



## Growing Vegetables, Growing Pride



**Felice Lucero, Salvador Esquibel, William Candelaria, Rodney Sanchez, Harold Garcia and Aaron Valencia (from left) are staff of the San Felipe Farm Services Program.**

If you drive north on Highway 25 from Albuquerque, New Mexico, there is a place you must stop. Every year, more and more people are stopping there. It is the San Felipe Farmers Market. It is an outdoor market set up next to highway Exit 252. Tribal members are selling cherries, mulberries, apricots, grapes, peaches, blue corn, white corn, melons, cucumbers, tomatoes, squash and chiles.

The scene of people buying and selling fresh fruits and vegetables looks happy and healthy. But a visitor to the tribe's farmers market is seeing just a little bit. Selling the fresh food is just the final step in a tribal-wide program.

Each step of the program is positive. It is bringing more health into the tribe -- with fresh foods and a chance for tribal members to earn money. But most of all, the program is re-connecting tribal members to their traditions.

### ▶ **Small start, now a major event**

The San Felipe Farmers Market started four years ago. Then there were a few people selling. They sold mainly corn, melons and chiles. Now the list of fruits and vegetables is long, and the parking lot is full! The market is open every Wednesday from the beginning of July through the end of October.

### ▶ **Farming ripples through community**

The market is having a huge impact on the community. The manager of the Pueblo of San Felipe (Katishtya) Farm Service Program, Felice Lucero (Katishtyahme), says the program has touched almost every community member, from youth to Elder. "You see children helping their parents and grandparents," she says.

Over 100 San Felipe tribal members spend many months raising the crops. The pueblo's Farm Services Program owns farm equipment and employs experienced farmers. Tribal members use the equipment to prepare the land, plant and harvest. They get kind advice and encouragement from the staff.

Many tribal members go to free farming classes. These classes are put on by the tribe's Farm Services program, in collaboration with New Mexico State University, the Sandoval County extension agents and the USDA Farm Agency. Farmers also gain new knowledge, such as how to prune fruit trees and grow different vegetables for different seasons.

### ▶ **Healthy dishes appear at feast days**

During community feast days, more healthy foods are being served. Houses prepare tamales and blue corn tortillas. These are made with fresh corn that tribal members grow.

Many families have members with diabetes, so they try to serve low-fat and low-sugar foods. Angie Tenoria-Nerva (Santo Domingo) has parents and a husband who have diabetes. She uses vegetable oil instead of lard to make dishes for the feast days.

Mary Lucero (Katishtyahme) says she often makes a low-fat chile stew for feast days. "I hear so much about people having diabetes. I'm trying to help prevent diabetes for my family and for community members."

### ▶ **Children eat more veggies, grow a melon**

Children are benefiting from the market. Three hundred WIC families get free vouchers to buy fruits and vegetables at the market. Mary is the WIC Program Director and says, "I am seeing many more WIC families eating more green and yellow vegetables."

Mary says the program has helped her family. Her 7-year-old grandson planted watermelon seeds and watered them. "He couldn't believe the seeds turned into a watermelon!" says Mary.

Head Start and elementary students also get coupon books, thanks to the Pueblo of San Felipe Health and Wellness Program Director, Marc Siemon.

### ▶ **Elders feel proud**

This year 400 Elders will get free vouchers to buy fresh fruits and vegetables through the USDA Senior Farmers Market Nutrition Program. Elders get van rides to the market. About half the San Felipe Elders have diabetes. Angie is the San Felipe Elderly Services Program Director and says the Farmers Market is helping Elders who have diabetes have easy access to healthy, fresh food. "A lot of the Elders are the farmers. They get a lot of exercise. They feel proud that their knowledge of farming is valued," she says.

### ▶ **Farming roots go way back**

Farming is not new to San Felipe tribal members. Felice remembers when she was growing up. "I remember wagons full of melons being pulled by horses," she says. "We used to run and jump on the back of the

wagons. Then we would help the farmers unload. We were rewarded with a melon."

Those were fun days. They were healthy days filled with physical activity and fresh foods. Those days may never completely return. But fresh foods are coming back. "We are capturing the traditions of farming. We are saving the traditions before they are lost," says Felice.

### ▶ **Health around the table**

Around a dinner table at the San Felipe Pueblo, a family is eating. There is a bowl of steamed yellow and green squash. There are fresh, sliced tomatoes. For dessert there is melon. Elders tell dinner-time tales of growing vegetables and delivering them by horse-pulled wagons. The Elders' stories might be the best part of the San Felipe Farmers Market Program. Felice says, "The Elders talk about the return to tradition. They say they get to touch the earth again. They get to tell their story."

For San Felipe tribal members, the story of the tradition of farming has a healthy and happy ending.



**Angie Tenoria-Nerva (Santo Domingo) say the Farm Services Program is benefiting the entire tribe.**

