

## NYFEA INSTITUTE 2024 – ALBUQUERQUE, NEW MEXICO

Eight PYFA members traveled to Albuquerque December 4-7 for the annual NYFEA Institute. New Mexico is the chili pepper capitol of the U.S. and has a lot of agriculture production in spite of their lack of rainfall.

The first tour was to Four Daughters Pecan Farm, a 20-year-old 650 acre operation with 420 acres of pecan trees. They are irrigated by the Rio Grande and three wells on the property. The trees require two inches of water every week from May through August, and less from August through October, when irrigation stops. The farm employs five people year-round and 12 for the harvest of 500-650,000 pounds per year. The pecans are hauled 200 miles to a cleaning plant and then shipped to Texas to be shelled. They also grow alfalfa and have some cattle which they feed with cereal waste from the nearby General Mills plant.



Next we visited the New Mexico State University Experiment Station in Los Lunas (one of 12 stations in the state.) Researchers there are conducting projects on mechanical harvesting of chili peppers, native plant windbreaks to prevent soil erosion from wind, growing tomatoes in solar panel shade, and Jujube fruit trees for commercial production.



A delicious fajita lunch was enjoyed at the Valencia County Sheriffs Posse community center, followed by a visit to the Hot Air Balloon Museum. Albuquerque is the location of a huge hot air balloon festival every October, attracting thousands of people to the city. The museum told the history of balloon flight and the varied uses of hot air and gas balloons through the years.



Los Poblanos Farm is a boutique hotel, spa, and urban farm including 25 acres with lavender, vegetables, fruits and herbs used in their restaurant, spa and bar. They use drip and flood irrigation applying 25 acre/feet of water per day every two weeks. They have two acres of lavender plants from which they distill the oil on site for various uses from food to soaps etc. Lavender is suited to this climate as it can stand temperatures from minus 20 to 100 degrees and can live for twenty years in rocky, sandy soil with no fertilizer. They also grow cherries, peaches, plums and apricots.



Across the street from Los Poblanos was the Agri-Nature Center, a 50 acre property with the mission of educating people about agriculture. Many school classes visit to see the heritage sheep, goats, chickens, wheat and rye, and medicinal herb garden.

An authentic Isleta Pueblo dinner was served at the 4-H Community Center.



Friday's tours began at McCall's Pumpkin Patch, a 400 acre farm that decided 27 years ago to enter the agri-tourism business. Today the family offers an amazing experience for six weekends in the fall. There is a 12 acre corn maze, 30 acres of pick-your-own pumpkins, 32 acres of parking, an 18 acre playground with every game and activity imaginable, a princess castle, and many food booths. They also offer a haunted barn and haunted corn maze for 10



nights. The farm has over 400 employees and welcomes an average of 6-7000 per day or over 100,000 people during the season. This was an incredible destination that would be worth the trip to Moriarty, NM, just to experience!

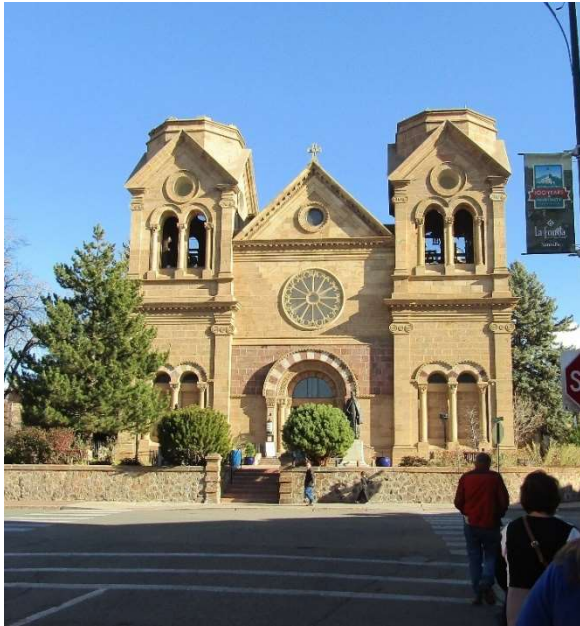


The next stop, right up the road, was Bill King's Ranch, raising registered Hereford, Angus, and Charolais bulls for breeding. The farm was a 1916 homestead and now includes "somewhere



between 50-70,000 acres.” They have 1400 cows and sell 400-500 bulls per year, all through private sales all across the U.S., Canada, and Mexico. They also sell show steers locally and grow silage corn, alfalfa and wheat. In New Mexico, 32 acres is needed to support one cow because it is so dry—some areas as little as 7 inches/year of rain/snow.

We next traveled to Santa Fe, the capital of NM. Lunch was served at the historic LaFonda Hotel, followed by a walking tour of this historic city, the first capitol city in the U.S., founded in 1610. The beautiful Cathedral Basilica, the Palace of the Governors, several art museums, and many native artisans along the streets—much more than we could see in a few hours.



The J.W. Eaves movie ranch has been the scene for over 250 western movies since 1969 such as the “Cheyenne Social Club” and the latest, “Killing Fate” to be released next spring. We were free to wander in and around the buildings and grounds as well as visit the bison and two calves.



Old Town Albuquerque held their tree lighting that evening and we visited the festivities and mingled with the crowds.

On Saturday, an optional tour visited the Indian Pueblo Cultural Center, founded in 1974 by several of the NM Pueblos. The height of Pueblo civilization was 850-1350 A.D. and this center told the history and present culture of the pueblos in NM including a display of student art work.



New officers were installed for the next year—President Tommy Ketchum, TX; President Elect Tim McSwain, SC; Secretary Keith White, AL. Winners of the Ag Communication and Ag Expression awards were Chloe Bomgardner and Jordan Anderson of Pennsylvania, Mackenzie Dixon of South Carolina and Jeremiah Young of New Mexico. They receive expense-paid trips to Agriculture’s Promise in DC in March.



The Institute wrapped up with great

western music by Sid Masters and the Swing Masters trio. Next year’s Institute is December 10-13, 2025 in Nashville.

