



Section 3: Conclusions

Drawing conclusions from an assessment is difficult because the purpose of an assessment is to understand the food system as it exists. Each piece of data gathered about the elements of the system is informative. However, the individual facts tell only a fraction of the food system story. Because the system is so broad and complex, it's the relationship between the details of the elements that best convey the overall health of the food system.

The conclusions drawn from the assessment:

- Summarize what was learned through the assessment process;
- Frame actions that could or should be taken in the short-term to strengthen the food system;
- Identify missing information about the food system that is clearly important but was not gathered during this effort; and
- Demonstrate the relevance of the food system in our community by showcasing related activities and showing their affiliation to this assessment.

This section is organized into sub-sections to respond to those categories of conclusions. In addition, the overarching lessons are summarized below.

Key Truths

The food system is a community resource and is as vital to quality of life as other infrastructure systems such as transportation, parks and recreation, and sanitary sewer systems. The food system dramatically effects:

- Availability and character of open space
- Linkages to cultural heritage and key historical assets
- Regional economic health
- Food security
- Human health and well-being

To be most vibrant, a healthy local food system requires ample agricultural inputs, diverse agricultural production, access to appropriate processing facilities, distribution and marketing infrastructure, and informed consumers.

A sustainable local food system requires favorable economic rewards and other values within each of the elements of the food system.

Key Findings

The Northern Colorado Food System is regional as is evidenced by the inter-county activity encouraged by the concentration of agricultural support businesses in Weld County, the strength of local food interest and customers in Boulder and Larimer County, and the plans for a year-round market in Larimer County to leverage Uniquely Fort Collins community development efforts.

Despite being one of the most productive agricultural counties in the nation, a significant, and growing, percentage of Weld County residents experience food security challenges. At the same time, producers in Weld County were some of the hardest hit by the agricultural credit crisis at the end of the decade. Perhaps connecting local consumers with local producers could mitigate some of these risks.

The amount of land in agricultural production in Larimer County is shrinking, and the limited amounts of prime agricultural land remaining are located in the pathway of potential future urbanization. It may be that ongoing conservation efforts could be refocused to lands of productive interest rather than recreational and aesthetic criteria.

The Boulder County Parks and Open Space program has acquired 25,000 total acres of productive farm land (13,000 acres with water rights) which are key natural resource inputs for creating an opportunity for local food production.

Additionally, the City of Boulder Open Space and Mountain Parks has acquired 14,000 acres of productive farm land (5,500 acres with water rights) that also add capacity for local food production on public agricultural lands.

Next Steps

The next steps to creating a more robust regional food system include:

- Increasing the public's awareness of the breadth, complexity and importance of the food system to public health, natural resource management and economic resiliency.
- Strengthening the connections between elements of the food system to expand and enrich it as a whole through more coordinated planning, nurturing partnerships and targeted investments.
- Identifying and implementing programs to ensure sustainability of agriculture and food production by addressing economic viability, producer succession, food safety regulations, regional food processing capabilities, local food contracts for commercial and institutional food services, and other currently limiting factors.

Conclusions by Element of the Food System

The following charts detail the conclusions reached by the three county Project Advisory Teams at the end of the study regarding important information learned and information still needed.

OVERALL CONCLUSIONS – PAT Conclusions Across Boulder, Larimer and Weld Counties

Things we learned and/or should do

- Understanding the food system (particularly with respect to economic factors and political context) is an important issue.
- The community prefers a diverse set of ways to learn about and discuss food issues, including fact sheets, meetings and community discussions.
- Most participants in the assessment process learned a great deal about a diverse set of agriculture and food issues outside of their usual realm of participation.
- Expanded farm-to-school programs offer potential to provide consistent markets for regional producers.

Things we learned we need to know more about

- Ongoing dialogue is needed about the food system to 1) research what other communities are doing and 2) identify critical actions for our region.
- A statistically accurate polling of the region is needed on food issues because the data gathered in this study reflects the thinking of people who are already engaged in the food system.
- A Local Food Summit (or annual series of summits) that gathers representatives from all elements of the food system to frame or evaluate feasibility work and identify best policy and practice choices may be beneficial.
- More study is needed to determine if a global economic crisis or other disaster such as energy shortages, extreme weather variability/events, or acts of terrorism could cause local food production to be considered a more lucrative production option for regional agricultural producers.
- Programs could be offered to address food safety education needs in production and consumer markets. Specifically these programs could target food safety and safe handling techniques for consumers, distributors and producers.

AGRICULTURAL INPUTS – PAT Conclusions Across Boulder, Larimer and Weld Counties

Things we learned and/or should do

- Land and water are the critical natural resource inputs for agricultural production. In terms of local food production and availability, the study indicates that although pressures continue to mount for these limited resources, the availability of land and water in the short term are not constraining the region from enjoying a robust local food system.
- Agricultural land and water are at risk from economic pressures arising from both limited financial profitability at the farm-gate, and urban growth pressure that inflates the value of land and water above levels supported by agricultural uses. If unchecked over the long-term, as more water and land are transferred to alternative uses, these losses may severely prohibit agricultural production in perpetuity.
- In certain instances, increased investments in irrigation efficiencies have expanded water availability.
- Agricultural input costs continue to rise making it increasingly difficult to obtain reliable operating credit. This impediment may be especially true for small local producers, and beginning farmers.
- Growing increased amounts of local food most commonly requires additional labor force. Labor employment regulations are often onerous for small producers making it impractical to consider increased labor needs. Alternative labor forces may be available by utilizing local sources such as inmates, youth corp workers and other non-traditional labor types.

