



Regional Opportunity Report: Eastern Colorado Blueprint of Food and Agriculture

A unique opportunity to strengthen key food and agricultural areas through stakeholder conversations that explore opportunities for food-systems led community and economic development across Colorado

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EXTENSION

State of Possibilities



ENGAGEMENT

Background on the Colorado Blueprint

The stage is set for Colorado agricultural and food system stakeholders to frame, guide and innovate a Blueprint for the sector's future. Understanding key assets, emerging issues and priorities for future investments and policies will enable us to sustain the state's standing as a global leader in production and processing, while maintaining the culture of health, quality of life, and livable communities valued by both its long-time residents and those who choose to move to Colorado as their new home. This Blueprint is a unique opportunity to strengthen key food and agricultural areas through stakeholder conversations that explore opportunities for food-systems led community and economic development across Colorado.

In 2016, key organizations in Colorado's food system came together to guide a process culminating in a shared vision for the future of Colorado's food system. The groups include:

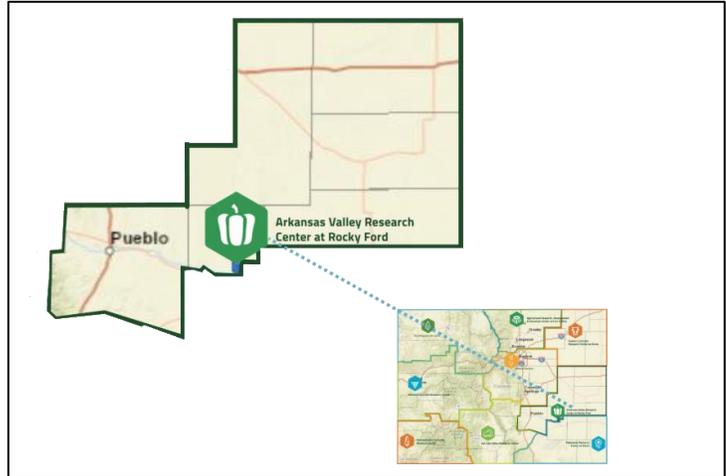
- Colorado State University Agricultural Experiment Station and Research Centers,
- Colorado Food Systems Advisory Council,
- Colorado Department of Agriculture,
- Colorado State University College of Agriculture,
- Colorado State University Office of Engagement and Extension,
- LiveWell Colorado, and
- Colorado Food Policy Network.

The groups divided the State into nine regions loosely based on the location of the state's agricultural experiment stations/research centers plus several additions to ensure representation of all corners of the state. Nine regional advisory teams were assembled to identify previous food system assessments, engage important regional stakeholders and voices, and help coordinate a regional townhall meeting. The regional advisory teams included representatives from the Agricultural Experiment Station, Colorado State University Extension, Colorado's Food Policy Network, and the Colorado Food Systems Advisory Council.

For each of the townhall meetings, members of the regional advisory team were asked to select up to four key issues that influenced but transcended any one industry sector across the food system. These could be topics on which the regions were already working or areas they saw as key opportunities to address (for example, workforce development and retention to support the next generation of agriculture). These issues were used to guide the townhall discussions. Colorado State University provided key background data points to support discussion. The remainder of this report highlights the result of those discussion in the Eastern Region.

Eastern Region Overview

The eastern region is located in the central eastern portion of the state and includes Cheyenne, Crowley, Kiowa, Kit Carson, Lincoln, Otero, and Pueblo counties. This region is anchored by the Arkansas Valley Research Center at Rocky Ford. The eastern regional advisory team includes: Mike Bartolo, Extension Specialist at the CSU Agricultural Experiment Station and Research Center; Julie Kuhn, Health Educator, in the Pueblo City County Health



Department; Jennifer Wells, Southeast Area Director of CSU Food Systems Extension Team; Kaye Kasza, Extension Agent on the CSU Food Systems Extension Team; and Dave Carter, Extension Director, and member of National Bison Association and COFSAC.

