

New Mexico's fortune may be in its soil

Written by Staff Reports
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New study reveals hidden economic opportunities

SANTA FE — New opportunities for New Mexico farmers to make money have emerged in the New Mexico Farm & Food Economy study prepared by the Crossroads Resource Center and released on June 15.

Based on publicly available data, the 46-page study found that over the last 50 years, farmers in the state spent \$14 billion more on animal feed than they sold and \$10 billion buying agrochemicals, petroleum products and agricultural inputs sourced out of state each year.

Due to these ever-increasing costs, there has been no gain in net cash income for farmers over the past half century.

Building soil health is an opportunity for farmers and ranchers to gain independence from costly inputs and become prosperous again.

Another opportunity which can be seen in the study has to do with reducing hunger in the state.

The data demonstrates that hunger has increased in the state and SNAP benefits are now at \$600 million. New Mexicans spend \$6.5 billion each year on food sourced from out of state.

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Study author Ken Meter thinks this deserves attention.

“New Mexico has a \$6.5 billion opportunity to grow food for its own people,” he said.

The report also found that organic product sales rose 365 percent from \$8.6 million in 2012 to \$40 million in 2017, suggesting New Mexico would gain economically by building soil health and at the same time providing more wholesome food for residents of the state.

The New Mexico Healthy Soil Working Group, which is now releasing its policy recommendations for the 2021 Legislative Session, is focused on five major goals.

Advance public health and food security in response to COVID 19 and for the long-term;

Create prosperity and jobs in agriculture, spurring local economic development;

Honor farmers and ranchers and their adoption of healthy soil principles;

Develop greater water retention, climate leadership and ecological well being;

Embrace social equity, including by engaging diverse and frontline communities in policymaking, to achieve the vast multicultural potential of the state.

The executive director of the Climate Change Leadership Institute, which commissioned the report expressed dissatisfaction with the current state of affairs in the state. Robb Hirsch, is also a co-founder of the New Mexico Healthy Soil Working Group.

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"It's unacceptable New Mexico is classified as a food desert and so many are food insecure while 97% of food grown here is exported and farmers are barely getting by," Robb Hirsch said.

The Working Group's recommendations include boosting the New Mexico Department of Agriculture Healthy Soil Program; shortening supply chains from New Mexico farmer to New Mexico consumer; establishing a public bank that will keep dollars in the state and support soil-building producers; increasing marketing of locally raised products under management for soil health; setting state guidelines around food waste salvage and composting; protecting essential food system workers; and advancing self sufficiency and food security in New Mexico while respecting our state's many cultures and traditions.

Working group co-founder Christina Allday-Bondy considers the current situation to be "a ripe opportunity to meld hunger mitigation, environmental resilience and economic development by redirecting dollars spent on costly inputs from out-of-state and investing instead in soil health."

For more information, visit nmhealthysoil.org, takeresponsibility.us; crcworks.org. Download the study at crcworks.org/nmfood20.pdf. Download the policy recommendations at tinyurl.com/nm-policy-recommendations-2020.