
SOWING SEEDS OF LEADERSHIP:



New Mexico Agricultural Leadership Program Updates

Class 17 -Southern New Mexico December 2025



Our mission is to develop knowledgeable, multicultural leaders for New Mexico's agricultural, food, and natural resource industries.

FROM THE FIELD TO THE WORLD: NMDA'S MARKETING & DEVELOPMENT DIVISION IN ACTION BY YESENIA PALMA

During our September seminar, I had the chance to learn about the New Mexico Department of Agriculture (NMDA) Marketing and Development Division through a presentation by Nicholas Frazzini, Sr. Ag Marketing Specialist. As I explored more about the Division, I was impressed and motivated by the scope of work and services it provides to support and promote our New Mexico producers.

Honoring Heritage through “Taste the Tradition®”

One of the most impactful programs highlighted was the Taste the Tradition® and Grown with Tradition® logo initiative. The logos serve as important tools for consumers to recognize products that originate from New Mexico. Producers can join the program at no cost and receive financial support for their label design and promotional efforts.

Social Media Programs with Significant Reach

NMDA is also making significant progress in digital marketing. Their recent influencer campaigns for green chile and pecans have reached hundreds of thousands of consumers across the U.S., with very high engagement levels. The promotional campaigns involved sharing cooking recipes and tips along with interactive content that highlighted New Mexico flavors in consumers' homes.

Domestic Marketing: Let the World See NM at Home

NMDA ensures that both the nation and the international community recognize where New Mexico's dedicated producers and packers operate through their presence at events like the New Mexico State Fair and international trade shows such as Natural Products Expo West. Events like the annual Green Chile Cheeseburger Challenge and Battle of the Salsas attract thousands of people and help build pride in New Mexico's food culture.

Success Story “Get Your Fix” – A Chile Campaign

The “Get Your Fix” campaign is NMDA's longest-running and most successful domestic marketing effort. Thanks to this initiative, New Mexico green chile is now available in over 2,000 stores across the country. The campaign also includes retailer training, promotional materials, and even an annual alumni chile roast in Washington, D.C.

Chef Ambassador Program: Cooking up local, colorful goodness

The Chef Ambassador Program, launched in 2018, provides NMDA with increased culinary expertise and star power to enhance its efforts. Chef ambassadors collaborate with NMDA to organize events, develop recipes using New Mexico products, and create content that connects consumers to local foods. (continued on next page)



(From the Field Continued)

These chefs support events, develop recipes, and create engaging content that connects consumers with New Mexico-grown ingredients.

Strengthening the Meat Supply Chain

Local processors can boost capacity and compliance through NMDA's Local Meat Processing Grant (LMPG) program and by attending the national convention. The program aims to strengthen local supply chains and support New Mexico's livestock producers in staying competitive.

USDA Grants are Improving Infrastructure

NMDA administers numerous USDA grant programs that support everything from specialty crops to resilient food systems. These include:

- Specialty Crop Block Grants
- Resilient Food Systems Infrastructure (RFSI)
- Local Food Purchase Assistance (LFPA)
- SNAP Double Up Food Bucks

NMDA also partners with the USDA's NMSU Extension on programs like SNAP-Ed and Senior Farmers' Markets Nutrition Programs. These initiatives not only help producers grow, diversify, and access new markets but also connect them with consumers and improve access to healthy food across the state.

Exporting with NMDA

NMDA also partners with the Western United States Trade Alliance (WUSATA) and the U.S. Livestock Genetics Export Association (USLGE) to offer services to New Mexico product exporters. These include marketing and brand promotion in India, Mexico, Canada, and the European Union, trade missions, market education campaigns, and inbound buyer visits.

Overall, this presentation served as a strong reminder of the wide range of NMDA's marketing and development efforts. From branding and promotion to marketing our products and growing infrastructure both locally and internationally, the work that NMDA's Marketing and Development Division does not only support New Mexico producers; it also fills us with pride to stand behind them.

If you're a producer, marketer, or love eating New Mexico food, please consider getting involved!

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THIS MONTH'S MEAL: BEEFY LESSONS ON LEADERSHIP AND LIFE

BY ANTHONY COLIN

Many, if not most, Americans choose to believe some version of the following story about the beef that they eat.

Once upon a time, a cow was born to a loving family. It was fed the most delicious cow food money can buy and taken on luxury vacations every 1-3 years. One day, having lived a full life and sensing that its time was near, the cow headed just behind the local supermarket, where it passed peacefully surrounded by loved ones. Something, something – ground beef is \$6.63 per pound.

As much as American agriculture strives to match the emotional tone of that story for its animals, our trip to the New Mexico State University Meat Lab told a much clearer version of the last half of that story.

Starting on the processing side where the meat lab's work usually ends, lab manager Jacob Painter took a hair-netted class 17 through the newly constructed facility. Mr. Painter provided a room-by-room explanation of how the lab worked and how it benefits both students and producers. The lab serves

as a training facility for students and a testing platform for innovative new strategies to address the challenges of New Mexican beef processing. As the cold of the refrigerated building nipped at our arms, the warmth and passion of our host shone through.

