



## Recognizing Our 2022 Golden Chile Award Winners!



Now well into its second year, the New Mexico Grown Golden Chile Awards Program is gaining steam. With a marked increase in participation, this is an encouraging sign for a local food movement that is ever growing and expanding!

This year, the NM Grown Coalition is recognizing 12 school districts, 11 preschools, and five senior center providers for their passion and commitment to serving fresh, locally grown produce and supporting our state's farmers! And, for the first time, the Coalition is honoring the 55 New Mexico farmers and food hubs eligible to sell to local institutions – without them, we couldn't connect the thousands of children and seniors across our state to locally grown food.



To refresh your memory, the Awards Program is a comprehensive four-tiered recognition program – Seed, Sprout, Blossom, Golden Chile – designed to acknowledge all levels of involvement in New Mexico's local food movement. As such, interagency and community collaboration has become a cornerstone in the evolution of this work, and we are fortunate to share the helm with a strong and diverse team of leaders. Representatives from the Governor's Office and Departments of Health, Education, Agriculture, Aging and Long-term Services, and Early Childhood Education & Care will be on hand to celebrate the winners during a virtual ceremony on September 14<sup>th</sup> (see *Current & Upcoming Events* for more information and a registration link).



Our team has been focused on getting a statewide Farm to Preschool initiative off the ground in recent months, and we are so thrilled to see more preschools engaged in the Golden Chile Awards Program this year!

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## Current & Upcoming Events



New Mexico Grown Month  
All September!



Throughout the month of September, schools, preschools, and senior centers will celebrate New Mexico Grown by highlighting local farmers and produce in classrooms and cafeterias across the state. Whether it's harvesting produce directly from the garden, offering fruit & vegetable tastings, serving locally grown produce in meals, or getting creative with cafeteria promotions, there's something for everyone!

### Golden Chile Awards Ceremony September 14<sup>th</sup>

The NM Grown Coalition is excited to announce the 2<sup>nd</sup> annual Golden Chile Awards, a recognition program that shines a light on the hard work and innovation of leaders championing New Mexico Grown efforts in schools, preschools, and senior centers. This year, we're also honored to recognize the work of farmers in our state! Please join us for a virtual celebration on September 14<sup>th</sup> from 1:30-3pm. Register here: <https://bit.ly/NMGROWNREG>



### Walk & Roll to School Day October 12<sup>th</sup>

Step right up and join states, communities, and schools nationwide in celebration of Walk & Roll to School Day!

While Wednesday, October 12<sup>th</sup> is the official day this year, schools can celebrate throughout the month of October. And, if it's not feasible to walk or roll **to** school, you can still plan an event **at** your school! Visit the website for more information, resources, and to register your school: <https://www.walkbiketoschool.org/>

### National Farm to School Month All October!

Following closely on the heels of NM Grown Month, Farm to School Month is another opportunity to highlight farmers, school gardens, food education, and lunch trays filled with healthy, local ingredients!



## Golden Chile Awards, cont.

We'd like to extend a big thank you to Alberto Zavala, Healthy Kids Healthy Preschool Coordinator for Southern NM, and Alena Paisano, who served as our Farm to Preschool Specialist and has since transitioned into her new role as Farm to School Coordinator with the Public Education Department. Their relationships and community connections have been a tremendous asset to our collective work in the preschool realm and beyond!



Showing off a big zucchini | Deming

Two of our Farm to Preschool pilot sites, Gold Star Academy & Child Development Center in Farmington and Family Resource Center in Deming (see *Farm to Preschool story on page 4 to learn more about Family Resource Center's NM Grown work*), earned the top Golden Chile award for such activities as establishing edible gardens, buying locally grown food, engaging families and communities in NM Grown programming, and providing culturally relevant nutrition education. **Bravo!**

Meanwhile, in the southeast, Roswell Schools earned a Golden Chile award by expanding their NM Grown work over the past year! We're also excited to see school districts in Farmington, Elida, and Dexter – home to our HKHC programs in San Juan, Roosevelt and Chaves counties – achieve the second highest award category of Blossom. Bumble Bee Learning Center in Sunland Park and Future Generations in Clovis, two additional Farm to Preschool pilot sites, also earned the Blossom award this year.



