



New Mexico Grown: FY23-FY25 Evaluation Report

Prepared by the University of New Mexico (UNM) Assessment, Planning, and Evaluation Lab (APEL) and the UNM Evaluation Lab, with support from the New Mexico Farmers' Marketing Association (NMFMA)



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I. Executive Summary

This report presents key findings and recommendations from a multi-year evaluation of New Mexico Grown (NM Grown), the state's local food procurement program. The evaluation, conducted by the University of New Mexico (UNM) with support from the New Mexico Farmers' Marketing Association (NMFMA), found that in FY23 through FY25 NM Grown positively impacted New Mexico's most vulnerable communities, food producers and distributors, and local economies.

Food producer participation increased from 217 total producers in FY23 to 253 total producers in FY25. Similarly, buyer participation increased from 114 buyers in FY23 to 144 buyers in FY25, while total buyer spending increased from \$1.93 million in FY23 to \$5.41 million in FY25. In FY25 alone, NM Grown generated an estimated \$7.05 million in total economic output, supporting approximately 139 jobs and \$2.41 million in labor income across New Mexico. The evaluation further revealed that NM Grown excels in quality and cultural relevance of products, improving recipients' food variety and diet quality, expanding markets and revenue for producers, providing strong and supportive leadership at Administering Agencies, and fostering community collaborations and relationships.

Key areas for future growth include: i) expanding buyer and producer participation, especially in rural and Tribal areas; ii) reducing program administrative burdens; iii) improving funding cycles to prevent spending gaps and better align with the producer growing season; iv) promoting regular buyer spending throughout the fiscal year; v) implementing group purchasing models for buyers in rural areas; and vi) strengthening outreach and technical assistance to support current producers and buyers as well as those interested in participating in the future.

Certain challenges facing NM Grown are programmatic in nature whereas others are more systemic. Solutions will need to be tailored accordingly. Securing recurring funding to sustain the program and the many food producers and communities that rely on NM Grown is a critical next step.



Key Abbreviations:

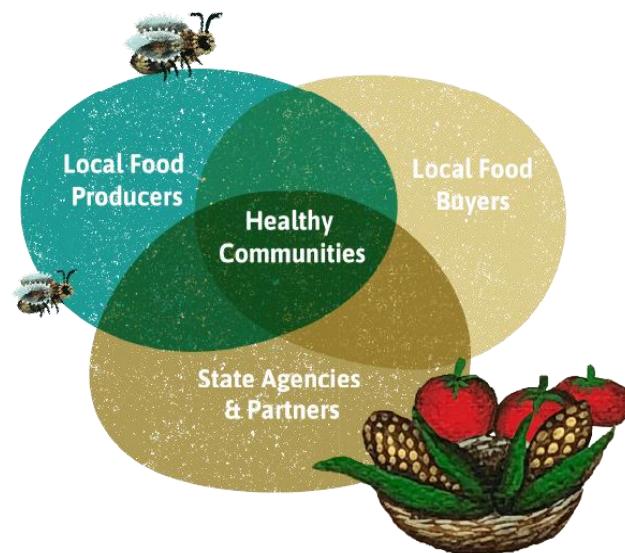
- ALTS**: New Mexico Aging Services (formerly Aging and Long-Term Services Department)
- APEL**: Assessment, Planning, and Evaluation Lab
- ECECD**: Early Childhood Education and Care Department
- FY**: Fiscal Year (July through June)
- LFDP**: Local Food Data Portal
- LFPA**: Local Food Purchasing Agreement
- NMDA**: New Mexico Department of Agriculture
- NMFMA**: New Mexico Farmers' Marketing Association
- OIEA**: Office of Indian Elder Affairs
- PED**: Public Education Department
- RFP**: request for proposals
- SD**: standard deviation
- UNM**: University of New Mexico

II. Introduction

New Mexico Grow

New Mexico (NM) Grow – the state’s local food procurement program – provides resources to institutions to purchase locally produced food from New Mexican farmers, ranchers, food hubs, distributors, and other food businesses. The food purchased through the program serves vulnerable populations around the state including children in early childhood education centers, students in K-12 schools, elders at senior centers, and food insecure clients at food banks. All food producers that sell to NM Grow buyers must be part of the Approved Supplier Program, a food quality assurance program that provides producers, especially those that are smaller-scale and historically marginalized, access to institutional local purchasing while also ensuring food safety, quality, and product specification requirements are met. Institutional local food purchasing programs have expanded in the U.S. and worldwide over the past 20 years, and such programs typically enjoy widespread support as they provide healthy and local food to populations in need, boost local economies, and support local agriculture (Garrity et al., 2024; Harris et al., 2012; Machata et al., 2024; Tran & Su, 2025).

NM Grow is an integral part of Governor Michelle Lujan Grisham’s *Food Initiative* – a comprehensive commitment to building a robust food system that measurably reduces hunger and improves equitable access to nutritious, culturally meaningful foods for all New Mexicans (“The Food, Farm, and Hunger Initiative,” 2023). Because NM Grow supports both producers and consumers, it simultaneously helps combat food insecurity and strengthen local economies. Moreover, the program is designed to contribute to the long-term viability of resilient local food systems and healthier and more equitable communities in New Mexico. At its core, the program is about local producers feeding their own communities. In this way, NM Grow is deeply rooted in community, relationships, care, and connection through food. Overall goals are that communities in New Mexico are healthier and individuals’ lives are improved as local food producers have more economic resilience and populations in need gain access to nutritious, local food.



NM Grow History and Growth

It was only 12 years ago when the legislature provided statewide funding for schools to purchase local produce for the first time. The \$240,000 that was approved by the State Legislature during the 2014 session was, in essence, the formal establishment of NM Grow. Prior to this, the only funding for local food purchasing that came through the legislature was limited to serving 12 schools in the North Valley of Albuquerque. During FY2014, for example, \$65,000 of produce was purchased, serving 6,000 students and sourced from five local suppliers (two hubs/aggregators, two individual producers, and one community farm). During its initial several years, NM Grow experienced modest, consistent growth, such that by FY21, \$523,000 was provided for NM Grow purchases. Since FY21, however, NM Grow has undergone significant expansion: funds for local food institutional purchase have grown remarkably, as have: the number of buyers; the number of participating producers, food hubs, and distributors; the number and types of food products that can be purchased through the program; and the number of affiliated community organizations and leaders who help make sure the program meets the needs of diverse communities across the state.

Funding for institutional food purchase through NM Grown has gone from \$523,000 in FY21 to \$5.27 million in FY25, a 10-fold increase in a five-year period. Until FY23, funding for these purchases was provided solely through the State, described below. In FY23, federal funding was also secured through a Local Food Purchasing Agreement (LFPA), a three-year cooperative agreement with the New Mexico Department of Agriculture (NMDA) that allowed food banks to purchase local food (*Local Food Purchase Assistance Cooperative Agreement Program*, n.d.). The LFPA in New Mexico, known as *Regional Farm to Food Bank*, became part of the broader NM Grown Program and provided \$4.16 million over three years for local food purchases, representing nearly one-third (35%) of total NM Grown purchases during this period. In March 2025, the USDA announced the termination of LFPA nationally and the *Regional Farm to Food Bank* program ended as of September 30, 2025.

Shown in Table 1, NM Grown Administering Agencies during the FY23-FY25 period included the New Mexico Public Education Department (PED), Aging Services (formerly Aging and Long-Term Services Department) (ALTSD), Early Childhood Education and Care Department (ECECD), Office of Indian Elder Affairs (OIEA), and NMDA, which provided a sub-grant to The Food Depot to manage Regional Farm to Food Bank purchasing on behalf of all food banks across the state.

Table 1: NM Grown Snapshot, FY23 – FY25

	FY23	FY24	FY25
Total market (\$)	\$1.93 million	\$4.63 million	\$5.41 million
Food Categories	Produce+ Meat	Produce+ Meat Eggs*	Produce+ Meat Value-add Eggs*
Administering Agencies	ALTSD ECECD PED NMDA	ALTSD ECECD PED NMDA	ALTSD ECECD PED NMDA OIEA

*During FY24 and FY25, eggs were only allowed for food bank purchase as part of a pilot initiative.

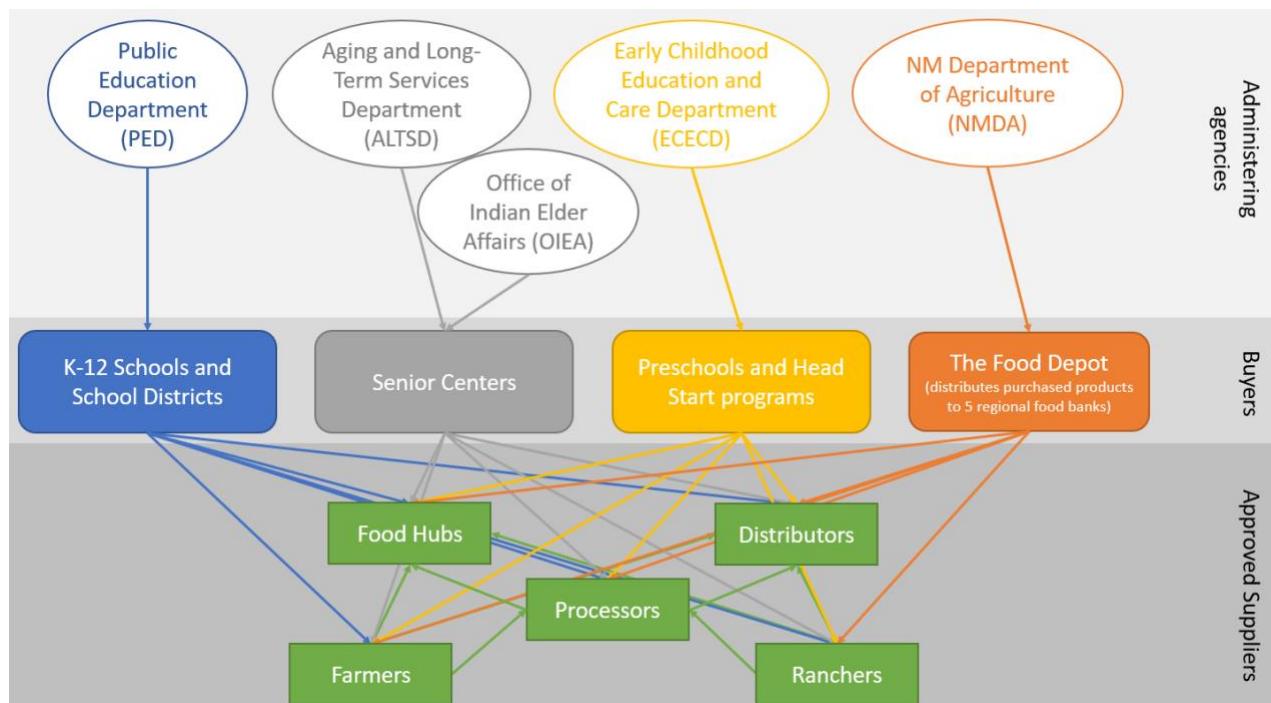


Figure 1. Organization of NM Grown

Figure 1 depicts how NM Grown is organized. For state monies, administering agencies (PED, ALTSD and OIEA, and ECECD) are awarded funding by the legislature for each fiscal year and provide grants for local food purchasing to individual K-12 schools and school districts, senior service providers and individual senior centers, and preschools and Head Start programs. These institutions purchase eligible products from Approved Suppliers directly; these Approved Suppliers can be individual farmers and ranchers, food hubs, processors, or distributors, as shown in Figure 1. Large institutions like school districts may require a bidding process while smaller institutions like individual senior centers or early childhood centers purchase directly from Approved Suppliers. Administering agencies help ensure products purchased are eligible and provide technical assistance and support to individual buyers, including connecting them with Approved Suppliers. Prior to its termination, The Food Depot received funding for all of its NM Grown purchasing through NMDA via the *Regional Farm to Food Bank LFPA*. Two procurement specialists purchased all local food from Approved Suppliers and distributed to five regional food banks to distribute to clients. NM Grown thus includes a range of buyers, from small, decentralized buyers to a single centralized buyer responsible for \$1-2 million in annual NM Grown purchases.

As a statewide program, NM Grown buyers and Approved Suppliers are located in large urban cities and small rural and Tribal towns and communities. Therefore, connecting buyers and Approved Suppliers and distribution of products is key to program success. In addition, Approved Suppliers may sell or purchase eligible products from other Approved Suppliers or producers that do not participate in NM Grown. For example, some ranchers (meat producers) sell products to processors who then sell final meat products to buyers. Produce+ and meat producers may also sell products to food hubs and distributors to sell to buyers. The NMFMA maintains online lists of [current buyers](#) and [current Approved Suppliers](#) and contact information to facilitate connections. Prior to FY25, delivery costs for products could be covered under certain institution's local food purchasing grants; however, in FY25, grants could only cover the cost of eligible products.

Eligible Products

During NM Grown's first several years, buyers could only purchase fruits and vegetables, nuts, grains, and legumes (a category of products now called Produce+). Increased state investment in NM Grown has brought the addition of new types of products that are allowed for purchase. During FY23, meat was introduced through a pilot initiative for the first time, and a wide variety of beef, bison, lamb/ mutton, and pork products were made eligible for purchase (Coakley et al., 2025). Meat products are now a fully integrated part of the program. In addition, eggs were piloted during FY24 and FY25 for food bank purchase only, and value-added products were added in FY25. The current NM Grown [Allowable Products List is available here](#).

Approved Supplier Program

The Approved Supplier Program is a food quality assurance program that provides farmers, ranchers, food hubs, processors, distributors, and other food businesses access to NM Grown markets while also ensuring food safety, quality, and product specification standards are met. Suppliers are required to apply to the Approved Supplier Program on an annual basis and must be able to demonstrate that they meet applicable food safety and quality standards for NM Grown allowable products. In short, the Approved Supplier Program connects producers to institutional buyers, simplifies and streamlines local institutional purchasing, and ensures product safety and accountability within NM Grown supply chains. The NMFMA manages the Approved Supplier Program on behalf of the state.

NM Grown Evaluation

Given the state, local, and federal investment in NM Grown, the NMFMA developed a request for proposals (RFP) for a multi-year program evaluation. The goal of the evaluation was to assess the effectiveness of the NM Grown program from FY23 through FY25 (July 1, 2022 - June 30, 2025) for key program stakeholders including: populations and communities that have benefited from NM Grown meals; food suppliers who have sold their locally produced food into the program; participating buyers; and administering agencies. The evaluation assessed

the extent to which the NM Grown program has achieved its goals and objectives during the three-year period and gathered insights about key program strengths and weaknesses, and potential ways to improve NM Grown in the future.

III. Evaluation Methods

The NMFMA selected an evaluator in April 2025, the University of New Mexico (UNM) College of Population Health (COPH) Assessment, Planning, and Evaluation Lab (APEL), through an RFP process. A summary of key evaluation questions included in the original RFP is presented in Appendix A. APEL and the NMFMA collaborated to define data sources and develop the evaluation plan, participant recruitment methods, and data collection tools. One buyer and one Approved Supplier reviewed and provided feedback on data collection tools; each received a \$250 gift card. The evaluation was reviewed and approved by the UNM Health Sciences Center (HSC) Institutional Review Board (IRB) as exempt research. All participants provided consent to participate.

Specific data sources, data collection procedures, and data analysis are described here:

1. **Desk review** of 35 documents and media provided by the NMFMA. The desk review was conducted throughout the evaluation period, but primarily served to inform the evaluation team about existing evidence, evaluation results of similar programs, and the development of data collection tools.
2. **Administrative data** from the New Mexico ALTSD, ECECD, PED, the Food Depot, and the NMFMA. At the end of FY25, each agency provided:
 - Number of buyers per FY
 - Local food purchasing grant allocation per buyer per FY
 - Spending per buyer per FY
3. **Local Food Data Portal (LFDP) data** were pulled in October 2025, including:
 - Total sales per supplier for FY24 and FY25 ^a
 - Sales of specific food items per supplier for FY24 and FY25 ^a
 - Total buyer expenditures and expenditures on individual food items for FY24 and FY25 ^a

The LFDP is a data-sharing platform providing information about NM Grown purchases and sales. The portal allows administering agencies to enter institutional buyer local food purchasing data, which is then aggregated and linked to dashboards that produce visualizations and reports, helping to track and deepen the understanding of local food purchases and sales. Administering agency staff are responsible for entering purchasing data (products and amounts, purchase amount (\$), and Approved Supplier(s) purchased from) into the LFDP based on individual buyer invoices. Falling Colors, LLC developed and now maintains the LFDP database and dashboard and also provides technical assistance and support to administering agency and NMFMA staff. Data can be queried by Fiscal Year, Administering Agency, and individual buyer. Budget utilization, demand for food, food attributes, and market patterns are also available at the state and county-levels.

For this evaluation, descriptive statistics (mean, standard deviation, range) were calculated for Approved Supplier sales by County per fiscal year and for buyer expenditures (total and by food item).

To estimate the total statewide and county-level economic impacts of NM Grown, the evaluation team used an input-output model (IMPLAN) to model the sales of specific food items aggregated to the county

level as Industry Output events across relevant IMPLAN agricultural and support sectors. The analysis provides estimates of the following economic impacts generated by NM Grown in FY25:

- Total output
- Employment
- Labor Income
- Value Added

^a The LFDP does not include data for FY23. Data for FY24 for one Administering Agency are incomplete.

4. Surveys, interviews, and site visits with NM Grown buyers and Approved Suppliers that participated in FY23, FY24, and/or FY25.

An online survey was sent to at least one individual for whom current contact information was available for FY23, FY24, and FY25 buyers and Approved Suppliers through the online survey platform, REDCap. The survey was open for 6 weeks in summer 2025 (August through October). Regular reminders were sent by email and delivered through phone calls. Survey participants could enter a drawing to win one of 35 \$75 gift cards. Survey data were analyzed descriptively by buyer and supplier type.

In addition, 14 one-hour interviews and six three-hour site visits were conducted with buyers and Approved Suppliers across the state. Buyers and Approved Suppliers indicated willingness to participate while completing the survey. Targeted recruitment was also conducted to ensure all buyer and Approved Supplier types, sizes, and geographic locations were represented. Interview participants received a \$75 gift card and site visit participants received a \$300 gift card. Thematic analysis was conducted to analyze interview and site visit data. A codebook was developed based on the interview guide and initial familiarization with the transcripts, then refined through an iterative process of coding by the primary coder and review by other qualitative team members. Higher-level themes are presented in alignment with the overall strengths, challenges, and recommendations.

