

Field Notes: AgriPolicy Brief

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NEW MEXICO FARMER INNOVATION PROGRAM

The New Mexico Farmer Innovation Program (NMFIP) is a program of Farm to Table which provides outreach, education and technical assistance for farmers interested in developing or expanding their operations, and looking for new market opportunities. Our efforts help to raise awareness about local, state and federal USDA programs and resources. Additionally, we help producers enroll in USDA programs, which will support increased supply chain resiliency in local food systems by improving the sustainability and long-term viability of their farms. The goals of Farm to Table through the New Mexico Farmer Innovation Program are to provide assistance through direct outreach, technical assistance, training programs, financial assistance, and to increase marketing opportunities.

We partner in multiple ways with funders, the USDA and like minded organizations such as the New Mexico Farmers Marketing Association and the New Mexico Grown Coalition, and agencies such as the NM Department of Agriculture and the Economic Development Department’s Healthy Food Financing Program, to collectively evolve and offer opportunities for the farmers and ranchers we work with and those who are looking for resources and programs to support their businesses.

This edition of the newsletter highlights the New Mexico Farmer Innovation Program and provides an overview of the USDA Office of Urban Agriculture and Innovative Production.

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WHAT IS USDA'S OFFICE OF URBAN AG AND INNOVATIVE PRODUCTION?

What is Innovative Production?

USDA defines innovative production as a diverse and dynamic area of agriculture, including indoor controlled environment agriculture, rooftop farms, outdoor vertical production, green walls, high-tech vertical farms, greenhouses, and hydroponic, aeroponic, or aquaponic farms. These operations are creating new and better markets, enhancing the competitiveness of specialty crops, and creating economic opportunities for the next generation of agricultural producers. They also support climate-resilient food systems by extending the growing season, conserving water, and providing local and regional food options.

USDA's Office of Urban Agriculture and Innovative Production (OUAIP) is a one-stop-shop for urban and innovative producers. To streamline the USDA experience, OUAIP has created a consolidated place for producers to find resources that fit their business model. Rather than trying to determine if a program designed to fit grain bins can fit hydroponics, USDA has taken the initiative to make sure programs relevant to innovative producers are listed in one spot.

OUAIP is funded through the appropriations process. Each year the the President provides a budget to Congress outlining the funding needed to run the Executive Branch. The Appropriations Committees in both chambers consider this budget and draft their own. On an annual basis, Congress must pass appropriations to fund the federal government.

HOW HAS NEW MEXICO USED THE OFFICE OF URBAN AGRICULTURE AND INNOVATIVE PRODUCTION?

The New Mexico Farmer Innovation Program at Farm to Table Micro-Grant program is designed to support smaller food producers and help them gain greater capacity in the New Mexico marketplace. The goal of this grant program is to improve access to healthy food in urban markets, Tribal communities, and small towns across New Mexico. The grants are competitive, with no match required, and are awarded in amounts of up to \$20,000 based on eligibility and merit, per project.

- In May 2024, NMFIP received 65 applications in our first Micro-Grant cycle. The beneficiaries were 14 farms from nine counties, a total of \$102,778. Funding for the Micro-Grant is supported by Farm to Table's Cooperative Agreement with USDA's OUAIP.
- In 2025, we received 72 Micro-Grant applications from 15 counties across New Mexico with a total request of \$1,209,245.33. This not only shows a need for this type of work in New Mexico but growing interest in expanding market access. Twelve awardees were selected by the Advisory Committee.



The AgriFuture Educational Institute aims to connect, inform and inspire the next generation of farmers, ranchers and others in agriculture.

AgriFuture
THE FUTURE IS BRIGHT

Monday, June 15 - Wednesday, June 17

INDIAN PUEBLO CULTURAL CENTER
ALBUQUERQUE, NEW MEXICO

WHAT TO EXPECT:

- Off-campus agricultural tours
- Educational speakers
- Industry networking sessions
- Marketing and agribusiness
- Financial management
- Opportunities for getting started
- Utilizing agencies
- Succession planning

Cost of attendance is just \$75. (scholarships available)
Includes ag tours and all meals.

REGISTER
TODAY!



For more information, contact Jane Steele Heitz
at (575) 646-1864 or jheitz@nmda.nmsu.edu

NEW MEXICO FARMER INNOVATION PROGRAM RURAL/TRIBAL GRANTS

In 2025, Farm to Table was able to obtain additional private funding to assist in Micro-Grants to Tribal and rural farmers. These competitive, one-time grants support short-term projects that advance regenerative agriculture, water and energy conservation, and climate change mitigation in rural and Tribal communities. These micro-grants help producers implement practical, climate-smart solutions that strengthen local food systems and increase access to healthy, culturally-relevant food.

