



# Regional Opportunity Report: South Central 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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## 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.

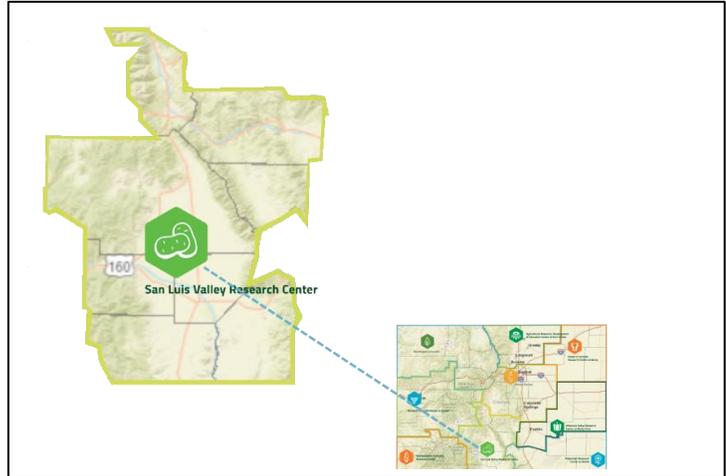
For each of the townhall meetings, members of the regional advisory team were asked to select up to four key issues that influenced but transcended any one industry sector across the food system. These could be topics on which the regions were already working or areas they saw as key opportunities to 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 South Central Region.

## South Central Region Overview

The south central region is located in the south central portion of the state and consists of Alamosa, Chaffee, Costilla, Conejos, Custer, Fremont, Rio Grande, and Saguache counties. This region is anchored by the San Luis Valley Research Center. The south central regional advisory team includes: David Holm, Professor of Horticulture at the San Luis Valley Research Center and CSU

Agricultural Experiment Station; Liza Marron, Director of San Luis Valley

Local Foods Coalition and member of CO Food Policy Network; Kurt Jones, County Director, in Chaffee County and member of CSU Food Systems Extension; Robin Young, County Director in Custer County and member of CSU Food Systems Extension Team; Trudy Kareus, CO 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/san-luis-valley/> for full list of previous assessments. Collectively these reports identified several key regional challenges and opportunities:

### Key Challenges

- Persistent poverty and food insecurity;
  - Higher poverty rate than the rest of the state (ranges from 8.72% to 28.95%, as compared to 18.5% at the state);
  - Higher unemployment rate (ranges from 2.3% to 4.6%, as compared to 2.8% for the state);
  - Slightly higher food insecurity rate (ranges from 8.9% to 16.6%, as compared to 12.9% for the state).

### Key Opportunities

- Agriculture is the primary economic driver and accounts for nearly a third of the region's economic activity;
- Agricultural powerhouse famous for potatoes, barley, and hay;
  - Examples of food/agricultural businesses and programs: Colorado Malting Company, Pinto Barn, Valley Roots Food Hub, Rio Grande Farm Park, San Luis Valley Local Roots Farm and Ranch Guide, Adams State University Value-Added Ag Sector Partnerships, active Rocky Mountain Farmers Union and Farm Bureau, Adams State Community Partnerships and many others;
  - Increase in production and availability of locally grown foods;
    - Twice as many 2010 survey respondents want to eat more locally than currently consuming;
- South Central Colorado has higher food access participation rates than state average.

## South Central Community Town Hall Focus Areas

The south central regional advisory team identified four focus areas to serve as the basis for discussion at their community town hall meeting: (1) Are there opportunities to increase utilization of local products by matching producers with appropriately-sized processing, distribution, and/or markets?; (2) Is there adequate access to land and/or water to support the next generation of agriculture?; (3) Do we have appropriate workforce development and regulations to meet changing needs of the food and agricultural sectors?; and (4) 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 members of San Luis Valley Local Foods Coalition, Rio Grande Watershed Conservation & Education Initiative, Ag banker at Sunflower Banker, Valley Food Co-op Adams State University, Rio Grande Farm Park, USDA-NRCS, Farmers with Altitude, Monte Vista Farmers Market, and Crestone Mountain Zen Center. 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 south central 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.

## South Central Community Town Hall Meeting Notes

*Focus Area 1: Are there opportunities to increase utilization of local products by matching producers with appropriately-sized processing, distribution, and/or markets?*

<b>Investments/ programs/projects</b>	<b>Lead Role</b>	<b>Supporting Role</b>
<b>Low hanging fruit</b>		
1. Meat and mobile processing -help Romeo outfit expand	Industry	Government/CSU
2. Grow into Value added production markets	Industry	Public/nonprofit and CSU
<b>Systematic impact</b>		
1. Producer Education and technical assistance to convert to value added business models	CSU	Government/public, private sector, community/nonprofit
2. Food incubators (e.g., VRFH)	Nonprofit/community	Industry/public
3. Consumer education on food preparation (i.e., cooking matters) and chef demos on new products and varieties	Nonprofit/community	CSU/industry

**Key takeaways:** To increase local utilization of the products produced in the region, the group identified the need for infrastructure (by expanding an existing mobile meat

processor), and, through producer education and technical assistance, increasing added production (e.g., vodka, ready-to-eat foods) and the adoption of alternative vegetables and field crops (e.g., garlic, malted barley, hemp). To increase local demand, the group identified the need to educate consumers on how to use local products in their cooking.

