By ART BOUFFARD

New Mexico consumers were urged Tuesday to voice concern about the spiraling costs of sugar and to make demands for a price roll back known at the congressional level.

Undertaking the awareness program are a group of soft drink bottlers who say they are caught in the middle having to buy sugar for their products — only to pass that cost on to the consumer.

"WE ARE SO concerned at this moment that we would support a consumer boycott of sugar," said Angus W. Pomeroy, general manager of Royal Crown Bottling Corp. "There is nothing that we and other industries such as bakeries, candy manufacturers and others that rely on sugar can do."

Noting that unless price roll backs are enforced, they said, their industry faces a 25 per cent layoff which will affect the trucking industry and other related industries dependent on their product.

The high sugar costs are also expected to result layoffs in other areas and industries relying on sugar because product demand is tapering off due to increased costs.

POMEROY AND Charles Russel, president of Coca Cola Bottling Co., had just returned from Santa Fe where they met Gov. Bruce King.

"We told Gov. King that there are 850 people directly employed in the bottling industry and that if sugar costs continue upward, it will result in a 25 per cent layoff or roughly a $1.5 million payroll loss annually in the state," Russel said.

Ted Kraut, branch manager for Ponca Wholesale, said candy and other items are being raised in price throughout the area. "By the first of the year, what used to cost 15 cents will cost 20 and 25 cents. Most vendors are raising the costs in their vending machines now — and it will continue to go up as long as sugar goes up."

THE BOTTLERS said they favor a consumer boycott on sugar "provided it is on sugar alone and the consumer doesn't seek to boycott items made of sugar," said Russel.

"For the consumer to boycott products made of sugar is to hurt the entire economy because it would mean drastic measures such as layoffs and loss of income for many families and workers who can't control sugar prices."

Russel said an industry investigation of sugar prices indicates no logical reason for the hikes other than "pure greed."

"WHAT WE NEED is unified action to get Congress to order a price roll back, Sen. (Pete Domenici, R-NM), has said he will investigate the situation and he needs all the public support he can get."

"But what is needed immediately is action, not investigation," Pomeroy added. "Our business is already down 10 to 25 per cent, and while our revenue is up because we raised prices, our profits do not show an increase."

"We can't understand why there is such an increase in sugar costs because there is no shortage in sugar," Russel said.

"Our study shows that sugar company profits are around 1200 per cent for the year and that Great Western Sugar Co., for instance, was paying $1.95 dividend per share a year ago, and today the per share income is $32," said Pomeroy.

"We need the public to stop showing their concern and to start sending letters and telegrams to their congressional leaders urging action to get things back under control," Russel added.

He says total sugar beet acreage this year was about 19,000 in Utah, down from about 25,000 a few years ago.

Sugar beet acreage in Washington this year was 63,000, compared to 91,700 last year, officials say.

Russell Baldrige, president of the Washington Sugar Beet Growers Association, said if retail sugar prices remain high, Columbia Basin farmers will produce all the beets the state's two processing plants can handle, or about 2.4 million tons.

Farmers plan more sugar beet acreage

Eastern Washington farmers will plant up to 30 percent more acres of sugar beets next spring unless there are fertilizer shortages and a consumer boycott of the product, sugar experts say.

Officials in Utah say it appears acreage will be up in this state, also, due to the high retail prices of sugar.

"It's too early to make any projections other than it looks very promising," says a spokesman for Amalgamated Sugar Co. He says the company has been taking a survey and discussing plans with sugar beet growers.

A spokesman for Utah-Idaho Sugar Co. says his company will take all the beets it can handle in its refinery, the only one in Utah.

David R. Waldron, Utah's deputy commissioner of agriculture, says sugar beet production may not rise as sharply in Utah as in Washington since that state has more land available.