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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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**Senator Campos Sponsors Bill to Improve New Mexico
Children's Health and the Farming Economy**

The NM Grown Fresh Fruits and Vegetables for School Lunches
Now Before the New Mexico Legislature

SANTA FE, NM (February 6, 2008) – The New Mexico Food and Agriculture Policy Council and the School Nutrition Association announced that over thirty organizations from across the state signed a resolution requesting a \$1.44 million appropriation from the state legislature for the purchase of “New Mexico Grown Produce for School Lunches.”

Legislation sponsored by Senator Pete Campos and Representative Rhonda King would provide funds for schools statewide to purchase an additional two servings of New Mexico grown fresh fruits and vegetables weekly for more than 212,000 school children participating in school lunch programs.

“I believe this statewide initiative addresses early intervention of healthy eating habits for New Mexico’s children and provides economic stimulus to our farming economy.”

“New Mexico’s children deserve the healthiest food possible”, said Maryann McCann, Taos School Food Service Director. “Poor nutrition and unhealthy eating habits are contributing to the poor health of our state’s children. School nutrition programs are the ideal place to promote healthier eating habits in our schools for all New Mexican children”, added McCann.

More than 212,000 school children participate in school lunch programs across the state. Approximately 63 percent of New Mexico’s school lunch participants come from low-income households. For many, this is the main meal of the day. Currently, most schools in New Mexico spend about 15 to 25 cents a serving to put either a fresh or canned fruit on each lunch tray they serve. “Schools have about \$1 per meal for food including milk,” stated Corrine Lovato, School Food Service Director of the Pecos School District. “It’s difficult to pay for fresh fruit and

vegetable options when you only have a dollar. Also for rural school districts like mine, we have less buying power so it costs us more to add fresh produce on the plate.” Pam Roy, coordinator of the New Mexico Food and Agriculture Policy Council said, “Increased funding from the state would enable schools to purchase New Mexico-grown fruits and vegetables to serve our children and provide additional markets and economic opportunities for New Mexico’s farming families.”

In 2007, the state legislature appropriated \$85,000 to the Valley Cluster schools in Albuquerque. Through this program close to 6,000 students are receiving two additional servings of fresh fruits and vegetables weekly. Currently, in a limited capacity, eight school districts-- Taos, Santa Fe, Las Cruces, Los Lunas, Alamogordo, Belen, Farmington, and Albuquerque-- are serving more than 165,000 school children with New Mexico grown fresh fruits and vegetables at least once during this school year.

The shortage of existing revenues for school meal programs in NM, consequently, poses significant barriers to fully implement these fresh food initiatives in our schools. “If the state contributes to the program, rural and urban schools across the state will benefit,” says Roy.

The program was initiated eight years ago when the Santa Fe Public school district partnered with the Department of Agriculture and several non-profit organizations to introduce local fruits and vegetables to school meals. The Department of Agriculture in partnership with the Human Services Department Nutrition Bureau, the Public Education Department and organizations like Farm to Table, are working together to provide regionally grown fresh produce, expand nutritious school meal programs, and coordinate distribution.

In a 2007 statewide study conducted by New Mexico’s Farm to Table and the Department of Agriculture, more than two-thirds of New Mexico’s school districts said they are interested in purchasing fruits and vegetables from New Mexico farmers. More than 100 of the state’s farming families said they would be interested in selling to schools.

“Fresh sweet watermelons, crisp apples, carrots and salad greens are among the favorites of school children,” said Le Adams, Co-Director of Farm to Table. She added, “Our producers can store apples into the winter months and some farmers are using ‘season extension techniques’ to be able to provide greens throughout the school year.”

In coordination with the School Nutrition Program run by the Human Service Department, the produce would be distributed to schools statewide on a regular basis. “If funded, school kids, farmers and communities across the state win,” said Adams.

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