

Senator Campos Sponsors School Nutrition Day and a Bill to Improve New Mexico Children's Health and the Farming Economy

The NM Grown Fresh Fruits and Vegetables for School Lunches
Now Before the New Mexico Legislature

SANTA FE, NM (January 29, 2010) – “In these challenging economic times when a quarter of New Mexico’s children are considered food insecure, it is even more important that we meet their nutritional needs through a healthy school lunch that includes fresh fruits and vegetables. Investing in our school meal program to purchase New Mexico grown fresh fruits and vegetables is a win – win for children and their health as well as New Mexico’s farming families”, exclaimed Senator Pete Campos. Legislation sponsored by Senator Pete Campos would provide \$1.44 million for schools statewide to purchase New Mexico grown fresh fruits and vegetables weekly for more than 221,000 school children participating in school lunch programs.

The New Mexico Food and Agriculture Policy Council and the School Nutrition Association announced that over thirty organizations from across the state support Senator Campos’ request.

“New Mexico’s children deserve the healthiest food possible”, said Maryann McCann, Taos School Food Service Director. “Poor nutrition and unhealthy eating habits are contributing to the poor health of our state’s children. School nutrition programs are the ideal place to promote healthier eating habits in our schools for all New Mexican children”, added McCann.

More than 221,000 school children participate in school lunch programs across the state. Approximately 67 percent of New Mexico’s school lunch participants come from low-income households. For many, this is the main meal of the day. Currently, most schools in New Mexico spend about 25 cents a serving to put either a fresh or canned fruit on each lunch tray they serve. “Schools have about \$1 per meal for food including milk,” stated Corrine Lovato, School Food Service Director of the Pecos School District. “It’s difficult to pay for fresh fruit and vegetable options when you only have a dollar. Rural school districts have less buying power so it costs more to add fresh produce on the plate; often fresh produce becomes cost prohibitive.” Pam Roy, coordinator of the New Mexico Food and Agriculture Policy Council said, “Increased funding from the state would enable schools to purchase New Mexico-grown fruits and vegetables to serve our children and provide additional markets and economic opportunities for New Mexico’s farming families. I believe this statewide initiative addresses early intervention of

healthy eating habits for New Mexico's children, benefits rural and urban schools, and provides economic stimulus to our farming economy.”

In 2007, the state legislature appropriated \$85,000 to the Valley Cluster schools in Albuquerque. Through this program close to 6,000 students are receiving two additional servings of fresh fruits and vegetables weekly. Currently, eight school districts-- Taos, Santa Fe, Las Cruces, Los Lunas, Portales, Belen, Farmington, and Albuquerque-- are serving more than 165,000 school children with New Mexico grown fresh fruits and vegetables when available

The program was initiated nine years ago when the Santa Fe Public school district partnered with the Department of Agriculture and several non-profit organizations to introduce local fruits and vegetables to school meals. The Department of Agriculture in partnership with the Human Services Department Nutrition Bureau, the Public Education Department and organizations like Farm to Table, are working together to provide regionally grown fresh produce, expand nutritious school meal programs, and coordinate distribution.

In a 2007 statewide study conducted by New Mexico's Farm to Table and the Department of Agriculture, more than two-thirds of New Mexico's school districts said they are interested in purchasing fruits and vegetables from New Mexico farmers. More than 100 of the state's farming families said they would be interested in selling to schools.

“Fresh sweet watermelons, crisp apples, carrots and salad greens are among the favorites of school children,” said Le Adams, Deputy Director of Farm to Table. She added, “Our producers can store apples into the winter months and some farmers are using ‘season extension’ techniques to be able to provide greens throughout the school year.”

In coordination with the Food Nutrition Program run by the Human Service Department, the produce would be distributed to schools statewide on a regular basis. “If funded, school kids, farmers and communities across the state will all win,” said Adams.

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