



Regional Opportunity Report: Southwest 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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Colorado State University
EXTENSION

State of Possibilities



ENGAGEMENT

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:

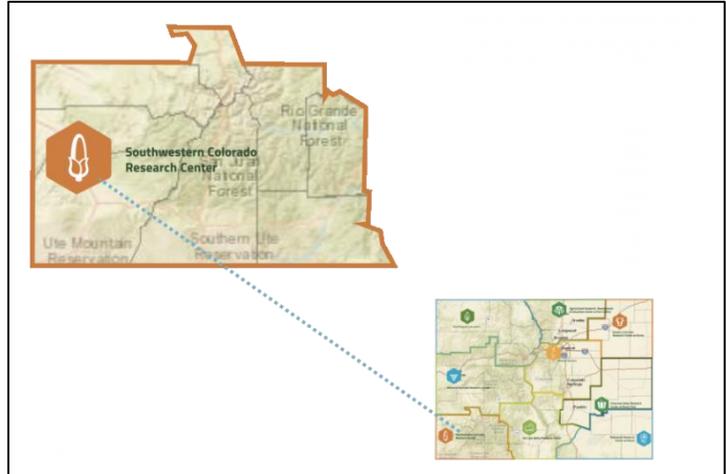
- Colorado State University Agricultural Experiment Station and Research Centers,
- Colorado Food Systems Advisory Council,
- Colorado Department of Agriculture,
- Colorado State University College of Agriculture,
- Colorado State University Office of Engagement and Extension,
- LiveWell Colorado, and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

Southwest Region Overview

The southwest region is located in the southwest corner of the state and consists of Archuleta, Dolores, Hinsdale, La Plata, Mineral, Montezuma, Ouray, San Juan, and San Miguel counties. This region is anchored by the Southwestern Colorado Research Center. The southwest regional advisory team includes: Abdel Berrada, Extension Specialist with CSU Agricultural Experiment Station and Research Center; Kris Holstrom, County Commissioner for San Miguel County; Gretchen Goenke, Growing Partners of Southwest Colorado; Jim Dyer, Director of Healthy Community Food Systems and Southwest Marketing Network and member of COFPN; Darrin Parmenter, Director of La Plata County Extension and member of CSU Food Systems Extension Team; Wendy Peters Moschetti, Director of Food Systems for LiveWell Colorado 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/southwestern/> for full list of previous assessments. Collectively these reports identified several key regional challenges and opportunities:

Key Challenges

- Lack of regional cohesiveness on initiatives;
- Demand exceeds supply – particularly for fruits and vegetables;
- Water scarcity.

Key Opportunities

- Food and agriculture is a key employer in the area;
 - Family-based agriculture has been a cornerstone of the region’s landscape since the 1880s;
 - Cattle and hay production is very strong in the region but there is a growing number of diversified fruit and vegetable operations;
- The region is rich in natural resources;
 - Good quality soil and productive climate with variations in elevation to allow for microclimates;
- Growing demand for locally produced products;
- Engaged and passionate community.

Southwest Community Town Hall Focus Areas

The southwest 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 to meet changing needs of the food and agricultural sectors?; (2) What

opportunities exist to match CO value-added products with (scale-appropriate) CO farm and ranch production?; (3) 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?; (4) How does food get to and move through communities? What are the implications for low-income households?

Community members attending the town hall meeting included farmers and members of San Luis Valley Development Group, San Juan Basin Public Health, The Garden Project of SW CO, Fort Lewis College, La Plata County Living Wage Coalition, La Plata Conservation District Dolores Water Conservancy District, San Juan Resource Conservation District, National Young Farmers Coalition, Local First, CSU Extension, Durango Farmers Market, Bayfield Downtown Farmers Market, Healthy Community Food Systems, City of Durango, Montezuma Orchard Restoration Project, Economic Development, and the SW Workforce Center. 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 southwest 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.

