

Field Notes: AgriPolicy Brief

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NM ORGANIZATIONS ADVOCATE FOR STATE FUNDING: END OF LEGISLATIVE SEASON REVIEW

The New Mexico Legislative session concluded on Thursday, February 19, marking a period of significant progress. Key victories included the expansion of no-cost childcare, increased affordable housing, medical malpractice reform, and a ban on local government contracting for federal immigration detention. Additionally, the state saw major investments in economic development.

The New Mexico Food & Agriculture Policy Council focused its efforts on securing vital funding for statewide food, agriculture, and conservation initiatives. We are deeply grateful for your collaboration and the care you bring to this work. A special thank you to everyone who joined us for New Mexico Food & Farms Day and our awards ceremony—your presence truly made a difference.

Please turn to page 4 to view the status of our priorities as they head to Governor Michelle Lujan Grisham’s desk for signing.

THIS ISSUE INCLUDES UPDATES ON:

NM Agriculture Organization’s Priorities	1 & 4
US House Ag Farm Bill.....	1
Supreme Court Decision.....	2
RMFU Fly In	2
USDA Reorganization.....	2
2025 Reflection.....	3

HOUSE COMMITTEE ON AGRICULTURE RELEASES FARM BILL TEXT

On February 13th, the House Committee on Agriculture Majority released the Farm, Food, and National Security Act of 2026. Chairman G.T. Thompson has been teasing this text for the better part of a year, often framing it as a comprehensive “Farm Bill 2.0.” As currently drafted, farmers impacted by tariffs receive no additional support or future market security.

On February 17, 2026, Representative Gabe Vasquez (NM-02) convened his Agriculture Advisory Group to hear from New Mexico farmers, ranchers, food banks, state officials, and agricultural advocates about their top priorities and challenges as Congress prepares to take up the 2026 Farm Bill next week.

The meeting included representatives from the Middle Rio Grande Conservancy District, Agri-Cultura Cooperative Network, Farm to Table, NM Food & Agriculture Policy Council, Black Farmers & Ranchers New Mexico, National Young Farmers Coalition, New Mexico Farm and Livestock Bureau, Dairy Producers of New Mexico, New Mexico Cattle Growers’ Association, Roadrunner Food Bank, New Mexico Farm and Livestock Bureau and the New Mexico Farmers Marketing Association.

During the meeting, these organizations emphasized strengthening local food systems, supporting small and specialty crop producers, protecting dairy and livestock operations, expanding market access, improving conservation tools, and addressing food insecurity across the state following cuts to food assistance under the One Big Beautiful Bill Act.





SUPREME COURT DECISION ON TARIFFS

On Friday, February 20, 2026, the Supreme Court ruled that many of the Trump Administration's tariffs were unconstitutional in a 6-3 court decision. The Court reviewed the use of the International Economic Emergency Powers Act (IEEPA), which allows the President to impose tariffs in time of emergency. The Court found that the purpose for which the Trump Administration did not fall under the purview of IEEPA.

US Senator Ben Ray Lujan issued a press release on the topic stating: "This Supreme Court decision is an important step forward. Now, the Trump administration must provide certainty to American small businesses by refunding the costs they have endured and take real steps to repair our economic relationships around the world."

Currently, it remains unclear how or if the US government is required to refund tariff revenue.

US Senator Martin Heinrich has also applauded the court's ruling and has been at work in the Senate to block tariffs from raising prices for New Mexicans. Heinrich cosponsored the No Tariffs on Groceries Act in January. This legislation is meant to prevent the enactment of tariffs that raise grocery costs for families. The No Tariffs on Groceries Act would require congressional approval for any tariff levied on food or agricultural products. While the law was blocked from passage, Heinrich is still committed to lowering grocery costs.

ROCKY MOUNTAIN FARMERS UNION LEGISLATIVE DRIVE IN

In February, the Rocky Mountain Farmers Union met in Santa Fe to hear from partner organizations and meet with the state legislature. In a whirlwind of learning, partnership, and networking, farmers, ranchers, and conservationists were able to talk with several lawmakers about the important work they do to support farming, ranching, and the New Mexico food system.

USDA REORGANIZATION

On February 25, 2026, USDA Secretary Brooke Rollins and USDA Deputy Secretary Stephen Vaden delivered a press conference from the sidewalk outside of the USDA South Building in Washington, DC. In the press conference, USDA leadership shared that the building is being turned over to the General Services Administration and will be put up for sale soon.

Deputy Secretary Vaden outlined that the Food and Nutrition Service (FNS) would be the first agency to be relocated in the unfolding reorganization plan. FNS will be moved from their current office in Alexandria, Virginia to the USDA Yates Building and the USDA George Washington Carver Building located within Washington DC. The other agencies will be moved into other buildings within the district or moved out to one of five hubs. Agencies will be notified of their moves in the coming months with the relocation completed before the start of the next school year. This will include the US Forest Service Office located in Albuquerque, NM.

In 2019, when APHIS and NIFA were relocated from the National Capital Region to Kansas City, Missouri, many employees left their positions rather than move to the new location. Currently, USDA employment is down by 20%, and that number is only expected to grow as employees are requested to relocate. Between normal attrition, the deferred resignation program, retirements, and other departures, USDA lost over 20,300 employees in 2025.

