Regional Opportunity Report: Southeast
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

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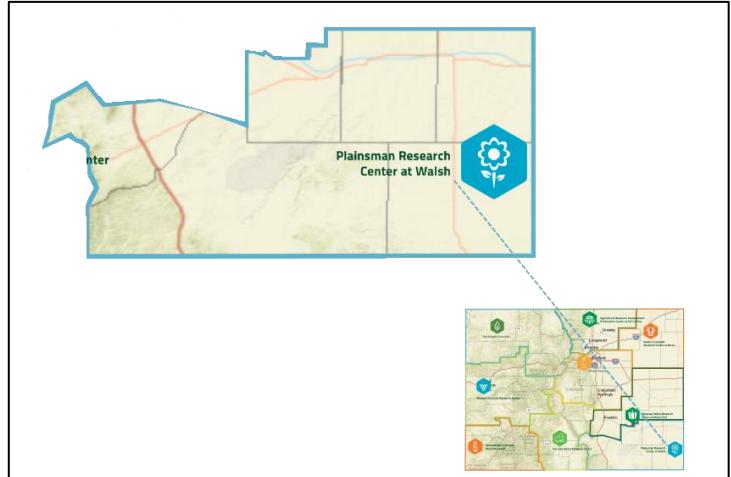- Colorado State University Agricultural Experiment Station and Research Centers,
- Colorado Food Systems Advisory Council,
- Colorado Department of Agriculture,
- Colorado State University College of Agriculture,
- Colorado State University Office of Engagement and Extension,
- LiveWell Colorado, and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

Southeast Region Overview

The southeast region is located in the southeastern corner of the state and consists of Baca, Bent, Huerfano, Las Animas, Otero, and Prowers counties. This region is anchored by the Plainsman Research Center at Walsh. The southeast regional advisory team includes: Kevin Larson, Manger of the CSU Agricultural Experiment Station and Research Center; Kaye Kasza, Extension Agent for CSU Food Systems Extension Team; Jennifer Wells, Southeast Area Director for CSU Food Systems Extension Team; Mallory Sikes, Extension Agent for CSU Food Systems Extension Team; Cindy Campbell, County Coordinator for LiveWell Huerfano County and member of COFPN; Wendy Peters Moschetti, Director of Food Systems for LiveWell Colorado and member of COFSAC; and Karen Falbo, Director of Nutrition Education for Natural Grocers and member of 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/southeast/ for full list of previous assessments. Collectively these reports identified several key regional challenges and opportunities:

Key Challenges
- Low population density. Ranges from 1.45 to 14.72 as compared to 50.93 at the state;
- Poverty rate for the region is higher than the state ranging from 14.9% to 25.6% 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, wheat, milo, sunflowers, vegetables, peppers, melons, onions.

Southeast Community Town Hall Focus Areas

The southeast regional advisory team identified three focus areas to serve as the basis for discussion at their community town hall meeting: (1) How does food get to and move through communities and what are the implications for low-income households?; (2) Can the region develop new products/crops (e.g., millet) that include local processing and distributing infrastructure to support opportunities for enterprise diversification other work force opportunities?; (3) How can we best ensure access to land, water, job and entrepreneurial activities to support a vibrant regional food system?

Community members attending the town hall meeting included members of Bent County Economic Development, Otero County Economic Development, Otero Junior College, Bent

County, CSU Extension, Baca County Extension Development, Southeast Colorado Small Business Development Center, and Crop Production Services, Inc. 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 southeast 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.

Southeast Community Town Hall Meeting Notes
Focus Area 1: 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. Cooking Education a. Stretch food dollars better	CSU	Government/public, private sector
2. Double Up Food Bucks a. No awareness in this area	Government	Community
Systematic impact		
1. Family Economics Education	Private sector, government	CSU, community
2. Community Gardens	CSU, community	Community, private sector
3. Community Leaders step up if at risk of losing a food business a. Sheridan Lake and Walsh as examples	Private sector, government	Private sector

Key takeaways: To increase food access for low-income households, the group identified the need to increase education for cooking, economics, gardening, and awareness of the double up bucks SNAP programming in the area. In addition to education, the group identified community owned food stores, farmers markets, and community gardens as other ways in which to increase access to healthy foods for the low-income members of their community.

Focus Area 2: Can the region develop new products/crops (e.g., millet) that include local processing and distributing infrastructure to support opportunities for enterprise diversification other work force opportunities?

Investments/ programs/projects	Lead Role	Supporting Role
Low hanging fruit		
1. Gluten free processing (all Gluten free grain requires same processing equipment) – could be marketed to textile industry, dog/pet food, human food	Industry/ Private Sector, CSU	Community and government
Systematic impact		
2. Find a way to process sorghum (milo) – steam flaking	Industry/ Private Sector, CSU	Community and government

Key takeaways: While the region has a comparative advantage in many areas of agricultural production, marketing costs are a big challenge. The group identified creating a gluten free processing facility as one way to develop new products in the area, as many gluten free grains can be grown in the region, as well as creating a way to process sorghum.

Focus Area 3: How can we best ensure access to land, water, job and entrepreneurial activities to support a vibrant regional food system?

Investments/ programs/projects	Lead Role	Supporting Role
Low hanging fruit		
1. Increase access to broadband phone, including wifi that's accessible, affordable, attainable – this is needed to support other initiatives in the area and needs to be a major priority	Government	Industry/private sector, community/ nonprofit
2. New technology education (e.g., drones)	CSU, government, nonprofit	Industry/private sector
Systematic impact		
1. Hydroponics and greenhouse education programs – distinguish this idea/movement from marijuana cultivation	CSU, government, nonprofit	Industry/ private sector
2. Increase support and awareness on small acre/small ag producers vs large	Government	CSU, industry/ private sector, nonprofit/ community

Key takeaways: The focus of the group was on new technologies, including increasing technology access (e.g., broadband phone, wifi) and technology education (e.g., hydroponics, greenhouse) as a main means by which to support the regional food system.

Southeast Next Steps

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

Investments/programs/projects	Regional Lead Organization/Contact
Cooking education programming	TBD
Increase use of double up bucks SNAP	TBD
Family economics education	TBD
Community gardens	TBD
Community leaders assist businesses if at risk of losing a food business	TBD
Gluten free processing facility	TBD
Sorghum processing facility	TBD
Broadband access	TBD
Education programs (technology, hydroponics and greenhouse)	TBD
Increase awareness of small vs large agricultural producers	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 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.