5. Focus groups with administering agencies and food hubs. Three 90-minute virtual focus groups were conducted. Two administering agency staff could not attend a scheduled focus group and instead participated in an individual conversation with the evaluation team. The three focus groups included:

- Administering agency staff involved in NM Grown at ALTSD, ECECD, OIEA, PED, and The Food Depot
- NMFMA staff involved in NM Grown
- Food hubs that participated as Approved Suppliers

Focus group participants received a \$125 gift card. Thematic analysis was applied to the focus group data following the same iterative coding and review process used for interview and site visit data.

6. An online survey of New Mexico-based food producers and distributors that did not participate in NM Grown in FY23, FY24 or FY25.

A separate REDCap survey was distributed by the New Mexico Economic Development Department, Santa Fe Farmers' Market Institute, and the NMFMA to assess barriers to participating in NM Grown from the perspective of local food producers and distributors that did not participate as Approved Suppliers in FY23-25. The survey was open for 6 weeks in summer 2025 (August through October). Survey participants could enter a drawing to win one of five \$75 gift cards. Survey responses were analyzed descriptively.

IV. Evaluation Results

Results of this comprehensive evaluation of NM Grown are presented in two sections. Section 1 includes administrative data and Local Food Data Portal results. Section 2 includes results of primary data collection through surveys, interviews, site visits, and focus groups with NM Grown buyers, Approved Suppliers, and Administering Agencies and stakeholders.

Section 1: Administrative and Local Food Data Portal Results

Administrative Data: NM Grown Participation

Approved Supplier participation over the three-year evaluation period is shown in Table 2. In addition to the Approved Suppliers participating in the program and directly selling to buyers, many food producers sold their products to food hubs and distributors that are Approved Suppliers. Therefore, the total number of producers participating as Approved Suppliers or selling to Approved Suppliers is estimated as 217 in FY23, 249 in FY24, and 253 in FY25.

Table 2. Producer participation in NM Grown by Fiscal Year (FY)

	FY23	FY24	FY25
Approved Suppliers (n)			
Produce+	63	93	77
Meat	28	32	33
Hubs and distributors	8	8	8
All Approved Suppliers (unique) (n)	85	118	112
# of producers sourcing to Hubs and distributors (n)	132	131	141
Total producers (n)	217	249	253
Approved Supplier approval rate (%)	91%	89%	88%
Approved Supplier Program Activities (n)			
# of food safety trainings held	46	26	36
# of distinct participants in food safety trainings	203	144	192

Data source: NMFMA summary data

Table 3 shows characteristics of Approved Suppliers by Fiscal Year over the evaluation period. Most counties in New Mexico had at least one Approved Supplier. Participation from suppliers in rural counties increased over the three-year evaluation period; however, few Approved Suppliers were located in Tribal areas. Among Produce+, meat, and hubs and distributors, many were small-scale and identified as or sourced from socially disadvantaged producers.

Table 3. Characteristics of Approved Suppliers by Fiscal Year (FY)

	FY23	FY24	FY25
Counties with at least one Approved Supplier (n)	25	28	28
% rural	39%	45%	50%
% Tribal	4%	7%	7%
Produce+ Approved Suppliers			
% < 5 acres (FY23) or < 3 acres (FY24, 25)	49%	40%	36%
% socially disadvantaged	44%	49%	43%
% with # of workers <6	73%	72%	74%
Meat Approved Suppliers			

% socially disadvantaged	39%	47%	67%
Food hub and distributor Approved Suppliers			
% sourcing from socially disadvantaged producers	100%	100%	100%
% with # of workers < 11	75%	75%	75%

Data source: NMFMA summary data

NM Grown buyer participation over the three-year evaluation period is shown in Table 4. Overall buyer participation and budget utilization increased over time. In FY25, a slightly lower percentage of buyers purchased at least one product through NM Grown (84%) compared to previous years (90% in FY24 and 94% in FY23).

Table 4. Number of NM Grown buyers and spending patterns by Fiscal Year (FY)

	FY23	FY24	FY25
Buyers (n)			
K-12 schools	58	64	64
Senior centers (providers)	22	24	51
Early childhood	33	38	28
Food banks	1	1	1
All buyers (unique) (n)	114	127	144
Buyers that purchased any products (%)	94%	90%	84%
Average budget utilization (%)	70%	98%	97%

Data source: NMFMA summary data and Local Food Data Portal Data

Local Food Data Portal and NMFMA Data: Purchasing

Along with Approved Supplier and buyer participation increases over the three-year evaluation period, buyer spending largely increased as well, growing from \$1.93 million in FY23 to \$5.41 million in FY25 (Table 5). By FY25, food bank purchases accounted for more than 42% of NM Grown spending.

Table 5. Total spending (\$) by buyer type by Fiscal Year (FY)

Buyer Type	FY23 \$	FY24 \$	FY25 \$
K-12 schools	1,041,094	1,789,489	1,572,508
Early childhood	146,984	261,953	279,156
Senior center	475,805	968,253	1,277,450
Food banks	261,776	1,614,355	2,280,584
Total spending	1,925,659	4,634,050	5,409,698

Data source: Administering Agencies

The distribution of buyer spending on Produce+ and meat products remained consistent over the three-year evaluation period, largely due to program restrictions on meat purchasing (limited to 40% of total allocation) for all buyers except food banks. The estimated total number of meals served across all buyers increased by 242% from FY23 to FY25 (535,025 to 1,831,319).

Table 6. Distribution of products purchased and meals served by buyers by Fiscal Year

	FY23 ^a	FY24	FY25	Total
Produce+ (%)	60%	63%	58%	--
Meat (%)	40%	37%	42%	--
# of meals served ^b	535,025	1,544,488	1,831,319	3,910,832

Data source: NMFMA summary data and Local Food Data Portal Data for FY24 and FY25

^a FY23 is an estimate; ^b Estimated based on dollars allocated to each agency

Table 7 lists the top 10 food purchases by buyers in FY24 and FY25. Food items are specific to type and cut; ground beef, for example, was the top food item purchased in FY24 and FY25 while beef stew meat was sixth in FY25.

Table 7. Top 10 Food Purchases (Total \$ Spent by All Buyers) for FY24 and FY25 ^a

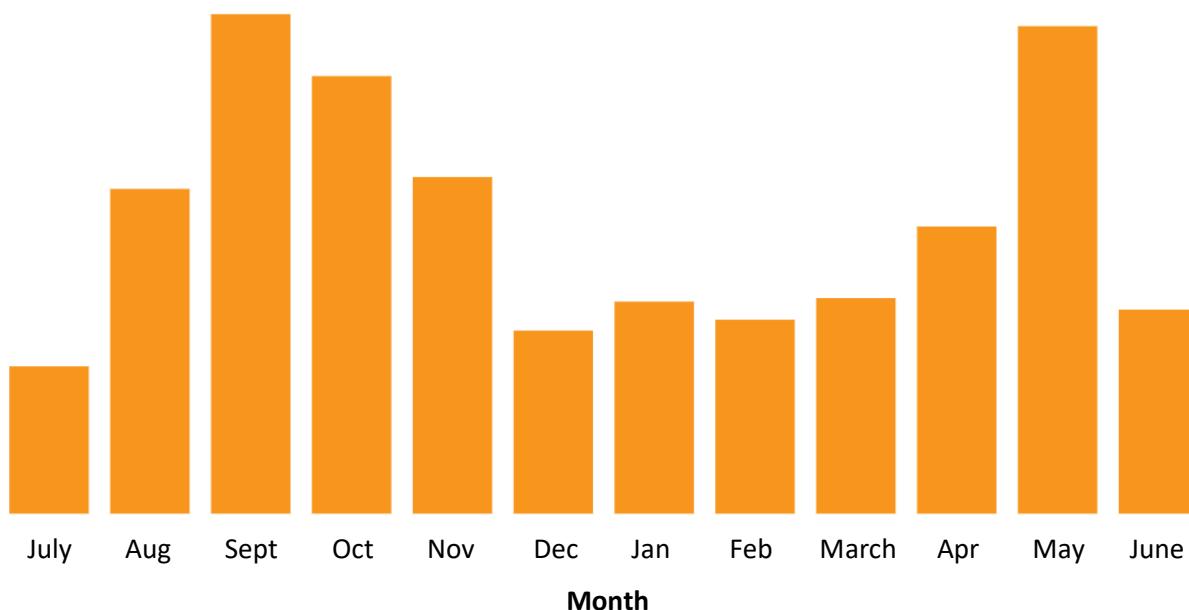
FY24		FY25	
Food Item	Purchases, \$	Food Item	Purchases, \$
Beef, Ground	719,914	Beef, Ground	1,471,660
Mixed Produce Box	271,162	Mixed Produce Box	405,969
Eggs (case)	208,896	Eggs (case)	191,231
Pork, Ground	142,721	Apples	190,925
Melon, Watermelon	123,348	Beans, Pinto	157,643
Beans, Pinto	120,471	Beef, Stew Meat	153,154
Peaches	119,480	Pluots	135,821
Melon, Cantaloupes	110,088	Apples, Specialty	127,166
Apples	97,167	Peaches	125,593
Pluots	94,182	Pork, Ground	112,498

Data source: Local Food Data Portal

^a Purchasing data are unavailable for FY23 and incomplete for one Administering Agency for FY24

Shown in Figure 2, NM Grown purchases varied across the year in FY25, peaking in September (peak growing season) and May (end of school year and approaching the end of the fiscal year spending cycle). Purchases were lowest in July and December.

Figure 2. NM Grown purchases (\$) by month in FY25

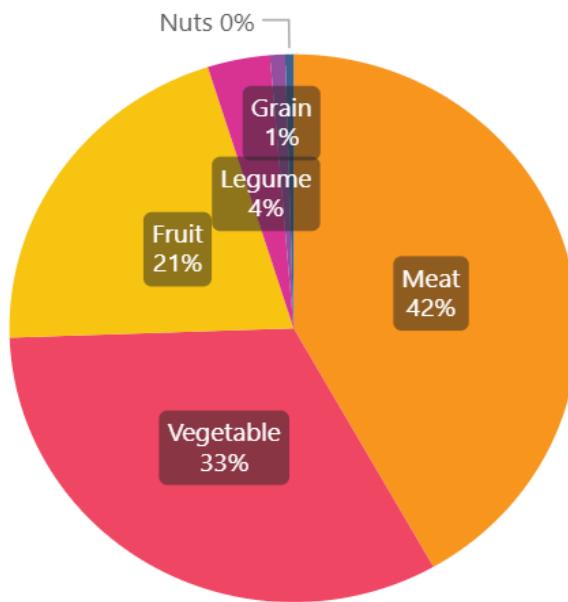


Data source: Local Food Data Portal

Figure 3 shows the percent of total buyer expenditures by food category in FY25. Top expenditures were meat (42%), vegetables (33%), and fruit (21%). Nuts constituted less than 0.5% of total expenditures by buyers in FY25.

Figure 3. Expenditures by Food Category for All Buyers in FY25

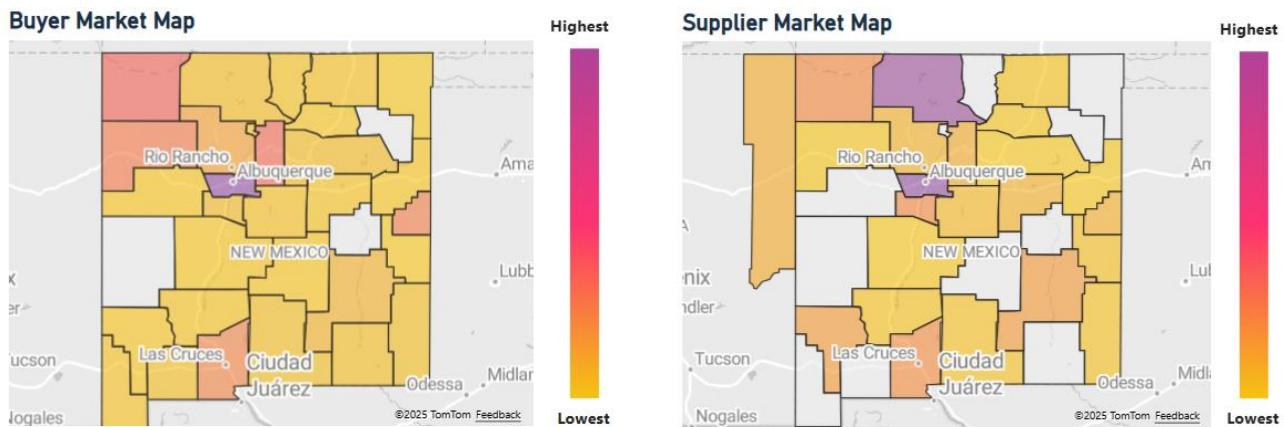
● Meat ● Vegetable ● Fruit ● Legume ● Grain ● Nuts



Data source: Local Food Data Portal

Figure 4 shows county-level buyer and supplier market maps for FY25. Dark purple indicates higher county-level buyer expenditures and supplier sales while yellow indicates lower county-level buyer expenditures and supplier sales. Counties with no color may include producers that source to food hubs and distributors that are Approved Suppliers but these sales are not included in the Local Food Data Portal.

Figure 4. Buyer and Supplier Market Maps for FY25



Data source: Local Food Data Portal (FY25)

Local Food Data Portal: Economic Impact Analysis

Supplier sales data from FY25 were compiled from the Local Food Data Portal, a statewide administrative records system used by the NMFMA and Administering Agencies to track the NM Grown program. Each spending category was mapped to an appropriate IMPLAN sector. For example, sales categorized as “Lamb/Mutton, Stew Meat (Boneless)” in the Local Food Data Portal were mapped to the IMPLAN sector “Animal Production” which captures all non-beef animal production and “Apples” were mapped to the IMPLAN sector “Fruit.”

Because data were available at the county level the estimated county economic impacts were aggregated to derive total statewide economic impact. The model assumes all sales represent local industry output changes for FY25.

Results are reported in 2025 dollars and reflect IMPLAN’s estimation of direct, indirect, and induced effects:

- Direct effects represent the immediate economic activity generated by the farm and ranch purchases.
- Indirect effects capture the business-to-business supply chain impacts on local industries.
- Induced effects reflect household spending generated by wages paid in both the direct and indirect sectors.

Statewide, FY25 NM Grown supplier sales generated an estimated \$7.05 million in total economic output, supporting approximately 139 jobs and \$2.41 million in labor income across New Mexico. Total value added, which is equivalent to the sector’s contribution to New Mexico’s Gross State Product, was approximately \$3.85 million.

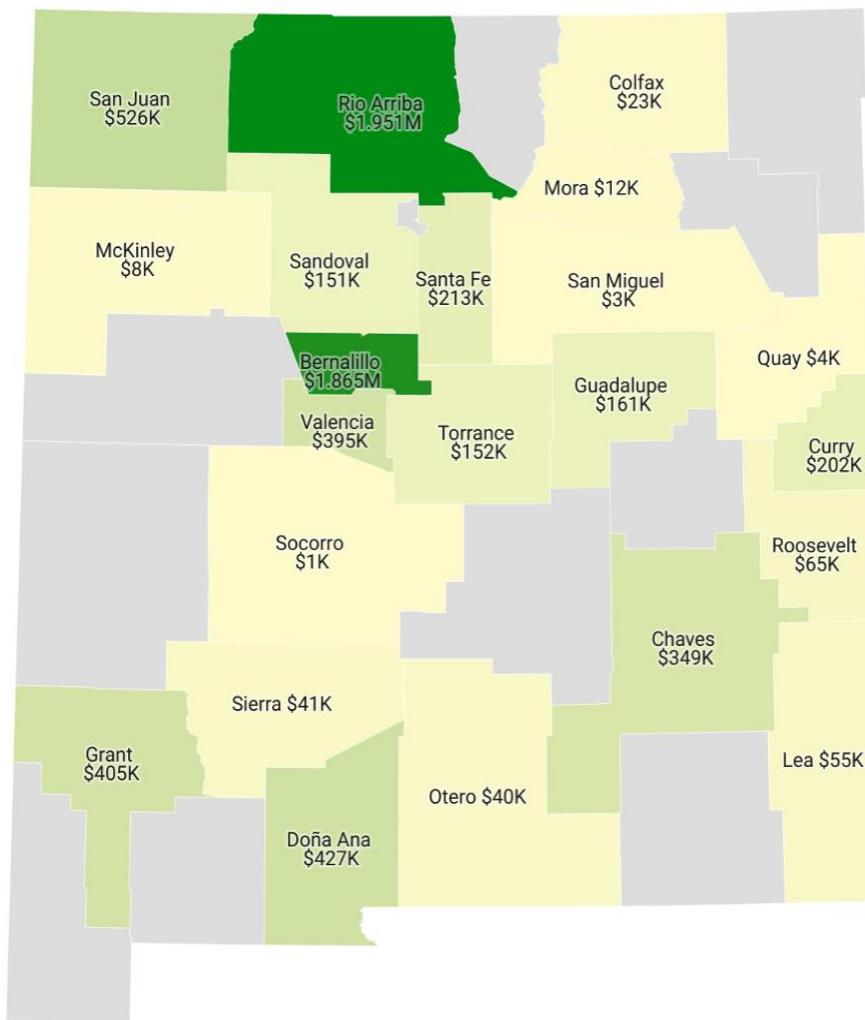
Table 8. Estimated Statewide Economic Impact of NM Grown for FY25

Impact Type	Employment n	Labor Income \$	Value Added \$	Output \$
Direct	116	\$1,760,513	\$2,754,712	\$5,041,499
Indirect	18	\$402,109	\$559,168	\$1,128,608
Induced	5	\$245,488	\$537,800	\$877,873
Total	139	\$2,408,110	\$3,851,680	\$7,047,981

The largest indirect impacts occurred in: beef cattle ranching and farming (\$284K), support activities for agriculture and forestry (\$195K), and wholesale – other nondurable goods merchant wholesalers (\$107K). Induced effects were concentrated in: owner-occupied housing (\$185K), hospitals (\$72K), and limited-service restaurants (\$46K).

County-level results are shown in the figure below. NM Grown supplier sales generated the largest total impacts in Rio Arriba, Bernalillo, and San Juan counties. These three counties accounted for over 60% of statewide economic activity in this analysis.

