

**Vision 2040 Agriculture/Ranching Focus Group Meeting
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Participants:

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Question 1: In one sentence, describe the character of Las Cruces and Doña Ana County –e.g. “Our region is...” What makes this area unique?

- A multicultural group of people who enjoy our natural environment in all of its forms – including our mountains, mesas and our livable and productive valley
- An island unto itself – Being quite a distance from Albuquerque and Santa Fe, a unique intersectional cooperation has developed that defy conventional conflicts. Also a decade or two behind other southwestern cities so it has the opportunity to learn from their mistakes and make all new ones
- A history and culture that is attractive both to visitors and to those of us who work and live here
- A collage of farming, education, open spaces, ranching, retirement, space and military bases, tourism and diverse cultures
- History, water, cultural crossroad
- Diverse cultures, great natural beauty and highly productive agricultural lands. As population expands competition between industrial/municipal/agricultural/natural resources users of water has increased. In the last few years it has become clear that planning is needed to accommodate all sectors. With proper building techniques not much is needed in the way of heating and cooling as temperatures are mild in the winter and although hot in the summer, not humid
- Numerous industrial, business and recreational opportunities can be sustained. In particular, farming and attendant support of livestock operations has the potential to be sustained essentially in perpetuity due to a hydrologic system throughout the Mesilla Valley

- The landscape (fertile and arid desert), people (culture and history), location (proximity to Texas and Mexican border), land grant university (institution's size given the population), generally peaceful environment

Question 2: What are the three most important opportunities and or potentials related to agriculture and ranching in the region? What are the three most important challenges the region faces?

Opportunities/Potential

- Changing community population
- University's role in training/educating future generations
- Value added niche marketing of agricultural output (crop mix)
- Sustainable water budget
- Balance urban growth/development while preserving viable agricultural business
- Promote environmental/aesthetic recreation
- Diversity of production (2X)
- Expansion of organic area due to proliferation of alfalfa fields which host 1000+ insects and every time it is cut beneficial insects migrate out to new fields up to ½ mile away
- Potential for small farms to increasingly produce more food for local consumption and sales to institutions such as schools, prisons, military
- Sustainable water resource
- Climate (2X)
- Land values
- General widespread perception of need to preserve agriculture
- High value crops (2X)
- Smaller high production farms
- Small Farm Institute (SFI) – provide a degree program at NMSU in sustainable agriculture that includes education, research and outreach. This will benefit established farms as well as encourage new growers to develop new agriculture operations
- Integrating urban development with mid-scale production agriculture and small scale urban-suburban agriculture to build on our agricultural roots
- Conversion of agriculture land and water to urban use as a means of retirement for aging farmers whose children choose not to farm
- Innovations in local agriculture production for a growing local market
- Further development of agricultural processing – dairy, vegetables, pecans

Challenges

- Water scarcity (5X)
- Unplanned growth (2X)
- Food security
- Institutional legal complications (competitiveness for control/ lack of coordination)
- Growing too fast – sprawl
- Inadequate infrastructure including social, political and institutional
- Research and training programs are needed to include farming incubators to train young people
- Land needs to be kept in production in some fashion-capital to purchase development rights where needed (2X)
- Climate change (3X)
- Land values
- Development
- Loss of culture
- Population encroachment on limited farm land
- Limited understanding of agriculture by new population
- Poor understanding by regulators of local workings
- Keeping all segments of the community involved in the movement forward

Question 3: How can the agricultural community make better use of limited water resources as growth continues? How is your land being impacted by development pressures?

- Plan for continuous agriculture so deliveries are optimized
- Ground water interaction must be considered
- More efficient use-remember that state law requires “best use” which historically is agriculture
- Increase value
- Establish legal/institutional mechanisms to accommodate market-driven transfers of available water
- Move to explore other crops/markets
- Form coalitions to buy development rights
- Public outreach/education
- Aquifer recharge occurs from flood irrigation
- Area is already doing a tremendous job making better use of the limited water resources given current legal and institutional constraints

Question 4: How can the completed Vision 2040 Regional Planning Project best benefit the agriculture/community?

- Develop a consensus on the logical coordination of growth and changing agriculture
- Find ways to hold onto agriculture or risk losing the biggest draw of the valley, which is our culture and heritage
- Respect the free market - private sector (farmers) will drive agriculture development in new and different ways, not planners
- Talk to Wal-Mart about providing capital for purchase of development rights which can then be donated to the NM Land Trust for agricultural preservation. Wal-Mart has a new sustainability director and is interested in sustainable/local agriculture systems
- Promote education
- Respect private property rights
- Expand the conversation with the agriculture community
- County would assist with dam rehabilitation (funding)