That is, until we reached the slaughter room itself. It is easy for me to convey that the literal temperature of the room was warmer. It is, however, difficult to concisely convey the psychological shift that a space like that demands. All at once, the room confronts you with:

- an obvious, designed care and compassion - smooth curves and calming colors meant to minimize an animal's stress as it transitions from this life to shelf life;
- a mortal anxiety that nips at your heels as you realize that the blood being casually rinsed from around your shoes was flowing oxygen through a living animal mere hours earlier;
- the industry-standard, unemotional business calculus that informs choosing a pneumatic gun over conventional bullets that might contaminate and waste finished meat.

There is no room for beef fairy tales in such a thoughtfully constructed space. In fact, thoughtful is the word to describe the entire lab - full of passionate people, creative solutions, abundant lessons on leadership, and hopefully enough reality to make us all that much more thankful for dinner.



LEADING THROUGH ETIQUETTE BY CHERYLIN ATCITTY

Our etiquette session at the Bobby Lee Lawrence Wine Academy, hosted by Dr. Jean Hertzman, served as a meaningful reminder that leadership in agriculture extends well beyond giving speeches or managing operations. True leadership is demonstrated through behavior, by showing respect, communicating effectively, and carrying ourselves with dignity in all settings. The elegant dinner, provided by Lorenzo's, created the perfect hands-on environment to learn the subtle art of professionalism in action.

Whether working with producers, industry partners, or government agencies relationships are vital in agriculture. Knowing proper etiquette helps leaders handle these connections with professionalism and confidence. It allows us to represent our organization, commodities, and communities with authenticity.

I have seen firsthand how proper etiquette can influence professional interactions that range from job interviews, to closing deals, and forming partnerships. Being unfamiliar with proper etiquette can lead to awkward moments or even missed opportunities. Learning these skills enables us to present ourselves and our organizations confidently, helping our ideas and abilities stand out during interactions.

This lesson reminded me that in agriculture, etiquette isn't about formality; it's about respect. Whether at a trade table, in a boardroom, or during a field visit, our behavior reflects who we are as leaders. Actions speak louder than words.

Through experiences like this, the New Mexico Agricultural Leadership program continues to develop confident, service-oriented leaders who represent our state's agricultural industry with professionalism, purpose, and heart.



Class 17 enjoyed an etiquette dinner with Dr. Hertzman instructing on the do's and don'ts.



SANTA TERESA INTERNATIONAL LIVESTOCK CROSSING AND NEW WORLD SCREWORM BY MICHAEL PURDY

Class 17 of the New Mexico Agricultural Leadership Program met for their fourth seminar in Las Cruces, New Mexico, where the focus of the meetings was trade, communication, and self-awareness. The purpose of this article is to summarize the group's trip to the Santa Teresa Border Crossing and our discussions on the evolving situation of the invasive New World Screwworm. On the drive to the facilities, the class observed various security measures implemented along the US-Mexico border. Border Patrol vehicles, checkpoints, and even drones and blimps, all monitoring activity along our southern border and the Santa Teresa International Livestock Crossing located directly on the border

Upon arriving at the facility, the class was greeted by the Director of the facility, Daniel Manzanares. Mr. Manzanares graciously gave a tour of the facility and provided a detailed overview of their daily operations. The class was able to learn about the many nuances and regulations involved in running a business that relies on international trade. We also learned about the history of the facility and the important role it plays for both U.S. and Mexican cattle producers. While the facilities on both sides of the border are managed by the Chihuahua Cattlemen's Association, it requires cooperation between the USDA, Mexican inspectors, Border Patrol, and many other entities to operate an operation of this size. Cattle producers and buyers from the U.S. and Mexico depend on this facility to make seamless transactions with their international partners and meet growing market demands.

On a typical year, the Santa Teresa International Livestock Crossing handles the sale and transport of over 500,000 cattle, totaling more than \$600 million in annual imports and exports. However, on this day, the corrals and pens of this facility were empty. Since July 2025, the US border has been closed to all live cattle imports from Mexico due to the northward spread of the New World Screwworm (NWS). The NWS is a parasitic fly whose larvae feed on the tissue of living animals and can severely impact livestock health. While NWS is endemic in South America, parts of Central America, and Mexico, recent increases in detections among cattle moving north through Mexico have led the US to close its southern border to all cattle imported from Mexico. Although significant efforts are underway by the US and Mexico to prevent and eradicate NWS, the livestock pens at the Santa Teresa International Crossing will remain empty until US officials determine it is safe to reopen the border to cattle crossings.

While livestock transport is halted, those working at the Santa Teresa Livestock Crossing remain busy making improvements to the facilities and the border wall. Although NWS has not yet been detected in the US, the impact is already being felt by many US cattle buyers who cannot get cattle into the country. Class 17 of the New Mexico Agricultural Leadership program was able to see firsthand the effort involved in providing an efficient pathway for US producers to conduct international business, as well as the effects of international relations on food security. The NMAL Class 17 would like to thank everyone at the Santa Teresa International Livestock Crossing for their hospitality to the class and their service to the agricultural industry.



