

THE POWER OF STORY



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27TH ANNUAL LOCAL FOOD CONNECTS CONFERENCE

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MARCH 5-7, 2025

Welcome!

Dear Local Food Connects Conference Attendees,

On behalf of the New Mexico Farmers' Marketing Association, we are thrilled to welcome you to our 27th annual gathering. Our theme this year, *The Power of Story*, highlights the deep and transformative impact that our stories can have on each other, our communities, and the local food system statewide.

In an era of constant change, the stories we tell shape how we view food, agriculture, and the world around us. Whether it's the personal journey of a small-scale farmer, the tale of a community coming together to shape a farmers' market, or the powerful narratives that challenge our understanding of sustainability, storytelling has the power to connect us, inspire action, and spark meaningful conversations.

During the conference, you will hear from passionate speakers, participate in dynamic workshops, and engage with a diverse group of individuals who share a common goal: to build a stronger, more equitable, and more sustainable food system. We hope the stories shared here will offer valuable insights and open up new pathways for collaboration and innovation.

As we come together, we encourage you to listen, share, and learn from one another. Each person here brings a unique perspective, and it is through these shared stories that we can cultivate deeper understanding, amplify our collective voices, and drive positive change.

Thank you for being a part of this exciting journey. We look forward to the stories we will share over the next few days.

Yours in local food,



Denise D. Miller

Denise Miller, NMFMA Executive Director

NMFMA Board of Directors



Jedrek Lamb, Board Chair
Teacher, Bosque Farms;
jedrek.lamb@gmail.com



Ralph Vigil, Vice Chair
Owner, Molino de la Isla
Organics, Pecos;
molinodelaisla@gmail.com



Todd Taylor, Treasurer
Owner, Ranchline LLC, Roswell;
todd@ranchline.com



Contessa Archuleta, Secretary
Financial Advisor, The Rikoon Group;
contessa.archuleta@rikoongroup.com



Linda & Mario Rosales
Owners, Rosales Produce, Socorro;
rosalesL5@aol.com



Bryce Townsend, Owner,
Black Mesa Farm, Pueblo of San
Felipe; moosebdt@gmail.com



Cindy Talamantes
Manager, Los Alamos Farmers'
Market, El Rito;
talacook@windstream.net



Joshua Cunningham
Local Food Advocate, Taos;
jkanizzle@me.com



Joe Phy
Vice President of Strategic Initiatives,
Roadrunner Food Bank, Albuquerque;
joe.phy@rffb.org



Carrie Theilen
Director of Regional Community
Health, Presbyterian Healthcare
Services, Santa Fe; cthielen@phs.org

CONFERENCE AGENDA

Wednesday, March 5

FOCUS: Market Operations & Double Up Food Bucks

TIME	EVENT	LOCATION
12:00 pm - 1:00 pm	Registration. Look for the bookstore and Jemez Rooms	Near the cafeteria
1:00 pm - 2:00 pm	Welcome and Introductions, Denise Miller & Sarah Thompson Market Manager Operations, Part 1 Andrea Warner, the NMFMA's Farmers' Market Liaison will lead this session designed to provide all market managers — and especially those who are new to the job — an easy seasonal approach for planning your market season. It all starts with a simple to-do list organized by pre-season, in-season, and post-season activities.	Jemez Rooms
2:00 pm - 3:00 pm	Market Manager Operations, Part 2 There's a lot to keep track of when it comes to managing a market, from ensuring your market information is correct on the NMFMA's website, to submitting invoices, to gathering your annual market data. The NMFMA's staff will present tools and resources during this session to help make your market successful.	Jemez Rooms
3:00 pm - 3:15 pm	Break with coffee, tea, and light snacks	Jemez Rooms
3:15 pm - 5:00 pm	Double Up Food Bucks — What's On the Horizon for 2025 Sarah Thompson, Sonora Rodriguez, Corey Mansfield — your NMFMA Double Up Food Bucks rockstars — will talk about what to expect this year for SNAP rules, market and vendor training, and outreach activities. Guest speaker Sarah Michaud, executive director of New Vistas in Santa Fe, will provide guidance on the American Disabilities Act (ADA).	Jemez Rooms
5:00 pm +	After Hours Get Together/ Dinner on Your Own & With Friends Head to the hotel to check in, if needed. Meet in the hotel lobby between 5:30-6:00 pm for an informal gathering of friends and colleagues to head out to dinner. See the list of restaurants provided in your folder.	Hotel



TELL YOUR STORY! Find the NMFMA team at a recording station near the registration table. Exercise your power as a storyteller working to strengthen food access and agriculture in your communities. What makes your community unique? What are your superpowers? How does your work make a difference?

