



## SIGNIFICANT ISSUES

The language in SJM 38 expresses support for a number of issues related to “seed sovereignty” in the context of New Mexico’s unique cultural and historical heritage. Seed sovereignty pertains to the movement to preserve traditional approaches to agriculture, free from the genetic engineering of seeds and the influence of large business interests which diverge from and threaten such practices. The Joint Memorial enumerates several resolutions:

1. That the Legislature recognize the significance of native seeds and their relationship to addressing hunger
2. That the Legislature support certain efforts of the organization known as The New Mexico Food and Seed Sovereignty Alliance (“the Alliance”)
3. That the Department of Agriculture collaborate with the Alliance to further a number of objectives characteristic of the seed sovereignty
4. That the Memorial is to be transmitted to the Governor, Director of the Department of Agriculture, and the Secretary of Indian Affairs

As indicated in SJM 38, New Mexico faces one of the highest rates of food insecurity in the United States. Efforts to address this problem through sustainable agricultural practices, especially within communities that have access to crop land and traditional agricultural know-how, may help address this serious problem. Data and empirical evidence have converged to reveal that the altering of traditional diets in New Mexico has not only resulted in food insecurity, but also in a myriad of other health maladies.

In the case of Indians, the consequences of changing dietary practices have been especially severe. According to the USDA, only 10% of Native Americans consume a “good” diet. This proportion is not significantly different from that of the population at-large. The “good diet” classification is based upon the rates of consumption of various dietary components, such as fat, fruits and vegetables, milk and whole grains.<sup>1</sup>

Despite having diets that are similarly poor as the population at-large, Native Americans suffer disproportionately from certain diet-related health maladies. Obesity and diabetes stand front and center. According to the Department of Health’s 2005 American Indian Health Status Report, Native Americans in New Mexico die from diabetes at a rate that is more than twice that of the general population (75.7 as opposed to 31.7 per 100,000 for the years 2000-2002.) The same report found that 33% of Indians in New Mexico were obese, while 20% of the population as a whole was thusly classified.<sup>2</sup>

Given the severity of this problem, efforts to investigate alternative approaches to food production may have value – both in improving diet and making communities more sustainable, thereby addressing issues of food insecurity simultaneously.

## OTHER SUBSTANTIVE ISSUES

Senate Joint Memorial 38 addresses issues related to genetic engineering of seeds, animals, and wild plants, the corporate patenting of genetic material, and the impact of such manipulations on

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<sup>1</sup> From the USDA: <http://www.cnpp.usda.gov/Publications/NutritionInsights/insight12.pdf>

<sup>2</sup> From NM DOH: [http://www.health.state.nm.us/pdf/health\\_status\\_report\\_final.pdf](http://www.health.state.nm.us/pdf/health_status_report_final.pdf)

the environment and human health. In particular, genetically engineered crops, such as maize in Oaxaca, Mexico and canola in Canada have escaped into the environment and contaminated native seeds and wild plants.

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