Gathering 'round for garden education | Clovis

We are, of course, also happy to see more Sprout and Seed winners as new programs are developed and expanded! Clovis Schools joins senior centers in Torrance and San Miguel counties in the Sprout category, and several preschools and school districts achieved the Seed award, including New Beginnings in Farmington, Socorro Head Start, and Kids in Need of Supportive Services in Silver City.

Statewide, the New Mexico Grown program awarded its highest level of grants this school year – \$1.27 million for schools, \$300,000 for preschools, and \$530,000 for senior centers! Round of applause, please! Organizations can use the funds to establish edible gardens and purchase and serve locally grown food in meals and snacks.



We can't wait to congratulate and celebrate our institutions and providers for making local food a priority for the children and seniors they serve. We hope you can join us virtually on September 14<sup>th</sup> – see you then!

## HKHC Team Gathers in Socorro

### Celebrating & Revisiting



The month of July brought the Healthy Kids Healthy Communities team back together in person for the first time since 2019! With a theme of *Celebrating Being Together & Living Health*, we celebrated local successes

and accomplishments, laughed our way through a guided **KABOOM!** playground activity, shared a delicious, healthy breakfast courtesy of the ONAPA team, and simply enjoyed being in each other's physical presence for two and a half days!

Graciously hosted by our HKHC Socorro County trio – James, Dezirae, and Cheyenne – at the city's brand new Convention Center, the training incorporated a tour of Socorro's recreational facilities and gardens, a stroll along a new 5K trail that eventually leads out to Box Canyon, a recreation area popular with rock climbers, and a taste of some local flavor at the Buckhorn Tavern.

To spark ideas for getting creative with nutrition education in the classroom, we designed colorful fruit kabobs using cookie cutters of all shapes and sizes. On the savory side, we sampled cooked kamut and forbidden rice while discussing the importance of whole grains. Both activities are part of our Healthy Kids NM Wellness Lesson Book (see page 3), a new resource for teachers that we're currently piloting in HKHC elementary schools across the state.



Rita Condon, leading us through a whole grains activity

In addition to reviewing key programmatic priorities like upcoming statewide BMI surveillance, promotion and communication strategies, and evaluation, we were also guided through an engaging systems thinking activity requiring us to take stock of our individual and collective roles, draw an image reflecting how we see ourselves as part of the bigger picture, and share with the group.



Creativity & diversity abound! Posing with our drawings

Being together in person after three years allowed us ample time to truly reconnect, and it provided us an opportunity to know our newer team members better – Victoria Martinez, San Ildefonso coordinator, Tahlia Natachu, Zuni Youth Enrichment Project's

new Executive Director, and our Socorro crew. Thank you to all who participated with open minds and open hearts! It's such a joy hearing about your communities and championing your achievements. And perhaps the best part of all? No screens!

## Community Spotlight: Chaves County / Dexter Schools



Shelley Montgomery and a farm-fresh delivery of watermelon

Shelley Montgomery's philosophy as Food Service Director is a simple guiding force in her work: the kids are always number one. "We want to feed them the most nutritious and healthy food, and we want it to be as tasty and fresh as possible," says Montgomery, now in her fifth year feeding 750 preschoolers through high school seniors at Dexter Public Schools. "I want to influence our kids to have the healthiest future they could possibly have. If we start when they're young, they don't have to think about it – those healthy habits are developed."

