

Hunger and Food Equity

Health Equity Council

Executive statement

Bernalillo County ranks among the top ten counties in New Mexico with the highest rates of hunger. Fifteen percent (15%) of the population, or approximately 100,000 neighbors experience food insecurity on a daily basis. In a seeming paradox, only 7% of arable land in Bernalillo County is being used for agriculture. Additionally, over 95% of the food New Mexicans consume comes from out of state, and nearly all food produced in New Mexico leaves the state. New Mexicans have a deep history in agriculture and millions of acres of potentially arable land to grow our healthy and nutritious food. To address food insecurity and an aging generation of farmers, it is imperative the city and county support the cultivation of arable lands including vacant lots and provide education, training, and opportunities to support young farmers in Ag careers in small-scale, regenerative, and pesticide-free farming.

Background

According to NM-IBIS, “Food insecurity refers to USDA’s measure of lack of access, at times, to enough food for an active, healthy life for all household members and limited or uncertain availability of nutritionally adequate foods” (NM-IBIS). Food insecurity is a paramount issue of health equity in Bernalillo County, NM. Malnutrition impairs brain functioning, ability to handle stress, and can result in long term health issues of heart disease, anemia, and psychosocial effects such as apathy, depression, anxiety and self-neglect (Saunders, Smith). Low-income and unhoused children and seniors can experience even greater health effects from lack of access to healthy nutritious foods.

Recommendations

Recommendation 1: Utilize existing resources and strengths and support local network, to greatly reduce the number of people that experience food insecurity and hunger on a daily basis. Increase arable land in Bernalillo County by investing financially in nonprofits and community groups to convert an additional 7,000 acres to sites of local food production through continued soil testing and soil remediation. ABCWUA must also work with the city and county to not only provide classes in water-wise irrigation, but to offer rate reductions as incentives to community gardens.

Recommendation 2: A Youth Urban Ag Corps can support and guide the much needed move to a more localized economy. Young farmer job training programs and neighborhood farm-stand markets support our economy and the ability for our community to pay for adequate housing, and healthy food. Youth Urban Ag Corps, addresses an aging farming population, provides opportunity for engagement and stewardship, and makes locally grown produce affordable and accessible for all people.

Recommendation 3: Growing and sharing food together builds better, safer, and more compassionate communities. Continue to support Farmers Markets, locally grown food distributions, and informal food sharing networks like Front Yard Food Gardens to build better communities block by block through sharing food and conservation.

Recommendation 4: Plant flowers and trees to ensure food, clean air, shade, and a place to play for generations to come. Pollinator gardens provide numerous benefits for the safety and wellbeing of Burqueños, ensuring carbon sequestration, healthy ecologies and beautiful habitat essential for the health and well-being of the next 7 generations.