The regional advisory team identified previous assessments that touched on any aspect of the food system. See <http://foodsystems.colostate.edu/research/colorado-blueprint/arkansas-valley/> for full list of previous assessments. Collectively these reports identified several key regional challenges and opportunities:

Key Challenges

- Low population density. Ranges from 0.83 to 67.69 as compared to 50.93 at the state;
- Poverty rate for the region is higher than the state ranging from 8.6% to 33.4% compared to 12.7% at the state;

Key Opportunities

- Food and agriculture is top industry by employment;
- High volume of exports both nationally and globally;
 - Major producer of livestock.

Eastern Community Town Hall Focus Areas

The Eastern regional advisory team identified four focus areas to serve as the basis for discussion at their community town hall meeting: 1) Is there scale-appropriate infrastructure for a diverse set of agriculture and food businesses?; 2) How does food get to and move through communities and what are the implications for low-income households?; 3) What opportunities are there to rebalance the farm/ranch portfolio through enterprise diversification and/or off-farm income/other workforce opportunities?; 4) Can we identify opportunities within the food and agricultural sectors for “win-win” situations leveraging rural-urban linkages?

Community members attending the town hall meeting included members of Pueblo Triple Aim, Arkansas Valley Organic Growers, Food Policy Advisory Board, CSU Extension, Healthy Communities – Pueblo, Pueblo County Economic Development, Localfood Pueblo, St. Mary-Corwin Medical Center, CO Dept. Public Health and Environment, YMCA, El Paso and Pueblo

County Public Health, School districts. Community members formed groups around an interest in each of the selected focus areas. Each group was asked to complete the following:

1. Select opportunities and levers for their focus area in the eastern region,
2. Prioritize investments, programs, or projects in their community that could be identified as low-hanging fruit (i.e. could be accomplished in the near future) and/or would create a systematic impact (i.e. typically a longer time frame), and
3. Identify the type of organization that would be take a lead role and a supporting role for each opportunity or lever. Results from these discussions follow.

Eastern Community Town Hall Meeting Notes

Focus Area 1: Is there scale-appropriate infrastructure for a diverse set of agriculture and food businesses?

Investments/ programs/projects	Lead Role	Supporting Role
Low hanging fruit		
1. Increase the value of product produced (wheat/millet/etc.)	CSU	Industry/private
2. Meat processing	Public (economic development)	CSU
3. Enhance transportation resources	Public (county/state)	Public (economic development/zoning) and industry
4. Beginning farms (knowledge, guidance, funding, and incubator)	CSU and government	Non-profits and private sector
5. Increase direct to consumer sales	Government, non-profits, and private sector	CSU
Systematic impact		
1. Access to capital	Private	Public (economic development)
2. Younger workforce	Will come if there are jobs	
3. Co-ops	Non-profits and private sector	CSU
4. Processing facilities	Private sector	Government

Key takeaways: While the eastern region is a strong agricultural producing region, the group identified the need to increase the availability of local processing and distribution facilities so as to increase the value of products produced in the region. Transportation has been identified as a challenge, although rail exists in the region, it is not currently being effectively utilized by agriculture in the region.

Focus Area 2: How does food get to and move through communities and what are the implications for low-income households?

Investments/ programs/projects	Lead Role	Supporting Role
Low hanging fruit		
1. Increase food bank programs in food deserts	CSU and non-profits	Government, CSU, private sector
Systematic impact		
1. Mobile food access points (like a bussed farmers market)	Non-profit and government	Private sector, CSU
2. Food hub/year round production	Non-profit	Government

Key takeaways: While food banks, farmers markets and farm to school programs in the region are improving, the group identified the need to increase local production and distribution as important means by which to increase food access.

Focus Area 3: What opportunities are there to rebalance the farm/ranch portfolio through enterprise diversification and/or off-farm income/ other workforce opportunities?