Montgomery and her indispensable team are fostering healthy habits with creative activities that promote local food from Graves Farm, which is practically in the school district's backyard. Produce is picked and brought to Montgomery's kitchen the same day. She and her staff hold watermelon eating contests and classroom citrus, apple, and melon tastings, including a student favorite grown by Graves – the honeylope. Who wouldn't love this deliciously sweet hybrid of a honeydew and a cantaloupe?! "When the kids go to the store with their parents, my goal is they'll recognize a honeydew or ask for a watermelon," says Montgomery, whose mom recently retired after 32 years of food service work in Roswell.

Engaging students in all aspects of school food service is one of Montgomery's strengths. She looks forward to annual kitchen tours for middle schoolers, who don hair nets and ask thoughtful questions about salt regulations, food safety and storage, and school lunch funding. Not only do kids learn how to safely wash and store produce at home, they also gain an appreciation for how a school kitchen operates and develop a connection with the folks who provide their nutrition each and every day. They point out the "lunch lady" in the grocery store, and staff feel a sense of pride when kids visit the kitchen or participate in classroom tastings.

Healthy Kids Chaves County Coordinator Paula Camp is grateful to work with Montgomery on NM Grown and Nuevo Thursday promotions, in addition to the wellness policy updates Montgomery led during pandemic-related school closures. "The kids are always her first concern, and she goes the extra mile participating in NM Grown activities and helping with fruit and veggie tastings in the classrooms," Camp says. Montgomery is quick to point out that she couldn't do any of this without her staff of 11, who she says is the best in New Mexico. The state's NM Grown Program has been an essential partner too, enabling her to buy \$8,900 worth of farm-fresh melons, squash, peppers, onions, and chile this year.

She also helped the Hagerman and Lake Arthur school districts apply for NM Grown funding this year. Her work with NM Grown earned Dexter Schools a Blossom award, the second highest award category in this fall's Golden Chile Awards Program. She's not resting though; Montgomery's mulling over new, creative activities to spark interest in healthy food. Maybe the fifth or sixth graders will be helping to make jam with local jalapeños and chile in the near future!



Preparing local bell peppers



### Introducing the Healthy Kids NM Wellness Lesson Book

The ONAPA team is excited to announce a new school-based resource we've been busy working on and intentionally rolling out in select HKHC schools across the state – the Healthy Kids NM Wellness Lesson Book! Last school year, we asked elementary teachers to pilot lessons from the first unit with their students and share candid feedback to help us improve. In the background, we're continually making edits that add rigor and enhance each lesson to be developmentally and culturally appropriate for all students.

We originally created the Wellness Lesson Book to make it easier for educators to teach children about healthy lifestyle behaviors in a comprehensive way with lessons and units that build on each other. To get at a truly holistic view of health, lesson topics also include things like positive self-image, hygiene, being helpful around the house, the importance of pollinators, and environmental health. We designed the lessons themselves to complement our existing Dinky books and program materials that focus on healthy eating, physical activity, reducing screen time, and drinking water. To help ensure each lesson had a foundation in New Mexico culture and tradition, we collaborated closely with Toni Truesdale, an esteemed local artist and educator.

As we continue to incorporate teacher feedback we will, over time, be able to share all four units and hope they become a valued resource for teaching children across New Mexico about healthy lifestyle behaviors. Stay tuned for future updates and opportunities to pilot lessons in elementary schools near you!





## Farm to Preschool: A Successful Start in Deming

When Tricia Gutierrez steps outside the Family Resource Center, she finds a handful of preschoolers hovering over one of three garden beds, comparing lengths of sunflowers and marveling at how much the squash has grown. “They love growing, putting soil in the beds, and poking holes for seeds,” says Gutierrez, site supervisor for the center that serves 46 children in Deming. Each day, the preschoolers check how their spinach, cucumbers, carrots, and radishes are growing. They smell them and study them with a magnifying glass; they take pictures, harvest, and sample each vegetable. Finally, they assess whether they prefer eating them raw or cooked.