Thursday, March 6

FOCUS: Engaging New Mexico's Local Food System

TIME	EVENT	LOCATION
8:00 am - 8:45 am	Registration, Coffee, and Light Morning Snacks: Near the cafeteria and bookstore	Jemez Rooms
9:00 am - 9:15 am	Welcome & Land Acknowledgement: Denise Miller, executive director Ralph Vigil, owner, Molina de la Isla farm, Pecos	Jemez Rooms
9:15 am - 9:45 am	Opening Remarks: Jeff Witte, Secretary of the New Mexico Department of Agriculture	Jemez Rooms
9:45 am - 10:15 am	State of the Plate: Denise Miller Take a journey with Denise to explore what the NMFMA accomplished during 2024, and see what the year ahead holds.	Jemez Rooms
10:15 am - 10:30 am	Break	Jemez Rooms
10:30 am - 12:30 pm	Stories from the Field: See the local food system through the lens of those who are working in numerous disciplines across the state. During this engaging set of presentations, you will hear from eight of your colleagues about what they're up to and what motivates them to keep doing the work they do. <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Ophelia Steppe, State Nutritionist, NM Aging & Long-Term Services Dept.• Carol Ann Fugagli, Executive Director, Upper Gila Watershed Alliance, New Earth Project• Karina Ortiz, Neighborhood Liaison, Albuquerque Railyards; Vice-President, Barelás Community Coalition• Manny Encinias, PhD., Owner, Trilogy Beef Community; Executive Director, Santa Fe Farmers' Market Institute• LeVar R. Eady, Market Manager, Downtown Growers Market Head Cultivator & Founder, BluRok Farm• Bryce Townsend, Owner, Black Mesa Farm, LLC and NMFMA board member• Bonnie Hopkins, County Program Director, NMSU Cooperative Extension• Mary and Zach Ben, Co-Founders/Owners, Bidi Baby Foods, LLC	Jemez Rooms
12:30 pm - 1:30 pm	Networking Lunch	Jemez Rooms



Table Talk: 12:30 pm - 5:30 pm - NM Grown Approved Supplier Program Technical Assistance

Are you a current or prospective NM Grown Approved Supplier? Do you need help completing your application for FY26 (sales starting in July 2025)? Drop by our table in the hallway and we will provide you one-on-one technical assistance to get your application completed.

For more information, please visit NewMexicoGrown.org/apply

TIME	EVENT	LOCATION
1:30 pm - 3:00 pm	Co-Creating Culturally Relevant Farmers' Markets Facilitated by Kirsten Hansen and Andrea Warner , join this discussion on how your farmers' markets strive to be inclusive of the populations in your area in ways that are culturally relevant, and economically and environmentally sustainable. These are big topics, so let's roll up our sleeves in order to learn from one another! Share your ideas, best practices, and the challenges you face.	Jemez Rooms
1:30 pm - 2:45 pm	Breakout #1 for Market Managers	
1:30 pm - 2:45 pm	New Mexico Grown Town Hall Presenters: Alena Paisano, Ophelia Steppe, Aaron Moore, Meredith Lorencz Are you a current NM Grown Approved Supplier or program buyer? We want to hear from you! Join us to learn more about the New Mexico Grown program and to share your feedback with program providers, agency leads and support staff. We will answer questions, address concerns and share updates on new program opportunities, as well as share tools for maximizing local food purchasing/sales. Attend this session to get involved, so that you can join us in bringing more fresh and flavorful local foods to the plates of community members in your region.	Board Room, Room 223
3:00 pm - 4:00 pm	Breakout #2 for Producers, Food Hubs, and NM Grown Buyers	
3:00 pm - 4:00 pm	Market Manager Listening Session: How to Support Vendors and Keep Your Market Humming This forum for market managers will provide open discussion on topics such as: <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Policy 2025, Pam Roy, executive director Farm to Table• Why the Approved Supplier Program is important for market vendors, Alena Paisano• Food permits and cottage food laws• Market data, and more	Jemez Rooms
3:00 pm - 4:00 pm	ASP Annual Training Update Presenters: Anita Adalja, Valerie Smith, Kevin Beltrán	Board Room, Room 223
4:00 pm - 4:15 pm	Break	