When the reorganization was originally announced, USDA provided the opportunity for the public to submit comments. USDA released a summary of the 14,000 comments received on the move. The vast majority of the comments were not supportive of the move, and some of the top feedback included a request that USDA create a comprehensive plan.

The Department does not appear to be changing the course of the reorganization as a result of the public comment. At the event with the National Agricultural Law Center, Deputy Secretary Vaden stated that there is not a choice.

The Administration is justifying the move by saying that the Department is meant to serve rural America and should be close to the populations it serves. However, Indianapolis, Kansas City, and Salt Lake City are all the largest cities in their respective states, and Raleigh and Fort Collins are second and fourth respectively.



REFLECTION ON AGRICULTURAL FUNDING IN 2025

The landscape of the USDA has changed significantly over the last year. A recent Office of Inspector General report confirmed the Department lost over 20,300 employees in the first six months of 2025—roughly one-fifth of its total workforce. These departures resulted from a combination of retirements, layoffs, and the Deferred Resignation Program.

In New Mexico, approximately 658 federal employees departed, representing 23% of the state's USDA positions. The impacts are felt most acutely in two key areas:

- U.S. Forest Service: Lost 5,860 employees nationwide (16% of its workforce).
- Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS): Lost 2,673 employees (22% of staff).

In New Mexico specifically, NRCS staffing decreased by 33%. For our state's farmers and ranchers, this reduction in personnel may lead to longer wait times for conservation planning and technical assistance as fewer staff manage an increasing workload.

Several conservation and commodity programs have undergone significant changes or reviews at the national level:

- Climate-Smart Commodities: In April 2025, the Partnership for Climate-Smart Commodities was cancelled nationwide. This program had \$666 million earmarked for 21 projects across 27 commodities in New Mexico.
- Water Saving Commodities: This program, which included up to \$15 million for the Elephant Butte Irrigation District and the NM State Association of Conservation Districts, currently remains under review.

While the 2018 Farm Bill has seen multiple extensions since 2023, Congress utilized the budget reconciliation process in July 2025 to pass H.R. 1, the One Big Beautiful Bill Act. This legislation moved \$59 billion toward increased payments and risk management for large-scale commodity producers.

Additionally, a separate legislative move removed payment limitations for EQIP and CSP. While this allows for more substantial investments in high-cost conservation projects, some advocates for small-scale agriculture expressed concern that this may reduce the share of funding available for smaller operations.

Navigating these shifts in long-standing programs can be daunting. As these federal policies continue to evolve, we encourage our members to lean into our local agricultural networks. By sharing information and staying engaged with neighbors, we can better understand our community's needs and advocate for New Mexico's diverse agricultural landscape together.



NM ORGANIZATIONS ADVOCATE FOR STATE FUNDING: END OF LEGISLATIVE SEASON REVIEW CONTINUED...

New Mexico food, agriculture, conservation and water budget requests in the [FY2027 budget bill](#) include:

- Double Up Food Bucks Expansion \$1 million in the NM Department of Agriculture (NMDA, #306, page 223)
- Regional Farm to Food Banks Program, \$2,000,000 to the NM Department of Agriculture (NMDA, #312, page 224)
- Approved Supplier Program, \$430,000 to the NM Department of Agriculture (NMDA, #310, page 224)
- New Mexico Grown and raised food for senior meal programs, \$1,500,000 in the Aging and Long-Term Services Department, "Kiki Saavedra Dignity Fund" (ALTS, #153, page 203)
- Healthy Food Financing Program, \$2,000,000 annually for three years (totaling \$6,000,000 in SB177) to the Economic Development Department (HB2, EDD, page 193)
- WIC and Senior Farmers Market Nutrition Programs, \$1,000,000 to the Department of Health (DOH, #186, page 208)
- Health Councils, \$4 million (#185, page 207)
- Student nutrition, \$42,201,000 (Healthy Universal School Meals) to the Public Education Department's Student Success and Wellness Bureau (PED, page 132)
- Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program Education, \$2,500,000 (HCA, page 205)
- Farmers and ranchers' soil and water conservation training program, \$1,000,000 to the NM Department of Agriculture (NMDA)
- Farmers and ranchers water efficiency grant program, \$10,000,000 (#302, page 223) to the NM State University Water Resilience Research Institute (WRRRI) and an additional \$5 million (#320, page 225-6)
- Land of Enchantment Legacy Fund, \$4,345,000 to the NMDA, water protection program of the environment department \$1,936,100, and conservation services program of the department of wildlife \$4,348,340.
- Acequia repairs and improvements, \$5,000,000 (#140, page 200). SB 193 passed which will double the funding for the Acequia and Community Ditch Infrastructure Fund (ACDIF) from \$2.5 to \$5 million per year. The bill passed the Senate and House and is awaiting a signature from the Governor!!
- Water Trust Fund, \$100,000,000 (pages 269 -270)

There's additional funding for acequia and land grant education, bovine reproductive trichinosis eradication, \$5,100,000; veterinary education and retention, \$1,500,000; and support for NM State University's meat processing facility, \$3,000,000 (pages 225-226).

While these items have passed both chambers of the New Mexico State Legislature, they now await the signature of the Governor to become law.