NM Grown Economic Impacts - Fiscal Year 2025

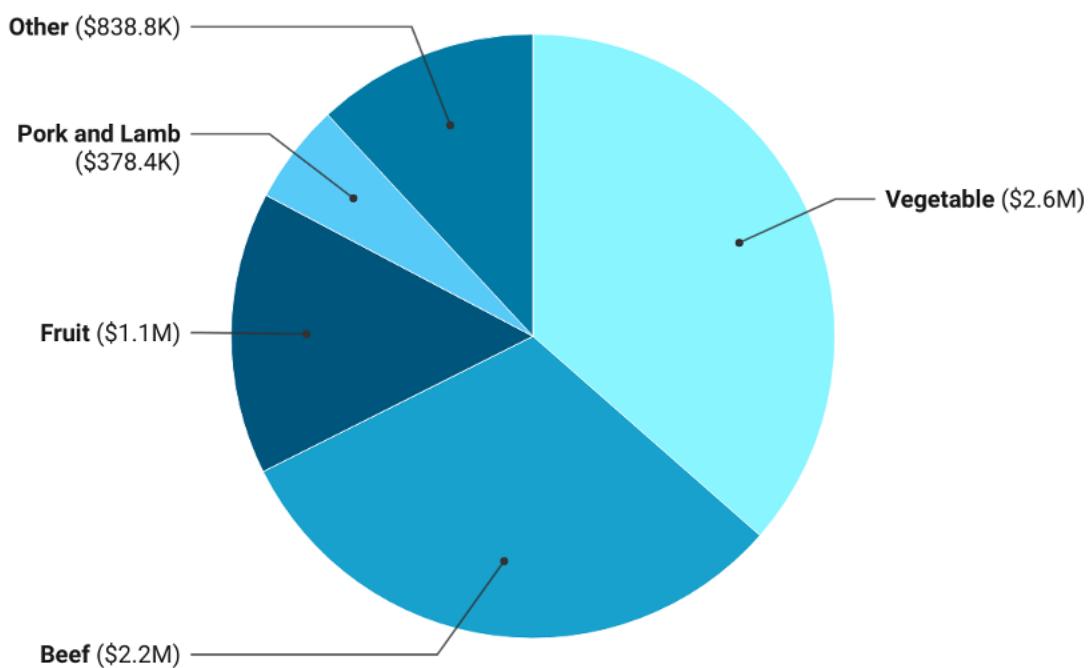


Estimated using IMPLAN input-output software from fiscal year 2025 NM Grown supplier sales data.

Map: University of New Mexico (UNM) Assessment, Planning, and Evaluation Lab (APEL), and the UNM Evaluation Lab •
Source: Local Food Data Portal • Created with Datawrapper

The figure below shows the proportion of statewide economic impact attributable to each type of supplier sale. Vegetable sales accounted for \$2.6M of the total statewide economic impacts, while beef sales contributed another \$2.2M.

NM Grown Economic Impacts by Food Type



Estimated using IMPLAN input-output software from fiscal year 2025 NM Grown supplier sales data. Other category includes tree nuts, juices, milling, and all other crops.

Chart: University of New Mexico (UNM) Assessment, Planning, and Evaluation Lab (APEL), and the UNM Evaluation Lab •
Source: Local Food Data Portal • Created with Datawrapper

These results underscore the large impact that NM Grown plays in supporting local economies across New Mexico. The magnitude of indirect and induced effects highlights the close linkages between agriculture, supply chains, and household spending within the state. An important limitation of this analysis is the IMPLAN assumption of fixed input-output relationships and average regional purchasing patterns. Thus, results should be interpreted as an estimate of potential local economic activity under FY25 spending levels, rather than as a forecast of future outcomes. These assumptions also do not directly attribute the impact on neighboring counties, thus the impact of NM Grown is likely to be felt across all New Mexico counties and not just the ones shown in this analysis. For instance, NM Grown sales made by food hubs, processors, and other food businesses aggregate product from numerous farmers and ranchers, many of whom are located in neighboring counties to those aggregator businesses. The Local Food Data Portal has no way to track that level of detail. As a result, the county-level economic impacts for farmers and ranchers who were based in a different county from the aggregator they sold their products to are not reflected in this analysis.

NM Grown local purchasing support in FY25 contributed significantly to the New Mexico economy, supporting local jobs, income, and business activity across multiple sectors. These findings demonstrate the broad importance of local purchasing not only as a direct producer of food but also as engines of local economic vitality.

Section 2: Survey, Interview, Site Visit, and Focus Group Results

Approved Suppliers: Survey Results

An evaluation survey invitation was sent to 161 FY23-25 Approved Suppliers for which current contact information was available or obtained through outreach. Fifty-eight (58) responses from unique Approved Suppliers were received, representing a response rate of 36%.

Figure 5 shows Approved Suppliers who participated in the evaluation survey by type. Participants could select multiple types, for example “meat producer” and “meat processor.”

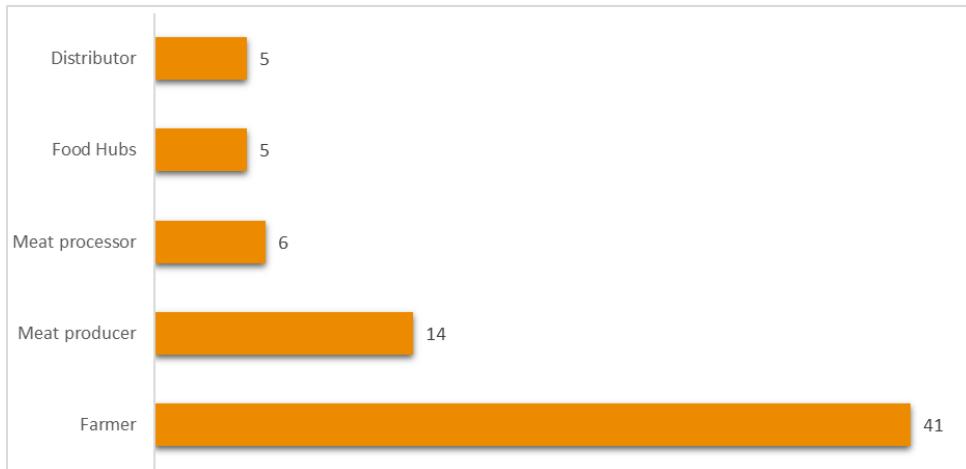


Figure 5. Number of Approved Suppliers that participated in the evaluation survey by type (n = 58)

Table 9 shows Approved Supplier survey participation in NM Grown across fiscal years. Among all Approved Supplier types, there was a 50% increase in participation between FY23 (n = 34) and FY25 (n = 51). Meat supplier participation increased the most (by 71%), followed by farm participation (by 50%). Food hub and distributor participation remained stable over the three-year evaluation period.

Table 9. Participation in NM Grown by Fiscal Year (FY) among Approved Supplier survey participants (n = 58)

Type ^a	FY23-FY25 n	FY23 n	FY24 n	FY25 n	% change ^b
Farms	41	24	36	36	50%
Meat producers	14	7	10	12	71%
Meat processors	6	5	5	5	0%
Food hubs	5	5	5	5	0%
Distributors	5	4	4	4	0%
All Approved Suppliers	58	34	49	51	50%

^a Survey participants could select more than one “type”

^b Percent change from FY23 to FY25

Table 10 shows products sold by Approved Supplier survey participants through NM Grown during the three-year evaluation period. Most Approved Suppliers (71%) sold Produce+ products and just under one-third (31%) sold meat products. The majority of Approved Supplier participants reported sales aligned with their primary designation: 90% of farmers sold Produce+ and 93% and 100% of meat producers and processors sold meat, respectively. Food hubs and distributors sourced products from a variety of producers, therefore product sales reflect a balance of both produce and meat.

Table 10. Percent (%) of Approved Supplier survey participants selling products by type during the evaluation period (n = 58)

Type	Products sold	
	Produce +	Meat
Farm (n = 41)	90%	7%
Meat producer (n = 14)	14%	93%
Meat processor (n = 6)	17%	100%
Food hubs (n = 5)	100%	60%
Distributor (n = 5)	60%	80%
All Approved Suppliers (n = 58)	71%	31%

To compare evaluation survey results with data collected by the NMFMA, meat producers and meat processors were combined to “Meat” (n = 8) and food hubs and distributors were combined to “Hub or distributor” (n = 8). The remaining analyses use these condensed categories.

Over the three-year evaluation period, more than half of Approved Suppliers sold products to senior centers (60%), food banks (59%), and K-12 schools (53%). Thirty-eight percent of Approved Suppliers sold to early childhood centers. Approximately 19% of Approved Suppliers that participated in the evaluation survey sold to no NM Grown buyers from FY23-FY25.

Table 11. Percent (%) of Approved Supplier survey participants selling to buyers during the evaluation period (n = 58)

	K-12 schools	Pre-schools	Senior centers	Food banks	None ^a
Farm (n = 41)	54%	41%	56%	51%	22%
Meat (n = 17)	53%	29%	71%	65%	12%
Hub or Distributor (n = 8)	63%	50%	88%	75%	13%
All Suppliers (n = 58)	53%	38%	60%	59%	19%

^a None = “none of the above”, indicating Approved Suppliers did not sell to schools, preschools, senior centers, or food banks through NM Grown

Among the 11 Approved Suppliers that did not sell to buyers through NM Grown during the evaluation period, several provided comments throughout the survey. Most mentioned small operation size and/or limited production capacity, lack of connections with buyers or buyers purchasing from just a few established suppliers, difficulties transporting products and lack of local food hubs, and high cost of participating as reasons for not selling to buyers.

Approved Suppliers also engaged with markets outside the NM Grown program during the three-year evaluation period, the most common of which were farmers’ markets (66%), grocery stores (50%), food hubs (50%), and restaurants (47%). Few sold to healthcare organizations (5%) or other outlets like retail, local pantries, or online (7%).

Table 12. Percent (%) of Approved Supplier survey participants selling to other (non-NM Grown) markets (n = 58)

Non-NM Grown Market	%
Farmers’ markets	66%
Grocery stores	50%
Food hubs	50%
Restaurants	47%

Distributors	28%
Farm stands	26%
Produce prescription/food as medicine programs	17%
Other (retail, local pantries, online, other local food programs)	7%
Healthcare organizations like hospitals, primary care centers, etc.	5%

The survey also asked Approved Suppliers about their agricultural production practices, and 64% of farmer and rancher respondents reported employing sustainable or regenerative practices in their operations.

Table 13. Percent (%) of Approved Supplier producer survey participants employing agricultural practices (n = 58)

Practice	%
Sustainable or regenerative practices (e.g., cover crops, no or low tilling, prescribed/rotational grazing, etc.)	64%
Conventional farming or ranching practices	31%
Other (aqua/hydroponics, grassfed, meet organic standards but not certified, vertical farming)	21%
USDA certified organic	10%
None of the above	5%

The evaluation survey included 14 questions on satisfaction with the administration and operation of NM Grown. Some questions were optional and are noted as such in Table 14. Approved Suppliers were most satisfied with knowledge of expectations and requirements for participation (88%) as well as buyer satisfaction with products (76%). Approved Suppliers were most dissatisfied with the availability of buyers (20%) and ability to find interested buyers (19%).

Notable is the percent of respondents who responded neutrally about their satisfaction with NM Grown. Neutral responses were highest with NMFMA and/or NMDA support and assistance (32%); ease of doing business with buyers, buyer availability, and Approved Supplier Program recruitment and marketing (29%); and amount of product typically sold (26%). Appendix C shows Approved Suppliers' satisfaction with NM Grown by supplier type.

Table 14. Approved Supplier survey participants' satisfaction (%) with NM Grown (n = 58)

	Dissatisfied	Neutral	Satisfied	N/A
Knowledge of expectations and requirements for participating as an Approved Supplier	2%	10%	88%	0%
Buyer satisfaction with products*	0%	15%	76%	9%
Knowledge of NM Grown program goals and mission*	2%	22%	75%	2%
Application process to become an Approved Supplier	5%	22%	72%	0%
Overall relationship with buyers	4%	19%	72%	5%
Overall experience participating in NM Grown	3%	24%	71%	2%
Pricing of products	3%	22%	64%	10%
Support and assistance provided by the NMFMA and/or NMDA*	4%	32%	61%	4%
Ability to find interested buyers	19%	21%	57%	4%
Approved Supplier Program recruitment and marketing materials*	9%	29%	57%	5%

Ease of doing business with buyers (including: communications, invoicing, distribution requirements, payment terms)*	13%	29%	55%	4%
Ability to transport products to buyers*	16%	23%	55%	5%
Amount of product typically sold	14%	26%	53%	7%
Availability of buyers*	20%	29%	48%	4%

^a Some questions were optional (noted with *); responses to questions ranged from 55-58

Approved Suppliers' perceptions of NM Grown impacts are shown in Table 15. Suppliers agreed most that NM Grown allowed access to new markets (73%); that NM Grown activities are culturally relevant, inclusive, and equitable (70%); and that NM Grown increased overall revenue (66%). Suppliers disagreed most that NM Grown allowed access to new funding resources (21%), increased production (18%), and resulted in new investments in operations (18%). Appendix C shows Approved Suppliers' agreement with NM Grown impacts by type.

Table 15. Approved Supplier survey participants' agreement (%) to NM Grown impacts (n = 56)

	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	N/A
NM Grown has allowed us to access new markets.	7%	16%	73%	4%
NM Grown activities are culturally relevant, inclusive, and equitable.	5%	20%	70%	5%
NM Grown has increased overall revenue.	11%	16%	66%	7%
NM Grown is meeting our needs.	11%	23%	64%	2%
NM Grown has allowed us to produce more.	18%	14%	55%	13%
NM Grown has allowed us to make new investments in our operation.	18%	23%	50%	9%
NM Grown has allowed us to increase the number of producers we source local food from*	13%	25%	50%	13%
NM Grown has allowed us to access new funding resources (like grant programs or financing).	21%	25%	38%	16%

*Answered by food hubs and distributors only

Approved Suppliers were also asked about their motivations for participating in NM Grown. Shown in Figure 6, among Approved Supplier survey participants that answered this question (n = 56), connecting with community was the highest reported motivator for participating in NM Grown (88%) followed by building new relationships with local food buyers (82%) and increasing sales (82%). Motivators by Approved Supplier type are presented in Appendix C.

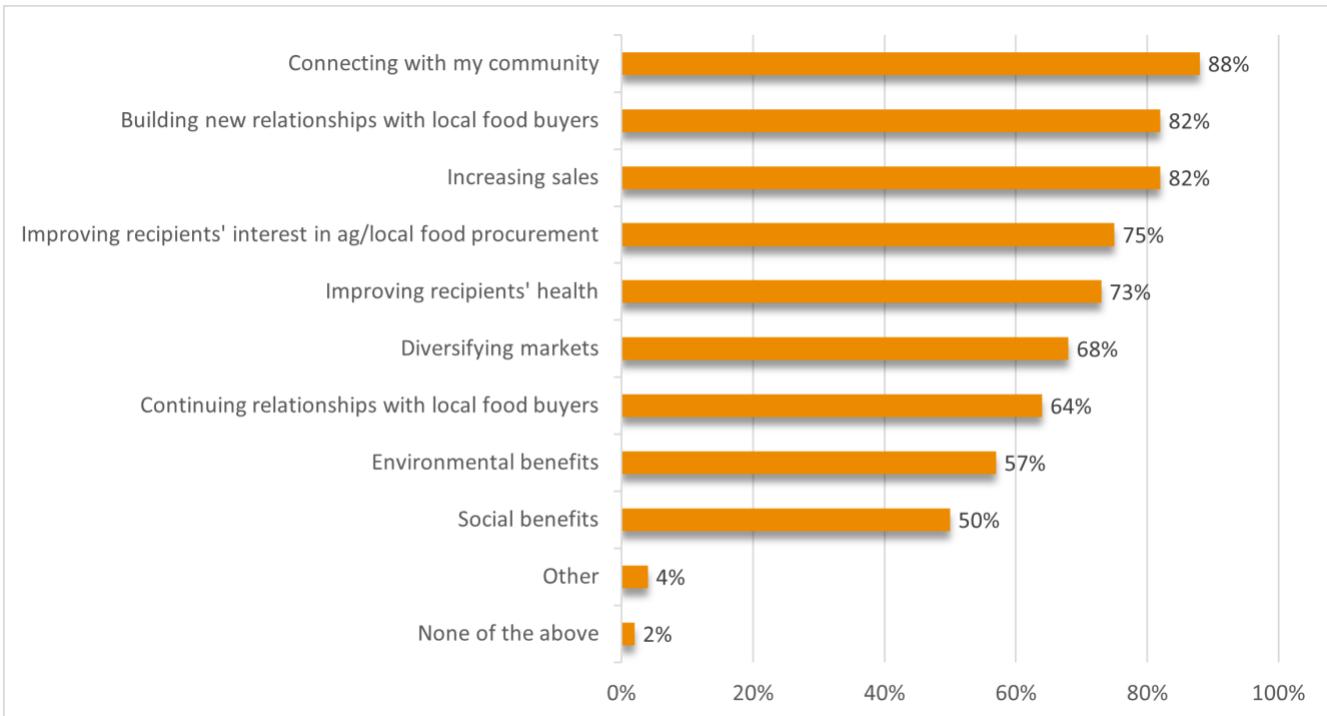


Figure 6. Approved Supplier survey participants' motivations (%) for participating in NM Grown (n = 56)

Approved Supplier survey participants were asked to report the exact number of NM Grown buyers they sold products to each Fiscal Year they participated. Table 16 shows the average number and range of buyers Approved Suppliers that participated in the evaluation survey sold to. Among all suppliers, the number of buyers sold to per Fiscal Year ranged from 0 to 75.

Table 16. Number of buyers (mean, SD, and range) Approved Supplier survey participants sold to by Fiscal Year

	FY23		FY24		FY25	
	Mean (SD)	Range	Mean (SD)	Range	Mean (SD)	Range
Farm (n = 37)	5.5 (13.3)	0-75	5.1 (12.5)	0-75	5.5 (12.1)	0-75
Meat (n = 12)	4.0 (3.7)	0-10	6.5 (6.3)	0-20	6.2 (8.1)	0-30
Hub or distributor (n = 10)	13.7 (24.3)	1-75	18.0 (26.0)	1-75	17.9 (25.7)	1-75
All Suppliers (n = 55)	5.4 (12.1)	0-75	6.4 (13.2)	0-75	6.7 (13.2)	0-75

Among food hubs and distributors that answered this question (n = 5), the average number of producers sourced from in FY23 was 8.4 (SD = 9.0) which increased to 11.0 (SD = 9.0) in FY24 and 11.8 (SD = 8.3) in FY25 (data not shown). By FY25, the range of producers hubs and distributors sourced from was 2 to 25.

