



**Request for Proposals (RFP)
New Mexico Grown FY23 - FY26 Program Evaluation**

<i>New Mexico Grown FY23-FY26 Program Evaluation</i>	
Start and end-date of the evaluation	March 1, 2025 – August 31, 2026 (18 months)
Application deadline	Apply on or before December 18, 2024
Application requirements	1) Proposal narrative of no more than 4 pages that summarizes the evaluation plan and provides key qualifications of the evaluator(s) and 2 references for past work 2) Proposed budget including all planned costs for carrying out the evaluation
Proposals and any questions, send to	bryan@farmersmarketsnm.org
Applicant required experience	Mixed-method evaluations; Local food procurement or food systems research and/or evaluation in New Mexico; Use of equity approaches in evaluation
Evaluation Budget Range	\$75,000 - \$100,000

I. Background

Introduction

This proposed mixed-methods evaluation will assess the effectiveness of the New Mexico Grown Program (NM Grown) over a 4-year period, from Fiscal Year 2023 through Fiscal Year 2026 (July 1, 2022 - June 30, 2026).¹ NM Grown – 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 Grown 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 been expanding in the US and worldwide over the past 15-20 years, and such programs typically enjoy widespread support (including political support across party lines) as they provide healthy and local food to populations in need, boost local economies, and support local agriculture.

¹ The four year period that the evaluation covers assumes a 1-year extension on a current USDA-funded Local Food Purchase Agreement (LFPA) grant. If the extension does not come through, the evaluation will cover three years and the timeframe for conducting the evaluation will have to be shortened accordingly.



NM Grown is an integral part of the Governor'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. Because NM Grown 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 Grown 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.

The program operates using the following high-level Theory of Change:

- *If buyers have consistent and sufficient funding and know-how to purchase healthy, New Mexico-grown food from local producers; and*
- *If local food producers – especially new and beginning, small-scale, and socially disadvantaged² farmers and ranchers – have the supports, knowledge, and capacities needed to sell their products to institutional buyers; and*
- *If adequate support structures, guidelines, and systems for producers and buyers to participate in the New Mexico Grown program are in place; and*
- *If the program appropriately and strategically pilots new food product types before moving them to scale; and*
- *If resources for program management and administration are able to keep pace with program expansion demands...*

→ **THEN** *communities in New Mexico will be healthier and individuals' lives will be improved as local producers have more economic resilience and populations in need gain access to nutritious, local food*

History and Recent Expansion

It was only 10 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

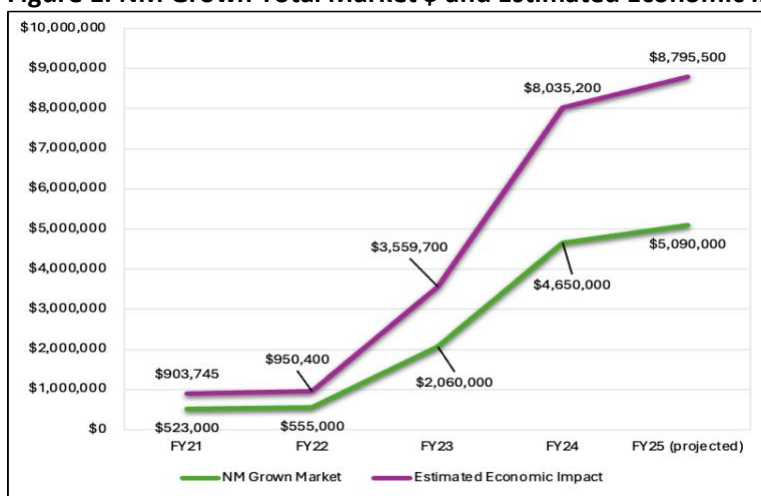
² The USDA defines a "Socially Disadvantaged Farmer" as a farmer who is a member of a Socially Disadvantaged Group. A Socially Disadvantaged Group is a group whose members have been subject to discrimination on the basis of race, color, national origin, age, disability, and, where applicable, sex, marital status, familial status, parental status, religion, sexual orientation, genetic information, political beliefs, reprisal, or because all or a part of an individual's income is derived from any public assistance program.



