



# Regional Opportunity Report: Northwest 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 northwest region.

## Northwest Region Overview

The northwest region is located in the northwest corner of the state and consists of Eagle, Grand, Jackson, Moffat, Rio Blanco, Routt, and Summit counties. The northwest regional advisory team includes: Barb Parnell, LiveWell Northwest CO Community Coordinator and member of CO Food Policy Network and CO Food Pantry Network; Karen Massey, County Director for Routt County, CSU Food Systems Extension Team; Todd Hagenbuch, Extension Agent, CSU Food Systems Extension Team; Meighen Lovelace, Director of Mountain Harvest Coalition and member of COFSAC; Sandy Stenmark, Physician and Director Kaiser Permanente Colorado's Clinic to Community Integration, Pediatric Cardiovascular Health and the Healthy Beginnings Collaborative.



The regional advisory team identified previous assessments that touched on any aspect of the food system. See <http://foodsystems.colostate.edu/research/colorado-blueprint/northwest/> for full list of previous assessments. Collectively these reports identified several key regional challenges and opportunities:

### Key Challenges

- Limited supply of locally produced products particularly fresh fruits and vegetables, which are often focus of food system assessments (i.e., short growing season, large distances to markets for both supplies and products, high land costs, etc.);
- Community residents face healthy food access challenges;
  - Food, housing, and transportation costs are high relative to other parts of the state;
  - Residents of the region may be food insecure yet ineligible for food assistance programs;
  - Increasing SNAP eligible and number of Free and Reduced Price eligible students, but low participation rates;
  - Declining health outcomes with regard to consumption of fresh fruits and vegetables and BMI ratings.

### Key Opportunities

- Long celebrated history of cattle ranching and related industries;
  - Visitors to the region place high value on the natural environment and working landscapes in the region;
    - 95% of respondents to a survey conducted in 2011 indicated interest in purchasing more locally produced food;
    - 44% of respondents indicated a willingness to pay more for locally grown foods.

## Northwest Community Town Hall Focus Areas

The northwest regional advisory team identified three focus areas to serve as the basis for discussion at their community town hall meeting: 1) How do we best leverage Federal resources to support CO agriculture and food systems?; (2) What value-added opportunities (processing) do we have in NW Colorado that we can leverage as participants in the larger Colorado or regional food system? Comparative advantages? Regional assets?; (3) How does food get to and move through communities and what are the implications for low-income households and local producers?

Community members attending the town hall meeting included farmers and ranchers, members of Community Agriculture Alliance, Northwest Colorado Food Coalition, Routt County Human Services, Colorado Mountain College, Steamboat Springs Chamber Resort Association, CSU Extension, Innovative Ag Colorado, Pura Vida Gardens, and Yampa Valley Sustainability Council. 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 northwest 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.

## Northwest Community Town Hall Meeting Notes

*Focus Area 1: How do we best leverage Federal resources to support CO agriculture and food systems?*

<b>Investments/ programs/projects</b>	<b>Lead Role</b>	<b>Supporting Role</b>
<b>Low hanging fruit</b>		
1. Expand online farmers market program in Steamboat Springs with federal investment	CAA, CMC – Alpine	NW Food Policy Group, Private sector
2. Funding to unite conservation easements with small beginning farmers	County Commissioners, Yampa Valley Land Trust, Land Trust Alliance	Conservation Easements, NRCS, CO Parks and Wildlife
<b>Systematic impact</b>		
1. Investment in community greenhouse where low income can grow food	Master gardeners program, lift-up non-profit, DHS	CMC
2. Increase double up bucks programs particularly in rural areas, not just at farmers markets but also at grocery stores	LWC	Lift-up DHS

Key takeaways: To increase the demand for local products and well-being of the well-being of the low income in the region, the group identified expanding an online farmers market in Steamboat Springs (a current project in the region funded through a federal grant) as well as developing a local double up bucks SNAP program to use at local markets. However, given that the region has a short growing season and thus limited quantities of local fruits and vegetables these interventions may prove difficult. To increase the supply of local food in the region, the group identified the need to assist farmers and community members to obtain land as well as to invest in season extension techniques (e.g., greenhouse, high tunnel, passive solar, aquaculture) through currently existing federal programs.

*Focus Area 2: What value-added opportunities (processing) do we have in NW Colorado that we can leverage as participants in the larger Colorado or regional food system? Comparative advantages? Regional assets?*

Investments/ programs/projects	Lead Role	Supporting Role
<b>Low hanging fruit</b>		
1. Local and regional links of infrastructure to promote diversity <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. Production assets/resources</li> <li>b. Marketing</li> <li>c. Supplies</li> </ul>	Colorado Agriculture Alliance and CSU Extension	CSU, CAA, Private Sector, State and Federal Government
2. Start-up/micro loans	Nonprofit	Private sector
3. Paperwork support for small producers	CSU	Nonprofit
4. Cooperative distribution small-scale	Private sector	Nonprofit
<b>Systematic impact</b>		
1. Investment strategies <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. Grants</li> <li>b. Personal investment cooperative</li> <li>c. Outside investment</li> <li>d. Investor partnerships</li> </ul>	State and Fed, CSU	Private sector, CSU, CAA, and State and Federal Government
2. Cooperative distribution at the regional/state level coordinating sales for local foods	CAA	CSU

Key takeaways: The group identified three USDA certified slaughter plants, wool production, sheep meat production, and hay production as value-added (processing) opportunities for which the region has a comparative advantage. The resort town of Steamboat Springs offers unique marketing opportunities and was identified as an asset for the region. In order to leverage these regional assets, the group identified the need for investments in the regional food system. Investment strategies include grants and investments from both inside and outside of the region. Examples of investments include start-up/micro loans, paperwork support, and distribution support for small-scale producers.

*Focus Area 3: How does food get to and move through communities and what are the implications for low-income households and local producers?*

<b>Investments/ programs/projects</b>	<b>Lead Role</b>	<b>Supporting Role</b>
<b>Low hanging fruit</b>		
1. Locating and distributing gleaned food	Shelby Castle from YVSC	USDA , EPA, CMC recovery, Montessori schools, Public schools, boys and girls club
2. Community root cellar	Ag Alliance	Land trust
<b>Systematic impact</b>		
1. Community center like the Taos model includes community kitchen/food preservation/cooking and feeding center/community garden	Lift-up	Public health, CSU Extension, HHS – SNAP Training, Yampa Valley Community Foundation, N West Co Health, Routt County Council on Aging, Methodist Church, WW Center for Independence, Operation Good Shepard, Human Research Coalition

**Key takeaways:** While the local food bank in the region benefits from local food donations, the group identified the need to increase donations by locating and distributing gleaned produce from local producers as well as investing in community food storage (e.g., root cellars). The group also identified the need to educate the low-income community in the region by creating a community center in which residents would have access to a community kitchen, food preservation and cooking classes as well as a community garden.

## Northwest Next Steps

After reviewing this report, the northwest 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>
Online farmers market in Steamboat Springs	Community Ag Alliance
Unite conservation easements with small beginning farmers	CSU Extension and Guidestone
Community greenhouse	TBD
Develop double up bucks SNAP participation	TBD I'm not sure this is feasible at all given the criteria for local produce, which is very limited here.
Local and regional infrastructure development, including cooperative distribution	TBD
Start-up/micro loans	TBD
Paperwork support for small producers	Community Ag Alliance
Promote diverse investment strategies to increase value added production	Community Ag Alliance and CSU Extension
Increase food access (locating and distributing gleaned food, create a community root cellar, create a community center)	Liftup and CSU Extension

## 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.