Shown in Figure 7, the percent of Approved Suppliers that reported sales of \$0 increased from FY23 (6%) to FY25 (11%); however, so did the percent of Approved Supplier reporting sales in the highest categories (\$50,000-99,999 and \$100,000 or more). In general, the distribution of total sales changed from FY23 to FY25 as more Approved Suppliers reporter higher sales categories. For example, by FY25, 30% of Approved Suppliers reported NM Grown sales as \$50,000 or more compared to 22% in FY23 and 25% in FY24.

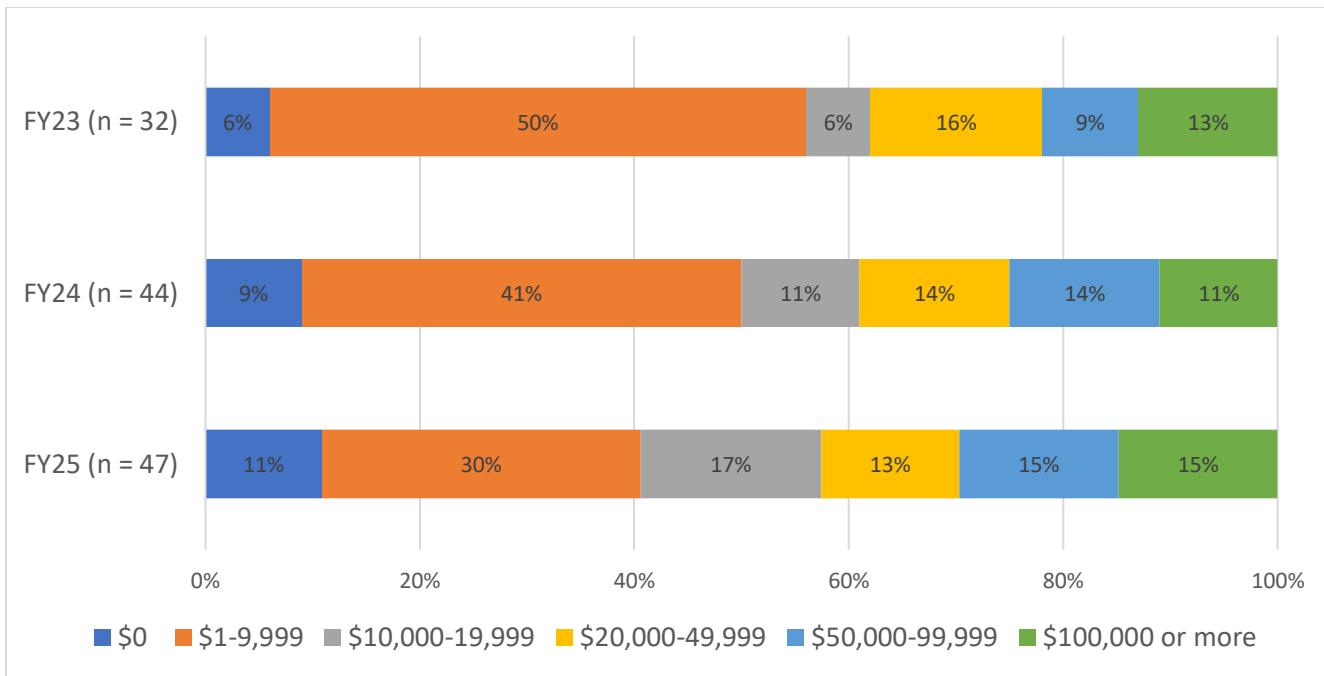


Figure 7. Percent of Approved Supplier survey participants reporting categories of total sales (%) by Fiscal Year

Shown in Figure 8, the highest percentage of Approved Suppliers reported NM Grown sales constituted 1-10% of total sales across all Fiscal Years. The percent of Approved Suppliers that reported 0% of total sales from NM Grown also increased from FY23 (9%) to FY25 (15%).

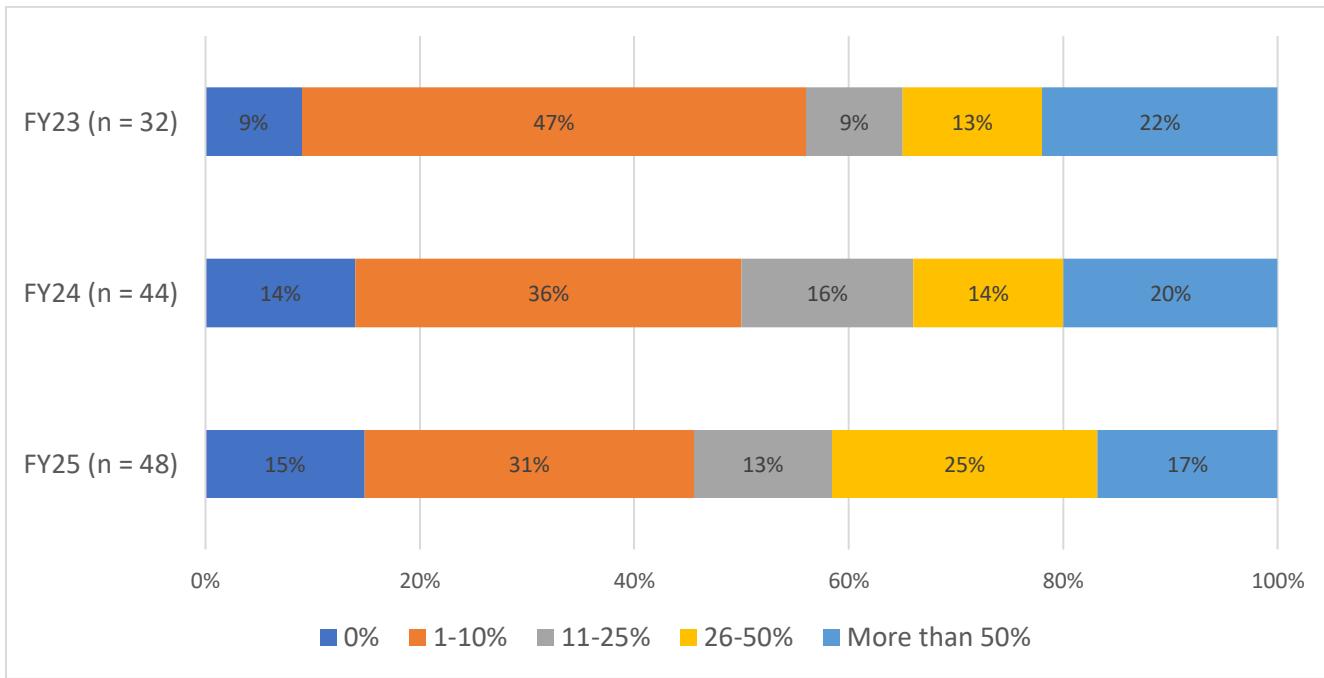


Figure 8. Percent of total sales from NM Grown per FY (%) among Approved Supplier survey participants

Among 54 Approved Suppliers that answered this question, 96% said they would participate in NM Grown in the future.

Approved Suppliers: Interviews, Site Visits, and Focus Groups

Ten (10) Approved Suppliers participated in a one-hour in-person or virtual interview: four Produce+ producers, three meat producers, two processors, and one distributor. Of these, four also participated in a three-hour site visit (two Produce+ producers, one meat producer, and one meat processor). In addition, representatives ($n = 3$) from three food hubs participated in a focus group. The figure below captures the range and depth of experiences shared through this qualitative data collection process. Described in the subsequent sections are key excerpts that exemplify the strengths, challenges and opportunities for growth according to Approved Suppliers.



Packed word cloud generated from the qualitative data analysis coding process in Dedoose

“Opportunity is the greatest impact.” – Small-scale rural producer

Strengths Reported by Approved Suppliers

Overall, Approved Suppliers report feeling well supported administratively, are forming stronger community connections, and report economic benefits of participating in NM Grown. New and expanded market access was the most frequently voiced economic benefit. Participating in NM Grown provides consistent access to a selection of buyers with dedicated funding for the types of locally produced products available from Approved Suppliers contributing to a consistent income stream for agricultural suppliers. Suppliers also attributed operation expansion and local food sourcing to participation in NM Grown. food hubs reported NM Grown organizational supports, market access and training as key factors in the success of the program. food hubs also had high praise for the well-organized program infrastructure particularly food safety supplier certification and requirements.

New markets – *“We couldn’t do what we do today without New Mexico Grown. I mean, that’s just hands down. It’s not a perfect system. But to me, it’s given us opportunity into markets that we didn’t have access to before.”* – Small-scale rural meat producer

New markets – *“So the New Mexico Grown program has helped us with consistent purchasing. It has opened our customer base to institutional markets. Before, we were always just working with other companies and people like restaurants or just other entities that were companies. And so it was never with*

schools or food banks, senior centers. And so now that we have the New Mexico Grown program, it has opened us to those customers. Which is really good, because now we have new consistent customers. And so that has helped a lot.” – Small-scale rural meat processor



New markets and infrastructure – *“The existence of the program itself and opening up that market to farmers has been huge in providing farmers with additional income and knowing that their products are going to sell. And the program set up the standardization that’s allowed other things to come from that”* – Food hub

Increased revenue – *“When we first started, about 60% of our sales were itinerant, so person-to-person... And so from that to now, it has just a huge drastic change. So 80% of our sales... is because of the New Mexico Grown program. So those are wonderful numbers to have. And again, that just guarantees those sales. So the impact locally that we’ve seen has been tremendous.”* – Small-scale rural Produce+ producer

Increased revenue – *“Sales-through sales directly, it’s impacted our food hub significantly. Probably 75% of our annual sales are New Mexico Grown transactions.”* – Food hub

Local food procurement – *“We’ve always purchased cattle from local ranchers because they’re close by, and we were always making a New Mexico Grown product. And then now it just fit perfectly with the program. But yes, all of our local ranchers have definitely also benefited from this program because we’re able to buy more cattle and more pigs from them.”* – Small-scale rural meat processor

Local economy/expansion – “*But as a whole, just the fact that it has helped our business to grow so much, I mean, I really attribute the steady and consistent growth that we've seen year after year since opening our retail business of being able to continuously produce and offer a high-quality product on our counter for our customers within our community and to keep those dollars within New Mexico and within our local community.*” – Small-scale rural meat producer

Market Expansion – “*We've gradually expanded our growing capacity to meet a growing demand. And much of that demand has come from New Mexico Grown organizations.*” – Small-scale rural Produce+ producer

When discussing leadership and training, Approved Suppliers described how networking opportunities organized by NM Grown partners connect them with state and local leaders opening opportunities to take on leadership and advocacy roles. NM Grown's website resources also have an impact on supplier internal training and mentorship programs. Suppliers capitalized on existing NM Grown tools such as buyer lists to use as part of their educational models. food hubs noted the importance of certification requirements NM Grown suppliers must meet that facilitate sales opportunities within NM Grown markets as well as with markets beyond NM Grown.



Leadership and advocacy - “*When it expands our networks, it allows us to get into-- it allows us to get into conversations and basically saying, "We have a seat at the table." And that's the most important thing is having a voice, having a seat at the table, having that voice, sharing our story, so that way, we can work together to create a solution. Once we develop that, implement it, and sure enough, it's in legislation. That is the best feeling that you can get is knowing that you have that support. From a small to medium-scale voice as a producer, that's what they provide for us. It's just been amazing to be able to have lunch with our local state representatives and senators from the state.*” – Small-scale rural Produce+ producer



Mentorship – “*The first thing that kind of pops to mind is the youth and the impact that I have been able to see in them of knowing-- through us knowing how their veggies are grown and then through the New Mexico Grown program, knowing how it has been-- how they distribute the produce throughout the state. So the New Mexico Grown program has helped a lot through that, knowing-- the students can go in and see the list and maps. We're like, "Oh, there's this list in the New Mexico Grown." ...And they're like, "Well, how do you sell it? Or how do you do?" And that's where it kind of gets the ball rolling...*” – Small-scale rural Produce+ producer

Training/certifications - “Able to sell, not just within the program, but to us and other wholesale opportunities because they have the certifications, and they got those certifications to be a part of the Approved Supplier Program and sell through New Mexico Grown. And we’re supported through that process because of the resources that New Mexico Grown has.” – Food hub

A critical strength of NM Grown is its robust organizational structure. When discussing administrative supports and technical assistance from NM Grown, Approved Suppliers report reliable communication and technical assistance from the NM Grown administrative team.

“The program is very well organized. If you have a question or an issue, you can get a response that day easily. They’re very helpful in making sure that you renew your certifications in a timely way. They help you do it if you need help. Again, it’s just very, very responsive and very well organized, so it just makes participating in the program very easy.” – Small-scale rural Produce+ producer

“I’m talking to the staff on a regular basis, and I’m talking through committees and meetings. If I have a problem, I mention it, and it’s taken care of right away. So in that sense, the communication is easy.” – Small-scale urban Produce+ producer

“They’re pretty quick and responsive anytime we’ve had any questions.” – Small-scale rural meat producer

Approved Suppliers provide products that feed some of New Mexico’s most vulnerable populations, children, youth and the elderly. Suppliers took pride in spotlighting the value of tradition and culture transmitted through the products they offer. The intersection between community pride and food is demonstrated in the impact of connections made between buyers and suppliers through NM Grown. Suppliers’ enthusiasm was palpable as they described the quality products they offer and new foods that contribute to a diverse menu and new culinary experiences.

“A great gentleman...runs the lunch program here [city]. He is a huge advocate of the program, both with us and New Mexico Grown. It’s really taken his lunch program to a different level. He’s more excited about cooking for kids now because the ground beef product he was getting in before would be 30% waste by

the time he cooked it down. He would just pour that fat off. Ours is a lot cleaner. It actually makes him excited about making food, which is probably why he’s a chef to begin with. And now he is starting to do New Mexico-focused meals...So he’s got a lot of excitement about the program, which is great. And he’s actually cooking. He’s not just heating things for children. He’s cooking their meals. And I think they can feel that when they sit down at the lunch table.” – Large rural meat processor



“When they have more culturally relevant foods on the table, they’re more likely to finish that food, which means healthy children, full stomach, more time and focus for schoolwork, and then from there, less food waste. Right now, if you serve them frozen pizza, which was our favorites growing up, was a frozen pizza is what we look forward to, but our children nowadays, they know the difference. They taste the difference. And if we’re giving them the

healthy food, they're going to have a healthy mind, they're going to have a healthy body, and they're going to be smarter for that. So the quality of education is going to go up. So without healthy, nutritious foods, then you don't have a healthy, nutritious kid. So that's what we want, and that's what we're providing and that's what the opportunity provides of being a part of the New Mexico Grown program.” – Small-scale rural Produce+ producer

“I think the greatest impact is the students and the public being able to purchase or eat local products. I think that's amazing. It's as fresh as possible, pretty much, with us, because as soon as we get an order, we buy cattle, we process it, and we fulfill the order within two to three weeks. So it's just a fresh, natural, good, wholesome product.” – Small-scale rural meat processor

“Being able to provide food that we can grow as parents, as farmers, and provide that...it was such an amazing experience and feeling...And we realized that's the type of reaction that we don't want for just ourselves, but for the rest of our community. And so that's where it really kicked off this journey into making these traditional food products, making them readily available [to]stable buyers-” – Small-scale rural Produce+ producer

“About introducing new foods-community connection to food- I mean, no doubt, the senior centers are getting very high quality. I will say our product is probably the highest quality you can buy, and it's fresh, generally one to two days old when they get it. I'll say that the recipients of that food are getting extremely high-quality food through the program. And in this case, we're talking about seniors and also schools. For example, growing up in New Mexico, there's a preschool here with several hundred children in there who are given many things they've never eaten before that we provide. And the manager there is a fantastic lady... She'll say, "Hey," to the kids, "Hey, try these little yellow cherry tomatoes." They love them, "Oh, that looks like candy." They love them. I know kids eat tomatoes, for example, or we give them some- - we'll harvest some carrots that are still young for them, and they'll love that, or pea shoot microgreens, things that these kids have never tried before, and they love them.” – Small-scale rural Produce+ producer



Challenges Reported by Approved Suppliers

Among the leading challenges facing Approved Suppliers are funding cycles, timing, and product pricing. Suppliers report a misalignment between buyer expectations regarding product availability and Approved Supplier capacity and inventory. For example, short lead times on Produce+ orders, due to funding availability cycles, posed fulfillment challenges if produce was already past the planting/harvest season or if meat requests did not allow meat suppliers and processors time to optimize cattle size for maximum benefit to the buyer and supplier. Suppliers are concerned about funding and purchasing cycles, lack of a stable labor workforce, the volume of products they can expect to sell and the prices they can offer. For instance, suppliers reported a lack of buyer awareness about the higher cost of supplying locally grown food compared to products sourced from large distributors. When possible, some suppliers worked with buyers to reach a mutually beneficial price. Conversely, some suppliers charged a slightly higher fee to NM Grown Buyers which allowed suppliers to maintain more economical pricing for local markets. Access to land and water were also reported as barriers to meeting buyer needs and participation in general. food hub Approved Suppliers similarly reported funding, timing, capacity, and inventory as the greatest challenges.