4:15 pm - 5:00 pm

Board Elections

Jemez Rooms

Join us to hear from your board, and to elect members for the next term. There are a total of four open seats this year, including two for board members who intend to continue their service.

Special thanks to Carrie Thielen, Presbyterian Healthcare Services, who has decided not to run for re-election this cycle. She continues to be an excellent partner in Food is Medicine work.

Running this year are:

- **Contessa Archuletta:** Up for re-election. Contessa is a financial specialist at the Riokoon Group in Santa Fe, and she is the board secretary. Contessa is running for her second term.
- **Bryce Townsend:** Up for re-election. Bryce is the owner of Black Mesa Farm on San Felipe Pueblo. Bryce is also running for his second term.
- **Jasmine Meyer, MPH:** Manager of Community Health Operations and Strategic Initiatives, Northern New Mexico Presbyterian Healthcare Services. **New board applicant.**
- **Zachariah and Mary Ben:** Co-owners of Bidii Baby Foods LLC, in Shiprock, and Mary is the Director of The BEN Initiative. **New board applicants.**



After Hours Special Event! Movie night at the Jean Cocteau Theatre, 8:00 pm
418 Montezuma Avenue

After dinner, enjoy a private showing of the brand new documentary, “Eating History: A Taste of New Mexico.” Come watch this one-hour film that just debuted on PBS at the intimate, old-school cinema owned by Game of Thrones author George R. R. Martin.

Tip: Enjoy dinner w/ colleagues near the theater at Capital Coal Neighborhood Eatery, 326 S. Guadalupe St.

Friday, March 7

FOCUS: Marketing Your Farmers’ Market & Other Outlets

TIME	EVENT	LOCATION
8:00 am - 8:45 am	Registration and Coffee, Light Morning Snacks	Near the cafeteria
9:00 am - 10:30 am	Marketing Strategies and Opportunities Mark Chamberlain, the NMFMA’s Marketing Director, and Denise Miller will review marketing strategies and opportunities, along with new Double Up Food Bucks research to help you increase awareness and customer engagement.	Jemez Rooms
10:30 am - 11:30 am	Make the Most of Social Media and Events in 2025 Jena Marquez-Donovan, NMFMA’s Digital Marketing Specialist, will share a social media marketing calendar to help markets develop their own seasonal plan” and then rewrite to read “how to align your marketing with the NMFMA’s communications to help promote your market on social media. Erica Villegas, GoodFoodNM Coordinator will provide an update on our text messaging program. Andrea Warner, Market Manager Liaison, will share the successful Shop and Taste events hosted by markets in 2024 and show markets how to host their own event in 2025.	Jemez Rooms

11:30 am - 12:30 pm

Wrap Up & Lunch

Jemez Rooms



Greenhouse Visit — Trades & Technology Center: After lunch, visit the greenhouse operations on the SFCC Campus. Learn about Controlled Environment Agriculture (CEA) at the college, a technology-based approach to food production and farming that allows farmers/growers/food producers and agri-tech businesses to optimize their growing conditions and resource management. Special thanks to Charlie Schultz, Academic Director, CEA Program.

