



IMPACT REPORT



NATIONAL
FARM to CAFETERIA
CONFERENCE

NATIONAL FARM TO SCHOOL NETWORK

December 1-4, 2025 | Albuquerque, New Mexico



ABOUT THE CONFERENCE

The National Farm to Cafeteria Conference is the premier event for anyone passionate about bringing local food to institutional settings and driving positive change in the food system. Hosted by the National Farm to School Network, the conference brings together food service professionals, farmers and food producers, educators, entrepreneurs, policymakers, government agencies, nonprofits, and youth leaders to strengthen the farm to institution movement. This conference offers invaluable opportunities to network, learn, and share knowledge among food systems leaders and advocates.

The **10th National Farm to Cafeteria Conference** was held December 1-4, 2025 in Albuquerque, New Mexico at the Albuquerque Convention Center. Over 900 attendees from across all 50 States, Washington, D.C., Guam, the U.S. Virgin Islands, Canada, and seven Native Sovereign Nations and Tribal communities gathered at the event. The three-day program included 40 workshops across 10 topical tracks, six intensive courses, 15 field trips, and a vibrant vendor fair featuring local New Mexico artisans, small business owners, and producers.



Conference Host – National Farm to School Network

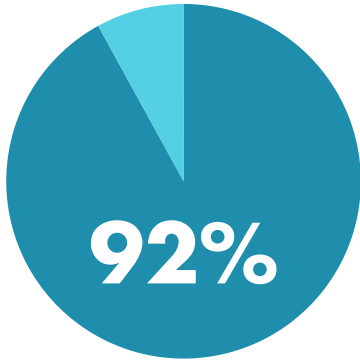
Jessica Gudmundson - Co-Executive Director
Miguel Villarreal - Interim Co-Executive Director
Sunny Baker - Senior Director of Programs & Policy
Passion Rutledge - Finance & Operations Director
Karen Spangler - Policy Director
Jiyoan Chon - Communications Director
Scott Bunn - Development Director
Trisha Bautista Larson - Programs Director
Cassandra Bull - Policy Specialist
Ryan Betz - Policy Specialist
Tomas Delgado - Program Manager
Hawthorn McCracken - Farm to ECE Associate
Karena Poke - Conference Assistant
Mariane Hernandez - Communications Intern

Local Host – New Mexico Grown

Alena Paisano - Approved Supplier Director at NM Farmers' Marketing Association
Aaron Moore - NM Grown Program Coordinator at the Public Education Department
Mitch Gray - Food Security Coordinator at the Aging and Long-Term Service Dept
Anna Martin - Food Security Coordinator at the ECE and Care Dept
Laura Spencer - Section Manager of the Family Nutrition Bureau at the ECE and Care Dept
Alexana Hickmott - Epidemiologist/Evaluator at the New Mexico DOH
Rita Condon - Director of the Obesity, Nutrition and Physical Activity Program at the NM DOH
Gabriel Gaarden - Healthy Eating & Physical Activity Coordinator at the NM DOH
Nicolette Perez - Health Educator at the New Mexico DOH
Maya Martinez - Farmer Innovation Program Director at Farm to Table NM
Edith Martinez - Farmer Innovation Program Administrator & Policy Associate at Farm to Table NM
Pam Roy - Founder and Policy Director at Farm to Table NM