Students tending to the garden is one component of the Family Resource Center’s work as a Farm to Preschool pilot site. Eight pilot sites from diverse areas of the state are implementing a comprehensive, culturally relevant program rooted in four core strategies: buying NM grown produce for meals and snacks, growing edible gardens, offering nutrition education, and encouraging family and community engagement. Additional preschools are receiving mini-grants to implement one of the four strategies.

Healthy Kids Healthy Preschool Coordinator Alberto Zavala meets with the preschools regularly to answer questions, discuss successes and challenges, and bring fun resources like colorful NM Grown posters for their classrooms. Preschool providers also receive dynamic trainings on each strategy and have opportunities to share and learn from one another.



Preparing seeds for the garden

To launch the garden project at Family Resource Center, preschoolers placed seeds in plastic bags by windows and learned how fruits and vegetables grow until the seeds germinated and were ready to be planted outside. The New Mexico State University’s Agriculture College joined staff, children, and their families for an interactive planting day. For future plantings, the preschool plans to spend a portion of its \$9,000 grant as a pilot site on more seeds, watering cans, kid-sized shovels, soil, and wood to revamp the three garden beds.

In addition to the garden beds, kids also chose one plant each to grow in a container and bring home for their family. Some parents have even told Gutierrez they are now starting their own gardens! Each week she sends home recipes, information, and activities. During some family meetings, parents help cook food from the garden or the staff prepares a dinner with garden veggies. “I think the program is so awesome,” Gutierrez says. “Just hearing the kids tell their parents at pick up about what they did and how their plant is growing is amazing.”

HELP New Mexico, Inc, which operates the Family Resource Center, agrees with Gutierrez’s assessment. After she presented information about the Farm to Preschool program, Help NM decided to implement the activities at all of its preschools in five southern New Mexico counties. What an incredible accomplishment to have an outside organization replicate a pilot initiative! **Congratulations** to the Family Resource Center for investing time and energy into teaching our youngest about the value of locally grown food. We’re all excited to see what’s on the horizon for Farm to Preschool, both in Deming and across the state!



## Colfax County Fosters Outdoor Recreation



Colfax County is making exciting plans that will draw hikers and bikers to the mountainous community 20 miles south of the Colorado border. The county’s progress expanding outdoor recreation increases physical activity options for residents, and also spurs the City of Raton’s economy. For years, Healthy Kids Colfax County has worked with local, state, and nonprofit partners to consider creating a five-mile trail from Raton to Sugarite Canyon State Park with a possible extension through private land to Colorado. The public will have access to that private land, now that the Nature Conservancy and Trust for Public Land announced they bought the 2,224-acre Bartlett Mesa property as a way to expand Sugarite and outdoor recreation in the area! The property is mostly high-elevation grasslands at the intersection of the Rocky Mountains and the Great Plains, situated south of the recently created Fishers Peak State Park in Colorado.

Meanwhile, the city is researching funding possibilities to create a multi-use trail from Raton’s downtown to Sugarite. With the recent property purchase, that trail could extend all the way to Colorado, linking the states’ recreational opportunities. “This is really important for Raton,” says City Manager Scott Berry. “Outdoor recreation is a top priority in the city’s master plan.” In addition to trails, Raton is making city streets safer for active transportation. One current project involves converting one lane of an old four-lane highway through town into a bike lane so people can safely ride or walk on the main road. “Raton is starting to realize people want pedestrian-friendly pathways and trails for both locals and tourists,” says Healthy Colfax County Coordinator Elizabeth Hampl, who serves on the city’s outdoor recreation taskforce. In recent news, Moss Adventures, a new potential partner offering experience-based adventures, is relocating its company to Raton – opportune timing as Colfax County positions itself as a destination for outdoor recreation! “People come through looking for outdoor recreation in Colorado, and we have all that right here,” says Berry.