Things we learned we need to know more about

- The idea of a publicly funded water bank for agricultural use should be further explored in cooperation with other regional water users.
- More information about regional water supplies and water rights is needed to understand which, and how much, agricultural water is at risk of future transfer and what the implications would be on the local food system.
- Information is needed regarding the level of water price increases that would lead producers to choose production enterprises that create more value per acre-foot of applied water. It is also important to understand if the existing irrigation water delivery system is sufficient and appropriate for serving water supply needs for these high value crops and what improvements are needed.
- Consumers are often unaware that water can, in many instances, be transferred away from existing irrigable lands. A better understanding is needed of whether and how the communication of this knowledge would increase the awareness of potential water transfers/loss to agriculture.

AGRICULTURAL PRODUCTION – PAT Conclusions Across Boulder, Larimer and Weld Counties

Things we learned and/or should do

- There is increasing diversity in the types of crops and livestock being produced, but given historic patterns, field crops, grass/pasture and cattle are still very dominant.
- Land and water conservation programs create a resource base for agriculture. More information is needed regarding how to best manage these resources to support local food systems.
- Land and water conservation is paramount for sustained agriculture production in the region.
- Boulder County Open Lands program is providing opportunities for beginning farmers in direct markets.
- It is important to follow-up on the evidence gathered in this study that more support for beginning farmers is needed, particularly in regard to training and financial resources.
- To achieve long-term sustainability within the food system, ag/food production must be consistently economically viable.
- Numbers of farms and acreage of land in organic production or being converted to organic methods is growing in the region.

Things we learned we need to know more about

- More information is needed to understand if Northern Colorado soils, markets, climate and water quantity/quality are appropriate for a more diverse set of production enterprises.
- Study is needed to determine what models of agriculture can sustain a family who chooses agriculture as a career track if they do not inherit their land or livestock. This study should also identify possible programs to bridge that gap.
- Explore options for keeping agricultural lands in production.

PROCESSING, DISTRIBUTION AND MARKETING – PAT Conclusions Across Boulder, Larimer and Weld Counties

Things we learned and/or should do

- Price of food changes in importance as a variable in food selection between those challenged by food security (where it is the most important factor), and local food buyers (where it is superseded by convenience factors).
- Availability of local foods is a concern: consumers would like to see more options in the places they already shop and eat (restaurants, schools.) In addition, increased availability of local food products in a more convenient form is desired. In the mean time, to satisfy consumer demand for local products, farmers markets and direct sales continue to grow.
- Seasonality is primarily a concern for produce, but there are commodities that could be available year-round. Currently, there is less interest, marketing and activity focused on these food types.
- Local foods would be more attractive to consumers if it was clearer what is local and/or produced using specific criteria
 - A national food safety event (eggs) demonstrated the potential local demand increase if confidence in the broader system wanes. But, a local-based event could do just the opposite (melons in the late 1990's in Larimer County), so food safety management should be an important part of marketing strategies.
- Any business intending to market food must be aware of and prepared to address a complex system of processes and requirements.

Things we learned we need to know more about

- More study is needed to understand the role and barriers of food distribution in our region, which include seasonality, scale of production, storage infrastructure and economic obstacles. Some of the questions to be addressed include:
 - What are the implications for the “resiliency” of the region to feed itself if there were economic, energy or climatic shocks?
 - Is a cooperative effort among producers economically feasible? Are there other barriers to collaboration?
 - Since there are existing consumer coops in the region, could there be a hybrid model with producer and consumer members? Could pooling producer equity overcome the “thin” infrastructure?
- More information is needed to understand the role of food safety requirements and regulatory compliance in the local food system. It may be a significant barrier to small-scale marketers, market operations, scaled up distribution and cost effective processing.
- Education on sources and factors contributing to food borne illness is needed among consumers and food producers. Food handling plans would benefit from better understanding of these factors.
- Without a year-round supply of local food, there is a barrier to using local products in restaurants which could explain our current “thin markets”. A series of case studies highlighting how chefs and other institutional buyers have managed direct farm accounts could show some “best practices” for those who claim there are too many barriers.

Things we learned and/or should do

- There is an expanding array of food certification programs nationally, and consumers seem to value those labels. Some marketing programs are being actively used in Colorado (organic, Colorado Proud), but this promotion is missing in some major product categories and seasons.
 - Currently, there is “thin” infrastructure for processing, distributing and marketing local foods in the Northern Colorado region. Moreover, there is a high cost of entry for new businesses that may want to innovate local food supply chains. It is not currently known if the market will bear more “scaled up” businesses.

