

STATE OF NEW MEXICO

County of Luna

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Media Release

Luna County is one of eight counties across the nation selected to begin a new grant-funded program intended to link family farmers with members of the community who lack healthy access to food.

Every county in the nation — 3,007 — was invited to apply for the Growing Food Connections funding, and Luna County was among 27 other applications accepted to argue for the award. The highly competitive process was capped by Luna County Manager Charles “Tink” Jackson fighting for bringing the program and funding locally. Jackson’s passionate argument for the program, coupled with research and fact-finding by county staff, secured Luna County’s place in the nationwide effort.

“This county was built on the hard work of farmers, ranchers and the others involved in the complex world of agriculture,” Jackson said. “We plan to support the hard work of today’s ag community in Luna County while addressing the serious issues around healthy food access.”

Luna County’s rich agricultural traditions, coupled with the county’s vision to increase access to healthy foods for area residents, create an ideal environment to strengthen the local food systems. This new program will join the county’s existing multi-pronged approach, through Luna County Healthy Kids Healthy Communities, to combating food insecurity and healthy food access.

“We have found that our local leaders want tools and resources, not handouts,” said Julia Freedgood, Assistant Vice President for Programs with American Farmland Trust. “And, that’s what GFC will do – help local governments develop a vision and a game plan to benefit farmers and ranchers and community residents who are underserved by our current food system.”

American Farmland Trust is a national organization dedicated to promoting sound farming practices and keeping farmers on the land. The group is one of the partners under the program funded by the United States Department of Agriculture. The partnerships will bring national expertise in food policy and planning to Luna County to assist with the creation of locally created and controlled plans and policies to support family farmers and enhance food security.

At the county level, the process will be facilitated by a committee of local residents currently being created. If you are interested in serving on the committee, contact Jessica Etcheverry at (575) 546-0494.

“I’m excited to begin working with members of our community to address the issues they see and the problems we can alleviate together with good planning and teamwork,” Etcheverry, Luna County’s Community Projects Director, said. “Don’t be shy; please contact me so we can begin collaborating toward these important goals.”

Luna County is one of two counties in New Mexico awarded the program. The other is neighboring Dona Ana County. With the exception of the New Mexico counties and a county in Kansas, all of the other sites are located in the Southern United States or east coast.

“The selected local governments will blaze a path for more than 30,000 local governments in the United States that have traditionally overlooked the problems and opportunities in their communities’ food systems,” Dr. Samina Raja, GFC Principal Investigator and Associate Professor at the University of Buffalo, added.

To learn more about GFC, visit www.growingfoodconnections.org.

PHOTO CAPTION

Charles “Tink” Jackson, Luna County Manager, is seen on one of Luna County’s many farms. He believes the Growing Food Connections program will help address food insecurity while giving support to local producers.

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