Investments/ programs/projects	Lead Role	Supporting Role
Low hanging fruit		
1. Prison labor workforce	Government	CSU, non-profit, private sector
2. Employment pathway	Government	CSU, non-profit, private sector
3. State level H2A program	Government	CSU, non-profit, private sector
4. Consumer education	CSU	USDA/government
5. Housing needs	Industry/Private sector	Government/public sector
6. Railroad development	Government	Industry
Systematic impact		
1. Incubation program	Government, CSU	Non-profit, private sector
2. Greenhouse production	Government, CSU, private sector	Non-profit, private sector, CSU, government
3. Financing opportunities	Community	Industry
4. Railroad development	Government	Industry
5. Logistics/freight coordinator	Community	Industry

Key takeaways: Given the rural nature of the region, the group identified the need to increase the number of workers in the region through prison labor, employment

pathways, and the state H2A program. In addition, the group identified increasing production and transportation infrastructure as a means to provide more opportunities in food and agriculture businesses in the region.

Focus Area 4: Can we identify opportunities within the food and agricultural sectors for “win-win” situations leveraging rural-urban linkages?

Investments/ programs/projects	Lead Role	Supporting Role
Low hanging fruit		
1. Connect corporate/industry buyers with producers	Non-profit	
2. Double up SNAP Program	Government	CSU
Systematic impact		
1. Non-commodity protein marketing	Private sector	

Key takeaways: While the majority of the region is rural, there is one urban center within the region (Pueblo) and another close by (Colorado Springs), both representing potential markets for the rural parts of the region. The group discussed the need to connect industry buyers with producers in the region with a focus on the branding associated with Colorado and regional products. An increase in double up bucks SNAP participation at farmers markets and retail outlets as well as supporting the development of a public market in Colorado Springs were identified as a means by which to increase demand for the rural producers in the region.

Eastern Next Steps

After reviewing this report, the eastern regional advisory team identified the following lead organizations for each of the regional priorities:

Investments/programs/projects	Regional Lead Organization/Contact
Increase the value of products produced	
Processing facilities	
Enhance transportation resources, including railroad and logistics/freight coordinator	
Increase access to capital	
Attract a younger workforce	
Support beginning farmers	
Increase direct-to-consumer sales	
Support local co-ops	Arkansas Valley Organic Growers; CSU Extension; El Pueblo Museum
Increase food bank programs in food deserts	Care and Share
Create mobile food access points	Care and Share; independent groups such as Pueblo Marketeers (could probably use financial support)
Food hub/year round production	Arkansas Valley Organic Growers

Increase labor availability (prison labor, employment pathway, H2A program, housing availability)	
Consumer education	CSU-Extension, Pueblo Alliance for Food Access
Incubation program	
Greenhouse production	
Financing opportunities available for farmers	
Connect corporate/industry buyers with producers	
Double up bucks SNAP	DSS could get the info out, but people need to sign up; PCCHD, if continued funding in the Healthy Corner Store initiative. St. Mary Corwin's Farm Stand (applied for double up?) Pioneer Museum Farmers Market (applied for double up); local farmers and farm stands on location.
Non-commodity protein marketing	

Colorado Blueprint Next Steps

With the help of key stakeholders and regional advisory teams, Colorado State University is compiling additional available data for analysis, including public health data using Community Commons, updating a previous study on the value chain of Colorado agriculture, and analyzing a survey of public attitudes of agriculture in Colorado (a survey conducted every five years by the Colorado Department of Agriculture). These data are being further augmented and enhanced through recommendations of these regional townhall participants (early 2017), key industry focus groups (late Spring 2017) and through integration of common regional themes that emerge from townhall conversations and prioritization exercises.

These documents, along with the conclusions from the regional townhall meetings and industry focus groups will be compiled into the Colorado Blueprint of Food and Agriculture. This document will be online and available for public comment (Summer 2017). Once public comments are incorporated and the document is finalized, the Blueprint will be introduced at the Ag Innovation Summit in Fall of 2017. In addition to the Blueprint, Regional Opportunity Reports (such as this report) will be provided to each of the regions, detailing the regional opportunities and levers that were identified in their townhall meeting.