

Albuquerque Town Hall Meeting
Aug. 31, 2007
Albuquerque Garden Center

Jeff Bader convened the meeting at 10:15 a.m. He introduced staff members of the Bernalillo Co. Extension Office and State Rep. Jimmie Hall. He announced the upcoming Small Farm conference in Moriarity. He introduced Dean Catlett who introduced the associate deans, who made introductory comments.

Joanie Quinn, director of the New Mexico Organic Commission opened comments. She expressed appreciation for NMSU's collaboration, particularly through the Alcalde Science Center and its direct connections to producers. She noted that organic acreage in the state has grown from 50,000 in 2005 to 105,000 today. She said there was a need for educational resources to help producers make the transition to organic production. She specifically requested land on the main campus at NMSU devoted to organic agriculture. Today, too much organic information is from outside the state. She asked for the development of an organic agriculture database, increased professional development opportunities for agents in organic agriculture, and a formal mechanism for producer feedback to NMSU through Web site development. (the associate deans pointed out several initiatives that addressed some of the organic community's needs.)

Gene Lopez, Extension and Research Support Council member for the Alcalde Science Center, expressed concern over the unfilled fruit specialist, noting that he had lobbied for funds for the center to make much of the work there possible. He expressed concern, too, that the fruit specialist was being shifted from a majority-Extension to a majority-research appointment. He said Extension would lose control over the position. He cited the need for an Extension focus and demonstration work. He lauded the work of the previous fruit specialist at the center, Ron Walser, and Rio Arriba agent Tony Valdez. (associate deans apologized for the delay in filling the position and said the outreach culture of the center would live on and involve more faculty from campus.)

Therese Bartz, a master gardener from Corrales, said there was a need for more younger master gardeners, but they could not attend trainings held during work hours. She noted that several states are teaching master gardener courses via the Internet. NMSU should do that and make the course NMSU-wide, rather than attached to a specific county. She said the Internet should be used for hotline purposes, as well. She also expressed concern for the spread of dodder weed in her county. She was surprised to find it was not on the noxious weed list and wondered if that could be corrected. She said there should be more outreach volunteers in all Extension programs.

Bonnie Gonzales, a producer from Corrales, said she would bring up dodder control in the next council meeting. She noted that the Corrales Farmers' Market was a great opportunity for Extension to work with other groups and gain more visibility. She said WIC, master gardeners, and producers could work well with 4-H, nutrition programs and other Extension programs.

Miquela Rivera, a psychologist with 4-H experience, asked that Extension reach the unaware, including low-income families with Extension programs. She said that today's youth expect more entertainment and fun in programming. (Paul Gutierrez noted that Extension needed more capacity to be able to handle more volunteers and Rep. Paul was helping with legislation to increase capacity. He said, too, that experiential learning was the 4-H way and what kids wanted. The Learning Games Lab was brought to her attention. Agent Virginia Alexander also mentioned low-income and farmers' market program on-going and said there was a need to connect with the NM Works program in her county.)

Frances Vasquez, of the New Mexico Department of Health, said she appreciated county Extension programs. She said Extension needed to be involved in a statewide coalition for nutrition in the schools that encourages local produce in schools. Extension nutritionists could review meals for the elderly and teach life skills and parenting to TANF families. She said there is a need for more Kitchen Creation Classes. She said that there is a need to recruit more minorities into Extension positions and a need to teach social skills to young people. She says that Extension programs address a number of the governor's priorities such as obesity. Interest in Pueblo people wanting to grow traditional foods is something that should be supported. She would also like to see Extension help people get red worms for compost. (Roberta Rios pointed out that the state nutrition specialist position was being filled. Melissa Long, southern Pueblo agent, said the Pueblos are being served and the university is supportive. They are working to expand programs.)

Laura Caffey, Extension and Research Support Council member from Bernalillo County, said Extension was understaffed in urban home horticulture, with only one specialist serving the state and one horticulture agent serving Albuquerque. More resources needed to be applied to this arena.

Kathy Dobesh, from Santa Fe, said there was a need to expose more of the population to farming and to recruit people into the self-sufficiency movement. (Dean Catlett said there was movement in that arena.)

Dean Catlett adjourned for informal interaction and lunch at 11:45 a.m.