Things we learned we need to know more about

- More information is needed to understand the potential for value added food products if there were more slaughter, processing enterprises and community kitchens. Would there be full capacity utilization given the seasonality of the market?
 - Is there public acceptance for processing facilities in the community?
- There may be less awareness about how commodities fit into our food choices and diets. More information is needed on the best ways to keep brand identity for local products in processed goods.
- Little is known about possible programs that could be used to communicate social, environmental, social justice and economic “indicators” to customers about the benefits of buying local. How could those same programs communicate to the broader public and policymakers?
- An analysis would be useful of available federal and state programs that could be better leveraged by stakeholders to coordinate food enterprises beyond the farm or ranch gate. Some economic development opportunities may be foregone without leveraging those resources. Public-private partnerships should be explored.
- There is need to build capacity for those entering the food sector for business planning, regulatory compliance and supply chain management.

CONSUMER CHOICE, NUTRITION AND PUBLIC HEALTH – PAT Conclusions Across Boulder, Larimer and Weld Counties

Things we learned and/or should do

- Food is related to health. Specifically, healthy food choices generally improve human health.
- Targeted health promotion programs impacted behaviors and health indicators in Weld County.
- There are significant increases in eligibility for and use of food assistance programs – government programs and non-profits services.
- There are some “food deserts” in each of the counties where the availability of food is limited by the types of food markets available. Nationally, urban areas are of concern, but the deserts are most pronounced in rural areas of this region.
 - Having healthier, higher quality food choices available for meals consumed away from home is important because of the growing trends of eating away from home.
 - Transportation is not reported as a significant barrier to food access.
- Local and healthy food access is less an issue of price and more an issue of cultural, geographic and convenience barriers.
- People’s food choices are influenced by physical access, economic status, and shopping convenience. Dominant factors in consumer food choices are degree of product knowledge and available options for effectively utilizing local producers/resources.
 - Federally funded nutritional programs are critical to food access and security for low income populations.

Things we learned we need to know more about

- Quantified information is needed regarding the significance in supplying households with food from the growth in home gardening and community gardens. What is the impact to people’s healthy living/eating?
- It is not known if the success of Weld County’s targeted health promotion programs on behavior and health can be sustained and replicated.
- There is little data to determine if making healthier choices available to those receiving food assistance will lead to healthier eating behavior within that population.
- Data is needed to predict whether or not more nearby and year-round fresh markets would increase the fresh produce consumption of the region’s consumers.
- Data should be sought regarding the use of SNAP cards that details where the food purchases are made: grocery, convenience stores, national chains, local markets, etc.
- It would be useful to know if the farm-to-school, school garden, and other healthy food choice programs are increasing consumption of fresh produce by students and families. If so, when does this occur (does the integration of healthy fresh food choice lead to increased consumption by students immediately and do these habits extend into their adulthood?)
- Data is needed on the health effects, if any, of Community Support Agriculture (CSA) participation.

Food System Related Activities within the Region

Other food system related activities were ongoing in the Northern Colorado Region concurrently with the food system assessment. All of these activities demonstrate the relevance of the food system within the community. Some of the activities were bolstered by the food assessment process. Other activities are recounted here simply because they demonstrate the level of interest in local food in Northern Colorado.

Parker Water and Sanitation: Lower South Platte Demonstration Project

The Lower South Platte Demonstration Project has explored methods for “saving” water with the intent of satisfying growing urban water demands with this savings. Subsequent objectives are an examination of the opportunity for agricultural producers to form a water leasing entity that will market water savings to municipal users. The entity’s institutional design, composition, size, bylaws and verification are all aspects to be identified in the research process. As part of larger CSU team, Drs. Bond, Goemans, and Pritchett from CSU’s Department of Ag and Resource Economics are developing a water allocation model to identify various alternative irrigation strategies and economic impacts.

Using historic acreages and data on water consumed by various crops, these researchers are trying to model how some water reduction shocks (that may happen in the future if urban areas exercise their rights to use water) may be minimized if producers considered the gross crop value to acre foot water use relationships that could guide production cropping decisions. This project is a good example of a municipality partnering with CSU to learn about not only water efficiencies that might be gained, but also, what types of production transitions might allow the rural-urban water transfers to be less impactful on ag based communities.

This effort is in its early stages, and includes only some water basins and production choices, but demonstrates how future decisions about the use and reallocation of water could be addressed with better science.

Larimer County Open Lands Department: Proposal to Conduct Detailed Study of Productive Farm Lands

The Larimer County Open Lands program has been funded by a sales tax measure which will expire in 2018. The department worked very closely with a variety partners including State of Colorado GoCo funds, the Nature Conservancy and the Cities of Fort Collins and Loveland, to leverage the County’s funds and maximize protection of targeted open spaces. Most of these lands are grasslands, important viewsheds, and recreational resources. Little productive farmland was acquired or protected under the program.

As the Department considers approaching the electorate for an extension of the sales tax, the community’s interest in local food is being considered. The Department is interested in conducting a study of the prime agricultural lands in the County to document the location, characteristics, and ownership of parcels that could be protected using future tax dollars and farmed to strengthen the local food system. The availability of physical access to suitable

irrigation water supplies and deliveries and the availability of water rights would also be researched. The Department is currently seeking funding for such a study.

