



# THE AG PLAN TRIBAL ROUNDTABLE

## FINAL REPORT

- Reporting outcomes from the Ag Plan Tribal Roundtable
- Roundtable held at the New Mexico Pueblo Cultural Center on Wednesday, June 20, 2018

### CONVENER

New Mexico Department of Health  
Office of the Tribal Liaison

### FACILITATOR

New Mexico First



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# INTRODUCTION

The *Resilience in New Mexico Agriculture* project began in 2014 to address unprecedented challenges to the health of the agriculture industry – issues no one farmer, rancher or businessman could tackle alone. The project has been supported by a variety of funders, and its backbone organizations are New Mexico State University Cooperative Extension Service (NMSU) and New Mexico First.

Foundationally, this project advances three activities:

1. Reforms to strengthen agricultural resilience in New Mexico
2. Support for the industry from policymakers and stakeholders
3. Improved understanding among the public about the value of agriculture to the state’s future

To achieve these goals, the *Resilience Project* centers on the development and implementation of a statewide policy plan for New Mexico agriculture – the Ag Plan.

Both tribal and non-tribal voices contributed to the development of the Ag Plan through input from over 600 participants at 13 regional meetings, as well as the deliberative efforts of a 30-member task force over six months. Following the release of the Ag Plan in August 2017, implementation efforts began to take shape, and participants voiced the need to reflect with tribal partners on what the Ag Plan’s implementation could look like on tribal lands.

The Ag Plan Tribal Roundtable was held as one step on the path to strengthening the resiliency of tribal agriculture. Participants acknowledged that agriculture is a core value of tribal communities. One participant shared “we are meant to provide food for our families and communities.” Another noted that agriculture is a foundation of native spirituality. Discussions throughout the morning centered on how to reinvigorate the value of growing food and how to use agriculture to enhance quality of life.

Participants articulated the importance of their discussion in light of challenges facing agriculture in their communities. Core concerns included addressing the need for healthy, fresh foods in tribal communities, as well as passing on traditions and knowledge. Ultimately, participants desired to determine how to achieve economic, health, community-building and soil and water conservation goals all through agriculture.

## Purpose of the Event

Since the Ag Plan’s release in August 2017, a roundtable was suggested for interested tribal members to discuss the Ag Plan and its potential benefits, opportunities, and challenges for tribal communities. At the Ag Plan Tribal Roundtable meeting, participants worked together to develop ideas around needs and opportunities stemming from the Ag Plan that could become the basis of future projects or collaborations.

As a result of the Roundtable discussions, objectives for native agricultural education and workforce, land and water needs, and agricultural economic opportunities were formed and are shared in this report. Following the Roundtable, New Mexico First will seek to work with participants to support, further develop or pursue funding for the identified project ideas. It is our hope that the concepts resulting from the Roundtable will contribute to a culture of cultivation in our state, support healthy communities, and strengthen our agricultural heritage.

## Convener

The New Mexico Department of Health (NMDOH) public health system serves 33 counties and 23 sovereign American Indian tribes, pueblos, and nations. The Department's mission is to promote health and wellness, improve health outcomes, and assure safety net services for all people in New Mexico.

The Office of the Tribal Liaison works to promote government-to-government relationships by strengthening tribal health and public health systems through on-going collaborations with American Indian tribes, pueblos, and nations. These collaborations are guided by tribal leadership in the creation, cultivation, and expansion of services and resources which respect the tenets of sovereignty and self-determination. One of the important initiatives of the Office is the reduction of tribal food deserts, promotion of food security, and enhancement of tribal agricultural and food systems.

## Process

At the Ag Plan Tribal Roundtable, tribal participants with an interest and connection to agriculture were invited to discuss the challenges and opportunities facing agriculture in their communities over a half-day session. After arriving at the New Mexico Pueblo Cultural Center, participants first shared their names, tribe/nation/pueblo and their connection to agriculture.