Legislature during the 2014 session was, in essence, the formal establishment of NM Grown. 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 Grown experienced modest, consistent growth, such that by FY21, \$523,000 was provided for NM Grown purchases. Since FY21, however, NM Grown 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.

Purchases/Sales: Funding for institutional food purchase through NM Grown has gone from \$523,000 in FY21 to a projected \$5.09 million in FY25 (a nearly 10-fold increase in a five year period). Until FY23 funding for these purchases was provided solely through the State. In FY23, federal funding was also secured through a Local Food Purchasing Agreement (LFPA), which is a 3-year cooperative agreement that allows food banks to purchase local food. The LFPA in New Mexico, known as *Regional Farm to Food Bank*, became part of the broader NM Grown Program and is providing \$4.1 million over three years for local food purchases (which is approximately 35% of total NM Grown purchases during this period).³ Figure 1 shows FY21-FY25 growth of the market along with estimated economic impact (using the [Local Food Impact Calculator](#)).

Figure 1. NM Grown Total Market \$ and Estimated Economic Impact, FY21-FY25



³ The LFPA will likely be extended for a fourth year through FY26, though this is not yet confirmed. Estimated funding for local food purchasing across all NM Grown buyers in FY26 is also not yet known.



Buyers: From FY21 to FY25, the number of buyers who participate in the program has also expanded. In FY21, there were 70 school and senior center buyers in two Administering Agencies – the Public Education Department (PED), through which schools have been purchasing local produce for over a decade now, and the Aging and Long-Term Services Department (ALTSD), through which senior centers began procuring locally in FY20. In FY22 the Early Childhood Education and Care Department (ECECD) came on board, as a small number of pre-schools and early childcare centers piloted local purchasing that year. As of FY23, there were 160 NM Grown buyers participating through the three state agencies; moreover, 156 food banks and food pantries had received NM Grown food purchased by The Food Depot, which manages NM Grown on behalf of all food banks and pantries in New Mexico. As of FY25, the number of buyers will likely be around 180. Depending on the agency the buyer falls under as well as the buyer’s NM Grown budget, procurement policies and purchasing models can differ a lot (in terms of volumes, whether or not purchases go to bid, how food is provided, etc.).

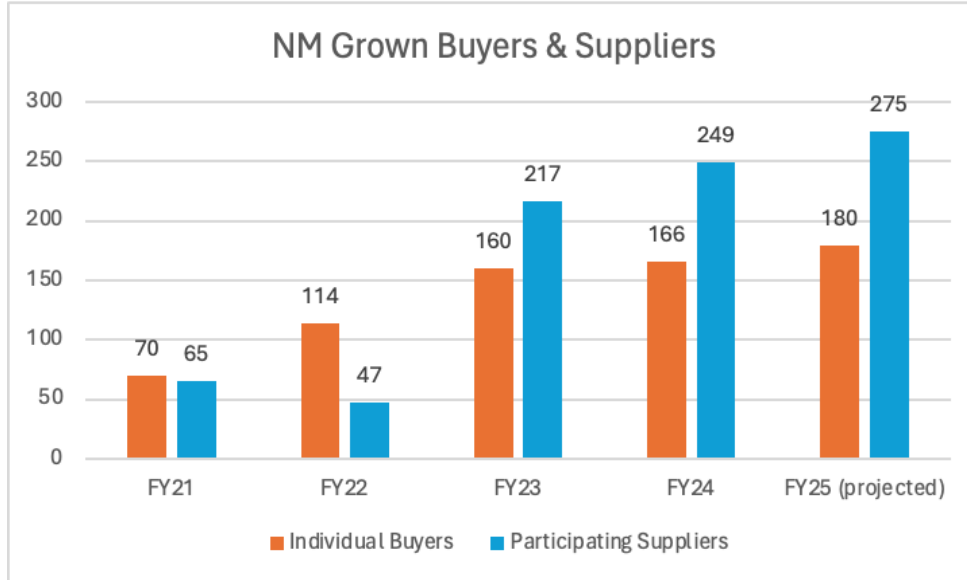
Products: Increased state investment in NM Grown has brought the addition of new types of products that are allowed for purchase. During NM Grown’s first several years, buyers could only purchase fruits and vegetables, nuts, grains, and legumes (a category of products now called **Produce+**). During 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. Meat products are now a fully integrated part of the program. In addition, eggs are being piloted during FY24 and FY25 for food bank purchase only, and a pilot for purchasing value-added products is anticipated for FY25. Based on pilot results, egg and/or value-added product purchasing may be expanded in the future.