Conference Speakers (in order of appearance)



Sarah Michaud
Executive Director, New Vistas,
Santa Fe



Ralph Vigil
Owner of Isla de Molina Farm, Pecos,
NM; Vice President of NMFMA Board
of Directors

As an 8th generation acequia farmer from East Pecos and Chair of the New Mexico Acequia Commission, Ralph Vigil’s passion lies in the defense of acequia traditions and culture. Ralph is also the owner of Molino de la Isla Organics LLC, a small certified organic farm specializing in traditional and acequia agriculture focusing on Farm to School, CSA, and Farmers’ Market sales. It is his primary goal to defend land and water through organic agriculture by utilizing our centuries-old acequia systems to demonstrate their ability to economically sustain our communities and aid in physical and emotional well-being.



Jeff Witte
Secretary of the New Mexico
Department of Agriculture (NMDA)

Jeff grew up on his family’s ranch on the Rowe Mesa between Moriarty and Las Vegas, New Mexico. He graduated from NMSU with a bachelor’s degree in agricultural business management and a master’s degree in agricultural economics and economics. Jeff first came to NMDA in 1994, and in May 2011 he was named Secretary of Agriculture. He is past president of the National Association of State Departments of Agriculture (NASDA), past president of the Western Association of State Departments of Agriculture, past president of the Western United States Agriculture Trade Association, and past chair of Natural Resources, Pesticide Management & Environment Committee for NASDA. The bulk of Jeff’s time as New Mexico’s secretary of agriculture is spent on the road, meeting with groups that represent farmers and ranchers across the state. Jeff and his wife Janet live in the Mesilla Valley.



Ophelia Steppe
State Nutritionist for the New
Mexico Aging & Long-Term Services
Department

Ophelia has made it her life’s work to aid others in enhancing individuals’ health and wellbeing by advocating for healthy lifestyles and

enhancing the wellness of underserved communities. In her current role, Ophelia offers dietary assistance to senior centers that are both tribal and non-tribal. She studied at California State University Northridge and the University of California, Los Angeles (UCLA) (CSUN). For more than fifteen years, she volunteered internationally and domestically in a range of nations and neglected neighborhoods. Ophelia has merged cultural interaction with community service to help build and renovate schools, homes, and shelters in remote towns through farming, social service, volunteer construction work, and orphanage assistance programs.



Carol Ann Fugagli
Executive Director of the Upper Gila
Watershed Alliance, New Earth Project

Carol Ann grew up in rural Nebraska. A passionate wildlife enthusiast, she became an ornithologist and environmental educator. She and her husband homesteaded in Gila, NM, growing increasingly concerned about climate change and soil degradation. After discovering the Johnson-Su composting method, they launched UGWA’s New Earth Project, which focuses on carbon drawdown, food security, soil health, education, and youth empowerment. Their innovative approach of adding food waste, wood shreds, and biochar to the composting bioreactors has produced a successful fungal-dominant ‘Living Earth’ soil amendment rich in microbes.



Karina Ortiz
Neighborhood Liaison, Albuquerque
Railyards; Vice President of the Barel
Community Coalition

Karina has been a passionate, creative, and caring part of the Rail Yards team since 2020. Karina grew up playing soccer with neighbors in Barel, and enjoys farming, cooking, wood working, and local food. She is a proud auntie with strong family ties to Indigenous Ancestors and relatives in Mexico. Ever since she joined the team at the Rail Yards Market, she’s sparked enthusiasm, inspiration and joy within others. Starting by volunteering at the Bike Valet in 2019, Karina has grown in skills and capacity and now is a proud member of the Leadership Team with a focus on neighborhood outreach. Karina has facilitated many initiatives in the neighborhood, managed food distributions, helped communicate news, and has been a strong advocate for more collaborative projects amongst our partners, vendors, employees, and customer networks.

Conference Speakers (in order of appearance)



Manny Encinias, PhD
Owner of Trilogy Beef Community;
Executive Director of Santa Fe
Farmers’ Market Institute

Dr. Manny Encinias, PhD works daily in multiple capacities to protect the traditions and enhance the future of family-owned agriculture enterprises, as well as strengthen local food networks. Dr. Encinias is the founder and President of Trilogy Beef Community, LLC. and also owns and manages the daily operations of the Buffalo Creek Ranch in Central New Mexico as part of a fifth generation ranching family operation raising registered and commercial Angus, Charolais, and Maine-Anjou cattle. The Encinias family is grateful to be an Approved Supplier through the NM Grown Program. Dr. Encinias is also the Executive Director for the Santa Fe Farmers’ Market Institute, and serves on the New Mexico Food and Ag Policy Governance Committee, the Estancia Basin Water Planning Committee, and the national advisory board for the Niche Meat Processors Assistance Network.