Governor Luarkie framed the morning's discussion with a reflection on the culture of cultivation that is deeply rooted in Native American culture. A culture of cultivation occurs at the intersection of economy, governance and spirit. This culture emphasizes the traditional sense of service to the community through growing livestock and crops to feed families and neighbors. Ultimately, agriculture reflects native principles of giving goodness to the world and the self.

Following introductions, facilitator and former Laguna Pueblo Governor Rich Luarkie presented briefly on goals for the meeting, as well as how the roundtable fit into the larger *Resilience in New Mexico Agriculture Project*. New Mexico First project manager Kelsey Rader also spoke to the phases of the *Resilience Project* to date. Governor Luarkie then facilitated discussion on the following questions:

- *How might we best ensure the next generation of tribal farmers and ranchers can thrive?*
- *What changes or improvements are needed to ensure that land and water can support tribal agriculture into the future?*

- *What economic opportunities do you think agriculture presents to your community, and what are challenges that stand in the way?*

The meeting concluded with participants sharing objectives for future steps. Facilitators also encouraged participants to act on the ideas expressed during the meeting and to reach out with questions or project interests.

## **Policy Organization**

**New Mexico First** engages people in important issues facing their state or community. Established in 1986, the public policy organization offers unique town halls and forums that bring together people from all walks of life to develop their best ideas for policymakers and the public. New Mexico First also produces nonpartisan public policy reports on critical issues facing the state. These reports are available at [nmfirst.org](http://nmfirst.org).

Our state's two U.S. Senators – Tom Udall and Martin Heinrich – serve as New Mexico First's honorary co-chairs. The organization was co-founded in 1986 by U.S. Senators Jeff Bingaman and Pete Domenici (retired).

## **Report Authors**

This New Mexico First report was prepared by Kelsey Rader and edited by Heather Balas, Aiko Allen, Governor Rich Luarkie and Bryan Crawford-Garrett.

# NEXT GENERATION OF TRIBAL FARMERS AND RANCHERS

To kick off the Roundtable discussion, participants were asked *“Think about the unique aspects of your own community. How might we best ensure that the next generation of tribal farmers and ranchers can thrive?”*. In response, participants offered rich insights into the successes, needs and challenges facing tribal communities who are trying to grow their next crop of farmers and ranchers.

One overarching theme during this portion of the discussion was how young people need an improved understanding of how they can succeed in an agricultural career. One participant noted that in modern society success is measured by how much money you make. In comparison to the past, growers had value and were important individuals due to their ability to feed the community. Reinforcing respect for agricultural careers and linking young growers with opportunities for economic success could help the next generation to engage in agriculture.

Participants also discussed that in native communities there is a need to redefine what success means, along with the metrics that determine success. Gov. Luarkie of Laguna Pueblo illustrated this point by pointing out a common metric for success is assessing poverty levels. In the Keres language, there is no word for poverty, and therefore this metric may not have a shared meaning across communities. A question the group considered on this point was how could tribal communities begin to create their own metrics and how does that redefine success?

Finally, Ventura Lovato from Santo Domingo Pueblo reminded the group that critical to understanding how we can best support new tribal growers is to ask how has their communities instilled the value of agriculture in youth? Ms. Lovato noted that youth learn most lessons in schools and other systems, and so it is important to assess how those spaces are creating lessons on the value of agriculture. Delane Attcity of Navajo Nation reminded the group that, in

## The Time for New Growers is Now!

Across the United States, including among indigenous nations, farmers and ranchers are aging with not enough young growers to take their place. According to 2012 Census data, the average age of tribal operators in New Mexico is 54 (this information is based on census data from Navajo Nation and Cochiti, Isleta, Santa Domingo, Jemez and Zuni Pueblos).

During the Tribal Roundtable discussion, many participants acknowledged the fear that as farmers and ranchers age, time is running out to pass on knowledge to the next generation.

Source: 2012 USDA Agriculture Census Data

all of these efforts, agricultural knowledge is the byproduct, while the focus is on teaching kids leadership, responsibility and other life skills through farming and ranching.