Participating Suppliers (Producers & Food Hubs): Each of these program expansions have opened significant new market opportunities for food producers and hubs across the state, which has corresponded with annual increases in the number of participating suppliers as shown in Figure 2 below.⁴ In recent years, new individual applicants to the Approved Supplier Program have self-identified more often as socially disadvantaged and have been more likely to have smaller farm sizes and fewer farm workers than returning applicants, showing that greater numbers of smaller-scale and socially disadvantaged producers are accessing the program. In addition, food hubs across the state are playing an increasingly important role in NM Grown. The hubs have progressively increased NM Grown sales as well as their distribution reach across the state, and all participating hubs now have or are in the process of obtaining HGAP+ food safety certification. Importantly, the hubs continue to increase the numbers of small-scale producers they source from and the various services they provide to those producers.

⁴ Prior to FY23, the NMFMA did not track the number of producers that sell to food hubs that then sell to NM Grown buyers. The NMFMA began tracking that information in FY23, which is one of the reasons the number of suppliers increased so dramatically from FY22 to FY23.



Figure 2. Number of NM Grown Individual Buyers & Suppliers, FY21-FY25



*Note that in FY23, FY24, and FY25, the # of individual buyers for food banks is only The Food Depot, which handles all NM Grown purchases on behalf of all food banks and pantries in the state. More than 150 food banks and food pantries have received NM Grown food purchased by The Food Depot.

The table below shows a snapshot of some of the key program information since FY21.

Table 1: NM Grown Snapshot, FY21 – FY25

	FY21	FY22	FY23	FY24	FY25
Total market \$	\$523,000	\$555,000	\$2.06 million	\$4.65 million	\$5.09 million
Food categories	•Produce+	•Produce+	•Produce+ •Meat	• Produce+ • Meat • Eggs*	• Produce+ • Meat • Eggs* •Value-add**
Participating Institutions	•PED •ALTSD	•PED •ALTSD •ECECD	•PED •ALTSD •ECECD • TFD**	• PED • ALTSD • ECECD • TFD***	• PED • ALTSD • ECECD • TFD***
# of Individual Buyers	70	114	160	166	180 (projected)
# Suppliers****	65	47	217	249	275 (projected)

*During FY24 and FY25, eggs are only allowed for purchase by The Food Depot as part of a pilot initiative.

**Value-add as a food product category is set to be added as a pilot during the latter part of FY25.



Finally, it is worth highlighting that the most important aspect of the recent expansion is that it means that more communities and individuals are benefiting from NM Grown – including food producers, children of all ages, elders, and food insecure families. Additional information about NM Grown and the Approved Supplier Program can be found in **Appendix 1** and **Appendix 2**.

II. Scope

The goal of this evaluation is to assess the effectiveness of the New Mexico Grown program from FY23 through FY26 (July 1, 2022 - June 30, 2026) 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 will be used to understand the extent to which the NM Grown program has achieved its goals and objectives during the four year period, as well as to gain insights about key program strengths and weaknesses, and potential ways to improve NM Grown in the future.