The Beginning Farmer training program from Boulder County Extension trying to equip a new generation of producers

The Colorado Building Farmers program builds farm community and farmer capacity through classroom and experiential learning for beginning farmers (0 – 10 yrs exp). The Market Farm Track is a series of 8 evening classes designed to help New Farmers explore farming as a business and provide Intermediate and Experienced Farmers with tools and ideas to refine and enhance their business management, production, and marketing skills. The mentorship program provides on-demand experiential learning to beginning farmers from experienced market farmers. Workshops have been held in Boulder County for the past 4 years, and have included producers from Boulder, Larimer and Weld counties, but also, many counties in the Denver urban area. Business plans developed in the course have provided participants with access to credit (through a regional FSA office), new markets and access to Boulder County open spaces as they continue to put parcels up for bid to producers who have viable farm production and business plans.

More information is available at: <http://www.coopext.colostate.edu/boulder/ag/smallfarms.shtml>

Ranch Way Feeds new organic feed processing facility and its role in the livestock industry's infrastructure

EASY FEED ORGANIC

Ranch-Way Feeds in Fort Collins, Colorado is now producing Organic Animal Feed. The “Easy Feed” lineup includes:

- a. Organic Cattle Feed
- b. Organic Horse Feed
- c. Organic Swine Feed
- d. Organic Chicken Feed
- e. Organic Turkey Feed
- f. Organic and All Stock Grain Mix.

Also available is Organic Beef Mineral, Organic Horse Mineral, Organic Sheep Mineral and Organic Goat Mineral.

Ranch-Way distributes organic feed throughout the Rocky Mountain Region from the mill in downtown Fort Collins.

Ranch-Way has installed a new organic feed milling system in order to manufacture “Easy Feed”. Organic Feed Certification was granted by the USDA and the State of Colorado in late summer 2010. This new enterprise was motivated by two market dynamics: continuing demand for organic feeds in Ranchway’s Santa Fe, NM retail store and trends that have shown continued growth in sales of organic animal products (and thus suggest demand for feeds, in a market with a very small number of certified organic feed mills). More information about their new product line can be found at: <http://www.ranch-way.com/products/organic-feed>

The expansion of the Weld County Farm-to-School program into Boulder and Larimer counties with more producers being trained to participate in the bid system

The process by which schools procure food is complicated and knowledge of how the system works is essential if local farmers want to begin selling products to school districts. A group of local producers have been participating in the bid system since the 2008/2009 school year when they began selling produce to Weld County District 6. In the fall of 2010, Weld 6 gathered producers, other school districts and interested community members to discuss some of the successes and failures of the farm-to-school program over the past three years as well as to educate new farmers on how they can participate.

Due to the success of the Weld 6 program, interest from both farmers and school districts, as well as new grant programs to grow Farm-to-School efforts, a larger conference was held on January 28th, 2011 in Brighton, CO. CSU Extension is partnering with Real Food Colorado, Slow Food Denver, USDA Farm Service and USDA Rural Development to conduct a workshop to address the issues of creating a farm-to-school program. The conference will bring together local farmers, schools and community partners to discuss past successes and failures in farm-to-school programs, general information about how food is procured by schools as well as an open forum for discussion. The hope is that by bringing together all the players involved in the school food system and having an open discussion, schools and farmers can learn from other successful programs in order to create more successful farm-to-school programs in Northern Colorado.

For a link to the conference details: <http://www.ext.colostate.edu/cis/farmentoschoolconference.pdf>

Farm-To-School Programs Creating New Markets for Local Growers/Producers

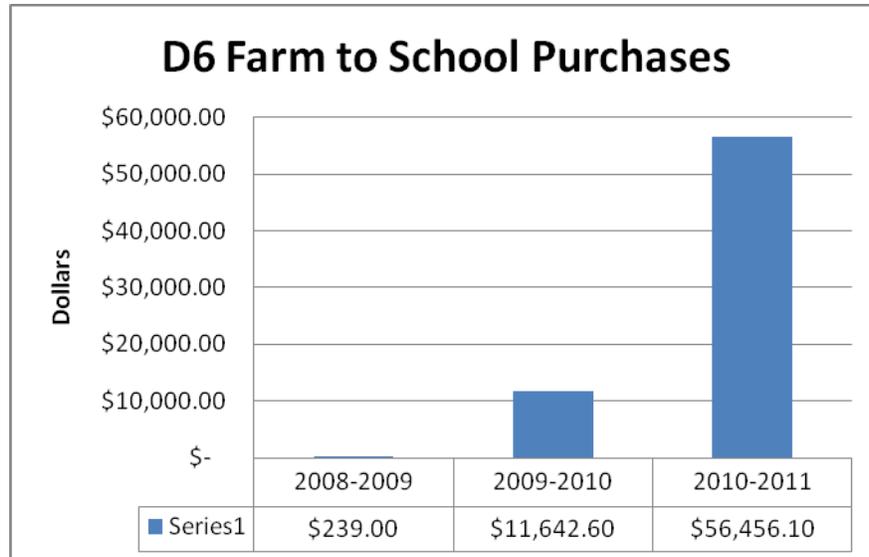
By Jeremy West, CDM/SNS

Nutrition Service Director, Weld County School District 6

One thing that became clear as the Northern Colorado Food System Assessment team studied the purchasing data of schools is the growth in purchasing foods, particularly vegetables, from local growers/producers. (Local as defined by USDA is a 400 mile radius of the buyer.) For example, in Greeley-Evans District 6, which serves a student population of 19,500, their purchases of local produce amounted to \$239.00 in school year 2008-2009, their first year to purchase local produce as part of their “Farm-To-School” program. In the current school year, 2010-2011, Nutrition Services estimates its purchases of local produce will be \$56,000. (See graph below) Similarly, St. Vrain Valley schools, which serves a student population of 26,000, have experienced significant growth in their procurement of local fresh produce.