## Successes and Opportunities

In both Sandia and Acoma Pueblos, efforts are being made to engage youth in agriculture through 4-H. James McCook from Sandia Pueblo reported that there are a variety of programs being tested out to see what engages young people most. The hope is to balance the burgeoning amount of “mathletes” on the pueblo with outdoor experiences and agricultural knowledge.

Charlene Carr, Land Grant Director of the Institute of American Indian Arts (IAIA), and others discussed the resources and programs provided by IAIA.<sup>1</sup> For tribes and pueblos with agriculture programs, IAIA can be a valuable partner and resource through their Land Grant Programs. Charlene encourages partnerships with tribal agriculture programs and IAIA, particularly for those communities who could use support in advocating for stronger agriculture programs.

## Challenges and Needs

One of the overarching challenges for growing the next generation of tribal farmers and ranchers at the Roundtable was determining how to best engage youth in agriculture. Some participants noted that technology can pull young people away from learning and engaging in the agriculture work at hand. Instead of learning ranch work, one participant noted that kids prefer to stay on their phones. Participants agreed that using technology to help interest youth in agriculture instead of distracting them could be a useful strategy.

Another critical obstacle participants voiced at the Roundtable concerned not receiving enough support and understanding from tribal leadership to develop and improve tribal agriculture youth programs. Some participants explained they felt the need to consistently educate and re-educate leadership on the value of agriculture in order to gain approval in developing and maintaining youth agriculture programs. However, some participants emphasized that some programs can be producer-driven, and instead of waiting on tribal leadership they should take initiative to build their own efforts.

Another critical challenge is making resources available to young people who want to become farmers and ranchers. Participants shared that many young people need to see that there are supports in place in order to feel more secure in pursuing a career in agriculture. Delane Attcity shared that apprenticeships could be a positive way of ensuring knowledge is passed between growers, and for students to have the support they need when starting out. Participants also

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<sup>1</sup> The Land Grant Programs through the Institute of American Indian Arts (IAIA) is a 1994 land grant serving institution that received its status upon the establishment of the original 1994 act. The institution provides agricultural educational and technical assistance to New Mexico’s 22 Native American communities, IAIA students, staff, and faculty, and the surrounding New Mexico communities through culturally accepted extension education, and research programs. (Institute of the American Indian Arts, 2018)



stated that providing agriculture scholarships and connecting young people with available land to work were other strong ideas.

Finally, participants also noted that in developing agriculture programs, young people need to be consulted and a part of the planning process. Federal funding programs also need to be evaluated for reducing and streamlining barriers preventing some tribes and pueblos from accessing needed funds for agricultural youth programs.

# LAND AND WATER

Land and water are the foundation of healthy agriculture. How tribes and pueblos are able to access and utilize their land and water resources while contending with increased pressures are critical questions that participants at the Ag Plan Tribal Roundtable met head on. Below are summarized responses to the question posed to roundtable attendees: *“What changes or improvements are needed to ensure that land and water can support tribal agriculture into the future?”*

## Successes and Opportunities

Franklin Martinez shared that Acoma Pueblo has had several successes in managing their land and water. Successes include a farm program that laser-levels fields and uses other assessments to strategize and develop more efficient water use. Acoma is utilizing renewable energy, as well as using tribal laws to protect wetland areas that contribute to ground and drinking water. Mr. Martinez added that in his experience there are funds available to assist in land and water conservation work on tribal lands.

Several participants discussed the potential creation of tribal soil and conservation districts. John Romero of Laguna Pueblo explained that his pueblo and others find they are competing for funding opportunities, and a tribal-focused soil and water conservation district could give exclusive priority to the tribes and pueblos to assist in major watershed restoration and other projects.

## Challenges and Needs

Similar to their non-native neighbors, participants at the tribal roundtable expressed challenges that arise from water use such as water availability, water quality (arising from oil and gas operations and uranium mining) and concerns over climate change and its impact on water. In regards to agriculture, participants shared concerns over how decreases in the state’s overall water supply could impact agriculture. To overcome some of these obstacles, participants discussed means of using water more efficiently. Ideas for water efficiency included re-thinking flood irrigation, growing more desert-friendly crops, and utilizing pipeline to reduce runoff losses.