Funding – *“And I don't know if that's the organization of the schools in particular, or if it is the communication that they're receiving from New Mexico Grown on when they're getting funding and how*

much... Like they don't know how much money they're getting, and then they've all of a sudden got a really short period of time where they've got to spend it all. Or they made projections to us that they were going to be getting a certain amount at a certain time, and then their funding was much smaller in the upcoming cycle than what they were expecting it to be." – Small-scale rural Produce+ producer

Buyer Expectations – "Not just beef, but most livestock, there is a period of time to where you've got to feed them for a long enough period of time to where you're able to make your money back on it. And so if you still got somebody calling you like, "We're out of meat, and we have to spend this money, and we need it right now," and maybe they needed another 300 or 400 pounds, and you kill them before they're too ready, you still have about the same amount of money tied up in your processing and your transportation, and you've got less pounds of product to be able to move through. And so your overall pounds that you're paying for on processing is a little less, but you're making less money as a whole." – Small-scale rural meat producer



Pricing – "When it came to them having to pay more than commodity for it, pricing for it, we got a lot of pushback for it, just because they were like, "Well, it's from New Mexico. It should be cheaper." – Large urban distributor

Pricing – "The majority of the time, it [NM products] will be much more than commodity levels coming out of Nebraska, Iowa, Texas, Kansas... We try to purchase as best we can, but pricing just keeps moving its way up. It's more expensive to get anything anymore. It costs more to deliver trucks, too. It's just it is what it is. Every which way we try to be is more efficient. But nonetheless, everything keeps moving its way up." – Large urban distributor

Staffing and labor – "And if one person in that system goes down, if one element of this system goes down, it causes a major backlog fast... There's one person per facility. I mean, like here, we have one mobile unit that we haul all of our stuff in.... So if our freezer trailer goes down, we can't deliver product to any facility that's going to temperature-check all of our stuff, which, from a food safety standpoint, is very important. If the freezer trailer goes down, then we can't deliver the product, right?" – Small-scale rural meat producer

Pricing – "Because the cost of labor has gone up so significantly - and labor represents about 75 to 80 percent of our costs at the farm - that it's been difficult to get to that magic place where you're actually generating a little profitability. So we're there, but we're just about there." – Small-scale rural Produce+ producer

Labor – "Quality labor, concerns about ICE. And those are probably the-- labor issues are far and away the most concerning things. We're blessed to have a very good crew at this point, but we do have some folks that are in proceedings. They're going to be concerned about how they're going to be treated. Because some of them are very valuable to us." – Small-scale rural Produce+ producer

Regulatory – “Local, more than state. City regulations, land use regulations have been an enormous barrier to us. We took 19 months to get our business license.” – Small-scale urban Produce+ producer



Water – “We use 75% of the water that we have in the state for agriculture. Of that agriculture, 90% is sent out of state. So we’re burning up water for other people than New Mexicans to benefit from our growing activities.” – Small-scale rural Produce+ producer

Water – “One [barrier] is they have no water, so outdoor soil-based farming is at risk and is continuing to get riskier.” – Small-scale urban Produce+ producer

Food hubs reported difficulty in meeting buyer expectations due to a lack of product, low volume and requests for products that were unavailable. food hubs also experienced frustration with the timing of the release of funds and requests for purchases. For example, funds released too close to the harvest season did not give farmers enough time to fulfill requests thus buyer needs either went unmet or purchased only produce currently being harvested.

Capacity – “Meeting demand-it's impossible for us to really meet buyer demand at full capacity. I know for us, we're still having to go across further down the state just to fill the needs for the buyers here.” – Food hub

Product availability – “There's still a big demand for pork and lamb that we can never fill. They're like, “Okay. I guess we'll take beef because that's what we can get.” – Food hub

Funding/Timing – “One thing that's hard, as an impact on our farmers, is in January, we have these conversations, where we're like, “What needs to be planted? What's the demand?” But then we don't find out what those funding for the institutions are until June or July. So a lot of farmers are hoping for the larger impact, the higher funding, and then it's not always working out.” – Food hub

Buyer expectations – “Hubs model allows them the flexibility to work with numerous small farmers to create the food boxes. But with the kind of big bulk orders where they only want one or two things for an institution, like a school or a senior center, sometimes our farmers can't necessarily do that.” – Food hub

Buyer expectations – “When it comes to fruits and vegetables, we don't always have that amount that's needed for large public institutions. For instance, [school], they sent me a thing to apply to become a vendor with them, and they had very specific things they wanted, which we don't always have. And they wanted us to deliver at like 6:30 in the morning, and we're two hours away.” – Food hub

Opportunities for Growth Reported by Approved Suppliers

Overall, Approved Suppliers were complimentary about their experiences with NM Grown and provided sound recommendations for future program improvement, including timing, technical assistance, regulatory requirements, local community networking opportunities, product purchase planning, market expansion, and marketing improvements. For food hubs, emphasis was placed on distribution-related growth opportunities.

Timing – “*Improve timing of when buyer requests come through and planting season... hire more drivers or more vehicles, whatever that could look like, that will probably, in my opinion, be the biggest needed impact.*” – Food hub

Technical Assistance – “*I guess one other recommendation that could potentially be helpful. It could also be a bottleneck, I don't know. For us, it's helpful for smaller producers, I think it would be really, really necessary, is to have some sort of system set up to where there is a requirement for them to give you some sort of lead time on an order.*” – Small-scale rural meat producer

Technical Assistance – “*If there would be somebody that can connect us to people to-- because I would love to go and even just connect through an email. And I would love to go visit some of the schools. I do not mind. We do not mind at all going to make a visit.*” – Small-scale rural meat producer

Collaboration – “*Use the list to refer buyers to suppliers closer to their area “approved supplier list, like [she] was saying, is really great because it does allow me to say, “Hey, call one of these folks over there. They're closer to you. Maybe they can help you out.*” – Food hub

Market expansion – “*Places like me and people that grow vegetables or raise the beef, they can start scaling these operations to service the schools because it's hard to do more quantity if you don't have the market there. And once the market's there, then you got to get the quantity. So just like I said with the building and the labor, it's a juggling match. And you can't do one thing big before you do the other thing big. They got to grow together. So getting in more schools, looking at these lunch programs, and looking at the variety of what we can feed the kids that's going to be better, that's not pre-processed food, that we can provide.*” – Large rural meat processor

Regulatory Requirements – “*So in our community, we're a border, but the reservation goes from New Mexico over into Arizona. So some of the rules of New Mexico Grown is, for the animals, out of four requirements, we have to meet three. And they have to be within the state.... I can't come down. I can't go across to the tribe, another tribal member in Arizona and buy a steer that I want to bring and feed out and finish. I can't do that now because it's not New Mexico, even though I finish it here. So there's these rules that are crossing borders in terms of state... it really limits us.*” – Small-scale rural meat supplier

Marketing – “*Put together some marketing materials that kind of tell the story of our beef, things that the schools can use, or whoever it is, whether that's the senior centers, the schools, whoever, things that they can use to kind of promote the product because I don't know how much the individuals who are actually receiving it know about the program and the initiative of the program the people who are receiving it, I think, maybe they've heard, “This has come from the New Mexico Grown funding,” but they don't know what does it really mean to be New Mexico Grown, what are the requirements there.*” – Small-scale rural meat producer

Marketing – “*We have little flyers that we print out sometimes that say-- we have one for lemon cucumbers that says, “Not all cucumbers are green.” And then it has a little blurb.*” – Food hub



Food hubs are eager to expand their service area but lack the staff and funding to transport and distribute beyond their current catchment area. They have, however, developed a referral practice to assist buyers in identifying a food hub resource closer to them.

Distribution – “*The most beneficial thing that could be offered in that form would be help with more distribution.*” – Food hub

Distribution – “*Distribution is often our biggest barrier to participating more in the program as well. I think having a way to communicate with-- I mean, and I think having the approved supplier list is really helpful for this because I think there have been times where folks have reached out to us, and I've said, "We can't. Y'all are too far away. I'm sorry. We don't have the capacity for that. But you could try [x] or [y] food hub or something like that.*” – Food hub

Barriers to Producer Participation

Fifty-eight (58) survey responses were received from local food producers that did not participate in NM Grown in FY23-25. An exact response rate could not be calculated since the survey was distributed publicly and via word of mouth; however, the link was sent to a list of 583 producers provided by the NMFMA. Based on this known distribution route, the response rate is less than 10%.

Shown in Table 17, the 58 survey respondents represented farmers, ranchers, food hubs, and distributors across New Mexico. Most sold produce (53%) and “other” products (52%) which included hummus, baked goods, eggs, chile, cooked meals, flowers, honey, jam, jelly, beverages, and wool/yarn. Fifteen (26%) sold meat.

Table 17. Summary of producer type and products sold among food producer survey participants who are not Approved Suppliers (n = 58)

Producer Type ^a	Product Type			
	Produce ^b	Meat products	Other	
n (%)	n (%)	n (%)	n (%)	
Farm	37 (64%)	27 (73%)	7 (19%)	17 (46%)
Ranch	13 (22%)	2 (15%)	11 (85%)	6 (46%)
Food hubs	11 (19%)	4 (36%)	2 (18%)	8 (73%)
Distributor	14 (24%)	8 (57%)	3 (21%)	10 (71%)
All types	58 (100%)	31 (53%)	15 (26%)	30 (52%)

^a Participants could select multiple “types” and “products”

^b Produce was defined as fruits and vegetables, nuts, grains, or legumes

Over half (53%) of producers that participated in the survey were located in rural counties and 50% farmed or ranched less than three acres. Most sold to farmers’ markets (76%) and few sold to other channels, including restaurants (17%), farm stands (16%), grocery stores (16%), and food hubs (16%). Most (93%) sold products direct to consumer. Nearly half (47%) used sustainable or regenerative practices (e.g., cover crops, no or low tilling, prescribed/rotational grazing, etc.) while 40% used conventional farming or ranching practices.

Table 18 shows barriers these food producers reported to participating in NM Grown. The top barrier was not knowing about NM Grown, reported by 36% of producers. More than one-fourth (28%) selected paperwork and administrative burdens, 21% selected not having enough supply, and 10% selected already having enough markets and not being able to meet requirements as barriers to participating in NM Grown.

Table 18. Barriers ^a to participating in NM Grown reported by food producer survey participants (n = 58)

	%
Didn't know about NM Grown	36%
Paperwork/administrative burden	28%
Not enough supply	21%

Already have enough markets	10%
Couldn't meet requirements	10%
Couldn't transport products	7%
None of the above	7%
Processing issues/bottlenecks	5%
Weren't interested	3%
Products didn't meet NM Grown criteria	3%
Didn't anticipate profit	3%
No NM Grown buyers nearby	2%
Timing of buyer requests	2%
Other [time, labor shortage, sell non-eligible products (eggs, value-added), sell to other non-NM Grown institutions or give away products for free, limited quantity, lack of land]	17%

^a Participants could select more than one option

Figure 9 shows what food producers reported would motivate them to participate in NM Grown. The top three motivators were building new relationships with local food buyers (63%), increasing sales (61%), and connecting with community (55%). “Other” motivators noted by 7% of producers included building a profitable business, increasing price, and expanding eligible products.



Figure 9. Motivators ^a to participate in NM Grown reported by food producer survey participants that do not currently participate (n = 56)

^a Participants could select more than one option

Producers were also asked to provide any other comments related to the NM Grown Approved Supplier Program. Among 22 comments received, six wanted more information and two mentioned specific products that should be added to the program. Others echoed the importance of balancing administrative burdens of applying with potentially limited revenue from participating. For example, a rural food hub commented, “*I hear it's a good program but it limits farmers with its requirements. Leaving less for farmers to sell at market to regular customers.*” Many expressed interest in participating in the future, especially with planned increases in operation size and product supply. Overall, 46 (82%) indicated they would like to participate as an Approved Supplier in the future.

“This is the first we are hearing of the NM Grown Approved Supplier Program, but it sounds like a program that aligns with our vision and ethics. We did not anticipate producing long term nor large scale, but demand has increased and it is something we are open to exploring.” – Small-scale rural farm

NM Grown Buyers: Survey Results

The NM Grown evaluation survey invitation was sent to 160 FY23-25 buyers for which current contact information was available or obtained through outreach. Eighty-eight (88) responses were received (response rate = 55%). Two individuals completed the survey for three organizations, therefore 85 individual buyers are represented in results.

Shown in Table 19, all buyer types were represented in the evaluation survey. Among all buyers (n = 88), participation increased by 48% from FY23 to FY25. Most buyers (88%) identified as an individual buyer while fewer (13%) identified as a collective buyer, purchasing products to distribute to individual buyers.

Table 19. Summary of buyer survey participants by type and FY participation (n = 88)

Type	FY23-FY25 n	FY23 n	FY24 n	FY25 n	% change ^a
K-12 schools	32	27	31	28	4%
Early childhood centers	22	10	18	18	80%
Senior centers	33	16	21	33	106%
Food bank	1	1	1	1	0%
All buyers	88	54	71	80	48%

^a Percent change from FY23 to FY25

Table 20 shows the type(s) of products buyers purchased over the three-year evaluation period. All survey participants purchased products during the three-year evaluation period. Most purchased Produce+ products (94%) and meat products (88%).

Table 20. Products purchased over three-year evaluation period by buyer type (n = 88)

	Produce+ %	Meat %	None %
K-12 schools (n = 32)	97%	78%	0%
Early childhood (n = 22)	100%	82%	0%
Senior centers (n = 33)	89%	100%	0%
Food banks (n = 1)	100%	100%	0%
All buyers (n = 88)	94%	88%	0%

Buyer survey participants were asked to report the exact number of Approved Suppliers they purchased from for each Fiscal Year they participated in NM Grown. Shown in Table 21, the mean number of Approved Suppliers buyer purchased from increased consistently from FY23 to FY25 for all buyers except K-12 schools.

Table 21. Number of Approved Suppliers (mean, SD, and range) buyer survey participants purchased from by Fiscal Year

	FY23		FY24		FY25	
	Mean (SD)	Range	Mean (SD)	Range	Mean (SD)	Range
K-12 schools (n = 32)	2.7 (1.9)	0-8	2.8 (2.0)	1-8	2.6 (1.9)	0-8
Early childhood (n = 22)	1.9 (1.3)	0-5	2.5 (1.5)	1-6	2.7 (1.3)	0-5
Senior centers (n = 33)	2.2 (1.8)	0-7	2.8 (2.7)	0-13	3.2 (2.1)	1-12
Food bank (n = 1)	15 (n/a)	n/a	40 (n/a)	n/a	57 (n/a)	n/a
All buyers	2.6 (2.4)	0-15	3.2 (4.8)	0-40	3.6 (6.3)	0-57

n/a = not applicable since n = 1

Buyer satisfaction with NM Grown is shown in Table 22. More than half of buyers were satisfied with all components evaluated except availability of supply of requested Produce+ products in needed volumes (48% satisfied), pricing of products (44% satisfied), and delivery and distribution costs (44% satisfied). Appendix C shows buyer satisfaction by type of buyer. Similar to Approved Supplier evaluation survey results, a relatively high percentage of buyers were neutral about components evaluated; 49% were neutral about pricing of products, 43% were neutral about delivery and distribution costs, and 38% were neutral about availability of supply of requested Produce+ products in needed volumes.

Table 22. Buyer survey participants' satisfaction with NM Grown (n = 84-88 ^a)

	Dissatisfied %	Neutral %	Satisfied %	N/A %
Knowledge of NM Grown program goals and mission*	0	9	90	1
Overall experience participating in NM Grown	1	11	86	1
Ability to access NM Grown funding through your Administrative Agency (i.e., ALTSD, ECECD, OIEA, PED, TFD)	0	13	85	2
Quality of products purchased	1	13	85	1
Overall relationship with Approved Suppliers	1	13	85	1
Knowledge of expectations and requirements for participating	0	18	82	0
Packaging of products from the supplier*	1	15	82	2
Food safety and source transparency*	0	20	80	0
Ease of doing business with Approved Suppliers*	5	19	76	0
Support and assistance provided for any questions or problems*	0	24	74	2
Suppliers' ability to deliver products*	9	21	70	0
Availability of supply of preferred meat products in needed volumes	1	27	65	7
Availability of supply of requested Produce+ products in needed volumes	15	38	48	0
Pricing of products	7	49	44	0
Delivery and distribution costs*	10	43	44	2

^aSome questions were optional (noted with *); responses to questions ranged from 84-88

Buyers also reported agreement with perceived NM Grown impacts, shown in Table 23. Agreement was over 50% for all impacts evaluated and was highest for acceptability of NM Grown foods by population served (89%), recipient satisfaction with products (86%), and providing an important economic opportunity for Approved Suppliers (85%). The highest percentage of buyers were neutral about meal program participation increases (33%), improvements in recipients' food security status (27%), and incorporating values-based procurement practices (24%) due to NM Grown. Appendix C shows buyers' agreement with NM Grown impacts by buyer type.

Table 23. Buyer survey participants' agreement with NM Grown impacts (n = 88)

	Disagree %	Neutral %	Agree %	N/A %
NM Grown foods are accepted by the populations we serve.	0	11	89	0
Recipients are satisfied with NM Grown products.	0	14	86	0
NM Grown provides Approved Suppliers with an important economic opportunity.	1	14	85	0
Participating in NM Grown allows us to incorporate equity approaches (e.g., prioritizing purchases from smaller-scale, rural, Tribal, or socially disadvantaged producers).	0	16	84	0
NM Grown improves recipients' diet/meal quality.	0	15	84	1
NM Grown foods are culturally relevant.	1	17	82	0
We need NM Grown funding to purchase local food products.	2	16	81	1
NM Grown is meeting my organization's needs.	5	16	80	0
We need NM Grown to access local food products.	1	23	76	0
Participating in NM Grown allows us to incorporate values-based procurement practices.	1	24	75	0
NM Grown improves recipients' food security status.	0	27	70	2
NM Grown increases participation in our meal program(s).	6	33	57	5

Buyer motivations for participating in NM Grown were also assessed (Figure 10). Buyers could select more than one response option. The top three motivators were supporting the local economy (90%), expanding local food offerings (78%), and improving recipients' health (73%). Appendix C shows motivators by buyer type.