Numerous school districts from the Denver Metro area and northern Colorado are meeting quarterly with local growers/producers at Farm-To-School meetings. This creates an opportunity for local growers/ producers to connect with local buyers to discuss opportunities to buy and sell local products and troubleshoot any concerns about the process. This, along with both a state and national focus on increasing the amounts of fresh fruits and vegetables offered to students as part of the National School Lunch Program, seems to be creating some new markets for local growers/producers.

Farm-To-School purchases don't only include buying fruits and vegetables, but also other staples like milk, milk products, grains, beef and other protein products. While purchases in the other categories away from fruits, vegetables and milk are minimal at this time, this is an area of expected market growth over the next 2-3 years.



A planned study on the feasibility of establishing a regional food distribution entity to support Farm-to-School and Farm-to-Chef activities

Many school districts have shown an interest in sourcing locally grown food for their cafeterias but do not have adequate resources. There are two main challenges when sourcing from local farmers: produce comes from multiple sources, maybe 6 different farms rather than from just one distribution company; and produce is very minimally processed increasing the facility and staffing needs for preparation at the schools. These challenges can be prohibitive for some school districts and they are not able to serve locally grown products in their cafeterias, even as interest grows and the USDA establishes programs to encourage local procurement.

This is where a food distribution entity comes in; this facility can bridge the gap and make farm-to-school and farm-to-cafeteria programs possible for school districts across Northern Colorado. Julia Erlbaum, of Real Food Colorado, with assistance from Colorado State University, is conducting a feasibility study for a food distribution center in Northern Colorado whose main client would be school districts. This facility would aggregate, process and deliver products from different farmers across Northern Colorado to various school districts. Processing will include minimal processing, such as washing and boxing, as well as more extensive processing, such as freezing and drying, to increase local sourcing beyond the typical Colorado growing season. The actual location of the facility is unknown, but will be located in Boulder, Larimer or Weld counties. The feasibility study is well underway and should be completed by December 2011.

A regional meeting of area Farmer's Market Managers at the March 2011 Farmer's Market Association meeting

The Northern Colorado Food System Assessment was presented to the participants at the March 2011 Farmer's Market Managers meeting. The presentation included a summary of the study participants and process, a sampling of the types of data collected during the study effort, and a summary of the findings and results of the work. The presenters asked the participants at the meeting to fill out questionnaires to document their reactions to the assessment. A summary of their feedback follows.

When asked what would make a regional food assessment most helpful to local farmers markets, the respondents touched on most of the elements of the food system. Several responded that identifying and connecting to local farmers would be a helpful outcome of an assessment. Others suggested quantifying the importance of farmers markets to both farmers and consumers. Several suggested information should be gathered to help expand products available at markets by 1) identifying new sources of production, 2) encouraging vendors to create products that could be offered year-round, and 3) educating the public about food security issues and needs, including food deserts.

Several questions focused on the idea of Farmers Markets in a region working together. Information was collected on both the potential value of such collaboration and the level of interest in organizing these collaborative efforts. Participants could see value in regional cooperation to achieve common goals including attracting new customers and advertising, sharing best management practices for the markets, and working with vendors. Nearly all of the respondents expressed interest in participating in regional collaborative meetings with other area market managers if such venues could be arranged.

A summary of the Fort Collins Downtown Development Authority's year-round market concept

The Fort Collins Downtown Development Authority (DDA) has envisioned the Community Marketplace as a place to celebrate the health of our community, our agricultural lands and heritage, and our environment through the year-round offering of locally grown and produced foods. DDA completed a financial feasibility analysis in 2010 of the original concept that was conceived through a series of visioning workshops and planning activities in 2009. The study examined the marketplace concept through the lenses of operational sustainability and development feasibility and recommended adjustments to the concept so that it would be "right-sized" with the capacity of our local food grower and producer capabilities.

The development program recommended looks slightly different than the original vision put forth in 2009. The recommended development program consists of a partnership between the DDA and the Fort Collins Food Co-op and the Cooperative Extension's Old Town Farmers' Market to deliver on the following goals:

- Create a dynamic and inclusive place in the downtown;

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- Support the region’s farmers and food producers and provide opportunities to independent entrepreneurs;
 - Promote and model environmentally sustainable, socially fair, and economically viable practices;
 - Provide educational opportunities, particularly about the local food system and conscious consumerism.

With the completion of the financial feasibility analysis, the DDA is positioned well for the 2011 activities that will include:

- Advance conversations about formal partnership agreements,
- Address questions and make decisions about site selection and acquisition,
- Create the formal structure for management of the marketplace,
- Develop and execute a finance strategy.

For more information, or to follow the progress of the DDA Community Marketplace concept refer to <http://www.downtownfortcollins.org/>.