## Community Spotlight: Grant County

### Honoring Local Lunch Heroes with Skills Training and Public Appreciation!

As we partner with schools to create environments that promote health, we certainly can't ignore the vital role of school nutrition providers. More than that though, we should be recognizing the work they put in each day to ensure hundreds of students receive nutritious food, all while staying abreast of federal food regulations and safety standards. Down in Grant County, Healthy Kids Grant County Coordinator Alicia Edwards isn't letting all that hard work go unnoticed. In what is often described as a pressurized environment with little acknowledgement and few training opportunities, Edwards and her partners are providing public appreciation and professional development.

For the past three years, the Grant County Commission has approved a proclamation declaring May as School Lunch Hero Month for the Cobre and Silver school districts so nutrition providers are publicly recognized for their work in schools. Edwards partners with Silver's Student Nutrition Director Rhonda Torres to create and present certificates to each of the cafeteria staff members. This year, Silver Consolidated Schools Superintendent joined Healthy Kids Grant County to personally thank each of the cafeteria staff at every elementary school.



Alicia Edwards poses with her Grant County lunch heroes



Edwards expanded appreciation efforts this year by offering knife-skills training to nutrition providers at Silver Schools with the help of two strong Healthy Kids Grant County partners, Torres and local chef, Alexandra Olsen. The district paid its employees to attend the Saturday workshop, where attendees received their own professional chef's knife and learned methods to prep vegetables efficiently. "They have so many things to do in such a short time. Anything that helps them get their work done in a timely fashion is helpful to them," Edwards said. Olsen gave safety tips as providers enjoyed the rare opportunity to work and chat with their colleagues from other schools. After the training, they put all those prepped vegetables to good use for an appreciation party as well as a community meal held at the local food pantry. Edwards and Torres want to offer annual cafeteria trainings, and are already thinking about an event for early 2023. Excellent idea!



## Community Spotlight: Curry County

### Perseverance Pays – Clovis Finally Receives Trail Funding!

Perseverance and vision are certainly key factors in Healthy Kids Curry County's recent built environment success. After nine years of talking, planning, advocating, and applying for funding, the State awarded the city of Clovis \$250,000 to plan a trail project that has the potential to transform the community's culture around physical activity.

When Mitch Gray became the coordinator for Healthy Kids Curry County in 2012, Clovis had one street with a bike lane. No trails. No safe routes to school. Not even stop signs on many neighborhood streets! Tim Rogers, statewide active transportation consultant for HKHC, declared Clovis streets unsafe for biking. But the pair researched the city's past infrastructure and master plans and discovered a project from the 1960s that proposed a trail around the Liebelt channel, an arroyo running through the heart of Clovis. Every time the city rewrote its master plan, the Liebelt project was included, but there was never any follow through on the proposal.

Healthy Kids Curry County worked with the city engineer at the time to persuade the city to apply for funding to build the Liebelt Trail. They didn't get the funding, but Gray and Rogers continued their advocacy, convinced the project would encourage people to be more active once it became easier and safer to walk and bike around town. At the same time, they addressed safety issues by helping the city rewrite its master plan to include a requirement for bike lanes on all new and rebuilt streets, resulting in several new bike lanes on local roads. Gray and city officials then decided to approach the trail project in phases and apply, once again, for planning funding.

This time, the grant application was successful! The state funding will help the city develop a plan, with community input, for creating a trail that will connect neighborhoods, parks, schools, medical facilities, grocery stores, and the Clovis Community College. People will be able to walk from the northwest part of town all the way to the southeast. "It will mean so much to the community," says Gray. "There's not a lot of outdoor desire in Clovis. The culture isn't there. To me, this is what makes this trail so important. It's a culture-changing project. If we can show people it's safe, we can create a belief system and a cultural expectation that walking is an option." The project will tie in opportunities for a multi-modal transportation system in Clovis, rather than only destination trails. The next step will involve hiring a planner to write a proposed trail plan so the city is eligible to apply for funding to build the project. A heartfelt congratulations to the city of Clovis and Healthy Kids Curry County – it's been a long time coming!