

Hello to our partners and friends across the state! Fall flew by as we promoted walking to school events, celebrated Golden Chile awards, conducted BMI surveillance, and spread awareness about the importance of NM Grown to our communities. Thank you for all your hard work!

We were excited to see so many Healthy Kids Healthy Communities (HKHC) coordinators and their community partners at the first in-person Golden Chile Awards celebration, held in conjunction with the NM Food & Farms Day Awards this past October. Farm to Table NM, the NM Food & Agriculture Policy Council and the NM Grown Coalition collaborated on the statewide recognition event this year.



Assistant Cook Anna Diaz (far left) and Food Service Director Beth Fair (far right) accept the Golden Chile Award on behalf of Elida Municipal Schools, posing with (L to R) Pam Roy - Farm to Table, Alena Paisano - NM Farmers' Marketing Association and Rita Condon - NMDOH ONAPA Program.

About 180 people attended with awards presented for almost every community in the HKHC program. Congratulations to the 66 Golden Chile awardees and 5 Food & Farms Day honorees for their outstanding efforts in supporting farming, conservation, farmers' markets and sustainable food systems!

And a special thank you to HKHC coordinators for traveling to Albuquerque with your partners so we could honor recipients in person and for the work you do supporting the NM Grown program.

News & Events

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Congratulations to Gabriel Gaarden, who has recently accepted a new position as the statewide Healthy Eating and Physical Activity Coordinator for the Obesity, Nutrition & Physical Activity Program! Stay tuned for more information about this new role for ONAPA.

In other staffing news, we are excited to welcome Nicolette Perez as a new health educator for HKHC! She starts March 3.

On Your Calendar

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We look forward to hearing about your plans for recognizing **National Nutrition Month** at our upcoming coordinator meeting at 2:30 p.m. on Feb. 12. Future meetings will be held April 9 and June 11.

Kudos!

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Bravo to Caron Powers, HKHC Coordinator in Roosevelt County, for presenting 35 letters supporting NM Grown to legislators at a Chamber of Commerce Meet & Greet in Portales! Thank you for increasing awareness of NM Grown!

Upcoming Stories

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- Ramel Family Farms in Raton
 - Healthy Kids Healthy Preschool Challenge
 - Kids Kitchen trainings



Healthy Preschools

Increasing opportunities for healthy eating & physical activity in preschool settings



Kits Help Preschools Launch Gardening Programs

Staff at Little Footprints had wanted to start gardening with their young students but didn't have any tools to get started – until they received a garden kit from the Department of Health's Healthy Kids Healthy Preschool (HKHP) Program. The kit comes with everything needed to create a garden, except soil.

With seeds, trowels, watering cans, various sized grow bags, gloves, crop markers, and sunscreen, kids planted a dozen different heirloom seeds, and teachers incorporated gardening into their lessons. Aracely Pinela, Little Footprints' program administrator in Hatch, said the kids and teachers were excited to see green beans grow in the cloth bags.



Little Footprints staff pose in front of their garden kit. The HKHP Program distributed 36 garden kits so far this year as an incentive to early childhood centers interested in participating in the Farm to Preschool program.

“We grew tomatoes, pumpkins, sunflowers, green chile and lettuce,” she said. “What I really want is to get the community to help us prepare our raised beds and plant with their kids so they are learning healthy habits and how you can grow your own food. I think having a garden is a great way to become healthier. I'd like to do another healthy activity with our community, like walking to school.”

The HKHP Program, led by Alberto Zavala in the south and Michelle Chavez in the north, provided Little Footprints with the kit to encourage the program to participate in Farm to Preschool. Araceli heard about the kits when she attended New Mexico's annual Child and Adult Care Food Program (CACFP) conference, where the HKHP Program gives a presentation about all aspects of its programming.

“We go to the four regional trainings and annual conference every year and talk about implementing a wellness policy, our healthy challenges, Farm to Preschool, and how centers can join the NM Grown Coalition,” said Alberto.

