



Cuba, NM

▲ Community Example from Chapter 4 of "Lessons for Leaders:"
Lessons in Advancing Policy/Systems Change

Community Background

Cuba is a rural village located 80 miles northwest of Albuquerque where nearly all schoolchildren qualify for free and-reduced price lunch and 17.5 percent of potential workers are unemployed. While only 800 people live in the village, 8,800 live within a 35-mile radius, including residents of the tri-chapter area within the Eastern Agency of the Navajo Nation, which is also a food desert.

Community Action

In order to maintain a solid, working relationship with community partners in the tri-chapter area, the *Healthy Kids, Healthy Communities* (HKHC) partnership in Cuba addressed cultural factors along with planned physical changes to improve access to fresh, healthy foods. Beginning in 2011, produce vendors and other HKHC partners expressed interest in transporting fresh food out to tri-chapter communities through a mobile market or a community-supported agriculture program. Progress required more time than planned since meetings were longer than anticipated and featured extended breaks to share a meal. Partnership staff and willing growers and vendors also had to be flexible with expectations for a mobile market when the community decided against the plan. Culturally, it was important for them to develop their food system from within to increase the number of growers within their community, and then potentially move toward a mobile market with produce entirely grown by the community. This would simultaneously strengthen the food system and economic development, since money generated by the market would remain within the tri-chapter community instead of leaving to neighboring Cuba.

When residents of the tri-chapter area expressed their preference to expand backyard gardening and farming efforts, HKHC staff supported a visit by members of Hasbídító, a youth development organization, to Leupp Family Farm in Arizona where they could see firsthand how a community with similarly challenging growing conditions has thrived. HKHC also engaged the services of Hunger Grow Away, a horticulture organization familiar with working with American Indian populations, which donated fruit trees and provided technical assistance. It connected one Cuba-based grower/vendor to work with tri-chapter community growers on approaches to water-saving techniques and extending the growing season. In this way, the HKHC partnership engaged and supported the community on its own cultural terms.

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Hasbídító, with the Rio Puerco Alliance as its fiscal agent, received grants in 2013 totaling \$75,000, from Walmart Foundation and New Mexico Department of Agriculture, to establish a mobile farmers' market serving the outlying Navajo areas. They named it the Tri-Community Mobile Farmers' Market. It launched in June 2014 using locally grown produce and has been successful in receiving other funding to continue food systems work.