



Regional Opportunity Report: Front Range 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:

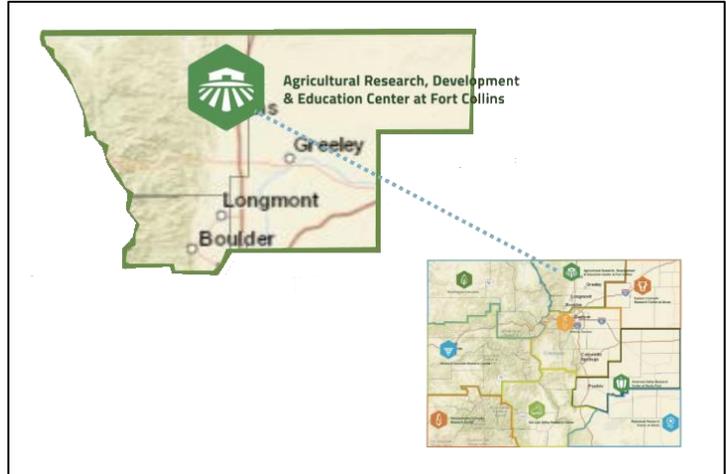
- Colorado State University Agricultural Experiment Station and Research Centers,
- Colorado Food Systems Advisory Council,
- Colorado Department of Agriculture,
- Colorado State University College of Agriculture,
- Colorado State University Office of Engagement and Extension,
- LiveWell Colorado, and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

Front Range Region Overview

The Front Range region is located in north central portion of the state and consists of Boulder, Larimer, and Weld counties. The Front Range regional advisory team includes: Jennifer Kemp, Local Food and Public Outreach Specialist for Boulder County Parks and Open Space; Brad Christensen, Director of the Northern CO Food Cluster, COFPN; Adrian Card, Extension Specialist, CSU Food Systems Extension Team; Martha Sullins, Front Range Regional Specialist, CSU Food Systems Extension Team; Dave Schafer, Livestock Unit Manager for ARDEC; Dave Carter, Extension Director, National Bison Association, 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/fort-collins/> for full list of previous assessments. Collectively these reports identified several key regional challenges and opportunities:

Key Challenges

- One of the fastest growing regions in the country;
 - Pressure increasing for limited natural resources;
- Retail food access in parts of the region;
- Local food system linkages;
- Local food system coordination;
 - Growing competition for local food dollars.

Key Opportunities

- Food and agriculture is a key employer in the area;
- Strong farmers markets;
- One of the fastest growing regions in the country;
 - Rapid growth in demand and opportunities for new food businesses/ventures;
- Highly engaged network of institutions, businesses, non-profits and residents interested in supporting food and agriculture.

Front Range Community Town Hall Focus Areas

The Front Range regional advisory team identified four focus areas to serve as the basis for discussion at their community town hall meeting: (1) Do we have appropriate workforce development and regulations to meet changing needs of the food and agricultural sectors?; (2) Is there adequate access to educational opportunities, leadership roles/institutional knowledge, as well as to land, water and capital to support the next generation of agriculture?; (3) What opportunities exist to match CO value-added products with (scale-appropriate) CO farm and

ranch production?; (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 farmers, school districts, and members of Rocky Mountain Farmers Union, Boulder County Farmers Markets, LoCo Food Distribution, National Farm to School Network, the Kitchen Community, CSU Extension, People and Pollinators Action Network, To Market Ltd., Metro Catering, Boulder County Food System Advisory Council, Office of U.S. Senator Michael Bennet, MouCo Cheese Company, Fortified Collaborations, 2 Muddy Boot, LiveWell Colorado, City of Fort Collins, CO Farm Bureau, and the Department of Public Health and Environment. 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 Front Range 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.

Front Range Community Town Hall Meeting Notes

Focus Area 1: Do we have appropriate workforce development and regulations to meet changing needs of the food and agricultural sectors?

Investments/ programs/projects	Lead Role	Supporting Role
Low hanging fruit		
1. Create more interactions between buyers and growers	Non-profit/ community	Government
2. Support opportunities for farmers to scale up through wholesale buying education (e.g., Market Ready training)	CSU	Government
Systematic impact		
1. Logistics and distribution for scaling up farmers	Private sector	Non-profit/ community
2. Create bill with funds to create beginning farmer program	Government/ non-profit/ community	
3. More processing and preserving capability	Government, non-profit/ community, private sector	CSU

Key takeaways: The group identified relationship building, education, and access to storage and processing facilities as a means to help farmers scale up to provide products to the diverse set of retail and institutional buyers in the region. Universities, including CU Boulder was identified as both a potential client and a location with processing and storage capabilities.