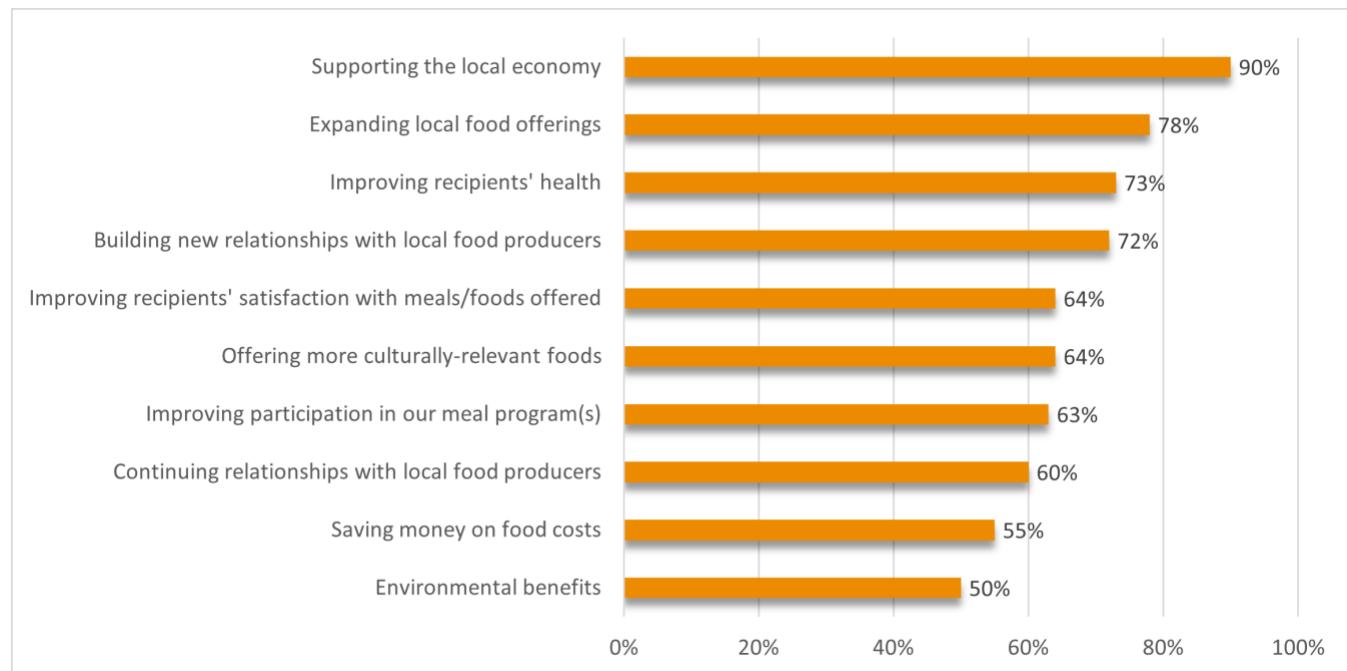


Figure 10. Buyer survey participants' (n = 88) motivations ^a for participating in NM Grown

^a Participants could select more than one option

Buyers also reported resources they need more of to successfully participate in NM Grown, shown in Table 24. The top three needs were funding (69%), resources like staff and time (32%), and food storage (30%). Appendix C shows buyer needs by type.

Table 24. Resources ^a buyer survey participants need more of to successfully participate in NM Grown (%)

Resource	%
Funding	69
Resources (e.g., staff, time)	32
Food storage	30
Access to Approved Suppliers	27
Equipment to process and prepare food purchased	22
Ability to receive distribution	11
Knowledge of how to use food purchased	10
Knowledge of how to participate and access NM Grown funds	8
Administrative support	8
Interest from population(s) served	8
Leadership support	3

^a Participants could select more than one option

Figure 11 shows NM Grown spending among buyer survey participants across the evaluation period. Most buyers (58%) spent between \$1 and \$9,999 in FY23. The distribution of spending tended to increase toward middle spending categories (\$10,000-19,999 and \$20,000-49,999) from FY23 to FY25.

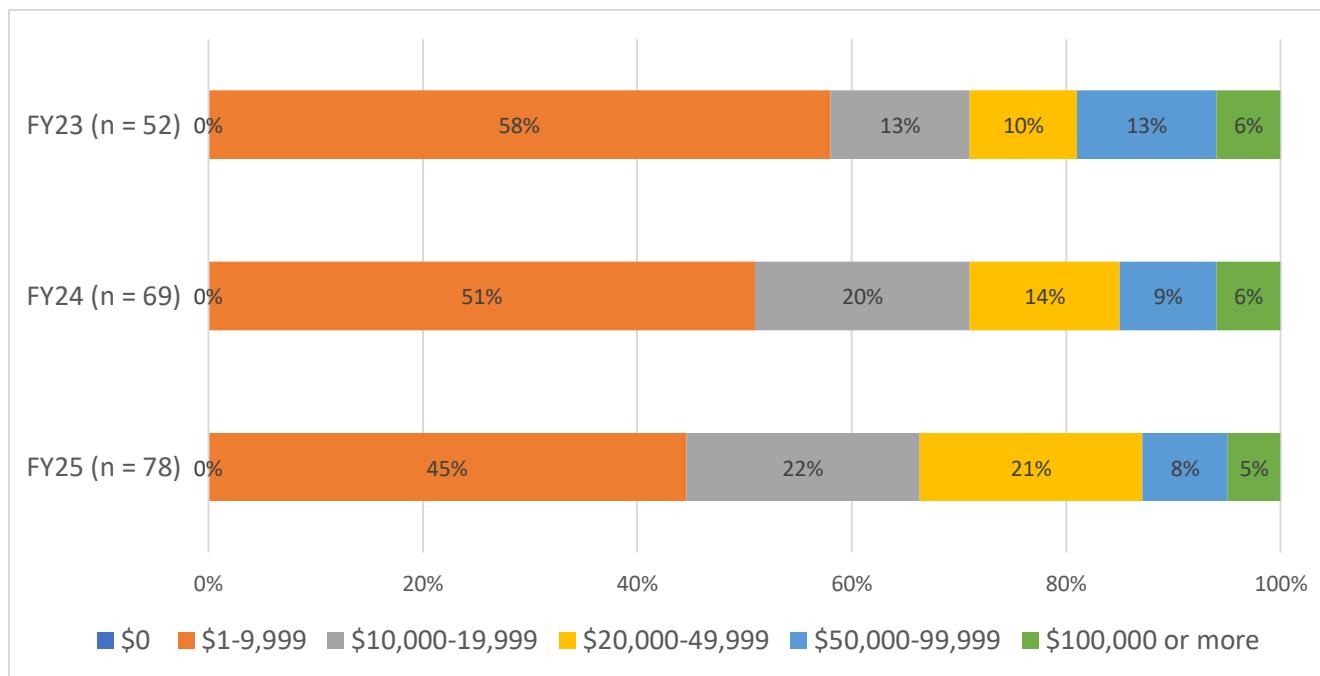


Figure 11. Buyer survey participants' spending by Fiscal Year (FY) by category (%)

Figure 12 shows the percent of their local food purchasing grant allocation buyers spent across Fiscal Years. The percent of buyers that spent more than 75% of their grant allocation remained stable over the evaluation period, ranging from 69% in FY24 to 74% in FY25. Very few survey respondents spent 0% of their grant allocation; however, about one in five buyers spent just 1-25% of their allocation in all three evaluation years (19% in FY23, 22% in FY24, and 17% in FY25).

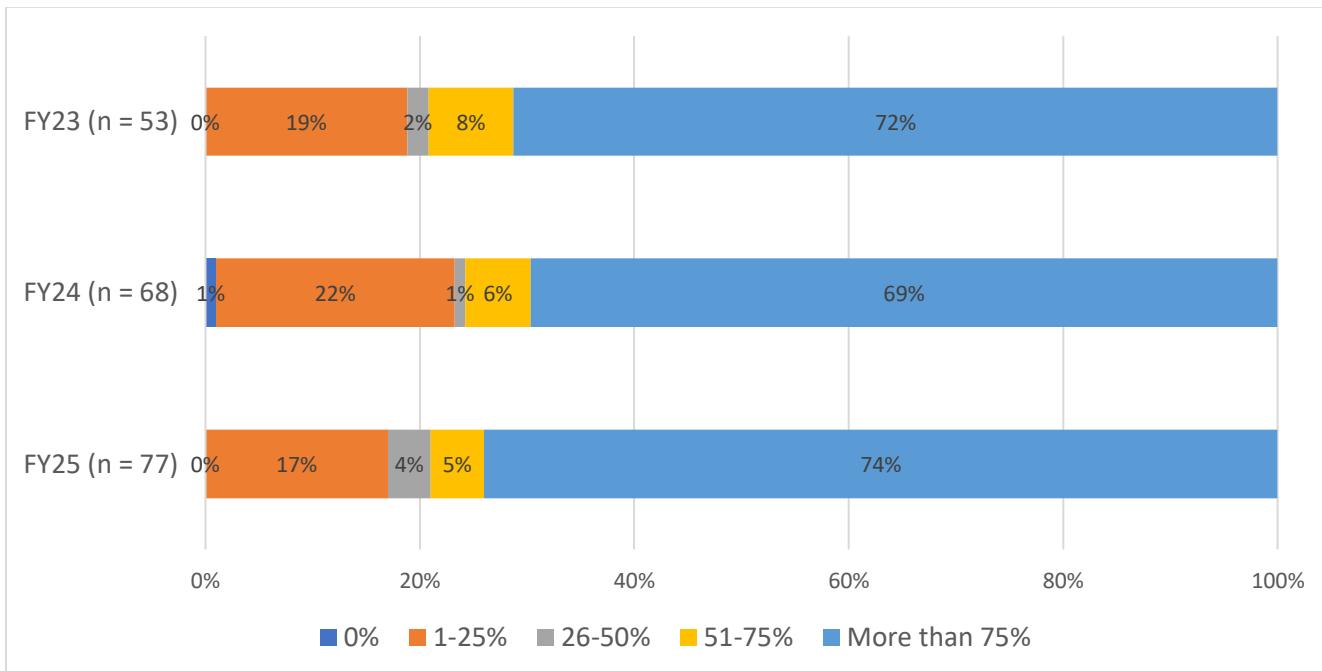


Figure 12. Percent of local food purchasing grant allocation spent per Fiscal Year (FY) (%) among all buyer survey participants

Among 85 buyers that answered this question, 96% said they would participate in NM Grown in the future.

NM Grown Buyers: Interviews and Site Visits

Ten (10) buyers participated in an interview: four K-12 schools, three early childhood education centers, and three senior centers. Of the 10, two also participated in a site visit (one K-12 school and one senior center provider representing three individual senior centers). Note that one food bank representative participated in a focus group; these results are described in the section, “Administering Agencies and Other Stakeholders”, starting on page 45. Interview and site visit data show the following strengths, challenges, and opportunities for growth according to NM Grown buyers.



Strengths Reported by NM Grown Buyers

Overall, buyers enthusiastically report NM Grown products are high-quality, culturally-relevant, and fresh, improving menu variety and nutritional value. Buyers discussed that NM Grown improves access to products that they would not otherwise be able to find or afford, allows for menu diversification, and improves meal appeal.

"But it's a snack that, one, we would have never known about the company without the buyer's-- or the seller's list, and two, it's something that we can't afford on a normal basis. Where we are here in Curry County, we just don't have a lot of options. And to be able to go and purchase-- and you sure can't purchase year-round, and this is something that we're able to get year-round." – Small rural preschool

"Well, one, the money that we receive obviously helps offset what we can put on a child's tray and improve the nutrient-dense products and items on their tray. So that's one. Working with the local vendors, I was born and raised in New Mexico, so I'm very near and dear to local businesses. I grew up in one." – Large urban school district

"I think it's had a good impact on maybe the access for people to have fresh fruits and vegetables. I think that's important for everybody. I think it helps with the economy because we're able to purchase from local vendors, whether local vendors is here or local to the state. So I think there's an economic factor to that as well. And there's that you want to make people access fresh stuff." – Small urban senior center provider

NM Grown also introduces an excellent opportunity to market local foods and local producers to recipients, buyer organization staff, and families and complements educational and curricular initiatives in K-12 and early childhood education centers. Serving NM Grown products is sometimes the only opportunity schools and early childhood centers have to educate children about local food and agriculture.

"Like I said, when their favorite day is Taco Day, we have to let them know that those beans are from New Mexico, that meat is from New Mexico, that lettuce is from one of the farms around here. And that's kind of one of our goals. We do those Nuevo Thursdays or whatever, the promotional programs, like we want everything, so we can be proud of it and show it to the students and say, "Hey, man, go home and tell mom and dad." So next time the menu comes out and there's a Zia symbol, they want to go and eat that day because it's local." – Large urban school district



"I think that the staff and the families and the chefs are more excited about food because of our commitment to a farm-to-table program, that people are thinking about it in a different way. One of the things we like to say is we spend so much time and thought and consideration about our curriculum what we eat in our meal program is as much a part of the curriculum as the daily lesson plan. And so I've just seen more passion surrounded by the food we serve and what it means for the children." – Small urban preschool

"But my kids have never had honeyloupe until I brought it in. And so them just learning where food comes from helps a lot. I only get a short window to talk to kids and kind of tell them about their food and where it comes from. And so it helps shorten it to let them know, "Hey, this came from Portales. Hey, this came from Clovis or a close area." – Small rural school district

Senior centers in particular describe the emotional, social, and cultural importance of fresh, local foods and engagement through congregate meals to seniors' physical and emotional wellbeing.

"So I know for a lot of our seniors, something that comes from a farm, something that comes fresh, means a lot more than something that you can buy in the store. And not necessarily because it's healthier, but I think it helps them remember some of those things from their past and maybe things they used to do. So I think it is really important to do that because it's just neat to see the seniors, especially when they get a smile on their face and they're telling you a story about something like that. And to a lot of people, it's meaningless - it doesn't mean anything - but if you work with seniors and they tell you some of these stories, sometimes those stories really touch your heart." – Small urban senior center provider

"... but just the happiness that they're having this food. Sometimes because they're older, and their families still have to work, they're home alone, so some of them won't eat. So being able to give them this at our center makes a big difference. ... So they eat as a group. They do activities as a group, so the engagement is there. Because some of them say when they're home, they just watch TV, or they just sit there alone. So it's kind of like they're going out to a restaurant to engage with friends or have activity. So it gives them a little reason to get up." – Small rural senior center provider



Many buyers serve New Mexico's most vulnerable populations such as children, seniors, and food bank clients. Buyers note that NM Grown improves recipients' diet quality, variety, and food security status. In addition, the program promotes relationships with food and agriculture and creates excitement about new and familiar culturally-relevant products. Buyers report recipients know when they are eating NM Grown products versus products from usual vendors.

"Well, there's total food insecurities with [redacted]. Prior to being CEP, community eligibility provision, I think our free and reduced students were in the 70th percentile, which is huge, huge. And so we're providing more nutrient-dense, freshly grown products here for those students." – Large urban school district

"We could tell the difference right away. I keep going back to beef, but it's probably my favorite vendor in New Mexico. It's just a great product. The moment we brought it in here, students, our staff, everybody could tell the difference. Right away, it was almost like, "Okay. These are the things we need to focus on to create more participation," to create that." – Large rural school district

"I think it's huge because you think about the fact that we live out here. I mean, yeah, we all have gardens here, but a lot of seniors don't grow gardens because it's hard to bend over. It's hard physically to have a garden. So they don't get the fresh produce that they should. So instead they're eating canned veggies, which are not good for you, you know what I mean? And fresh veggies are so much better. So I think the impact is enormous. We were just talking about the people here in Quemado would rather have a salad than anything else. The days that they have a salad, it's just packed in here because people love that. The fresh produce and the salads." – Small rural senior center provider

In addition to positively impacting buyer organizations and the vulnerable populations they serve, buyers perceive that NM Grown positively impacts families, communities, food producers, and the local economy. The program results in strengthened connections and new connections with Approved Suppliers and is successful because of the connection to community. Buyers note that recipients' excitement about the program and products (especially students and preschoolers) extends to families and staff, with parents and teachers asking about the origin of products and purchasing from local producers themselves. Buyers also report encouraging local food producers that do not currently participate in NM Grown to become Approved Suppliers and encouraging peer institutions to participate.

"And we tend to use-- we become familiar with some of the farmers, right? ... We forge those relationships and then we kind of, I want to say, use the same folks, but like I said, they start to understand our needs a little better too. So they can provide a little more." – Large urban school district



"And then parents are noticing. We put on our signage at our open house or our family nights. Anytime we use anything that's NM Grown, we put it on there, "NM Grown," and we put the little logo and stuff so that, that way, it becomes more aware for families if you're seeing it." – Small rural preschool

"... when you're supporting local businesses and local farms, you're supporting our economy. You're supporting jobs and exposure in unique ways for these businesses in these farms like through the early childhood programs, through the community-based programs, again, strengthens their relationship with the community, which is going to then increase their buyers from places that aren't us. And so it's just a win-win across the board." – Small urban preschool

Challenges Reported by NM Grown Buyers

Buyers of all types acknowledge barriers related to staffing and labor shortages and turnover, high product prices, inconsistent timing in the rollout of funds (and gaps in the ability to spend during the fiscal year), and delivery and distribution availability and costs.

"And COVID really also, and I know COVID's been a while, but COVID really put us down. Everybody. But we went from having an average of 700 employees within our department. And right now, we're still 150 shy. We're right at 550." – Large urban school district

"I'll use ground beef as an example. So if we're getting it from our purveyor, our main vendor, say it's 3.79 a pound. Okay? New Mexico ground beef is phenomenal beef, but it's 5.79 a pound. So that \$2 difference, that just gets added to our plate cost. You know what I mean? So then all of a sudden that meal just became a little bit more expensive to produce." – Large urban school district

"The grant year ends in May, so all the money needs to be expended by May. And then in June, there's no grant money to be spent, and that's the peak growing season. And then most programs are just gearing back up in July when the grant's finally awarded. So if the gap was in the dead of winter, like the month of

December when even some centers are closed a week, like I think that would be better.” – Small urban preschool

“The only barriers for procurement processing, like I had mentioned, is maybe moving the grant monies for a different start off at a different part of the year, maybe at the beginning of growing season when they probably start planting unless they have greenhouses and other ways to grow.” – Large urban school district

“Well, I think it's like a Catch-22. If we had more money, right, if we had more money, it would take us longer. It would carry us longer. But with the money that we do get, sometimes it's hard to spend it because it's either the product is not available or we get it too late in the year, or it doesn't fall within our menus. Like some of the product doesn't fall within our menus, and before we know it, it's getting towards the end of the year, and we're just like, "Okay. We have to spend this money." So I think there's a combination of things. I think if we had more money but the prices were less, I think we could use them as efficiently as we do with other vendors that we have.” – Small urban senior center provider

Some buyers also note their lack of kitchen infrastructure for processing and scratch cooking, challenges finding enough Produce+ products to fulfill 60% of local food grant budgets, and challenges finding products throughout the year, particularly in the winter.

“... especially when it comes to the fact that we don't cook our meals. Our lunch is vended, so we're only looking at snacks.” – Small rural preschool

“The challenge is just finding something besides ground beef during the winter. ... Like I said, there's really no place up here that we've been able to find that produces any nuts, like almonds, pistachios, or anything like that.” – Small rural preschool

“But unless those farmers have a greenhouse, you're not going to be able to purchase anything during the



winter months and early spring. And sometimes the winters are harsh, so you can't plant anything in the fall to get a spring crop. And so you're kind of limited when they start pulling their produce off of their plants in mid-July, and then they're done by October. And so you just have that short window right there.” – Small rural school district

“Well, a lot of the times, they'll just say, 'Keep the product. Discard the product' ...So we ended up losing product because there was a lot of complaints about them... our seniors are so set on what they like. If they like a certain type of apple, that's the only thing they want to eat. And we want to make sure that,

yes, we want to introduce new stuff, but we're also respectful in saying, 'Here, I know this is what you guys like, and this is what we want to get you. We don't want to make you eat something that maybe you don't want to eat.'" – Large, urban senior center provider

Certain NM Grown participants have more challenges.

