

## FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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### NEW PROGRAM PREPARES NEW MEXICANS WITH DISABILITIES FOR FARMING CAREERS AgrAbility Launches in Albuquerque

ALBUQUERQUE (April 27, 2023) – New Mexico is facing a decline in small farming operations. At the same time, New Mexicans with disabilities are seeking meaningful employment opportunities. A program through Mandy’s Farm and the New Mexico Division of Vocational Rehabilitation addresses both challenges. Seven young adults with intellectual, developmental, or physical disabilities who are interested in the agriculture industry recently began participating in a two-year AgrAbility apprenticeship.



*AgrAbility apprentices prep the soil for planting spring crops while learning about New Mexico agriculture.*

Housed on three acres of farmland in Albuquerque’s South Valley, AgrAbility provides in-depth education and hands-on skills training and experience in fruit and vegetable production, animal husbandry, permaculture, farm operations and infrastructure, water conservation, soil amendment, and worksite safety. Apprentices actively participate in land revitalization and growing projects focused on sustainability. They will experience two full crop growing seasons, which helps them learn about what grows best in New Mexico’s climate, comparable yields, and overall productivity of crops.

“We encourage and embrace innovation as a pathway to access and equity for people with disabilities,” says Mandy’s Farm Executive Director Melissa McCue. “And, as a stakeholder in improving New Mexico’s food and agriculture industry, we can now fulfill the desire of those we serve to have equal opportunities to pursue an occupation in agriculture.”

Says apprentice Zak Gonzales, “My favorite thing to work on is planting and building things. I like working with tools and starting the seeds. After graduation I want to be able to work on a farm that has animals and plants.”

NMDVR is providing employment funding support for the apprentices. “We’re pleased to be able to assist these young people in mastering the necessary skills, knowledge, and experience to achieve their employment goals while increasing and strengthening small farming operations and positively impacting agriculture in our state,” says Program Manager Anthony Harkness.

As a sign of its early success, AgrAbility has partnered with M’Tucci’s restaurants in Albuquerque to provide locally grown produce for their chefs to feature in menu items. This is the first New Mexico iteration of the national AgrAbility program. Additional partners include the New Mexico Technology Assistance Program, University of New Mexico Occupational Therapy Program, and New Mexico State University.

*NMDVR helps eligible individuals with documented disabilities find suitable employment. To do so, NMDVR partners with employers seeking opportunities to enhance and diversify their workforce. Vocational rehabilitation is a voluntary program supporting people who want to work. With a long history of success and proven methodology for making the best fits, NMDVR is committed to helping participants thrive in their communities.*

*The Vocational Rehabilitation program receives 78.7% of its funding through a grant from the U.S. Department of Education. For federal fiscal year 2023, the total funds awarded is \$22,066,600. The remaining 21.3% is funded by state appropriations and transfers from the Commission for the Blind and Commission for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing.*

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