In January of 2026, Farm to Table opened up the first cycle of Rural/Tribal Micro-Grant to award \$53,000 in Micro-Grants. The Committee awarded six farms/ranches a Micro-Grant for the following projects:

- A high-desert demonstration farm installing a greywater irrigation system, edible windbreaks, and perennial food systems to conserve water and reduce erosion. The project will divert approximately 5,000 gallons of household greywater annually into food production and culminate in a hands-on workshop for community members.
- A regenerative sheep operation purchasing mobile corrals to reduce animal stress, improve halal and USDA meat quality, and expand targeted grazing on leased lands lacking infrastructure. The project strengthens grassland restoration and supports culturally important halal meat production.
- A small farm expanding organic vegetable and pasture-raised egg production using no-till methods, onsite composting, drip irrigation, and low tunnels. The project will triple vegetable bed space, grow a flock of 60 heritage hens, and model climate-resilient agriculture in a high-altitude, water-limited region.
- A Navajo Nation farm implementing regenerative practices across 18 fields, including soil testing, crop rotation, cover crops, and composting. The project will track soil health improvements, increase yields, and host a public field day to encourage adoption of sustainable farming practices.
- Diné-led nonprofit developing the Eastern Agency Producers' Network to increase local food production in communities where over "76% of residents experience food insecurity." The project provides technical and financial support to growers and teaches climate-smart practices such as rainwater harvesting, mulching, composting, and no-till growing.
- A rural farm expanding hydroponic production and constructing a climate-battery mini-greenhouse to extend the growing season. The project increases access to fresh produce in an underserved community and builds long-term resilience to drought.

FTT will be opening the second cycle of Rural/Tribal Micro-Grant in the Summer of 2026, with a total of \$53,000 available for awards.



RURAL/TRIBAL MICRO-GRANT AWARDEE: BRAZOS FARMS

In May, the Farm to Table team visited Brazos Farms, Los Ojos, New Mexico. The Brazos Farms is one of Farm to Table's NM Farmer Innovation Program rural grantees. Farm owner Joysree Aubrey welcomed the Farm to Table crew to her operation and shared the challenges and rewards of growing produce for her community in Northwestern New Mexico. Brazos Farms prides itself in blending traditional practices with modern day technology.

Through the Farm to Table NM Farmer Innovation Micro-Grant, Joysree will be expanding her operation to include additional hydroponic equipment. Not only will this allow her to produce more food but it will also aide in extending the growing season, allowing her to provide fresh producer earlier in the spring and later into the fall.

This farm is just one of the projects funded through the Farmer Innovation Program. Stay tuned for more stories from Farm to Table's grantees.



Brazos Farms' Joysree Aubrey showing greens being grown in a hydroponic system in Los Ojos, NM. Photo Credit: Ivy Jean Reynolds



Brazos Farms' hoop house, Photo Credit: Ivy Jean Reynolds

Strengthening New Mexico's Local Food System

Farm to Table's mission is to build a local, healthy, equitable and sustainable food system through education and advocacy. The 2026 Micro-Grant recipients embody this mission by expanding climate-resilient food production, preserving agricultural heritage, and increasing access to fresh, healthy food across New Mexico. These projects show what's possible when we invest directly in farmers, ranchers, and community-based food producers. Their innovation and leadership are essential to building a more resilient future.

STRONG OPPOSITION TO A URANIUM MINING PROJECT IN CHAMA WATERSHED

According to [Source New Mexico](#), In February 2026, Gamma Resources, LTD., a Canada based company, filed a notice of intent with the Carson National Forest to explore the potential for a uranium mine along four miles of federal forest land. The project would include 12 boreholes up to 500 feet deep. This operation is the first of its kind on federal forest land in a very long time and comes at a time when the Executive Branch has urged for federal lands to be used for energy development, including mining and drilling. Bureau of Land Management records indicate that the company, Gamma Resources, LTD has active claims about two miles south of Canjilon, totaling approximately 900 acres. In a January [Executive Order](#) titled Unleashing American Energy, the White House directly outlines that it will be the policy of the United States to “to encourage energy exploration and production on Federal lands and waters.”

New Mexico lawmakers have spoken out in opposition of the project and in April Senator Ben Ray Luján led a letter with the New Mexico delegation letter to the Forest Service calling for a full environmental review. In May both Senator Lujan and Congresswoman Theresa Leger Fernández traveled to the Chama watershed to meet with community members on the proposed mining project.

