

Local Food Industry Development

Far too often, the existing food systems — a term commonly used to refer to all the processes, infrastructure and activities related to feeding a community — in the state of New Mexico contribute to poor nutritional outcomes for individuals and families, especially those considered low-income. Not only does New Mexico have one of the highest obesity rates in the nation as a result of these significant shortcomings, the systems in question contribute very little to the state economy, with as much as 80 percent of all money spent on food and nutrition leaving the state, according to New Mexico State University Extension Service.

It is primarily because of these nutritional and economic challenges that McCune supports development of market-based alternatives that will ultimately produce better health outcomes and contribute more directly to the economic well being of the citizens and communities of New Mexico. While agriculture is one of the largest contributors to the state's gross domestic product, it can be a tough business for new generations of entrepreneurs to crack if they aren't already a member of an old, established farm family or if they don't have the backing of a large, corporate farming operation.

That said, a stronger, more locally based (and focused) food industry has been growing in New Mexico communities for the better part of this century. Grass roots efforts such as farmers markets and Community Supported Agriculture (CSA) programs have not only provided training for new farmers and germination for new businesses, they also provide the public with greater options to feed their families nutritional, locally grown fruits, vegetables and meats. This movement has been critical to the shift in people's ideas about what it means to eat healthy, and what it means to support local agriculture. Local food system development also drives increased interest in protection of land and water, which are essential for local food production. All of this, in turn, allows for more small business creation and a deeper statewide economic impact.

To this end, the Foundation has identified six key leverage points for the development of the local food industry:

Key Leverage Points

Market development hinges on the promise of community based programs that are focused on building and maintaining relationships between consumers and small farms and other food producers. These programs have great potential when it comes to driving small-scale food entrepreneurship around New Mexico. Priority will be given to approaches that increase profitability and revenue for small farms and producers around the state. This includes programs that support sharing materials in order to build a broader market, as well as a deeper level of market engagement among small and

new farms. Other innovative market engagement and development approaches will be considered.

Shared infrastructure can refer to equipment and facilities as well as administrative and operational functions and capabilities. Organizations that develop, implement and/or maintain shared infrastructural elements that support multiple farms and producers are well aligned with this priority. The Foundation also supports development of new technologies that improve farm profitability, through greater means of production, farm management training or increased access to consumers.

New farm/farmer development emphasizes expansion of the capacity of new farms, both in terms of agricultural practice and competence with standard business practices. As the demand for local and sustainable agriculture grows among consumers, the development of new farms and new farmers will present an opportunity for economic development as well as an avenue to uphold and maintain the state's longstanding (in New Mexico, that's practically ancient) agricultural traditions — particularly in vulnerable or rural communities where tradition persists despite the wide range of challenges our families face. But not to rest on tradition alone, new models of capital development to support emerging agricultural businesses will also be prioritized.

Nutritional health education/interventions refers to the need to engage and influence broader audiences in conversations about nutritional health as opportunities are presented by the growth of a more localized food industry. Having such programs directly connected to locally grown produce can provide even greater impact. The Foundation supports programs and organizations whose focus is on creating mechanisms that connect vulnerable populations with healthy and fresh local produce, dairy products, meat and other food products.

Support for **Policy and advocacy** demonstrates the Foundation's interest in development of new, innovative policy approaches that could drive greater demand for the products created by local farmers and producers. As such, the Foundation is aligned with organizations that drive development of policy that is supportive of emerging local food industries around the state. The Foundation also supports advocacy efforts that support heirloom and indigenous crop and seed varieties to maintain genetic diversity of our food system in the face of changing climate characteristics.

In addition, the McCune Foundation recognizes the deep link between agricultural practices and land conservation and management and supports efforts to develop and support practices that conserve land, soil and other resources.