Investing in intertribal and other collaborations was noted by many participants as a means to address some of the challenges raised. Especially for much-needed watershed restoration work, some participants encouraged future partnerships with neighboring communities. Additionally, federal funding for conservation work was also discussed, but again participants cited experiences where they were not able to leverage federal funding due to exclusive program standards.

Overgrazing was also mentioned as a challenge to maintaining healthy land and water for agriculture. Participants discussed the need for tribal leadership to prioritize grazing

management. Wild horse populations and their impact on pastures and fields were also a topic of concern.

Like building the next generation of tribal farmers and ranchers, participants also wanted to see and support the next generation of tribal natural resources specialists. One participant noted that she would like to see more people who can advocate on behalf of their tribes and their water rights issues. Gov. Luarkie added that efforts must be made to encourage more tribal youth to pursue these disciplines to grow this critical workforce. Particularly for agriculture, people who are technically skilled in natural resources issues can add depth to the conversation

# ECONOMIC OPPORTUNITIES

Economic opportunities in tribal agriculture are available, but there are challenges to securing those opportunities. When asked *“What economic opportunities do you think agriculture presents to your community, and what are challenges that stand in the way?”* Roundtable participants brainstormed many possibilities future endeavors. Attendees also shared successes to date, which could be built upon or serve as examples to others.

The conversation made it clear that the economic opportunities for agriculture are out there and growers must coordinate and mobilize to meet demand. Ensuring that agriculture is considered a viable economic opportunity by tribal leadership and community members was noted as paramount to securing support.

## Successes and Opportunities

Regarding increasing production and creating economic opportunities out of agriculture, there have already been major successes to date. In Santa Clara Pueblo, agriculture production has increased in part because of a tractor service program which provides work for anyone who requests it. Towana Yepa from Jemez Pueblo also shared her achievements selling produce to charter schools and overcoming barriers for providing produce out of season though using hoop houses. Ms. Yepa was able to take advantage of state-funding that helps schools afford local produce out of the New Mexico Grown Program.<sup>2</sup>

In addition to already-established programs and practices, participants eagerly discussed other marketing possibilities. John Romero noted that one of the unique aspects of native-grown produce and livestock is that they stem from ancient traditions and represent the long legacy of tribal agriculture. Buyers have taken notice of the value of native produce and participants agreed that

### Tribal Agriculture by the Numbers

Based on the available agricultural census data, there is a relatively high amount of agriculture activity throughout tribal lands. On the pueblos of Cochiti, Isleta, Santa Domingo, Jemez, Zuni there are a total of 565 farms and ranches. Approximately 70% of these agriculture operations are cattle ranches.

For the pueblos listed above and the Navajo Nation there was a combined \$3,428,228 total market value of agriculture production generated in 2012. However, for each tribe and pueblo total market value of products is outweighed by total farm production expenses.

Source: USDA Agriculture Census Data 2012

<sup>2</sup> The New Mexico Grown Initiative provides New Mexico students with regionally grown fresh fruits and vegetables, while providing a new market for farmers, an economic benefit to both urban and rural areas, and assists schools meet new Federal nutrition requirements. (Farm to Table, 2018)

there is demand for their products. Concrete examples of new market opportunities include gaming facilities, schools, and other large institutions.

To access existing markets, participants noted there were programs and resources in place and available for use. Delane Attcity shared that Navajo Agriculture Products Industry (NAPI) has feedlots and fields available for leasing and use to others with a preference for native users. The Intertribal Agriculture Council may also have resources to support accessing national and international markets.<sup>3</sup> Participants also considered how a “native-grown” label that serves as branding for different tribally grown crops and livestock could also serve to build market success.

## Challenges and Needs

Although participants recognized that market demand does exist for native grown products, accessing some of these markets is not without difficulty. One of the greatest challenges expressed was a lack of capacity for any single pueblo or tribe to meet the present demand. To address this, several participants recommended forming an intertribal co-op or aggregation program similar to the Agri-Cultura Network.<sup>4</sup> Such an alliance between the tribes could maximize capacity and reduce costs and increase profitability. One participant recommended considering a native-led cattle growers association.