LeVar R. Eady
Downtown Growers’ Market Manager;
Head Cultivator & Founder
of BluRok Farm

With over a decade of experience in cannabis and hemp cultivation, LeVar has combined his expertise in sustainable agriculture with his leadership role at DGM, managing one of Albuquerque’s largest and most diverse farmers’ markets. LeVar is a graduate of Morehouse College with a degree in Biology, and has spent years studying plant sciences, genetics, and regenerative agriculture. His passion for creating opportunities within the local food system, particularly for BIPOC farmers and small-scale growers, drives his work at DGM. Now a second-year market manager, LeVar has navigated the challenges of running a large, well-established market while ensuring accessibility, community engagement, and vendor success. His journey highlights the resilience, adaptability, and vision needed to sustain and grow a farmers’ market in a dynamic food landscape.



Bryce Townsend
Owner, Black Mesa Farms LLC;
NMFMA board member

Bryce is a farmer from the Pueblo of San Felipe, growing a variety of organic produce that he sells at the Albuquerque Downtown Growers’ Market, and the San Felipe Pueblo Farmers’ Market in order to provide his community with local access to fresh produce. He also serves on an advisory board for an infrastructure grant program being offered by a collaboration between the NMFMA and New Mexico Acequia Association, on a review committee for applications to the master’s program for Community and Regional Planning, School of Architecture and Planning at the University of New Mexico, and oversees a grant program for the San Felipe Pueblo that includes the implementation of a young farmer mentorship program.



Bonnie Hopkins
San Juan County Program Director and
Agricultural Agent for the New Mexico
State University Cooperative Extension
Service

Since 2013, Bonnie has served San Juan County, providing expertise in weed and pest identification and management, soil health, horticulture, livestock and agricultural concerns, as well as farm food safety and food system development. She is passionate about strengthening local food systems, supporting farmers’ markets, and guiding beginning farmers toward success. Bonnie also collaborated with county administration and staff to create the Growing Forward Farm project, an outdoor educational farm designed to serve the community across San Juan County. She holds an Associate’s Degree in Culinary Arts from the New England Culinary Institute, a Bachelor’s Degree in Sustainable Agriculture from Fort Lewis College, and a Master’s Degree in Agricultural Integrated Resource Management from Colorado State University.



Mary and Zach Ben
Bidii Baby Foods, LLC and the
Ben Institute

Zachariah Ben is a sixth generation farmer and sandpainter in Shiprock, NM. He is of the “Giant People” born for the “Red Running Into Water” clan. His maternal grandfather’s clan is the “Red House People” and his paternal grandfather is of the “Salt People.” Zach has over 10 years of experience in traditional farming and is the Co-founder and Owner of Bidii Baby Foods, LLC, a Navajo-registered business that sells a product line of organic indigenous baby foods. Zach manages a 16-acre organic farm in Gadii’ahi, NM. Zach also serves as a Tribal Liaison with University of New Mexico where he supports other indigenous entrepreneurs as they establish their businesses.

Mary Ben, MPH, DrPH has been farming in New Mexico for over six years. She is a founding member of The BEN Initiative, a 501c3 established to serve as a fiscal agent for farmers and grassroots organizations working on Birth, Environment and Nutrition (BEN) related projects across northwest New Mexico. Mary co-founded Bidii Baby Foods LLC with her partner, Zachariah Ben, and helps operate their 16-acre farm in Gadii’ahi (“Cudeii”), NM. Mary holds a Masters of Public Health in Maternal and Child Health and a Doctorate in Public Health from Johns Hopkins University.



Aaron Nathaniel Moore
NM Grown Program Coordinator–
Nutrition Programs, NM Public
Education Department



Meredith Lorencz
Local Food Procurement Specialist, The
Food Depot

Meredith grew up on a crop farm in rural Michigan. As a trained chef, she’s worked in the hospitality sector for 10 years, spending extensive time in South Africa in various levels of the food system, from fine dining restaurants to community-based food projects. She most recently pivoted from working for chef and humanitarian Jose Andres at his renowned Minibar in Washington, DC to connecting with the emergency food network in New Mexico during the COVID-19 pandemic. She is based in Gallup.