Be Local Winter Farmers Markets *(existing activity alongside the Food Assessment work)*

The Winter Farmers Markets have been sponsored since 2006 by Be Local Northern Colorado, a non-profit organization based in Fort Collins. The purpose of the Markets is to provide an off-season venue for direct sellers of locally-grown produce and meat, locally produced food products, and land-based crafts people (e.g. alpaca fiber, wood products utilizing local resources, etc.)

Since 2006, the Winter Farmers Markets have grown from a single event to 14 markets held twice monthly from late October through mid-April for the 2010-2011 season. Also in 2010, the Winter Markets expanded to hold two Markets in downtown Loveland. Each Market date featured 50-55 vendors, drew 1500-2000 visitors and produced vendor sales of approximately \$25,000. Vendors came from Larimer, Weld and Boulder counties as well as a few from metro Denver and southeastern Wyoming.

During the 2008-2009 season, the Winter Markets expanded to the post-holiday period (January – March) for the first time. This accomplished two things: first, Fort Collins then had at least one farmers market every month of the year. Secondly, the growers began to be able to plan on a year-round customer base, and have begun to expand their late-season production to include more storage crops and root vegetables and to experiment with early and late-season greens grown in hoop houses and similar season-extending structures. And in 2010-2011, the Markets have had their first greenhouse grower with tomatoes and similar produce available fresh-picked at each Market.

In addition to encouraging producers to expand their offerings and production volume, the Winter Farmers Markets are helping to accustom area farmers’ market shoppers to year-round availability of local food. This kind of effort to simultaneously increase both the supply of and

the demand for locally produced food is critical to the growth and strength of the smaller farmers and ranchers in the three counties.

Overview of Colorado MarketMaker

A new online resource available to connect consumers, producers and institutional buyers. Visit to learn more about your local farm, ranch and food businesses:

<http://co.marketmaker.uiuc.edu/main/index>

Colorado MarketMaker is an interactive mapping system that locates businesses and markets of agricultural products in Colorado, providing an important link between producers and consumers. There are currently over 20,000 businesses listed in Colorado MarketMaker. Since the website was updated and promoted, it has averaged over 150,000 website hits per month by over 10,000 unique visitors, so it represents a great promotional resource, free of charge to farm and food enterprises.

Colorado businesses include:

- Producers=529
- Farmers markets=138
- Wineries=91
- Food retailers=5,490
- Processors=1,433

Check out these features:

- a. Buyer-seller forum, <http://co.marketmaker.uiuc.edu/main/marketplace>, lists products and services that buyers are looking for and sellers are offering. Updated daily, see listings from across the country. Note you should be a listed member to use this service.
- b. Publications and fact sheets that may be of use to food producers who use MarketMaker, <http://co.marketmaker.uiuc.edu/main/documents>
- c. All food businesses are invited to submit information on their companies to be included in the Business Spotlights and Taste of Colorado.

For more information on Market Maker and what they are doing, contact Dawn Velasquez at Dawn.Velasquez@ag.state.co.us.

Weld County - Retail Food Purchasing Cooperative

(a summary of Greeley's food retailers survey to identify where targeted investments in market development may best serve consumers)

During the Healthy Weld 2020, A LiveWell Colorado Community, team's data collection and research process, several immediate projects were identified to fill critical gaps in the local food system. The first project identified is the need to improve marketability between regional producers and local food retail establishments through a food purchasing cooperative. Through extensive conversations, key challenges and opportunities have surfaced that could be effectively

addressed through a sustainable cooperative. The project is progressing in four phases, as outlined below. Phases 3 and 4 will take place during 2011-2012.

Phase 1: Mapping Food Retail in Weld County and Identifying Food Deserts

Healthy Weld 2020's Active Community Environment Consultant identified and mapped all Weld County food retail establishments, beginning with a county-wide database of all licensed food establishments. With this information, a GIS map was created that provided a broad picture of Weld County's food retail environment.

This food retail map, along with additional food system assessment data, was used to identify several food desert areas that could greatly benefit from increased access to healthy locally produced food products. Various projects (Farmer's Market, Retail Food Purchasing Cooperative and Food Access projects) are underway to provide communities with proven strategies that can be used to increase healthy food access options for many Weld County residents.

Phase 2: Surveying Food Retailers

Through phone interviews, Healthy Weld 2020 identified mapped retailers food purchasing sources, and their interest in participating in a Food Retail Purchasing Cooperative. Thirty-five (35) percent of the retailers surveyed are interested in more information about participating in a cooperative. Several food retail-producers also expressed interest in participating in a cooperative.

Phase 3: Surveying Food Producers

The Healthy Weld 2020 team will conduct research of local food producer marketing systems to determine their interest and/or capacity for selling products to local retailers. Through existing networks, task forces, producer partnerships and cooperative-building resources, Healthy Weld 2020 currently has extensive resources to accomplish this phase.

Phase 4: Developing an Operating Blueprint and Initializing a Cooperative

An operating blueprint will be developed to serve as a general start-up guide for interested retailers and producers. The blueprint will build upon existing area cooperative models, extensive research of food retailer and producer capacities, and specific user-member needs. Healthy Weld 2020 staff will initially provide technical assistance to the cooperative until an internal manager can be identified to ensure long-term sustainability.

