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OUR VIEW

Eating healthy is easier with fresh ingredients at hand

The New Mexican

Jun 30, 2025

Coming to a neighborhood near you — healthy, nutritious food in areas of Santa Fe where produce-rich grocery stores are in short supply, courtesy of the Santa Fe Farmers' Market Institute.

Instead of shoppers having to get to the Santa Fe Railyard to shop from local producers, a mobile market will go out and about in the city much like the ice cream trucks of yore. The Tianguis Móvil Mobile Market is a farm stand on the move that features fresh produce, along with dried beans, honey, apple cider vinegar and herbal tea.

Based on a pilot program in 2024, the mobile market is up and running. In recent days, the market was parked off Airport Road behind a closed former dollar store, near the entrance of the Tierra Real neighborhood. Accessible, healthy food, near where people live.

The idea came out of Comida Local Para Todas, a food-for-all initiative run locally that went into low-income communities to find out what people needed. Initiative organizers found that people in poorer neighborhoods sometimes did not know how best to access nutritious food. People also didn't know about the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program or the Women, Infants, and Children program — both of which make buying healthy produce and other fresh goods easier for folks with smaller budgets.

In Santa Fe — home of one of the finest such markets in the nation — people at all income levels can't get this food easily.

Now, there is Tianguis Móvil, with *tianguis* a reference to open-air markets common in Latin America, places where people gather and buy goods. Placing such markets where the people are living is important in parts of town where grocery stores can be scarce. According to the U.S.

Department of Agriculture, much of the south side of Santa Fe fits in the category of “low income and low access.” That indicates low-income census tracts where a significant number of residents are more than a mile from the nearest supermarket.

The institute is buying produce directly from local growers — that’s an economic boost to our regional food supply — and keeping costs down by selling goods at only a slight markup to pay for fuel for the mobile market.

This is but one solution to getting healthier food to people, something crucial as Americans fight against such lifestyle illnesses as obesity, diabetes and high blood pressure. All are conditions affected by unhealthy eating, especially overconsumption of sugary or overly processed foods.

Eliminating food deserts is smart public policy, whether at the local, state or national level.

The Santa Fe Farmers Market also operates the Market del Sur, which will run from 3 to 6 p.m. each Tuesday from July 1 until Sept. 30 in the Presbyterian Santa Fe Medical Center main parking lot, 4801 Beckner Road. El Paisano on Airport Road brought a well-stocked grocery store to the area as well. But a market brings food right to neighborhoods or schools or other places where people gather.

This problem is not just one affecting Santa Fe.

In Kansas, the Rural Grocery Initiative, operated by Kansas State University, was developed to support locally owned grocery stores both to revitalize communities and increase the supply of healthy foods. The initiative hosts a summit to help small towns get and maintain grocery stores, as well as providing help with grant applications, a toolkit for operations and other supports to communities.

Successful grocery stores in small-town America serve as an economic engine: Owners pay taxes, provide jobs and offer a place for local growers to sell goods. A town with a local place to shop is more vibrant than one without. It’s that basic, and holds true for neighborhoods within larger cities as well as small towns. The Kansas initiative could be a model for New Mexico, where small towns such as Roy struggle with no general stores. New Mexico State University, with its agriculture expertise, would be a logical site to run such an initiative.

And on the south side of Santa Fe, being able to walk from your front steps to a mobile market offering fresh produce will improve the health and well-being of our neighbors. These mobile markets could be sent up the High Road to Taos to reach rural villages someday. All people deserve

access to healthy, nutritious food — and they shouldn't have to drive across town to find it.