Large school districts struggle to find nearby suppliers with capacity to produce and/or deliver the volume of Produce+ and meat products required. Coupled with procurement delays and difficulties when bidding is required, school districts rely on multiple Approved Suppliers to fulfill the need for one product or use their regular distributor. Some report that even food hub and distributor Approved Suppliers cannot fulfill needs for product volume. Large school districts also report barriers due to significant training needs, especially when introducing new products with food safety concerns like raw meat.

"Typically, we're putting the New Mexico Grown product on our lunch menus and we're prepping for about 12,000 lunches a day. So again, that one little hiccup that we always struggle with is getting that quantity. We need to be able to put that local grown product on the 12,000 meals, right? Because even the hubs ... even those that work with multiple farmers, they still can't meet that demand." – Large urban school district

"Training, it depends on the item. I mean, if we start slow and we decide that we're going to get beef from a local rancher ... we're talking 500 out of 550 people that need training for one meal, for one product." – Large urban school district

"And they want us to do more. We want to do more. We just need to figure out how to do more and train more and to get there with making everybody safe and training, communicating. And that's the part that I think we all want that to be there. It's kind of a missing part." – Large urban school district

Rural buyers of all sizes struggle most with finding local Approved Suppliers and/or delivery and distribution costs and logistics from Approved Suppliers located farther away, sometimes leaving them unable to find any Approved Suppliers.

"I would just say the hardest part is I wish we could support more local right here in [redacted] County, but it's just not the right-- the right stuff's not grown here. The farmers don't have enough. The couple vendors, like I said, they don't even have enough sometimes for us to do a full snack if we were getting cherry tomatoes or cucumbers and stuff. I can't get enough of what I need for a meal at a time." – Small rural preschool

"And then we've had a company say that they will not deliver here when they say they will deliver here. And then we had another one down in Santa Fe say that they were going to charge us all this delivery fee... And the closest place to us is two-and-a-half hours for us to go get produce. So it takes us some time and a whole day of labor. And we only have two cooks and myself. And I have four other hats plus whatever



else they want to put on my hat. So in a small district I don't have a whole lot of time to be running all over the place to go get food or whatever. And then our cooks really can't leave.” – Small rural school district

“That's what I'm trying to find. I'm trying to find in Gila, but that's out of the county, but that's where a lot of our produce comes from is in Gila. They have a lot of farms down there. But we don't have a lot of farms up here, and I wish we did. But every time I hear about somebody who's doing something, I'm like, "Okay, if you have a big garden, you could turn it into a farm, and we could purchase it." So I have a man that I was talking to that's starting a honey farm in Luna. I'm like, I can purchase honey from you. I need to get you set up with him. I gave him all the information so that we can purchase honey from him.” – Small rural senior center provider

Opportunities for Growth Reported by NM Grown Buyers

Discussions with buyers revealed several opportunities for growth. Recruiting additional Approved Suppliers throughout New Mexico is key, particularly in rural and Tribal areas and those that can produce large quantities needed by larger institutions like school districts.

“Truthfully, the quantities, right? And I know, like I said, PED has tried working on getting that communication between the buyers and the farmers so that they know, "Okay, they're going to require 10,000 pounds of lettuce. We need to harvest enough," even if we just have to focus on that's all we're going to harvest so that we can at least meet that one category. But for some reason, it just hasn't happened. We're always still struggling to meet that quantity. And I don't know where the disconnect is, right?” – Large urban school district

“Could it be stronger? Of course. Because I think there's always room to grow in any program. And there's always ways to network with more farms and to enhance that. Could we be buying more fruit? ... if we had more fruit vendors that we could build a relationship with. So I think there's always room to grow.” – Small urban preschool



“Maybe centralizing somewhere where all the farmers and all the hubs send in what they have and then giving accessibility to all the vendors so that from day to day, week to week, month to month, you can see what's available and not necessarily because you have a relationship with a certain vendor that they tell you, "Okay. We have tomatoes available. Call us now," or, "We have apples available." But rather making it more like a big chain-- well, I don't want to say chain, but like a big business where you-- like Amazon, right? You go log in to Amazon, and you can see everything they have. And I don't have to reach out to somebody that supplies Amazon to see what they're going to be sending Amazon. But having a location where it's centralized for everybody to be able to go in at once and say, "Okay. This company up North has all this available. This company down South has all this available," versus relying on those personal

relationships and kind of knowing what the vendors already have. So kind of bringing it together just for the benefit of everybody.” – Small urban senior center provider

NM Grow is already successful in creating and maintaining strong relationships; however, buyers recommend strengthening those connections through in-person events, networking, and providing a map of participating Approved Suppliers in addition to the current vendor list. Several mentioned re-exploring the app that is being created by New Mexico State University, Path to Plate, that connects buyers and Approved Suppliers.

“And the first year we applied for the grant, we struggled just trying to find vendors. But every year we form more and more relationships.” – Small urban preschool

“So this program that New Mexico State University was working on [Path to Plate] was kind of like because all the farmers were going to be there. So then those buyers could just go in, click on three farmers, print out the pricing for the items they want, and there’s the three price points.” – Large urban school district

“So I think looking at the state as a whole and trying to figure out, ‘Okay. In the southern part of the state, we grow chile and onions. In the northern part of the state, we can grow apples and pears,’ right, so different parts of the state, and then really using that to leverage and sell more to the different parts. ‘So we have chili. We can send up North. You guys have apples. You can send here.’ But knowing that those resources have been allocated and some of the farmers have gotten the resources that they need to make that successful, because I think it is a big program. And I think that within time, they can probably make it grow and really do a lot with it, but they’re going to have to treat the whole state as one and not like different areas.” – Small urban senior center provider

NM Grow may also consider providing more extensive local food procurement education and training to new and returning buyers on topics like producer capacity, product variety and availability, pricing, and distribution capabilities to align buyer and Approved Supplier expectations. Current NM Grow trainings are perceived as effective and culturally-relevant, through most buyers report they lack the time to participate in regular NM Grow meetings. Recording training events and meetings and making recordings available to all buyers, which also limits the training burden on Administering Agency staff, is recommended.

“For us, it’s huge, money for that training and money to train our people, somehow to pay for overtime or to get them in here, instead of us recreating the wheel on if they had those procedures set up.” – Large urban school district

“I’m always looking for farmers to try-- because I would happily purchase theirs locally if I could. So I’m always trying to get a hold of people that-- and I hear they’re doing farming or whatever to get them set up because it would be so much easier to get it from here, so. And we just got set up with some people who raise pigs that are set up with her now, so we can actually get pork as well as the beef.” – Small rural senior center provider

NM Grow must also work with the state and Administering Agencies to secure adequate recurring funding, distributed in a timely manner that is aligned with planning for the planting season, to sustain the NM Grow program.

“The only barriers for procurement processing, like I had mentioned, is maybe moving the grant monies for a different start off at a different part of the year, maybe at the beginning of growing season when they probably start planting unless they have greenhouses and other ways to grow.” – Large urban school district

Finally, NM Grown may consider a group purchasing and delivery model in rural areas or areas where Approved Suppliers are lacking. This idea was mentioned by all buyer types, including senior centers, early childhood centers, and K-12 schools, who could collaboratively place orders for a single distribution to rural communities.

"If we can expand those funds and if we can get on some kind of a delivery system or collaborate with a couple of different schools to meet some kind of amount quota or something like that, that way, we can just have a little bit-- have a few more options of food items, not just what we're limited to here." – Large urban school district

Administering Agencies and Other Stakeholders

Two focus groups were conducted with administering agency representatives. Among 11 focus group participants, all administering agencies were represented (ALTSD, ECECD, the NMFMA, OIEA, and PED). Focus groups findings are presented as they align with NM Grown strengths, challenges, and opportunities for growth.

Strengths Reported by Administering Agencies and Stakeholders



Agency representatives described NM Grown as a national model for building resilient local food systems that connect farmers, schools, early childhood programs, food banks, and Tribal senior centers. Across agencies, the program was credited with improving food quality and access, stimulating local economies, and strengthening community and cultural identity.

"Having a local food that was harvested within 24 to 36 hours of top-quality nutritious produce or a high-quality protein, which is also very difficult to have consistent access to for food banks-- these are deeply coveted."

Participants emphasized strengths related to human connection, trust, and shared values. They described this approach as central to maintaining partnerships and ensuring statewide sustainability.

"...the strength of New Mexico Grown and the Approved Supplier Program lives in the relational component of this all, that it's more than just food access. It's about helping people restore right relationship with food and sometimes helping to grow that for young people."

"It all comes down to this sort of, how do we center humanity, community, culture into food."

Participants emphasized that NM Grown has expanded access to fresh, locally sourced produce and meats across multiple settings, from child-care meals to senior congregate dining, while reducing reliance on canned or processed options. Agencies described the program as transformative for meal quality, nutrition, and participant satisfaction, particularly in rural and food-insecure areas.

"This is why, because our senior meals are a lifeline to a lot of our seniors, especially in rural areas. They're on fixed incomes, and they depend on these meals. That's just money that they don't have to pay for lunch, that they could use that money for food for breakfast or food for dinner or even extra money for their pets. ... So I think the New Mexico Grown program has made such a big impact when it comes to food insecurity for our seniors."

Agencies also highlighted how NM Grown funding supports scratch cooking, culinary creativity, and cultural relevance across institutions. School and early-childhood staff have used local purchasing to introduce children to regional crops, while senior centers have developed salad bars and gardens that provide both nutrition and engagement.

"...those rural areas are food deserts. So they've been relying on canned vegetables, fruit cocktail, a lot of canned food. So for them to see that greenery on their plate, that roughage that they need, they're so excited."

Beyond improving meals, participants viewed NM Grown as a bridge between cultural preservation, intergenerational connection, and community health. Agencies described its role in supporting food sovereignty and traditional foodways, especially in Tribal communities where partnerships with Native farmers have reintroduced heritage ingredients and recipes.

"So when I do the nutrition trainings or New Mexico Grown trainings, I try to bring in Native farmers because they want to purchase from Native farmers. And they talk about traditional foods that they grow, traditional dishes... They want traditional recipes because they want to provide their seniors, their Native elders with traditional meals kind of thing."



Agency respondents also highlighted the stability and neutrality provided by the Approved Supplier Program. Because the Approved Supplier Program operates as a nonprofit rather than a regulatory body, it offers objectivity, flexibility, and a trusted presence that fosters collaboration across agencies and producers.

"So we come with objectivity and the ability to pivot quickly. And we're the only nonprofit that is part of the interagency task force. And that position is really important. And sometimes, it feels like we're holding too much, really. We wish we weren't holding as much, but it's been a critical piece for that stability that translates to the producers, to the buyers, across the program, and it's why sometimes the New Mexico Grown and the Approved Supplier Program, it almost gets commingled so closely because they're interwoven. So I think the stability that ASP has provided to New Mexico Grown has been incredibly important."

Several participants also emphasized the program's commitment to leadership development and workforce sustainability. They described the Approved Supplier Program as a space that nurtures local food system leaders, builds capacity among agency partners, and invests in a new generation of practitioners dedicated to community-centered food systems.

"We also invest as an organization into those relationships and make sure that we try to sustain the professional sort of capacities that are in our state because, let's face it, it's a challenge. Workforce is a challenge, and especially for this type of work. And so I'm really proud that as a program and as an organization, NMFMA indirectly makes that a goal to really retain leadership, grow leadership. And I like to believe that ASP is a great space for that with our really strong team of leaders."

Through these efforts, NM Grown has fostered interagency and cross-sector collaboration, bringing together schools, Tribal governments, aging services, and food system organizations to coordinate deliveries, share trainings, and strengthen statewide infrastructure for local procurement.

Challenges Reported by Administering Agencies and Stakeholders

Despite broad success, agencies described persistent structural and administrative barriers that complicate program implementation. Many centers operate with limited staff capacity, often juggling multiple roles while managing procurement, reporting, and meal service.

"Some of them are the bus drivers. Some of them are the cook too, and they're also running the center and whatnot. So we try to be there as much as we can for them and to be able to help provide that assistance."

Manual invoicing and slow reimbursement processes have created additional burdens, particularly for smaller or rural sites.

"We do everything by email. They send in their invoices by email. We process them. We send them to ASD and DFA by email. I mean, most of the time, they're just scanning in their documents to us and sending them by email. So depending on when they send them to us, it could be months later before they're reimbursed, sometimes many months."

Rural and Tribal programs face infrastructure and transportation challenges, including limited cold storage and high delivery costs for perishable foods.

"Some of them don't have those cold trucks to where they could meet that farmer or that driver and pick up their product. I said, "If it's dried good or something like that, that's okay. But not meat, no produce." They can't put that in their car kind of thing. So that was kind of a barrier for the tribes."



Agencies also cited seasonal and cultural constraints, from funding cycles that misalign with harvest schedules to traditional norms around gifting food rather than selling it, that require ongoing education and relationship-building.

"I think there was some that wanted to become a supplier but kind of held back because of tradition. They didn't want to sell the products because they don't feel they're working to grow the produce that they just want to give it."

Agency respondents further noted that funding remains inconsistent and is often delayed, creating instability for producers who must plan planting seasons before allocations are confirmed. The single-year funding cycle was described as "pretty crazy," given that institutional procurements typically operate on multi-year timelines.

"The funding ends up being okay every year, but it's not always secure in the time when producers are planting, so in January. So the funding cycle at the state agencies has been-- I don't know if precarious is the right word, but it hasn't been secure. And so that hasn't created as much market stability as there could be, which would be really helpful if that was a factor."

Turnover among institutional buyers was another key challenge. When staff change, relationships and informal agreements often dissolve, leaving producers uncertain about who to contact or how to continue selling.

"I think an area that may be kind of a falling short piece, or considered, in my mind, is the relationships kept after turnover within institutions with buyer to grower. I think that's a big piece that kind of gets left on the side, is producers are kind of left to know like, "Well, I don't know who to talk to now," and then on the other end, when a new person comes on board, it just isn't really handed over. So I think that's a big piece. And obviously, sometimes, it's out of people's hands, but I think that's a part that does fall within an area that people miss sometimes."

Participants also noted that the informality of procurement, while designed to reduce barriers, can make the system fragile when it relies solely on relationships rather than contracts. Local autonomy can also mask "a layer of just a lack of coordination," as one participant described, underscoring the need for stronger engagement with fiscal managers and procurement officers to improve payment systems and accountability.

Finally, respondents emphasized that despite the Approved Supplier Program's reach, some Tribal programs remain newly integrated or face unique administrative barriers. Participants described promising developments, such as pilot projects allowing tribally operated and BIE (Bureau of Indian Education) schools to access funds for the first time, but stressed that "it needs to be maintained" to ensure equity and sustainability.

Opportunities for Growth Reported by Administering Agencies and Stakeholders

Participants envisioned several strategies to sustain and strengthen NM Grown's future impact. Foremost was the need for stable, multi-year funding to support early season purchasing, reliable planning, and equitable growth. Agencies noted that stopgap funding strategies make the program vulnerable and limit expansion.

"I think I'm going to continue to do it until they say we can't. But like I say, we're robbing Peter to pay Paul right now. So we're doing the carve-out, but we'll probably be short about 4 or 5 million for the whole piece. And we'll have to request that from the legislature, which we already are for this next session."

Participants emphasized the importance of investing in local infrastructure, including cold storage, refrigerated trucks, and community greenhouses, to strengthen local supply chains and extend the growing season.

"So I would say distributors and maybe more greenhouses for the winter houses. And a lot of them are-- yeah. A lot of them are interested in-- some of them would buy everything local: eggs, chicken, fish. That was something they wanted, was more value chain food items, like salsa or maybe even cooked meals that are frozen, because during the winter when some of the centers have to close down in those rural areas because of the weather, a lot of them are purchasing ready-made meals out of state."

Agencies also highlighted opportunities to foster innovation and intergenerational engagement by connecting elders, youth, and local farmers through gardens, seedling exchanges, and farm-to-school collaborations.

"Just imagine if they grow seedlings, and they could give seedlings to other senior centers, or something, or to the schools, or the schools could give it to the senior centers. And then that money would circulate like this, and then the food would circulate within your community."



Participants reflected on the lasting value of NM Grown in nurturing pride, education, and a renewed culture of growing food, especially for younger generations.

"So it's just been such a beautiful, wonderful program that I appreciate. And I hope it keeps growing. And I hope that a lot of our schools and little kiddos and all our kids are learning more about growing food because farming is a dying breed, I believe, especially in brown communities. Yeah. So I love the program."

Participants also recommended formalizing and protecting the Approved Supplier Program's nonprofit role to preserve its flexibility, neutrality, and continuity. Respondents emphasized that the program's presence as a trusted intermediary has been crucial for program stability, particularly during agency turnover, and should be supported through dedicated, long-term funding.

Agencies also suggested strengthening interagency coordination and buyer education, ensuring that procurement officers and fiscal managers understand vendor requirements, payment systems, and the broader value of local purchasing. Participants described the need for "more engagement with the fiscal management end" and greater clarity in vendor processes to support both efficiency and equity.

Finally, participants emphasized the importance of building and retaining food system expertise within both agencies and community organizations. They described the Approved Supplier Program as a rare space "to sustain the professional sort of capacities that are in our state," providing consistency and leadership in a sector

challenged by frequent turnover. Collectively, agencies characterized NM Grown and the Approved Supplier Program as both a model and a movement for equitable, values-based procurement that reflects New Mexico's distinct culture and values.

V. Discussion and Recommendations

Discussion of Evaluation Findings

NM Grown was among the first statewide local food procurement programs in the U.S. and has grown steadily over the past 10 years. As of FY25, NM Grown is positively impacting New Mexico's most vulnerable communities, its food producers and distributors, and local economies, boasting an estimated \$7.05 million in total economic output. While buyers, Approved Suppliers, and Administering Agencies do experience challenges, many report smoother participation experiences with time. NM Grown excels in product quality and cultural relevance of products and activities, improving recipients' food variety and diet quality, expanding markets and revenue for producers, strong and supportive leadership at Administering Agencies, and fostering community collaborations and relationships. NM Grown could be further strengthened by recruiting additional buyers and Approved Suppliers across the state, especially in Tribal and rural areas; enhancing production and distribution capacity to meet the needs of larger institutions like school districts; reducing administrative (e.g., paperwork) and funding barriers; and promoting regular buyer spending across fiscal years. NM Grown is now well-established but could have an even greater impact if these key challenges are addressed.