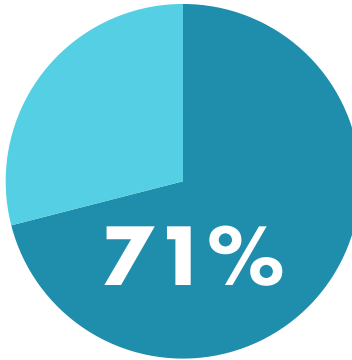
IMPACT HIGHLIGHTS

Overall Conference Experience



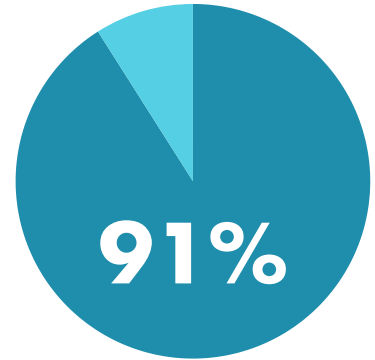
Very satisfied or satisfied

Conference Organization



Extremely or very well organized

Conference Staff Effectiveness



Found staff extremely or very friendly and helpful

Overall Session Ratings

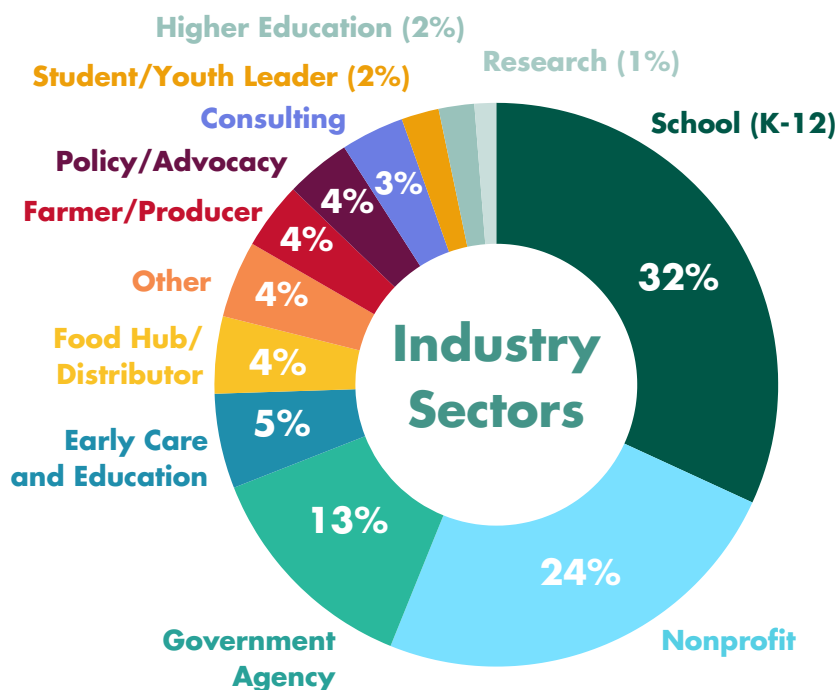


“This was a truly invaluable experience for myself, my organization, and the community we serve! It was incredibly inspiring, necessary, and activating. Thank you for your support!”
— Conference attendee



ATTENDEE SNAPSHOT

983
Attendees



48%

of attendees represented an NFSN Partner Organization

85%

were first-time attendees

84

attendees received a scholarship to attend

“It was great to be back at this conference and connect with so many old and new friends! Your conference truly feels like a movement, and that everyone is values aligned which is special compared to other ag conferences.”

— Conference attendee

“Thank you for supporting grassroots leaders like me. This opportunity renewed my work and will create lasting impact in my community.”

— Conference attendee

ATTENDEE SNAPSHOT

ALL 50 STATES, Washington D.C., Guam, the U.S Virgin Islands, and seven Native communities were represented.

Top 10 States Represented

New Mexico: 192
California: 84
Washington: 39
Texas: 36
Michigan: 34
New York: 33
Wisconsin: 30
Colorado: 26
Arizona: 25
Oregon: 21

36%

of attendees identified as Native persons or persons of color

"I loved the networking! The conference brought a lot of great people together."

— *Conference attendee*

Indigenous Leadership and Representation

The Navajo Nation, Choctaw Nation, Cherokee Nation, Cochiti Pueblo, San Felipe Pueblo, Taos Pueblo, and Zuni Pueblo were represented by attendees and speakers.



PROGRAM OVERVIEW



143

Presenters



32

Posters



40

Workshops



15

Field Trips



6

Short Courses

Keynote Speakers



Ron Finley, gangster gardener from Los Angeles and founder of the Ron Finley Project.

This year, National Farm to School Network featured a community-level leader as a keynote. Ron Finley spoke authentically about his experience revitalizing food deserts in his community while empowering youth.

“ We’re going to change the world. Let’s do it with a shovel.



Mariah Gladstone, Native American chef and founder of Indigikitchen.

As the closing plenary speaker, Mariah Gladstone engaged the audience in Native history, foodways, and food sovereignty through captivating storytelling featuring her community and lived experience.

“ Restoring Indigenous food systems is so necessary. And it starts because so much of it was very intentionally undone.

PROGRAM SNAPSHOTS



AWARD CEREMONY

Golden Chili Awards

As a celebratory kickoff to the conference, the Golden Chili Awards, hosted by the New Mexico Grown Coalition, honored 92 champions of New Mexico's local food system—including schools, senior centers, early childhood programs, farmers, ranchers, food hubs, and more.