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Longmont Community Food System Assessment

The purpose of this project was to work with the LiveWell Longmont Coalition and its food systems subcommittee to develop product and process goals for a city-wide, participatory food systems assessment. The intention is to inform LiveWell Longmont's policy and environmental strategies to improve access to healthy foods for all residents

Key Findings:

- It seems appropriate to acknowledge the fact that there might be different consumer clusters and that vary in factors that are important to them, reported challenges (i.e. affordability), and shopping locations. This allows for better targeting of education, outreach and promotional programs
- Demographics are not the only factors that influence behavior, attitudes about produce also seem important to many.
- These clusters prefer different locations and might require different changes in the ways they are engaged and educated to increase their fruit and vegetable consumption.

Overall Conclusions from the Survey Assessment:

- Increasing access to Farmers' Markets and other locally sourcing location is a priority for a majority of the sample.
- Distance to shopping venues is a problem, but it is specific to the distance and the needs of a type of customer.
- Price still seems to be the largest barrier (or perceived price difference) in eating more fruits and vegetables.
- Identifying consumer clusters and targeting their needs and barriers in the future will make food promotion to encourage healthy living behaviors more effective.

A summary of the Larimer County employees wellness program statistics drawing the correlation between nutrition and health care costs

Larimer County Government is self insured for employee health and has 2,802 members covered by the insurance. To be fiscally responsible, the County has tracked what dollars are spent on health issues directly related to unhealthy behaviors, such as poor nutrition, tobacco use, physical inactivity and substance abuse. The data from the 2009 plan year shows that claims related to unhealthy behaviors totaled \$512,339 on the Larimer County Medical Insurance Plan. Of this total, \$432,454 and 1,792 services can be directly attributed to poor nutrition. 301 members or 11% were responsible for those services. The average charge was \$400 per visit of which the plan paid \$241 (after discounts, deductibles, and co-pays). That averages the plan paying \$1436.72 for the 301 members that had claims for poor nutrition. Poor nutrition was clearly the highest contributing factor and the largest slice of the unhealthy pie when compared to the other behaviors.

For more information contact Liz DeJongh, (970) 498-5984, dejonged@co.larimer.co.us.

The Growing Project

A relatively young 501(c)3 non-profit in Northern Colorado, the mission of The Growing Project is to increase self-reliance and create a strong, diverse and just local food system. The vision of The Growing Project is to connect our community members to each other, their food, and their land through urban agriculture and community gardening. The short-term goals of the organization are to significantly increase the amount of cultivated land in the community as well as increase the number of opportunities available for people to take active roles in their own food security and the food security of their community through direct agricultural experiences and outreach. At this time, The Growing Project supports three community gardens, one of which is youth run, and an emergency food rescue effort affectionately referred to as the Glean Team. Using information provided by the Northern Colorado Regional Food System Assessment, The Growing Project hopes to create a coalition of urban agriculture and community gardening organizations throughout Northern Colorado in order to further promote healthy, active lifestyles and further increase fresh food access. For more information, please visit www.thegrowingproject.org

Farmers market price reporting established by CSU Extension in Northern Colorado

Market price reports were taken at 6 markets including Old Town Fort Collins, Greeley, Berthoud, Loveland, Longmont, and Boulder. The purpose of collecting price data and availability information from these markets is to give growers and producers an indication of the average price and current supply of products in different communities. A specified list of the more popular produce and meats was used at each market, offering a fairly standard view of current price and availability of these products in each community.

Many growers and producers seemed to utilize this online resource and showed appreciation during conversations, while a fewer number of growers felt this resource was of less benefit to their particular operation. The former showed enthusiasm at the ability to now see a tangible indication of what to expect when attending a certain market; the latter seemed to compare price data to more tradition food distribution systems and did not feel the need to compare price data and availability from the surrounding markets. Overall, the market price reports and product availability seems to be embraced by the farmers' market community and is anticipated for the coming growing seasons.

Reports were posted on the CSU Boulder Extension site at:
<http://www.coopext.colostate.edu/boulder/ag/abm.shtml#prices>

Colorado Food Systems Advisory Council

The Colorado Food Systems Advisory Council (CO-FSAC) was founded in May 2010 through Senate Bill 10-106, which was sponsored by Representative Marsha Looper and Senator Bob Bacon. The creation of the bill was based on recommendations included in the Food Policy Blueprint, a report commissioned by LiveWell Colorado in 2009, and on a September 2009 report by the Centers for Disease Control, which included the development of food policy councils as a key strategy for increasing access to and consumption of fruits and vegetables.

At the writing of this summary, December 2010, the Colorado Food Systems Advisory Council had not officially met or developed a work plan, however, the Bill provides some recommendations and general guidelines for the Council. Under the direction of the Bill, the Council will provide recommendations for legislation and policy action, where appropriate. The Bill further recommends that CO-FSAC identify and use existing studies (such as the Northern Colorado Regional Food Systems Assessment) regarding the food system, work with other task forces, committees and organizations, and collaborate with local and regional food policy councils to develop recommendations that promote the building of a robust, resilient, and long-term local food economy including recommendations that address hunger and food access.

