



Article 428

December 13, 2015

## Bernalillo County Summits Develop Entrepreneurship

*By Finance New Mexico*

While Bernalillo County economic developers work hard to attract major industries to Albuquerque and unincorporated parts of the county, they understand that supporting the creation of numerous small businesses can lead to an equal number of jobs and opportunities.

This approach to growth has spawned a series of business summits over the past two years, each hosted by a Bernalillo County commissioner and highlighting a business opportunity or concern identified by that commissioner or the commissioner's constituents.



The summits connect entrepreneurs with resources to help them get started or expand, elected officials who can answer questions and hear their concerns and business experts willing to share firsthand experience and advice.

Participants walk away with fresh ideas, and commissioners learn about impediments to growth.

Concerns raised by food-service entrepreneurs at a summit for restaurateurs in 2014 led to increased opportunities for home-based food-oriented businesses. The county's Health and Sanitation Code was revised to allow residents of unincorporated Bernalillo County to publicly sell baked goods, jams, jellies and dry mixes they produce and package in their own homes at farmers markets, fairs and similar venues. Before the change, the county food code did not allow any foods prepared in a private home to be sold commercially, even products with long shelf lives and no need for refrigeration.

### Food for Growth

Agrotourism is important to New Mexico in general and Bernalillo County in particular, according to Commissioner Debbie O'Malley, who hosted the most recent summit held last month at Hotel Albuquerque. That summit focused on food and it aimed to educate and inspire New Mexicans who are — or want to become — food entrepreneurs, whether by growing food, producing a food-based product or preparing food for others to eat.

More than 130 people attended to hear from experts, network with peers and nurture their embryonic business ideas. Experienced entrepreneurs showed up to learn more about what Bernalillo County is doing to support farms and food-centric businesses.

Two centerpiece speeches by successful food entrepreneurs injected inspiration into the day's events and demonstrated how passion, commitment and a love of New Mexico's heritage are common ingredients of food-based ventures of all sizes.

Celina Aldaz-Grife, owner of Celina's Biscochitos, described her evolution from real-estate agent to owner of a bakery based on her traditional version of the New Mexico state cookie. And Matt Rembe, executive director of Los Poblanos, explained how the historic Albuquerque ranch functions as an inn and organic farm that produces the food served at its exceptional on-site restaurant, La Merienda.

Workshops led by government and business experts showed summit-goers how to put their ideas and aspirations into play. Each workshop addressed an essential concern of food entrepreneurship — operations, marketing and logistics — and described what's involved in running and marketing food-oriented businesses and what business owners need to know about safely and legally preparing food for sale.

Besides activating communication that can inform policies, summits are all about relationship building, according to Shawn Perry-Turner of the county Economic Development Department. Connections made at the summits continue afterward, with county specialists continuing to help summit participants find resources they often don't even know about.

To learn more, visit <http://www.bernco.gov/economic-development/>.

*Finance New Mexico is a public service initiative to assist individuals and businesses with obtaining skills and funding resources for their business or idea. To learn more, go to [www.FinanceNewMexico.org](http://www.FinanceNewMexico.org). Sponsored by:*