On May 6th, Senator Ben Ray Luján traveled to Canjilon, New Mexico where he listened to the concerns of the community and spoke about his plans to introduce legislation removing the Chama Watershed from mineral extraction. Pam Roy from New Mexico Farm to Table was able to attend the event where she too heard the concerns of local farmers, ranchers, landowners, and community members.

HOW TO FIND YOUR POLLING LOCATION

As summer rolls in, don't forget to mark your calendars for New Mexico's primary election on June 2, 2026, and general election on November 3, 2026. You can find your polling place on the [New Mexico Secretary of State's Website](#).

The poster features a central circular logo with a rainbow and a water drop, containing the text 'SACRED WATER CIRCLES'. To the left is a teal water drop with the text '6/1/26 @ 12 PM [MNT]'. To the right is another teal water drop with 'ALL ARE WELCOME!'. At the top, it says 'WATER CAN'T WAIT' and 'YOUNG FARMERS'. The main title is 'WATER STORIES FOR FEEDING LOCAL COMMUNITIES' and the subtitle is 'QUARTERLY VIRTUAL GATHERING'. Below the logo, it says 'We want to know' followed by the question: 'Do you have enough water for your agricultural production this year, and are there other water-related concerns, including natural disasters?'. At the bottom, it promotes a 'Raffle! \$100 visa giftcards (must be present to win)' and 'Register on Classy!' with a starburst icon.

NEW MEXICO WATER QUALITY CONTROL COMMISSION ADOPTS RULE ON THE DISCHARGE OF “PRODUCED WATER”

New Mexico, being one of the leading oil states in the United States, has been working to address concerns regarding produced water. According to the New Mexico Environmental Department, for every 42 gallons of oil produces there is a corresponding 168 to 252 gallons of water produced. This year, New Mexico lawmakers have been trying to address growing concerns about the disposal of produced water's impact on the environment and human health balanced with the ever growing need to conserve water as water resources become more and more scarce.

In May of 2025, the New Mexico Water Quality Control Commission (WQCC) adopted a rule that prohibited the discharge of produced waters to New Mexico's ground and surface water. This action includes the prohibition of “pilot projects” resulting in a complete ban on the discharge of produced water. This rule is set to sunset in five years meaning that the topic will naturally arise again in 2028.

FROM WASHINGTON, D.C.

On the Forest Service

During a hearing on the President's 2027 Forest Service Budget, Senator Heinrich called the budget a "...roadmap on how to dismantle the Forest Service."

As the west heads into the summer, the lack of water has many concerned about the ferocity and frequency of the potential wildfire season. The Forest Service has seen the largest loss of federal employees of any USDA agency, leaving the Service understaffed and under-resourced as the summer draws closer. In the last year, the Service has lost approximately 5,800 employees and the reorganization will remove the Albuquerque Office, reducing New Mexico jobs and forcing New Mexicans to relocate or leave their positions within the Service.

On the Farm Bill

Last month, the House of Representatives passed the 2026 Farm Bill out of the House, marking the furthest a farm bill has made it in Congress since 2019. Member of the House Committee on Agriculture Gabe Vasquez (NM-02) as celebrated bipartisan wins within the bill including:

- virtual fencing programs at USDA, like those in place already at New Mexico State University,
- adjustments to the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) to allow the program to cover the purchase of hot rotisserie chicken, and
- expanding the ability for farmers, ranchers, and landowners to engage in voluntary conservation programs that support wildlife habitat connectivity and migratory corridors.

The 2026 Farm Bill, as passed by the House, does not address the sweeping cuts to food assistance programs made through the 2025 Reconciliation package. During the debate on the bill, Rep. Vasquez spoke out against the cuts to the Nutrition title and stated he will continue to fight to restore SNAP funding.

On May 13, 2026, the House of Representatives passed a bill authorizing the year round sale of E15, gasoline containing 15% ethanol. Previously, this bill had been coupled with the Farm Bill but through the House voting process, the bills were decoupled and sent to the Senate to be considered separately.

On the Repeal of the Roadless Rule

As covered in [Volume 1, Issue 3 of the AgriPolicy Brief](#), the Roadless Rule in a 2001 regulation that prohibits the construction of road through portions of the nation's national forests. In New Mexico approximately 1.6 million acres are protected by this rule to preserve wild places, support wildlife, clean water, and back country recreation.

Senator Heinrich joined Senator Salinas (D-Or) in a [press release](#) speaking out against USDA's proposal to repeal the rule. The next step in the process will be the release of a draft environmental impact statement and the comment period that follows will be the last time Americans can voice their opposition to the attempt to repeal the rule and protect millions of acres of public land.

FARM BILL TRACKER

