

‘Pipeline for Ag Leaders’ program supports minority students

BY CARLOS ANDRES LÓPEZ



From left, NMSU graduate students Briza Castro, Imelda Martinez and Naomi Lucero are part of a new program that supports animal science majors from underrepresented groups. The program established a pipeline between NMSU and the California State University, Chico, to train more minority students for competitive careers in the agricultural sciences.

research internships or other summer activities in New Mexico, including the Dairy Consortium and the U.S. Beef Academy.

“A critical component of this program involves giving students research skills that will set them up to be problem-solvers who can meet the demands of the agricultural workforce,” Hernandez Gifford said.

Briza Castro, Imelda Martinez and Naomi Lucero – all animal science graduate students at NMSU – joined the program’s first cohort last fall.

“Being in this program has been such a blessing,” said Martinez, a first-year graduate student. “I feel very fortunate to have someone like Dr. Hernandez Gifford, who has had such an impact in the field of animal science, guide me through my master’s program.”

Lucero, another first-year graduate student, said she found a much-needed support system through the program.

“When I started grad school, I was nervous about not having a strong background in agriculture, but Dr. Hernandez Gifford reassured me and encouraged me to believe in myself,” she said.

The College of ACES will train more students from underrepresented groups for competitive careers in the agricultural sciences through a new program jointly operated by the California State University, Chico.

“Pipeline for Ag Leaders” – launched last fall through a \$999,786 grant from the U.S. Department of Agriculture’s National Institute of Food and Agriculture – establishes a pipeline between NMSU and CSU-Chico for minority students pursuing degrees in animal science.

“We’re recruiting, retaining and graduating outstanding students from underpre-

sented groups to increase their capacity to enter and enhance our nation’s food and agricultural sciences workforce,” said Jennifer Hernandez Gifford, an associate professor of animal science at NMSU and the program’s director.

Hernandez Gifford and her co-principal investigators, Sergio Soto at NMSU and Kasey DeAtley at CSU-Chico, have already recruited students into the program, which runs through 2026. Students in the program will complete their undergraduate degrees at NMSU or CSU-Chico and continue their education as graduate students at NMSU. CSU-Chico students will also visit NMSU during the summers to participate in