San Juan County earns Golden Chile Awards for NM Grown support

All school districts, preschools, producers & senior centers to be honored

For immediate release:

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(Farmington) – San Juan County continues to be strong champions of locally grown food with 16 organizations earning awards in the Golden Chile Awards program this year, the state's annual recognition program for participants of the New Mexico Grown Program. Every school district in the county earned awards in addition to six food producers, three preschools, two senior centers, and one food hub.

The New Mexico Grown Coalition, a network of nonprofits and state agencies, will honor 136 recipients statewide at an awards ceremony Oct. 19 in Albuquerque. The awards honors efforts to connect children and seniors to local food as well as offering such NM Grown programming as gardening lessons, nutrition education, and family and community engagement activities.

"San Juan is a leader in New Mexico's local food movement," said Rita Condon, who supports NM Grown as director of the New Mexico Department of Health's Office of Nutrition and Physical Activity. "Congratulations and thank you for investing in the health of your community and the local agricultural economy."

> "Investing in locally grown food and gardening education means so much to us because we're not just feeding children, we're helping them understand where their food comes from and giving them opportunities to experience it firsthand."
> --- Xaria Garcia, Love the Children Learning Center

This year, food service providers nominated food producers and hubs to be recognized for their support of NM Grown. San Juan County food producer/ hub awardees are:

- Alkaline Fields Farm of Aztec
- Bluffs Farm of Farmington
- Carruth Cattle of Bloomfield
- Edgars Farm of Aztec
- Gathings Gardens
- San Juan College Harvest Food Hub of Farmington
- Williams Family Farm of Farmington

“I’m proud to live in a community that believes in supporting our farmers and ranchers, and providing the healthiest, fresh food to children and seniors,” said Patience Williams, coordinator of Healthy Kids San Juan County, a program that expands healthy eating and physical activity opportunities.

School districts represented the largest number of awardees statewide this year with 35 recipients, including Aztec Municipal School District, Bloomfield Schools, Central Consolidated School District, and Farmington Municipal Schools.

Love the Children Learning Center, ECHO Aztec, and Farmington Preschool were among the 18 preschools statewide that earned awards. Both Aztec Senior Center and Blanco and Lower Valley Senior Centers also earned awards for their NM Grown participation.

“These awards are proof positive that our program is not only supporting the community that we love but also making a difference in local agriculture,” said Michelle Murray, San Juan County’s deputy Parks and Facilities director. “I am especially grateful for Elders Greenhouse, Bluffs Farms, Edgars Farms, and Carruth Cattle that provide nourishing, local foods to our seniors, our staff who prepare these meals, and everyone else it takes to make it happen.”

The awards program recognizes all levels of involvement in New Mexico’s local food movement with four tiers – Seed, Sprout, Blossom, and Golden Chile. Blanco and Lower Valley Senior Centers and Love the Children, which serves about 200 children in Aztec, Bloomfield and Farmington, earned Golden Chile awards, the highest award possible. Only 13 food service providers earned a Golden Chile this year.

“Whether they’re planting a seed, watching something grow in our gardens, taste-testing a new fruit or vegetable, or enjoying locally grown food on their plate, we’re creating positive experiences with healthy food at a young age,” said Xaria Garcia, Love the Children’s kitchen manager. “We hope these little moments grow into healthy habits and an appreciation for fresh, local food that they carry with them for years to come. Receiving the Golden Chile Award is incredibly special to us because it recognizes something our entire team has put so much love into.”