Pam Roy
Executive Director, Farm to Table;
Coordinator, NM Food & Agriculture
Policy Council

Born and raised in Santa Fe, Pam has spent a lifetime focused on community initiatives and food and agriculture issues. She coordinates the New Mexico Food and Agriculture Policy Council, Santa Fe City and County Food Policy Council, serves as the Rocky Mountain Farmers Union Government Relations for New Mexico, helped start NM’s “farm to school” program in 2001, and was an originating partner of the National Farm to School Network. Pam has a Master’s Degree in International Agriculture and has worked on agriculture and policy initiatives in other countries over the years.



Anita Adalja
Approved Supplier Program Food
Safety Trainer

Anita Adalja is a proud farm food safety nerd who has been facilitating food safety trainings and developing curriculum for farmers across New Mexico since 2017. She is a NM Grown trainer and reviewer, Produce Safety Alliance lead trainer, a USDA HGAP+ auditor, and is the food safety specialist at La Semilla Food Center. She has worked as a farmworker across the country for many years and is the founder of Not Our Farm, a non-profit farmworker storytelling and powerbuilding project. She is also a farmer at Ashokra Farm, a small farm in Albuquerque.

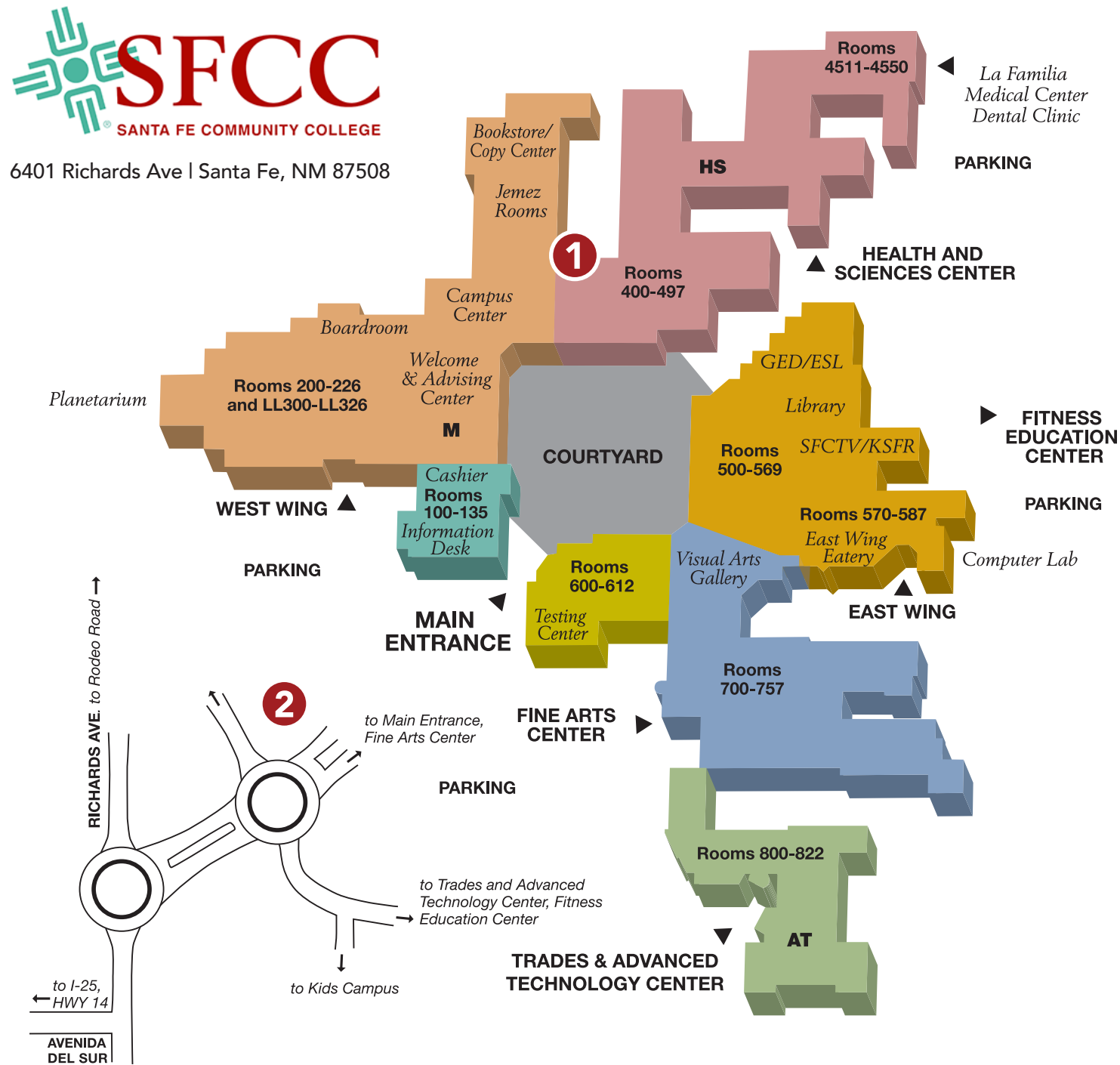


Valerie Smith
Approved Supplier Program Food
Safety Trainer

Valerie Smith is a food safety trainer and reviewer for the NM Grown Approved Supplier Program. She grew up in rural New Mexico and earned a B.S. in Biology at NM Institute of Mining and Technology. Afterwards, Valerie worked for 20 years in food retailing and distribution. Valerie has written food safety plans for grocery stores and distribution, and has provided technical assistance to GAP certified farms. She is an avid gardener and nature lover.

NMFMA Staff

