



Regional Opportunity Report: Western 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:

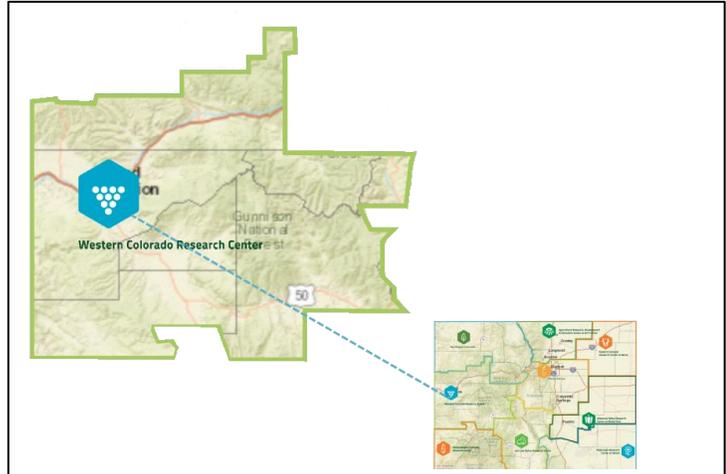
- Colorado State University Agricultural Experiment Station and Research Centers,
- Colorado Food Systems Advisory Council,
- Colorado Department of Agriculture,
- Colorado State University College of Agriculture,
- Colorado State University Office of Engagement and Extension,
- LiveWell Colorado, and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

Western Region Overview

The western region is located in the central western portion of the state and consists of Delta, Garfield, Gunnison, Lake, Mesa, Montrose, and Pitkin counties. This region is anchored by the Western Colorado Research Center. The western regional advisory team includes: Perry Cabot, Water Resources Specialist for CSU Agricultural Experiment Station and Research Center; Abbie Brewer, Director of Valley Food Partnership and member of COFPN; Dana Wood, County Coordinator for Garfield Health Communities Coalition and member of COFPN; Ann Duncan, Area Extension Agent for CSU Food Systems Extension Team; Meighan Lovelace, Director of Mountain Harvest Coalition and member of COFSAC; Trudy Kareus, 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/western/> for full list of previous assessments. Collectively these reports identified several key regional challenges and opportunities:

Key Challenges

- Persistent poverty and food insecurity;
 - Higher students eligibility for free or reduced-price lunch than the rest of the state (ranges from 4.3% to 74.4%, as compared to 42.2% for the state);
 - Higher poverty rate than the rest of the state (ranges from 9.9%-19%, as compared to 12.7% for the state).

Key Opportunities

- Food and agriculture is the number one industry with regard to employment in the area;
- Highly productive agricultural lands;
- The 'Our Side of the Divide' campaign, downtown revitalization initiatives, Cottage Food Bill, and other innovative programs have boosted agritourism and local business investment.

Western Community Town Hall Focus Areas

The western 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) How can we best promote job and entrepreneurial opportunities in agriculture and the food system to a broader set of youth?; (3) Can the region develop new products/ crops that include local processing and distributing infrastructure to support opportunities for firm diversification and/or new work force development?

Community members attending the town hall meeting included farms and ranches, members of a business incubator, public health departments, Valley Food Partnership, CSU Extension, food hub, and a county manager and commissioner. 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 western 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.

Western 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. Education on healthy and local food consumption	Nonprofit/ community	Private/ industry, CSU, and Public/govt
2. Incentivizing healthy food in assistance programs such as SNAP/Double SNAP and Local Foods RX	Private/ industry	Comm/Nonprofit, CSU, and Public/govt
3. Ag Loans, increasing both availability and education	Private sector & Nonprofit/ community	Govt/Public
Systematic impact		
1. Changing the narrative to make Ag viable through entrepreneurial and workforce support	Private/industry	Govt/ CSU & Nonprofit/ community
2. Service hub cooperative (not marketing but business support services)	Nonprofit/ community	CSU, Private & Government

Key takeaways: To increase food access in the region, the group identified education and promotion of healthy food consumption, agricultural loans, and food assistance as key components to increasing food access.

Focus Area 2: How can we best promote job and entrepreneurial opportunities in agriculture and the food system to a broader set of youth?

Investments/ programs/projects	Lead Role	Supporting Role
Low hanging fruit		
1. Replicate Routt County Community Ag Alliance to leverage organizational resources to support farmers and entrepreneurs	Nonprofit/ community (Valley Food Partnership?)	CSU, private sector/ industry
2. Innovation around how we integrate agriculture into classroom	Government	CSU, nonprofit/ community, industry/ private sector
3. Improve web-based resources to increase awareness of resources, buyer pools, custom work, employment opportunities, etc. including listservs, webinars, etc. (must be farm ownership of listserv)	Private sector/ industry	Nonprofit/ community
Systematic impact		
1. Ag workforce development – training and technical expertise to meet diverse needs of region	CSU, private sector/ industry, government, nonprofit/ community	
2. Convert H2A costs into an ag labor benefits program	Industry/ private sector	Nonprofit/ community, government

Key takeaways: To promote job and entrepreneurial opportunities in agriculture in the region, the group identified the need to improve resources available for producers through leveraging the knowledge of an existing organization, improving web-based resources, and workforce development training.

Focus Area 3: Can the region develop new products/ crops that include local processing and distributing infrastructure to support opportunities for firm diversification and/or new work force development?

Investments/ programs/projects	Lead Role	Supporting Role
Low hanging fruit		
1. Identification of markets, which require regional, company, and industry clarity – larger businesses going more local	Industry/ private sector, nonprofit/ community	CSU, government
2. Product marketing and education go together – research for consumer	CSU, industry/ private sector	Government, nonprofit/ community

targeting, industry specific campaigns, why buy it? What is it?		
Systematic impact		
1. West Slope food hub support (aggregation, distribution, marketing)	Industry/ private sector, nonprofit/ community	CSU, government
2. Processing facilities (industry specific)	Industry/ private sector	CSU, government, nonprofit/ community

Key takeaways: To assist producers in the region to develop new products/crops, the group identified marketing as a key component, including identifying markets for specific products as well as product marketing and education. Additionally, the need for infrastructure support was identified, including processing, aggregation and distribution.

Western Next Steps

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

Investments/programs/projects	Regional Lead Organization/Contact
Education on healthy and local food consumption	TBD
Incentivizing healthy food in assistance programs	TBD
Ag Loans, increasing both availability and education	TBD
Changing the narrative to make Ag viable through entrepreneurial and workforce support	TBD
Service hub cooperative business support services	TBD
Replicate Routt County Community ag alliance to leverage organizational resources to support farmers and entrepreneurs	TBD
Innovation around how we integrate agriculture into classroom	TBD
Improve web-based resources to increase awareness of resources, buyer pools, custom work, employment opportunities, etc.	TBD
Ag workforce development – training and technical expertise to meet diverse needs of region	TBD
Convert H2A costs into an ag labor benefits program	TBD

Identification of markets, which require regional, company, and industry clarity	TBD
Product marketing and education	TBD
West Slope food hub support (aggregation, distribution, marketing)	TBD
Processing facilities (industry specific)	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.