Several participants discussed how regulations must be thoughtfully considered, as they can limit some economic opportunity. One participant shared that a grazing ordinance had the unintended consequence of effectively ending a community’s sheep industry. Participants emphasized again that examples such as this point to the need to work closely with leadership to build understanding.

Capital for expanding and scaling up operations was also offered as a challenge. Participants wanted to see what possibilities there were to increase access to capital for tribes and pueblos.

Understanding, accessing and utilizing existing resources, as well as tapping the support of partners was also articulated as a major need. Dept. Secretary Hunter encouraged participants to think about ways the state could act as a resource. Charlene Carr from IAIA noted that her organization is working with NMSU cooperative extensions service to better understand roadblocks experienced by tribes and provide support to overcome them.

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<sup>3</sup> The Intertribal Agriculture Council conducts a wide range of programs designed to further the goal of improving Indian Agriculture. The IAC promotes the Indian use of Indian resources and contracts with federal agencies to maximize resources for tribal members. (Intertribal Agriculture Council, 2018)

<sup>4</sup> The Agri-Cultura Network is a farmer-owned brokerage that sells sustainably grown, local produce to restaurants, institutions and families. (Network, 2017)

# CONCLUSIONS AND NEXT STEPS

The Ag Plan Tribal Roundtable drew together a group of strong voices committed to supporting agriculture in tribal communities. Hopes for the future centered on collaboration to achieve greater economic success from agriculture, supporting land and water quality, and finding ways to pass on traditions and lessons on the value of agriculture to the next generation. Concrete follow up steps include future meetings, site visits, and continued conversations on the ideas expressed in this report.

Although there are considerable challenges facing agriculture, participants at the Ag Plan Tribal Roundtable identified more opportunities than hardships. Participants encouraged one another to take initiative in their communities and push for more economic and human investment in agriculture. Additionally, participants articulated their desire to help and work with one another to improve the importance and resiliency of agriculture in their communities.

The Roundtable conversation echoed the deep tribal connection to agriculture and participants' desire to fulfill traditions of feeding their communities. One participant noted "I would like to know at the end of the day that my cattle went to support the community over the dollar amount I receive for it". Ultimately, feedback at the Roundtable reflected many of the hopes and struggles others face in agriculture throughout the state, as well as a commitment to support the future of farming and ranching.

# APPENDIX

## Participants, Observers and Staff

### **PARTICIPANTS**

- Delane Attcity, Navajo Nation
- Joseph Bronk, Santa Ana Agricultural Enterprises
- Charlene Carr, IAIA
- Delbert Crow II, Jicarilla Apache Nation
- Jewel DeDios, Jicarilla Apache Nation
- Ventura Lovato, Santa Domingo Pueblo
- Franklin Martinez, Acoma Pueblo
- James McCook, Sandia Pueblo
- Gilbert Naranjo, Santa Clara Pueblo
- Emeric Padilla, Santa Clara Pueblo
- John Romero, Laguna Pueblo
- Tamara Sandoval, Jicarilla Apache
- Towana Yepa, Jemez Pueblo

### **OBSERVERS**

- Joaquin Baca, University of New Mexico
- Jens Deichman, Crow Flats Farm
- Bill Dunn, Sundance Consulting Inc.
- Alexandra Eckhoff, New Mexico Livestock Board
- Matt Garcia Sierra, Campaign Office of U.S. Congressman Steve Pearce
- Dawn Hunter, Dept. Secretary, New Mexico Department of Health
- Katy Leate, Oveja Project
- Raphael Nevins, Healthy Futures New Mexico
- Dave Nezzie, Office of U.S. Senator Heinrich
- Allan Oliver, Thornburg Foundation
- Carole Palmer, COPE
- Michael Patrick, NMSU Cooperative Extension Service
- Lee Platero, Sundance Consulting Inc.
- Poqueen Rivera, Office of U.S. Congresswoman Michelle Lujan-Grisham
- Andrew Sweetman, Water Resources Department of Santa Ana Pueblo

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