*Focus Area 2: Is there adequate access to land and/or water to support the next generation of agriculture?*

<b>Investments/ programs/projects</b>	<b>Lead Role</b>	<b>Supporting Role</b>
<b>Low hanging fruit</b>		
1. Facilitating access to and sale of alternative crops (high value/water saving)	CSU	Private/industry
2. Identifying supply chain (post-farm gate) including market for alternative crops...developing and spreading the word about appropriate technology	Private/industry	Government, nonprofit/community (e.g., SLV local foods)
<b>Systematic impact</b>		
1. Water conservation practices – research and technology	CSU	Private/industry
2. Water conservation practices – management and dissemination of best practices – this also includes regulation (which should be for farmers BUT ALSO include urban residents – no lawns, appropriate zoning)	Private/industry	Government, nonprofit/community

**Key takeaways:** Water scarcity is one of the main challenges for the region. The group identified the need to invest resources in water conservation practices, including research, technology, management practices, and regulations to support the next generation of agriculture in the region. Due to the scarcity of water, educating producers on high valued crop production as well as production of crops with low water requirements were also identified by the group as means by which to support future agriculture in the region.

*Focus Area 3: Do we have appropriate workforce development and regulations to meet changing needs of the food and agricultural sectors?*

<b>Investments/ programs/projects</b>	<b>Lead Role</b>	<b>Supporting Role</b>
<b>Low hanging fruit</b>		
1. Veggie and other education program in schools	Community	School districts, private partnerships
2. Vocational/continuing education	CSU/Adams (establish guarantee credit transfer) Rio Grande Farm park	CPAC, private foundation funding
3. Rio Grande Farm Park	Community/nonprofit	Land is managed by the city, private funding
<b>Systematic impact</b>		
1. FFA (the group had limited understanding of how FFA actually worked. Two of the attendees were members but only had very particular experiences)	Schools	Nonprofit funding, advisors, CSU
2. Beginning farmers	Rio Grande and CSU	USDA federal funds
3. Scholarships	Scholarship donation from private entities	Federal funds

**Key takeaways:** The group identified educating current and future producers as the main strategies needed for workforce development in the region. Education includes beginning farmer programs/farmer incubator programs, vocational/continuing education (including a certification program), education in the K-12 schools (including replicating a successful farm-to-school program in Alamosa across the region), and through FFA.

*Focus Area 4: How does food get to and move through communities and what are the implications for low-income households?*

<b>Investments/ programs/projects</b>	<b>Lead Role</b>	<b>Supporting Role</b>
<b>Low hanging fruit</b>		
1. Valley Roots Food Hub mobile distribution across SLV	Private	CSU and nonprofit
2. Commercial stores donate excess (educate, connect needs from food banks)		
3. Farmers market tours/education set times to connect farms and customers in rural areas		
4. Transportation in SLV – mobile market		

5. Local food in restaurants and stores – education of value	Private	CSU and nonprofit
<b>Systematic impact</b>		
1. Trade with other counties		
2. EBT access to local producers	Nonprofit	Government
3. Every community has a greenhouse	Nonprofit	CSU regulation
4. Paid community organizer to do all of this (AmeriCorps, VISTA Volunteer)		
5. Expanded hours, more days, more staff for food banks/farmers markets	Government	Nonprofit

Key takeaways: The group identified providing outreach and resources to producers to donate excess produce, strengthening the capacity to food banks, and connect to other regions for more variety of partnerships as the key investments to increasing local food access for low-income community members.

### South Central Next Steps

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

<b>Investments/programs/projects</b>	<b>Regional Lead Organization/Contact</b>
Meat and mobile processing facility	TBD
Increase markets for local value added production	TBD
Provide producer education and technical assistance to convert to value added business models	TBD
Support food incubators	TBD
Education (consumer education on food preparation, vegetable and other education program in schools, vocational/continuing education)	TBD
Facilitating access to and sale of alternative crops	TBD
Identifying supply chain (post-farm gate) for alternative crops	TBD
Improve water conservation practices	TBD
Workforce development (Rio Grande Farm Park, FFA, Beginning Farmers, scholarships)	TBD
Valley Roots Food Hub mobile distribution across SLV	TBD
Connect commercial stores to food banks	TBD
Connect farms and customers in rural areas (farmers market tours/education)	TBD
Mobile market (transportation in SLV)	TBD

Educate on the value of local food in restaurants and stores	TBD
Trade with other counties	TBD
Increase food access (EBT access to local producers, expanded hours, more days, more staff for food banks/farmers markets)	TBD
Community greenhouse	TBD
Paid community organizer	TBD

### 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.