Focus Area 2: Is there adequate access to educational opportunities, leadership roles/institutional knowledge, as well as to land, water and capital to support the next generation of agriculture?

Investments/ programs/projects	Lead Role	Supporting Role
Low hanging fruit		
1. Build networks for young and beginning farmers	Nonprofit/ community/CSU	Nonprofit/ community
2. Farmer leadership programs – e.g., CALP, RMFU – BFI and Fellows	Nonprofit/ community	CSU
3. Increase opportunities to build institutional knowledge for new farmers (incentivizing Board participation)	Nonprofit/ community	CSU
Systematic impact		
1. Guaranteed income program for farmers	Public/ government	Private sector/ industry
2. Increase mechanisms for farmer to reinvest in agriculture (owner-financing) and maintain water rights	Public/ government/ industry	Public/ government and non-profit/ community

Key takeaways: While farmer education has been a part of the programming in the region, the group identified expanding beginning/advanced farmer programs, farmer mentor programs, farmer leadership programs, and farmer education on the policymaking process and alternative growing methods as means by which the region could increase farmer educational opportunities and knowledge.

Focus Area 3: What opportunities exist to match CO value-added products with (scale-appropriate) CO farm and ranch production?

Investments/ programs/projects	Lead Role	Supporting Role
Low hanging fruit		
1. Mobile farmers market	Non-profit/ community	Non-profit/ community
2. Food retailer engagement and education as higher priority	CSU/government	Private sector/industry/ government
Systematic impact		
1. Alleviate risk of adopting new enterprises, new crops and new techniques	Government	Government / CSU
2. Increase resources, investment and information for small and medium	Private/industry/ CSU	Government / CSU

enterprises (e.g., low interest loans, grants)		
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Key takeaways: The group identified increasing resources for and investment in small and mid-size producer education and technical assistance for new crops, livestock, and value added processing as well as increasing the availability of loan and risk management tools. Additionally, the group identified creating a mobile farmers market and increased engagement with food retailers and institutional buyers as a means by which to increase market opportunities for regional producers.

Focus Area 4: 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. Improve investment, programs, and projects (Double Up Food Bucks – creating a more useable program, bringing convenience to people who will actually use it, education about program, times and places that people can actually go to) – improve ease of application for SNAP – perhaps synchronize with free/reduced lunch at schools to “co-enroll”	Private/ industry	Nonprofit/ community
2. Food and food system education (education of what to do with ‘off’ ‘ugly’ produce, cooking classes in schools to bring basic skills, where to get food and how to use more and waste less	Nonprofit/ community	Private sector/industry
3. Focus on co-location with mobile pantries going to areas/locations where need has been determined		
Systematic impact		
1. Are there needed infrastructure investments that would benefit rural (frontier) communities and again populations?	Government/ private sector/industry	Nonprofit/ community
2. Policy change – WIC – CO is only state that doesn’t allow WIC in corner stores	Private sector/industry	Government

Key takeaways: The group identified increasing participation in food assistance programs (e.g., SNAP, WIC), with a focus on the double up bucks program, as an important way to increase healthy food consumption in low-income households. Additionally, food

education and increased access through infrastructure (e.g., mobile pantry) were identified by the group as ways in which to increase food access in the region.

Front Range Next Steps

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

Investments/programs/projects	Regional Lead Organization/Contact
Create more interactions between buyers and growers	TBD
Support opportunities for scaling up: education, logistics, distribution	TBD
Build institutional knowledge for new farmers (beginning farmer program, farmer leadership programs)	TBD
Support more processing and preserving capacity	TBD
Guaranteed income program for farmers	TBD
Support mechanisms for farmer to reinvest in agriculture and maintain water rights	TBD
Mobile farmers market	TBD
Food retailer engagement and education	TBD
Alleviate risk of adopting new enterprises, new crops and new techniques	TBD
Increase resources, investment and information for small and medium enterprises	TBD
Improve investments in food security programs (double up bucks SNAP, WIC)	TBD
Increase food and food system education	TBD
Location mobile pantry where needed most	TBD
Infrastructure investments to benefit food access in rural community	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.