Other areas of interest to the General Assembly that CO-FSAC might consider exploring are:

- Food made available to children through public schools and ways to improve the nutritional quality of those foods and increase children's access to locally grown foods
- Efforts to make local, healthy, and safe foods available through public assistance organizations, including the use of electronic benefit cards for SNAP and FMNP coupons at local farmers' markets
- Identify and provide solutions to regulatory and policy barriers to developing a robust, resilient, and long-term local food economy
- Strengthen local infrastructure and entrepreneurial efforts
- Potential impacts that production of local, healthy, safe foods would have on economic development in Colorado

The CO-FSAC is still under construction. For more information, feel free to contact Wendy Peters-Moschetti at wendy@wpmconsulting.net or Megan Phillips at megan@wpmconsulting.net.

Boulder County Parks and Open Space Cropland Policy process

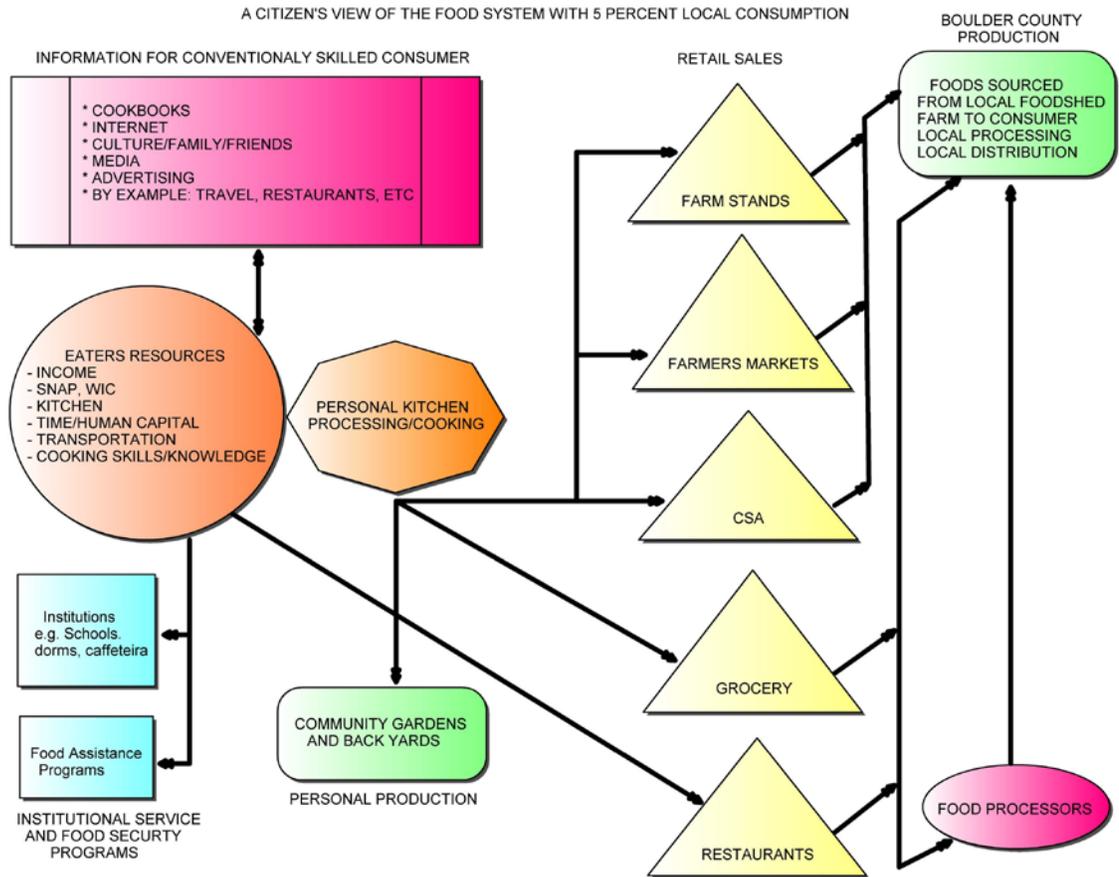
Boulder County Parks and Open Space is working in 2011 on a detailed process that will produce a policy document which will provide a framework for the management of the 13,000+ acres of irrigated and dryland parcels under its administration. The RFSA will provide valuable information for staff and citizens working to develop the Cropland Policy.

Preserving Community: A Citizen Led Movement to Increase Possibilities for Local Consumption through New Food Processing and Supply Chains

Using the graphics he developed below, Luther Green from Boulder County, took the challenge to envision how Northern Colorado consumers could increase their consumption of local goods, as this assessment suggests many intend to, but only through new infrastructure and approaches to food procurement. Of particular focus is how to bring more foods into diets for a longer portion of the year.

Community kitchens are facilities where locally produced, gleaned or recovered foods can be further processed or preserved for members of a community. Food product development often takes place at these facilities, thereby creating income generating opportunities and products with local identity. Small-scale food processing and decentralized root cellars provide infrastructure

and technical expertise necessary to launch new food-based businesses. Much of the food we eat is processed in some way and in areas with relatively short growing seasons, such as the Northeast. The use of canned, frozen and stored fruits and vegetables when produce is "out of season" is another way to develop community food systems.



A CITIZEN'S VIEW OF THE FOOD SYSTEM WITH 50 PERCENT LOCAL CONSUMPTION

