

Urban Agriculture and Central Market

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Introduction

Food is simple and universal. It is proven to revitalize communities without gentrification. Currently, the State of New Mexico imports several billion dollars worth of food every year. A large percentage of this food ends up in Albuquerque and Central New Mexico. An urban agricultural program and central market is needed in Albuquerque to help establish and promote a direct-to-urban market initiative that will help strengthen the New Mexican agricultural infrastructure and reduce losses from food imports. New Mexico's food security and future sustainability are of great importance.

Urban Agriculture

Agriculture has a historical tie to the State Fair and can have a symbiotic relationship to livestock and equestrian activities at the State Fairgrounds. New Mexico's agriculture has always been a part of the state's cultural identity. An urban agricultural program can be used to help expand the state's agricultural infrastructure and promote sustainable agricultural practices.

An organic urban farm at the State Fairgrounds can be used as a small farm innovation center that provides education for small farmers throughout the New Mexico. It can serve as a research facility and functioning demonstration to the year round production that is essential to the central market concept. With the existing ties with 4H and other agricultural programs, the State Fairgrounds is the perfect location for this type of program to have a statewide reach. It can also provide agritourism income and employment opportunities for the immediate communities.

A portion of the program should be dedicated to a community garden. People from the surrounding communities can have convenient access to grow their own food. This type of program can help expose Albuquerque's youth to agriculture and help them understand where food comes from and why sustainable agricultural practices are so important. With the increase in nature deficit disorder, many children go through their early life with the misunderstanding that food comes from grocery stores and restaurants.

The operating expenses for such a program would be comparable to Rio Grande Community Farm (RGCF). RGCF is a non-profit farm located at the City of Albuquerque's Los Poblanos Open Space in the north valley. They operate on an annual budget of approximately \$150,000. With direct distribution with an associated central market (later described), income would be generated to cover these operating expenses and a property lease. This type of program should be run by an educational organization

similar to RGCF and will require collaboration with many public and private sectors within New Mexico to provide exceptional resources to help advance New Mexico's sustainable agricultural infrastructure.

The greatest problem and potential opposition to an urban farm at the State Fairgrounds is the lack of access to surface water. The site would be required to operate off a well. However, using a drip irrigation system it could operate close to the current levels of the water usage from the between race spraying at the Down's racetrack. Rio Grande Community Farm is currently installing a state of the art subsurface system for up to 50 acres for \$75,000. They received a \$22,000 grant from the USDA. Additionally, an innovative water harvesting system could be installed on existing buildings to supplement the needed water through catchments and cisterns.

The overall size of this organic farm would be dependent upon costs, funding, and land availability. It could function on a single acre for nearly no cost but to really provide income it would need more acreage. Ideally, 50+ acres would be utilized for year round growing. This type of project takes several years to develop and each year it could grow larger. Growth would be self-sustaining from the income generated through sales at the central market.

The State Fair and large event parking provides issues with usage of acreage on the State Fairgrounds. The infield of the racetrack would be an ideal location for an urban farm but with the parking demands it is in conflict with other uses. The majority of the time this property is not utilized. It contributes to Albuquerque's urban heat islands, water run-off, and provides no return value beyond these large events.

Existing technologies have been proven to provide dual use of such property. A porous pavement system (such as Invisible Structure's Grasspave2) can be used to provide turf and tree growth in parking lots as a "green" alternative for gravel and asphalt surfaces. With such a system, this area could be used to provide multiple uses for this property. A park space can be used by the local communities and utilized for outdoor events. It could even be potentially used for grasses for horse and livestock. During the fair and other large events it could continue to be used as parking space.

Another alternative would be for an underground parking structure to be constructed. This would provide adequate State Fair parking while leaving the top acreage open for other uses. A similar underground structure can be compared with the parking structure at the federal courthouse in Downtown Albuquerque.

Excluding the parking requirements, an organic urban farm can provide more return and value to the community for less cost than any other potential usage of this property. It is simple and should be considered the idea for UN-developing a portion of the State Fairgrounds for the benefit of Albuquerque's communities and New Mexico's sustainability.

Central Market

With a multi-billion dollar food market in New Mexico, a central market is key to the development of a **direct-to-urban market** initiative in New Mexico. Too much of our food is imported from outside of New Mexico and too much money is lost as a result of it. John O'Connell of the City of Albuquerque's Environmental Health Department has outlined this initiative and has pinpointed the need for a central market facility to help stem a substitution to imports and improve New Mexico's food security and overall sustainability.

A central market could be compared to that of the fresh fish markets in Boston or Seattle. It is a facility that provides wholesale and retail distribution in a very short amount of time. It caters to individuals and buyers for restaurants, public and private institutions such as schools, hospitals, and military installations. In New Mexico this would account for grains, produce, meats, and value added products.

A central market would also operate as a wholesale market for commodity farm products such as grains, produce, flowers, seasonal items, meat and poultry. It would serve larger and statewide producers as well as small and medium-sized producers. The complimentary retail opportunities could support processed and preserved specialty products, processed dairy products, locally produced wines, and other value added agricultural products.

This facility has been outlined to provide direct sales to the urban market for small and medium-sized producers via a permanent farmer's market. The Santa Fe Farmer's Market Institute is constructing a farmer's market building in Santa Fe for \$4.6 million. It will operate as a permanent indoor farmer's market. They have capped operating expenses at \$20,000 per year for the next three years.

This type of retail facility would become a "destination" in Albuquerque and would only further enhance Expo New Mexico and the surrounding communities. In a study done by the Santa Fe Farmer's Market Institute they found that for every \$1 spent at the farmer's market an additional \$3 are spent in the surrounding community.

A central market can provide a location for lower income individuals to purchase local, nutritional foods through Food Stamp transactions. The monthly Food Stamp allocation for Albuquerque is \$9 million per month. A central market program with EBT, and WIC could take advantage of these federal funds and provide outreach and education for low-income families in Albuquerque. In New Mexico, 40% of those eligible for Food Stamp never even apply.

An integrated opportunity for the central market is the need for educational facilities to provide commercial kitchens, conference rooms, and exhibition facilities to help with culinary instruction and demonstrations, agricultural programming, and regional cultural

orientation programs. Many of the existing facilities at the Expo New Mexico could be utilized for these purposes.

A central market of this type should provide a year round destination with specialty restaurants and bakeries that provide an added value to foods that are transferred through the market. The food should be a showcase for food products that are grown or made in New Mexico. It should highlight New Mexico's cultural distinctions through the food that can only be found here. It should also provide a healthy alternative for the neighboring communities. In addition, it is an available opportunity for State Fair visitors to experience. It would also provide food options for visitors of other events that typically don't have the type of food vending that is common to the State Fair.

This type of market should be operated by Expo New Mexico and should rely on a Board of Directors to ensure diversity for market vendors. The market can only be as strong as the vendors that attend it. Attention needs to be paid that the market will not increase costs to farmers. Existing buildings and property could be utilized to house this type of market. Ideally, a new building with proper kitchen facilities would be constructed but it could operate for several years within existing structures with some modifications.

Potential impacts of a central market would be food and water waste. A corresponding urban farm can translate much of this waste into compost and livestock food. They could share a symbiotic relationship with cyclical returns in demonstrations of sustainable waste disposal practices to market vendors and the public.

Excluding the impacts of organic waste and water usage, a central market and urban farm can make use of the acreage and facilities at the State Fairgrounds. It can provide a transformation and year round destination for the people of New Mexico, as well as international visitors. For New Mexico there is nothing more important than one of our most basic needs. Food is universal to everyone and can help distinguish and highlight our culture, while helping those in need.