Regional Opportunity Report: Northeast
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

March 2017
foodsystems.colostate.edu

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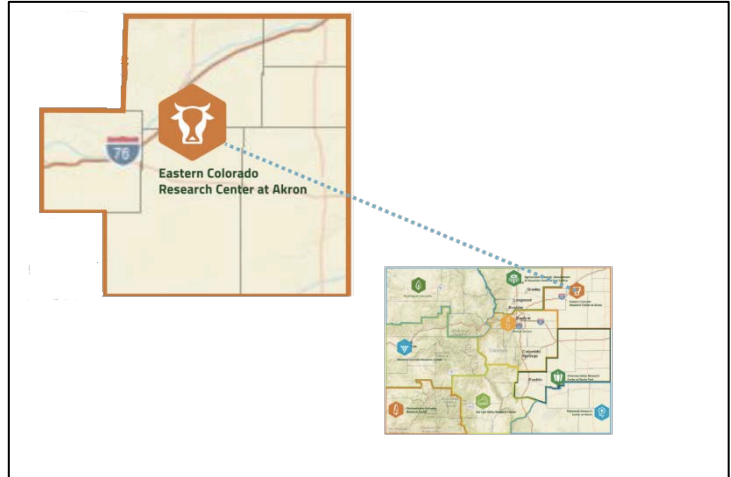
- Colorado State University Agricultural Experiment Station and Research Centers,
- Colorado Food Systems Advisory Council,
- Colorado Department of Agriculture,
- Colorado State University College of Agriculture,
- Colorado State University Office of Engagement and Extension,
- LiveWell Colorado, and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

Northeast Region Overview

The northeast region is located in the northeastern corner of the state and consists of Logan, Morgan, Phillips, Sedgwick, Washington, and Yuma counties. This region is anchored by the Eastern Colorado Research Center at Akron. The northeast regional advisory team includes: Doug Couch, Manager of the CSU Agricultural Experiment Station and Research Center; Linda Langelo, Horticultural Extension Program Associate and Coordinator for the regional Colorado Food Policy Network; Brent Young, Regional Extension Specialist for the Colorado State University Food Systems Extension Team; and, Tom Parks of the Colorado Food Systems Advisory Council.

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

Key Challenges
- Low population density including ranges from 1.9 to 22.15 people per square mile as compared to 50.93 at the state makes establishing local or regional markets for locally-grown or manufactured items difficult, can also have workforce implications;
- Poverty rate for the region is slightly higher than the state ranging from 10.4% to 16.9% compared to 12.7% at the state; and
- Water is limited in this region, with slightly more than half of all land in farms being used for dryland farming.

Key Opportunities
- Food and agriculture is top industry by employment and contribution to regional GDP, including large agricultural employers such as Cargill Meat Solutions, Leprino Foods, Seaboard Farms, and Western Sugar; and
- Development of water storage is one of the focus areas in the region's five-year plan.

Northeast Community Town Hall Focus Areas

The northeast regional advisory team identified two focus areas to serve as the basis for discussion at their community town hall meeting: 1) Is there infrastructure that is appropriate for all sizes of farm and ranch operations to support production, processing and distributing of foods locally, regionally, and globally that leverage opportunities the market is presenting?; 2) How does food get to and move through communities and what are the implications for low-income households?

Community members attending the town hall meeting included farmers, members of Colorado Food Systems Advisory Council, Colorado State University's Northeast Regional Engagement Center (NREC), Yuma Conservation District, Yuma City Council, Colorado Agricultural Preservation Association, Logan County Economic Development, Logan County Farmers and Market. 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 northeast 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.

Northeast Community Town Hall Meeting Notes

Focus Area 1: Is there infrastructure that is appropriate for all sizes of farm and ranch operations to support production, processing and distributing of foods locally, regionally, and globally that leverage opportunities the market is presenting?

Investments/ programs/projects	Lead Role	Supporting Role
Low hanging fruit		
1. Foster investments in greenhouses (give them to local farmers; enocurage spin off opportunities).	Government/Public and CSU	Industry/Private Sector and Government
2. Promote regional food and agriculture business opportunities - especially education and apprenticeships for high school students.	Nonprofit/ Community	CSU
Systematic impact		
1. Expand agritourism infrastructure to expose more urban to rural.	CSU	Private Sector
2. Create commercial kitchens (like a kitchen incubator or meat processing incubator; food trucks cook first in commercial kitchen which creates additional demand).	Nonprofit and Private Sector/Industry	Government/Public and Community/ Nonprofit

Key takeaways: The group identified education and apprenticeships as one of the key investments they would like to be made in the northeast region. This includes teaching the next generation of agriculture and meat processors and providing business apprenticeships.

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. Address the unique marketing challenges farmers markets have in this region (Farmers markets provide a key source of produce, but people shopping at those locations cannot fully leverage double up SNAP grants/programs; very important because groceries have poor produce offerings).	CSU, private/ industry, and community/ nonprofit	Government/public and CSU
2. Promote mobile food pantry as alternative to conventional food assistance (Integrate faith community).	Community/ nonprofit	Government/ public
Systematic impact		
1. Increase direct sales of livestock by addressing processing capacity limits (Beef producers have some options and some pigs; Otis is now closed; Add permanent livestock processing, mobile a possibility).	Private sector/ industry/ government	Government/ public

Key takeaways: The group identified meat processing (potentially mobile) as the area where they would like to see investment. Additionally, they believe there is opportunity to convert more acreage to organic, therein increasing the value and marketability of agricultural products.

Northeast Next Steps

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

Investments/programs/projects	Regional Lead Organization/Contact
Greenhouse investments	CSU Extension, NJC, NRCS, High School Vocational Agriculture, FFA
Food and ag education/apprenticeships	NJC, High School Vocational Agriculture, FFA
Agritourism infrastructure	County Economic Development
Commerical kitchens	CSU Extension, County Commissioners, Local Health Departments, Rural Community Resource Center
Marketing farmers markets	Local Farmers Markets, CSU Extension, County Economic Development, NRCS
Livestock processing	Local Processors/CSU

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 complied 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.