On average, HKHP recruits about 55 to 60 early childhood education programs each year. Ultimately, the program wants preschools statewide to implement all the strategies that will give preschoolers more opportunities to eat fruits and vegetables and be physically active.

This is the second year the HKHP Program gave garden kits to encourage participation in Farm to

Once we get the garden going, I'd like to make baskets for people in need in our community.

– Aracely Pinela, program administrator at Little Footprints in Hatch

Preschool, which incorporates gardening and healthy eating into center curriculum. “We're educating and exposing them to gardening and removing barriers that get in the way. Then based on their experience, they can continue to improve their garden programming over time,” said Alberto.

So far, 80 percent of preschools increased their garden activities after receiving a kit, Alberto explained. In Hatch, Little Footprints staff applied for a grant for raised bed gardening and is ready to earn a more advanced award in the Golden Chile Awards Program in 2025 after earning a Sprout Award last year for getting started.



Coordinator Corner



Farmers' Markets with JoAnn Velasquez

Healthy Kids Guadalupe County Coordinator JoAnn Velasquez established a farmers' market in Santa Rosa about 14 years ago, and today the market operates without her involvement. Here, she offers advice on setting up a sustainable market.



Santa Rosa Farmers' Market

Essential Partners

Growers

NM Farmers' Marketing Association

Local NMSU Extension Ag Agent (recruitment)

Local Public Health Office (promotion & support)

Senior Centers (connect seniors)

JoAnn's community relationships made it easy for her to determine the need for fresh produce in her rural county, and those relationships helped guide her decisions about when and where to host a market.

The NM Farmers' Marketing Association (NMFMA) guides you through the logistics of setting up your market and applying to accept food assistance program benefits. Your NMSU county extension agent can help connect you with growers. Make use of your marketing budget from NMFMA to put up posters promoting the market in community hubs like your senior center. In addition, tell everyone you can about it!

When your market is stable, find someone who is willing to oversee the market and has a purpose for doing it, ideally a grower or retired grower who understands vendors' needs.

Beginning Tips

- Make sure you have community support and understand the needs of the growers and residents.
- Attend the [NM Farmers' Marketing Association](#) annual conference if possible and connect with staff who can help you set up your market. NMFMA offers training opportunities throughout the year. questions@farmersmarketsnm.org
- For ease, you can adopt NMFMA's rules as your by-laws. These establish such policies as your percentage of growers, market timing and location, liability insurance, and volunteer workforce.
- [Santa Rosa's bylaws](#) are in the Coordinator Corner's folder on the HKHC Google Drive.
- **A membership with NMFMA is essential** to provide you with affordable liability insurance (required), a minimum \$300 annual marketing budget, and other resources that help you launch your market. The cost is based on the number of growers (3-19 total vendors is \$25 annually).
- **Location is key!** Pick a location that has easy access and is in an area of town people frequent. JoAnn had great success locating the market on city/county property because it was centrally located, and employees shopped during their lunch breaks.
- **Be consistent.** Pick a market day that works best for growers and don't change it.



Healthy Eating in Schools



Strategies that increase access to healthy, local foods in NM schools

Grant County School Creates Food Forest

Visionary teachers at Harrison Schmitt Elementary are working with Healthy Kids Grant County, students and partners to transform portions of their 10-acre campus into a food forest. The concept is similar to nibbling on food growing in grandma's garden, just on a larger scale. Students can walk between apple, mulberry, pomegranate, and peach trees, sampling grapes, goji berries, and Egyptian walking onions (the bulb falls off and replants itself!) along the way.

"This is something that keeps giving to you for decades and doesn't require constant input," said Trish Doherty, art teacher and garden co-leader with Special Education teacher Kim Staffeldt. "The kids were so excited to try wolf berries and find wild tomatoes, and it was exciting to have that connection to the land and to know where your food is coming from. It's healthier without chemicals and pesticides. It feels like this is the way things should be for our kids."