NUTRITION INCENTIVES TEAM			
Sarah Thompson	Nutrition Incentives Programs Director	sthompson@farmersmarketsnm.org	410-402-0363
Kirsten Hansen	FreshRx Program Manager	kirsten@farmersmarketsnm.org	505-690-1529
Sonora Rodríguez	Double Up Food Bucks Outreach Coordinator	sonora@farmersmarketsnm.org	505-228-5726
Corey Mansfield	Nutrition Incentives Programs Administrator	corey@farmersmarketsnm.org	505-983-4010
APPROVED SUPPLIER PROGRAM & VALUE CHAIN COORDINATION TEAM			
Alena Paisano	Approved Supplier Program Director	alena@farmersmarketsnm.org	505-819-8277
Kevin Beltrán	ASP Food Safety Training Manager	kevin@farmersmarketsnm.org	505-448-2891
Emma Dewey	ASP Systems Manager	emma@farmersmarketsnm.org	505-983-4010
MARKETING TEAM			
Mark Chamberlain	Marketing/Creative Director	mchamberlain@farmersmarketsnm.org	303-898-0858
Denise Miller	Executive Director	dmiller@farmersmarketsnm.org	505-699-2064
Jena Marquez-Donovan	Digital Marketing Specialist	jena@farmersmarketsnm.org	505-983-4010
Andrea Warner	Market Manager Liaison	andrea@farmersmarketsnm.org	575-313-2923
Erica Villegas	GoodFoodNM Coordinator	erica@farmersmarketsnm.org	505-983-4010
OPERATIONS TEAM			
Denise Miller	Executive Director	dmiller@farmersmarketsnm.org	505-699-2064
Charise Gonzales	Director of Finance and HR	chgonzales@farmersmarketsnm.org	505-983-4010
Bryan Crawford-Garrett	Monitoring, Evaluation, Research, & Learning Lead	bryan@farmersmarketsnm.org	505-369-6447
Scott Knauer	Information Technology Manager	scott@farmersmarketsnm.org	575-693-1957
Amy Lucker	Data Entry and Administrative Assistant	accounting@farmersmarketsnm.org	505-983-4010
Catherine Baca	Membership and Conference Coordinator	catbaca@farmersmarketsnm.org	505-983-4010



We'd like to give a big thank you to Santa Fe Community College for hosting our annual conference!



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