STATE OF NEW MEXICO
Environment Department

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NEWS RELEASE
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The Environment Department's mission is to protect and restore the environment and to foster a healthy and prosperous New Mexico for present and future generations.

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NMED establishes food service operator advisory group
Partnership strengthens collaboration between restaurants and regulators

SANTA FE — The New Mexico Environment Department today announced the establishment of the Food Service Operator Advisory Group to strengthen collaboration with New Mexico's restaurant industry, improve regulatory processes and advance food safety statewide.

The group will hold its inaugural meeting on Tuesday, November 10th.

The advisory group will provide a forum for restaurant owners and operators to work directly with NMED's Environmental Health Bureau on food safety regulations, permitting, inspections and other challenges facing the industry. The initiative is designed to make regulatory processes more predictable and efficient while maintaining the public health protections New Mexicans depend on.

"Restaurant operators are on the front lines of food safety every day, and their experience is invaluable to the work we do," said **NMED Environmental Health Division Director Bill Schaedla**. "By giving these businesses a direct voice in how we approach regulatory challenges, we can reduce unnecessary burdens, improve consistency and make it easier for restaurants to succeed without compromising public health."

"Restaurant owners and public health officials share the same goal: keeping our customers safe while ensuring our businesses can thrive," said **Steve Lemon, owner of Pranzo Italian Grill in Santa Fe and a member of the advisory group**. "This advisory group gives us a meaningful voice, improving consistency and transparency, and finding solutions that protect public health without imposing unnecessary burdens on the businesses that serve our communities."

The group is designed to include approximately 15 to 20 restaurant operators representing New Mexico's geographic, cultural and business diversity, including independent restaurants, multi-location businesses, rural establishments, mobile food vendors and seasonal operators.

The advisory group will meet at least quarterly and focus on six key areas:

- **Rules and fees:** Providing operator feedback on regulatory changes, fees and compliance requirements.
- **Permitting and inspections:** Improving consistency, reducing unnecessary delays and streamlining regulatory processes.
- **Workforce development**: Expanding access to affordable food safety training, including programs for rural and multilingual communities.
- **Foodborne illness prevention:** Strengthening outbreak response, emergency preparedness and restaurant reopening procedures.
- **Business growth:** Identifying regulatory challenges facing small businesses and emerging food service models.
- **Communications and transparency:** Improving access to regulatory guidance, strengthening public trust and promoting consistent communication between operators and regulators.

NMED is launching the advisory group through a one-year pilot program, with initial priorities including guidance on food service rule and fee amendments adopted in October 2026, a statewide assessment of restaurant operators' needs and expanded food safety training resources.

During the pilot, the group will also help develop standardized permitting checklists, foodborne illness response protocols and other resources intended to make compliance easier and more consistent for restaurants across New Mexico.

The advisory group will serve in an advisory capacity only and will not have independent regulatory or enforcement authority. Existing rulemaking, public participation and enforcement procedures will remain unchanged.

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