WORKSHOP

Lightning Talks

The lightning talk series featured 26 different speakers across two days, who gave five-minute presentations on their area of expertise. Attendees got to learn about a range of topics, from transitioning poultry houses to greenhouses, a pilot harvest of the month ECE project in Nebraska, innovative ways to engage youth, to a local farm to prison initiative in California.



WORKSHOP

Growing Farm to ECE Settings: Learning from Diverse Statewide Approaches

Representatives from Massachusetts, Michigan, Mississippi, and Oregon shared their approaches to translating farm to school to farm to ECE. Attendees then participated in a hands-on activity focused on adapting procurement, education, and garden activities for early care settings.

FIELD TRIP

Environmental STEAM & Sustainability at Polk Middle School

Participants heard directly from Polk Middle School students about their sustainability and garden projects. A tour of the school gardens was paired with insights from the school's garden educator on how project-based learning and culturally relevant curriculum are advancing food education and environmental justice.



INTENSIVE COURSE

Strengthening Your Local Value Chain with Smart Procurement Strategies

Participants learned tactics for building resilient regional food systems, such as redistributing information, risk and power among schools, farmers and aggregators. They also explored menu planning aligned with local seasonality and practical budgeting strategies.

GROUNDING IN NEW MEXICO

Working alongside our local partner, New Mexico Grown, we ensured the conference celebrated New Mexican culture while supporting the local economy.

The New Mexico Vendor Fair connected more than a dozen small business owners, artisans, and producers directly with attendees, creating opportunities to discover and purchase locally made products.

We were honored to host Native American Hoop Dancers, youth performers from Albuquerque's National Institute of Flamenco, and a local guitarist, who shared their talents throughout the conference.

Conference meals showcased New Mexican recipes, such as green chile enchiladas, with ingredients procured from local vendors.



"I really loved how the event was grounded in New Mexico. I appreciate how much I was able to learn about the movement there." – Conference attendee



LAND ACKNOWLEDGMENT

Grounding in Place: Honoring the Land and Nourishing the Future

This session highlighted the stewards of New Mexico lands and food systems who have spent decades working across farming, aggregation, processing, marketing, and policy. The panel featured the NM Grown Coalition and how it emerged from a shared vision of access to nutritious, locally grown foods in meal programs by establishing sustainable institutional markets for local producers.



FEATURED WORKSHOP

Regional and Cultural Approaches to Corn in New Mexico

Attendees learned about different types of native corn and their unique cultural and nutritional value, getting to sample native recipes featuring corn. The session explored the history and process of nixtamal and highlighted success from local school partnerships.

MEDIA BY THE NUMBERS



38,500

page views
on farmtoschool.org/conference

Whova Mobile App

838 unique users

3727 messages sent
between attendees

12,000 impressions
of the agenda

24 attendee-organized
meetups

200,000+ sponsors
impressions

“

I really enjoyed this event, which is why I wanted to take a moment to thank you for making it such an engaging and well-run experience. I came away with valuable insights and also met some great people.

— Conference attendee

Podcasts at the conference

This year, podcasters from four different podcasts joined us to record live with our audience:

- **Farming Ugly Podcast:** *Uchennaya Ogba & Phil Wade Ross*
- **The Farm to School Podcast:** *Michelle Markestyn & Rick Sherman*
- **Food Dignity Podcast:** *Clancy Harrison*
- **Institute of Child Nutrition:** *Patrick Garmong*





**NATIONAL
FARM to CAFETERIA
CONFERENCE**
NATIONAL FARM TO SCHOOL NETWORK

CONFERENCE SUPPORTERS



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Sustainable
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GET INVOLVED

Become a Partner Organization

Our network of Partner Organizations fuels this movement! National Farm to School Network provides Partners with access to exclusive resources, networking opportunities, and in-person meetings. Sign up as a Partner Organization and join the movement for a healthy food future.

www.farmtoschool.org/our-network

Sign Up For Our Newsletter

Receive the inside scoop on the latest webinars, events, policy updates, job and grant opportunities, and more.

www.farmtoschool.org/join

Donate to Support Our Work

Your support helps National Farm to School Network provide vision, leadership, and support at the national and local levels to connect and grow the farm to school and early care movement.

www.farmtoschool.org/donate



Watch the recap!



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Grounding in Place: Honoring the Land and Nourishing the Future; featuring: Alena Paisano, New Mexico Farmers Market Association; Chili Yazzie, Toobah; Cristina Dominguez, La Semilla Food Center; Helga Garcia-Garza, Agri-Cultura Network; Kendal Chavez, Office of Governor



NATIONAL FARM *to* SCHOOL NETWORK

