the closest grocery store.
- ⇒ **33%** of rural stores do not carry fresh fruit.
- ⇒ The cost of fresh fruits has increased over **77%** since 1989 while fats and sweets have decreased **33%**.
- ⇒ **77%** of NM adults do not eat recommended daily servings of fruits and vegetables.
- ⇒ **1 in 14** New Mexicans have type 2 diabetes.
- ⇒ Diet-related diseases cost New Mexico **\$324 million** each year.
- ⇒ **Only 1** full-service distributor serves NM rural grocers.

Successful Model:

La Montanita's Coop Trade Project

In response to customer demand for local products, La Montanita leased a warehouse and refrigerated trucks. Since 2006, they have distributed \$350,000 worth of regional produce, meat, dairy other products to grocery stores, restaurants and institutions across the state, benefiting more than 50 vendors.