The teachers work in the garden with a rotating crew of fourth to sixth graders and financial support from a Bootheel Foundation grant. They've hosted workshops from community partners who taught students about permaculture and how to make A-line levels to find level ground. They spread mulch and dug swales to capture and distribute water. When the ground proved impenetrable, the school district stepped in with heavy equipment support.



The agricultural-focused school has joined the enthusiasm, contributing bunny manure from one classroom's pet and kitchen scraps for compost. "We're teaching them how it's all connected," Trish said.

Kim is retiring in two years and already planning to return to ensure their vision is complete with cafeteria food harvested from the forest, a raised bed garden, and greenhouses, in addition to outdoor classrooms and an outdoor kitchen.

"Without our strong teacher champions, none of it could happen,"

said HKHC Grant County Coordinator Cassandra Hartley. "That's the cornerstone of all the Healthy Kids work – a staff or teacher champion on the inside and support from the outside, like the coordinator. I'm really appreciative of the wonderful teachers we have who are so focused on health and nutrition for our students."

Thank You, Community Partners!

Ace Hardware in Silver City

Healthy Kids Grant County

The New Earth Project

Silver Consolidated School District

Western Bank's Bootheel Foundation

Community Partners Make the Difference

Students in Stout Elementary's Garden Club are excited to see vegetables like broccoli, lettuces, potatoes, carrots and onions growing in their garden since Healthy Kids Grant County helped replace the garden's drip irrigation system. Ronald Hartley, owner of Enchanted Touch in Silver City, donated an irrigation kit and then installed the system with the students. Thanks, Ronald, for saving Stout's garden!



Physical Activity in Schools



Increasing opportunities for students to be physically active

HKHC Communities Celebrate Walk & Roll Day in October



Across NM, volunteers, teachers, parents, school staff and HKHC coordinators recognized the annual day dedicated to boost awareness of the benefits of walking to school.



Raton Intermediate School walks to school in Healthy Kids Colfax County.

In Healthy Kids Roosevelt County, 370 kids walked laps around their gym or playground. Every year, Coordinator Caron Powers makes a sign for each participating school. A teacher begins the walk at James Elementary in Portales (above).



About 365 students walked to school in Healthy Kids San Juan County. A City Council member and the Kirtland H.S. football team joined the kids, along with parents, volunteers and staff.

Benefits of Walking to School

- Inspires families to use their feet to commute
- Builds a sense of community
- Encourages policy/environmental changes that support safe walking and biking



A community partner, Xcel Energy staff in Roswell (pictured in the back), greets kids in the morning with snacks, and then accompanies them to Nancy Lopez Elementary School. In Healthy Kids Chaves County, 1,374 students walked, rolled and scooted their way to 10 schools, escorted by 279 family members and other adults.



BMI Surveillance

Collecting data and measuring trends



Every fall, a team of Healthy Kids coordinators, ONAPA staff, and trained volunteers follow a standard protocol to measure the height and weight of kindergarten and 3rd grade students in NM. This year, they visited 69 schools and measured more than 5,500 children.

We collect these data every year to monitor childhood obesity over time, identify at-risk populations, and guide prevention efforts and resource allocations. We expect to release the latest childhood obesity report for NM in March, National Nutrition Month.

Our BMI Surveillance program is successful because of our wonderful volunteers, including CNM Rio Rancho Nursing Program students (right), student nurses at Doña Ana Community College (bottom right), and Clovis High School's Health Occupations Students of America (HOSA) program (below). We thank them, as well as our other volunteers:

- Zuni Youth Enrichment Project staff in Zuni Pueblo
- Deming High School's HOSA program
- San Juan Community College
- Santa Fe Community College
- DOH staff in Roswell
- UNM Gallup



In other fall activities...

Tamara Schubert and Amie Steen from the NMSU Cooperative Extension Office and Joanne Palamino from the Department of Health in Roswell join Healthy Kids Chaves County coordinators, Becky Joyce and Paula Camp, for a Healthy Kids 5.2.1.O presentation in Roswell (left).