Buyers, Approved Suppliers, and Administering Agencies that participated in this evaluation were largely enthusiastic about NM Grown and its goal of strengthening local food systems and economies. The diverse array of purchasing models utilized among buyers provide opportunities for all types of local food producers to sell products, including small-scale and socially disadvantaged producers, food hubs, and other food businesses. On the other hand, the complexities of so many buyers and purchasing models introduces challenges with coordination, logistics, technical assistance and support, and Approved Supplier expectations. In this evaluation, dissatisfaction with NM Grown stemmed from obstacles that face any local food procurement program (Bloom et al., 2022; Krzyzanowski Guerra et al., 2021; McCloskey et al., 2020; Pinard et al., 2013; Rosenberg et al., 2014; Smith et al., 2013; Thomson et al., 2024; Thomson et al., 2022; Whitehouse et al., 2025) such as higher prices, product delivery logistics and cost, and more

limited options during the winter and non-growing seasons. Importantly, nearly one in five (19%) of Approved Suppliers that completed an evaluation survey did not sell to any buyer over the three-year evaluation period despite most indicating a strong desire to participate. There was also some disconnect between buyer and Approved Supplier experiences with the program where buyers, especially senior and early childhood centers and food banks, are more satisfied with the program while smaller-scale Approved Suppliers, larger school districts, and small rural buyers experience more challenges. Many evaluation participants also reported "neutral"

responses to program experiences and some program impacts, though perceived program impacts were mostly positive.

After 10 years of investment and experience, NM Grow is succeeding in improving food access, food security, and community health in New Mexico. In addition, NM Grow is a lifeline for the state's many family-owned, small-scale farmers and ranchers and new food producers, processors, and distributors. Some challenges reported by current NM Grow participants will require multi-level solutions at local, state, and federal levels, namely land and water rights and access, training needs, and labor shortages and turnover. Of most importance is the need to align buyer menu planning with the planting season and Approved Supplier capacity. The loss of the *Regional Farm to Food Bank* LFPA and other recent changes at the federal and state levels are also creating new barriers and exacerbating existing challenges. Therefore, identifying and securing recurring funding to sustain the NM Grow program and the many Approved Suppliers that rely on NM Grow is a critical priority. Concurrently, regular data collection and evaluation efforts are key to show not only return on investment but also potential shifts in program experiences and impacts due to changes in funding, policy, and federal and state leadership.

Evaluation Limitations

Evaluation limitations must be acknowledged. This evaluation assessed perceived NM Grow impacts. Due to limitations in time and funding and complexities accessing NM Grow recipients, particularly young children and students, outcomes such as dietary intake, nutrition status, and meal participation among the direct recipients of NM Grow food products were not measured. Further, parents of children, seniors, and food bank participants did not participate in this evaluation. This is an important next step in comprehensively evaluating objective program impacts. Moreover, Tribal voices are not fully represented in surveys or qualitative data though two OIEA staff participated in a focus group, one Indigenous producer participated in an interview, and one participated in a site visit. We attribute recruitment challenges to high staff turnover and competing demands experienced by our Indigenous colleagues. In addition, purchasing data were missing for the OIEA for FY25 and the LFDP had extensive missing data for FY23 and some missing data for FY24. Economic impact analyses for these years (FY23 and FY24) were therefore not conducted. Finally, NM Grow reach and impacts on local food producers selling products to NM Grow buyers solely through food hubs and distributors could not be assessed since these individual producers are not on the Approved Supplier list.

Recommendations

Based on results of this multi-year evaluation, recommendations for NM Grow include:

Funding and Policy

- Secure adequate recurring funding for food purchasing as well as key NM Grow program supports: Approved Supplier Program administration, data collection and evaluation (including the Local Food Data Portal), and interagency coordination.
- Ensure timely distribution of funding to buyers and approval to use funding, aligned with Approved Suppliers' planning for the growing season.



- Fund local food purchasing for food banks through the state of New Mexico since federal funding ended in September 2025.

NM Grown Infrastructure and Administration

- Enhance producer infrastructure statewide, especially in rural and Tribal areas, for food production, processing, and distribution, including refrigerated trucks, to meet the needs of buyers, particularly large institutions like school districts.
- Ensure buyers have resources and staff necessary to find, store, and prepare products, including training staff on new products and product types and cuts, particularly meat.
- Develop and implement a collaborative purchasing and distribution model for buyers in rural areas or in areas that lack Approved Suppliers.
- Provide more information about Approved Suppliers to buyers and buyers to Approved Suppliers. Highlight new producers, current product availability, and forecasted product needs. Centralize the distribution of key information (new producers, current product availability) and send to all buyers as often as monthly.
- Strengthen technical assistance, training, and education for existing buyers and Approved Suppliers on programmatic challenges such as food safety, capacity, and distribution and systemic challenges such as water scarcity, labor shortages, and staff turnover.
- Increase coordination among Administering Agencies and the NMFMA to streamline program technical assistance and support, facilitate connections and information exchange between buyers and Approved Suppliers, and maximize the distribution and use of funds.
- Maintain NM Grown staffing at all Administering Agencies, expanding if possible, to support additional outreach, technical assistance, interagency coordination, and general support of current and future buyers.

Buyers and Approved Suppliers

- Increase awareness of the NM Grown program and provide outreach and/or technical assistance to food producers and buyers interested in but not currently participating.
- Recruit more buyers and Approved Suppliers statewide to ensure all communities are benefiting equitably.
- Strengthen connections between participating buyers and Approved Suppliers through in-person events, networking, and a map of participants.
- Explore technological solutions to connect buyers and Approved Suppliers through platforms and apps such as NMSU's Path to Plate app.
- Encourage regular buyer spending throughout the fiscal year.
- Forecast buyer requests (product type and volume) and consider guaranteed funding for Approved Suppliers for agreed upon sales with ample time to grow desired products.

Data and Evaluation

- Consider a follow-up evaluation, led by members of Indigenous communities, of Tribal buyers and Approved Suppliers' experiences and challenges participating in NM Grown.
- Ensure purchases are accurately entered into the Local Food Data Portal quarterly.
- Conduct an annual survey of participating buyers and Approved Suppliers. Consider direct outreach to Approved Suppliers and buyers that discontinue participation or do not spend funds to identify and problem-solve challenges.
- Identify other key metrics and data sources to evaluate NM Grown impacts regularly. These metrics may include local food producers' revenue, expansion, and markets; buyers' spending (total and percentage of total food spending), meals served, and recipients reached; recipients' access to healthy foods, food and nutrition security, diet quality, and wellbeing; and direct and indirect economic impacts.

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VII. Appendices

Appendix A: Evaluation Questions Defined in the Request for Applications

Community-level:

- Is NM Grown serving the needs of those it is intended to directly benefit (i.e., local food producers and food insecure populations)?
- What impacts is the program having on broader community well-being — namely in terms of local economies, equity, food access, and the environment?
- What are the program experiences of harder-to-reach communities in New Mexico, such as Tribal and rural communities?

Buyer-focused:

- Do buyers have the funding, knowledge, resources and tools to be successful in the program?
- How are buyers incorporating Values-Based Procurement practices and equity approaches in NM Grown?
- What are some of the important pros and cons, as well as best practices, of the different purchasing models and procurement practices used by each Administering Agency?
- How can the Local Food Data Portal best be utilized by each administering agency and overall?

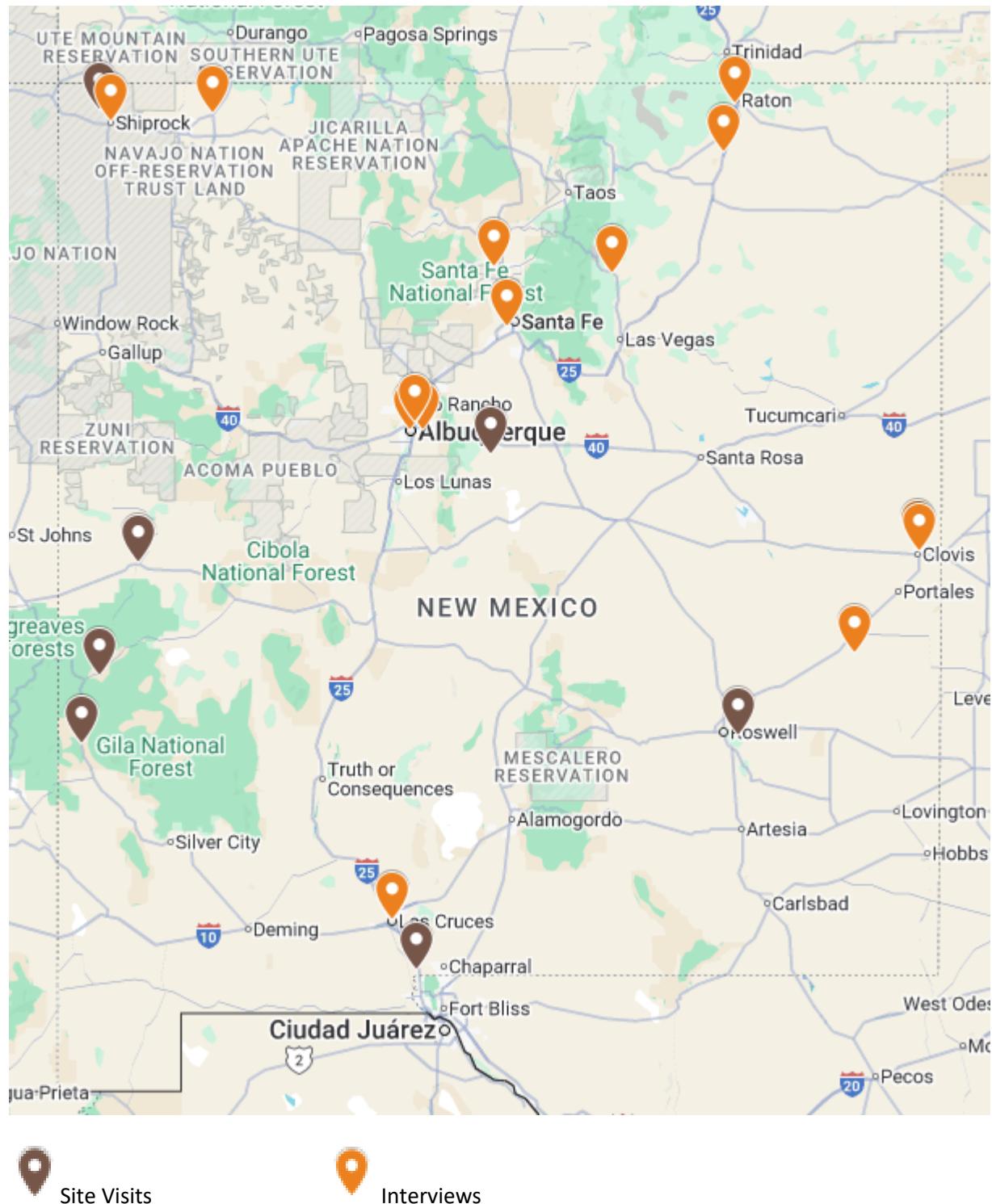
Supplier-focused:

- How effective are NM Grown's producer-focused initiatives – including training, outreach, Technical Assistance, and other support – that are designed to support producers in accessing the ASP and being successful in the program?
- How inclusive and equitable are the producer-focused activities, especially for smaller-scale and socially disadvantaged producers?
- To what degree are Approved Suppliers able to sell to NM Grown buyers once they are in the ASP, and is NM Grown helping to open up other sales opportunities for Approved Suppliers?
- What are the strengths and challenges of the roles food hubs, distributors, processors, and other aggregators are playing in the program?

Crosscutting:

- Are program activities: culturally relevant, inclusive, and advancing equity?
- Is the program adequately resourced in terms of: funding for NM Grown purchasing; program management and administration; and, program data, evaluation, and learning?
- Is the program Theory of Change valid, and do stakeholders envision other elements that should be considered for the Theory of Change in the future?
- What can the program do moving forward to reach its full potential?

Appendix B: Map of Buyer and Supplier Interview and Site Visit Participants



 Site Visits

 Interviews

Appendix C: Evaluation Survey Results by Approved Supplier and Buyer Type

Approved Supplier Results by Type

Table AC1. Supplier survey participants' satisfaction (%) with NM Grown by type (n = 54-58 ^a)

	Farm (n=41)	Meat (n=17)	Hub or Distributor (n=8)
Knowledge of expectations and requirements for participating as an Approved Supplier	90	82	88
Buyer satisfaction with products*	70	94	88
Knowledge of NM Grown program goals and mission*	68	82	75
Application process to become an Approved Supplier	71	71	63
Overall relationship with buyers	71	76	63
Overall experience participating in NM Grown	71	76	75
Pricing of products	63	65	50
Support and assistance provided by the NMFMA and/or NMDA*	62	59	38
Ability to find interested buyers	54	65	63
Approved Supplier Program recruitment and marketing materials*	54	65	50
Ease of doing business with buyers (including: communications, invoicing, distribution requirements, payment terms)*	49	71	50
Ability to transport products to buyers*	51	65	63
Amount of product typically sold	54	53	50
Availability of buyers*	41	59	38

^a Some questions were optional (noted with *) and responses to these questions ranged from 54-58

Table AC2. Supplier survey participants' agreement (%) to NM Grown impacts by type (n = 56)

	Farm (n=39)	Meat (n=17)	Hub or Distributor (n=8)
NM Grown has allowed us to access new markets.	74	71	88
NM Grown activities are culturally relevant, inclusive, and equitable.	69	71	75
NM Grown has increased overall revenue.	64	71	88
NM Grown is meeting our needs.	64	59	63
NM Grown has allowed us to produce more.	54	65	63
NM Grown has allowed us to make new investments in our operation.	51	59	63
NM Grown has allowed us to increase the number of producers we source local food from*	33	33	50
NM Grown has allowed us to access new funding resources (like grant programs or financing).	36	41	50

*Answered by food hubs and distributors only

Table AC3. Supplier survey participants' motivations (%) for participating in NM Grown by type (n = 56)

	Farm (n=39)	Meat (n=17)	Hub or Distributor (n=8)
Connecting with my community	82	100	100

Increasing sales	87	76	88
Building new relationships with local food buyers	79	88	100
Improving recipients' interest in agriculture/local food procurement	74	82	88
Improving recipients' health	72	82	75
Diversifying markets	69	59	88
Continuing relationships we already have with local food buyers	62	71	75
Environmental benefits	59	65	75
Social benefits	51	35	63

Buyer Results by Type

Table AC4. Buyer survey participants' satisfaction (%) with NM Grown by type (n = 84-88 ^a)

	K-12 (n=32)	PreK (n=22)	Senior (n=33)	Food bank (n=1)
Knowledge of NM Grown program goals and mission*	84	91	94	100
Overall experience participating in NM Grown	84	82	91	100
Ability to access NM Grown funding through your Administrative Agency (i.e., ALTSD, ECECD, OIEA, PED, TFD)	72	82	100	100
Quality of products purchased	81	82	91	100
Overall relationship with Approved Suppliers	81	82	91	100
Knowledge of expectations and requirements for participating	72	77	94	100
Packaging of products from the supplier*	66	82	97	100
Food safety and source transparency*	78	68	91	0
Ease of doing business with Approved Suppliers*	75	64	85	100
Support and assistance provided for any questions or problems*	58	70	94	0
Suppliers' ability to deliver products*	65	73	73	100
Availability of supply of preferred meat products in needed volumes	47	54	88	100
Availability of supply of requested Produce+ products in needed volumes	38	36	64	100
Pricing of products	31	50	52	100
Delivery and distribution costs*	31	59	48	0

^a Some questions were optional (noted with *) and responses to these questions ranged from 84-88

Table AC5. Buyer survey participants' agreement (%) with NM Grown impacts by type (n = 88)

	K-12 (n=32)	PreK (n=22)	Senior (n=33)	Food bank (n=1)
NM Grown foods are accepted by the populations we serve.	78	91	97	100
Recipients are satisfied with NM Grown products.	78	86	97	0
NM Grown provides Approved Suppliers with an important economic opportunity.	78	86	91	100
Participating in NM Grown allows us to incorporate equity approaches (e.g., prioritizing purchases from smaller-scale, rural, Tribal, or socially disadvantaged producers).	72	86	94	100
NM Grown improves recipients' diet/meal quality.	66	86	100	100
NM Grown foods are culturally relevant.	69	82	94	100
We need NM Grown funding to purchase local food products.	66	77	97	100

NM Grown is meeting my organization's needs.	59	86	94	100
We need NM Grown to access local food products.	63	77	91	0
Participating in NM Grown allows us to incorporate values-based procurement practices.	56	82	88	100
NM Grown improves recipients' food security status.	56	50	97	100
NM Grown increases participation in our meal program(s).	44	55	73	0

Table AC6. Buyer survey participants' motivations (%) for participating in NM Grown by type (n = 88)

	K-12 (n=32)	PreK (n=22)	Senior (n=33)	Food bank (n=1)
Supporting the local economy	91	91	88	100
Expanding local food offerings	78	73	82	100
Improving recipients' health	56	82	82	100
Building new relationships with local food producers/suppliers	69	59	82	100
Offering more culturally-relevant foods	53	68	70	100
Improving recipients' satisfaction with meals/foods offered	53	50	82	100
Improving participation in our meal program(s)	72	36	73	0
Continuing relationships we already have with local food producers/suppliers	69	50	61	0
Saving money on food costs	34	68	67	0
Environmental benefits	31	55	64	100

Table AC7. Resources buyer survey participants need more of to successfully participate in NM Grown by type (%)

	K-12 (n=32)	PreK (n=22)	Senior (n=33)	Food bank (n=1)
Funding	88	41	70	100
Resources (e.g., staff, time)	38	32	24	100
Food storage	22	55	21	0
Access to Approved Suppliers	28	27	27	0
Equipment to process and prepare food purchased	19	32	18	0
Ability to receive distribution	19	9	6	0
Knowledge of how to use food purchased	9	9	12	0
Knowledge of how to participate and access NM Grown funds	9	5	9	0
Administrative support	6	14	3	100
Interest from population(s) served	6	0	15	0
Leadership support	3	5	0	100