The overall framing of the evaluation should consider how the program has fostered connections and strengthened community through local food production, sales/purchases, and consumption. The evaluation will focus on the following areas of inquiry:

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?

The evaluation is expected to be mixed-methods, using both qualitative and quantitative approaches to respond to the key questions above. An illustrative list of **potential** methods that can be incorporated includes but is not limited to: review of secondary source information (*note that the NMFMA will provide key background documentation and available data to the evaluator*); key informant interviews; focus group discussions; stakeholder surveys (such as suppliers, buyers, food service staff, participants, etc.); observation; and storytelling, among others. Participatory methods are encouraged if and where feasible. **Development of the detailed evaluation plan including framework, key questions, methodology, and tools will be a collaborative and iterative process between the Evaluator, the NMFMA, and other key stakeholders. The evaluation plan submitted as part of the Evaluator's proposal will therefore be seen as an initial proposed plan that will be subject to modification and change during the first phase of the project.** Given the length of the evaluation, the evaluator will have a significant amount of time for developing the detailed evaluation framework and plan.



III. Timeline, Deliverables, and Budget

The timeline below provides an outline of key milestones for this evaluation, with the expectation that the evaluation will be an 18 month endeavor from March 1, 2025 - August 31, 2026. Final deliverables for the evaluation will need to include: a detailed evaluation report; a summary report of no more than 5 pages; and a set of fact sheets with key findings in infographic form. The budget range for the evaluation is \$75,000 - \$100,000.

Table 2: Evaluation Timeline - Key Milestones

Task	Responsible	When
Develop Scope of Work and Request for Proposals (RFP)	NMFMA	September-October 2024
RFP is made available publicly and remains open for 31 days	NMFMA	November 18, 2024
Proposal responses due	Applicants	By December 18, 2024
Select evaluator	NMFMA	January 2025
Negotiate contract details	NMFMA & Evaluator	February 2025
Contract begins	NMFMA & Evaluator	March 1, 2025
Develop detailed evaluation plan (with framework, methodology, tools, protocols, etc.)	Evaluator, NMFMA, key stakeholders	Spring 2025
IRB process	Evaluator	To be confirmed based on evaluation plan
Data collection	Evaluator	To be confirmed based on evaluation plan
Data review and analysis	Evaluator	To be confirmed based on evaluation plan
Work on deliverables: detailed report, summary report, fact sheets with infographics	Evaluator	Spring-Summer 2026
Contract ends	NMFMA & Evaluator	August 31, 2026



IV. Response

Interested applicants are asked to submit a proposal package that includes the following:

- **Proposal narrative** of no more than 4 pages that summarizes the evaluation plan including proposed methods and provides key qualifications of the proposed evaluator(s) and 2 references for past work.
- **Proposed budget** that includes all planned costs for conducting the evaluation. Please note that Indirect/ Facilities and Administrative (F&A) costs may not exceed 15% of the total budget.

Proposal packages should be submitted on or before December 18, 2024 to Bryan Crawford-Garrett, Monitoring, Evaluation, Research & Learning Lead at the NMFMA: bryan@farmersmarketsnm.org. Any inquiries about the evaluation or proposal package requirements can also be sent to: bryan@farmersmarketsnm.org. Please include “**NM Grown Evaluation**” in the Subject when submitting questions or applications. Qualified applicants will have significant experience in: conducting mixed-methods evaluations; local food procurement or food systems research and/or evaluation in New Mexico; and use of equity approaches and/or frameworks in evaluation. Applications will be reviewed on the basis of cost competitiveness, evaluator qualifications, and strength of proposal.

Applications from consulting groups, universities, individuals, or other entities are encouraged. The NMFMA is committed to hiring practices for staff and contractors that are fair, equitable, and inclusive.

Appendices

Appendix 1: [New Mexico Grown Approved Supplier Program: Sustaining Growth for Agriculture Producers & Healthy Communities, Presentation for the Interim Water and Natural Resources Committee, July 23, 2024](#)