EXPLORING SOUTHERN NEW MEXICO BY MARISSA DILES

During our seminar in Southern New Mexico, we visited with Marianne Schweers, owner of Heart of the Desert Pistachios & Wines, in Alamogordo. Marianne was very welcoming and hospitable to our group, and she was proud to share her many years of knowledge with us.

Heart of the Desert is the state's first and largest pistachio orchard, known as Eagle Ranch. George and Marianne Schweers purchased the farm when George left the Air Force over 50 years ago. The farm had 400 trees when the Schweers first acquired it, and they have expanded it into a 13,000-pistachio-tree orchard, along with 24,000 grape vines for their wines.

When the Schweers first sold their pistachios to the public, they did so from their dining room. They later opened their storefront in Alamogordo in 1986, which they operate today. From there, they gradually expanded their facilities to include on-site cleaning, drying, and packaging.

Luckily, we visited the orchard during their harvest, which runs from late August through October. Marianne showed us harvesting taking place. To harvest the nuts, they use mechanical tree shakers that clamp onto the trees to shake them and the falling nuts are then collected into frames. After harvesting, the nuts are taken for hull removal, washing, and drying. The final steps are shelling, sorting, roasting, and packaging. Heart of the Desert performs the entire process on-site to ensure quality control and freshness from the orchard to the customer. It was clear during our visit that the Schweers family and everyone at Heart of the Desert is committed to providing a high-quality and delicious product to for the people of New Mexico.



Mrs. Schweers with class 17 members Anthony and Marissa



PUBLIC SPEAKING BY AARON ROMERO

As we develop our leadership skills, it's vital to improve our public speaking abilities. Public speaking is one of the most common fears that people have—often avoided until it's necessary. But the truth is, eventually, we will all need to speak in public. It is much better to be prepared and confident when that time comes.

It was a valuable opportunity to hear from Dr. Madison Dymont. Her insights were not only practical but also very encouraging. With a background in competitive public speaking from a young age, Dr. Dymont stressed that public speaking is not an innate talent—it's a skill that you can develop through practice and purpose.

Some of the tips for better public speaking include:

- Practice out loud and often: Repetition builds confidence and helps you refine your delivery.
- Make eye contact: Connecting with your audience visually helps build trust and keeps them engaged.
- Control your breathing: Deep, steady breaths can calm nerves and improve vocal clarity.
- Know your material: Familiarity with your content allows you to speak more naturally and respond to questions with ease.
- Focus on your message, not perfection: Audiences care more about authenticity and clarity than flawless delivery.

Dr. Dymont reminded us that even the most experienced speakers start somewhere—and that growth comes from stepping outside our comfort zones. Her talk was a strong reminder that leadership and communication are closely connected.

Dr. Dymont encouraged us to practice our speeches alone, even during everyday moments like driving. Impromptu speaking, she said, is a skill that improves with repetition.

If you're getting ready to speak to a group and expect a Q&A session, it's completely fine — and smart — to think ahead about potential questions and practice your answers.



It was humbling to learn that Dr. Dyment won a public speaking contest at a young age. However, during that experience, she realized that competitions weren't her calling and decided not to pursue them further. One of the biggest lessons was her demonstration of the power of a pause. Instead of filling silence with "um," she showed how a well-timed pause can command attention and create more impact. Her humility was apparent throughout her presentation, and her public speaking skills were undeniably outstanding.



SCENES FROM SEMINAR 4

Below left: Jacob Painter explaining to the class the differences in grass versus grain fed beef.
Below right: Anthony suiting up for the tour of the meat lab.



Above left: The empty stalls at the cattle crossing.
Above right: Daniel explaining the process of cattle crossing into the United States

A WORD FROM COLLEGE DRIVE

BY TINA WILSON

Las Cruces was the destination for seminar four. This seminar included several visits. After touring Heart of the Desert in July with the New Mexico Farm and Livestock Bureau, I knew I had to bring class 17 to see the operation. Heart of the Desert, owned and operated by the Schweers family, grows pistachios. Once harvested, pistachios are processed into various value-added products, such as popcorn and flavored pistachios. The Schweers also produce wine, olive oils, and gift baskets that feature their products. We were able to see pistachios being harvested, which is done in the same way as pecans. What I found most interesting about pistachios is the multiple layers that encase the nut. The outer shell is very soft and can be peeled away with your fingernail. Inside that is a more rigid shell that contains the nut meat inside. The NMSU meat laboratory is state-of-the-art facility is designed not only to teach students how to process meat but also to process meat for ranchers which will provide a vital service to the state of New Mexico.

The dates for our international trade and innovation mission to Argentina are set for March 21-27, 2026. As you may know, seasons are reversed in Argentina, so we will be visiting during fall. The average high temperatures are in the mid 70s, with lows in the 60s. If you are interested in joining us on this adventure, please let me know, and I will send you the registration packet.

I want to take this opportunity to wish you and your families a happy holiday season and a prosperous new year.



ARGENTINA

THANK YOU

Thank you to our sponsors. We appreciate your continued support of New Mexico Agricultural Leadership Program.

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