Southwest Community Town Hall Meeting Notes

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

Investments/ programs/projects	Lead Role	Supporting Role
Low hanging fruit		
1. CO Department of Labor and Employment could use new funding this past year to expand registered apprenticeship in sustainable agriculture	Private sector/ industry (agricultural employers – farmers – must request this from CDLE)	Government (state)
2. In light of potential decrease in federal and state funding, identify local, private, and/or regional funding for workforce development and education initiatives	CSU (Extension)	Nonprofit
Systematic impact		
1. Developing a workers’ center to assist workers, inform of rights, etc.	Nonprofits (Thrive! Living Wage Coalition, San Juan Citizens Alliance, Companeros, Durango Peace and Justice)	Government (state)

2. Addressing exemptions from labor protections for workers across the food system – agricultural workers, service industry workers, etc. discussing racial history in America that led to these exemptions	Nonprofits – (including food policy networks, Thrive! Living Wage Coalition)	Government
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Key takeaways: The group identified both regional and state-level for workforce development and education initiatives as key steps to meet the changing needs of the food and agricultural sector in the region. In addition to education, the group identified the need to create a center to assist workers, informing them of their rights and working to address the exemptions from labor protection rights.

Focus Area 2: 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. Small-scale: expand local value added products – more regionally even across state lines	Private sector/ industry (farmers/ distribution cooperative)	CSU, Community/ nonprofits (Fort Lewis, Local First, Government (SW Council of Governments)
2. Utilize tourist economy to market local products	Government (CTO)	Government (DATO, Business Improvement District, SW Council of Governments)
Systematic impact		
1. Hire/develop labor force to harvest and process seasonal abundance, market and distribute value added products	Community/ nonprofits (Food recovery lab - contact Local First Monique Digliogio)	Community/ nonprofits (Fort Lewis, MANNA, Soup Kitchen, Growing Partners, Bear Smart Durango), industry (theoretically processing, FLC), CSU
2. Agriculture trust for farm land purchases	Community/ nonprofits (Open Space Groups)	Government (municipal county planning), Nonprofit

		(Guidestone CO, farmers markets, incubator programs), industry/private sector (production facilities)
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Key takeaways: The group identified expanding local food value-added production in the region as an important means by which to match CO farm and ranch production with value-added production. They suggested using the tourist economy as well as workforce development as means by which to market and distribute the new value-added production.

Focus Area 3: 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. Pathways to careers in agriculture and leadership development	CSU and other colleges, government (schools)	Non-profits/ community (Everybody! Local/state/national orgs)
2. Creative ideas to supplement production and marketing and distribution	Industry/ private sector	Government
3. Preschool, elementary, and middle school ag education	Government, non-profits	Nonprofit/community
4. Marketing program for seconds – including unsold products at farmers markets	Community/ nonprofit (Local First), private industry (something similar to MM Local)	CSU (Extension focused on food safety), private industry (farmers)
5. Create incentives for retirees to lease land to beginning/next generation farmers	Community/ nonprofit (LandLink market place)	Private industry (banks), CSU, Government, nonprofits (foundations)
Systematic impact		
1. Keeping water in ag and used for ag	Industry/private sector, government	CSU, community/ nonprofit

2. Mid-scale incubation – scaling up	Private sector/ industry	CSU, community/ nonprofit
3. Creative land access and affordable opportunities (including farmland protection) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. Support land access for incubator graduates 	Community/ nonprofit (National Young Farmers Coalition), private sector (cooperative development)	Government, industry/ private sector, CSU, nonprofit (Fort Lewis and Land Conservancy)
4. Ag revolving loan fund for next generation of agriculture	Government, private industry	Community/ nonprofit
5. Support agricultural entrepreneurs including farming and value added businesses, business planning, understanding reasonable rate of return	CSU, nonprofit (Fort Lewis)	CSU Extension, private industry

Key takeaways: The group identified the need to educate our youth about careers in agriculture and farming and to educate our farmers on production, value-added production, business and business planning, marketing, and distribution as key means by which to support the next generation of agriculture. In addition, the group identified the need to assist the region to keep water in agriculture and to find affordable means by which new farmers can acquire land (e.g., revolving loan fund, land access incubator program, retirees to lease land). The group felt it is very important that if the public sector or CSU are taking a lead role, that their leadership is informed by communities.

Focus Area 4: How does food get to and move through communities? What are the implications for low-income households?

Investments/ programs/projects	Lead Role	Supporting Role
Low hanging fruit		
1. Education/knowledge to enhance self-sufficiency across all income brackets within 5-19 years	CSU Extension	Non-profits/ community (Cooking Matters, Pine River Shares – 299 pre-K educated, CO Health Foundation), private sector (farmers)
2. Orchard planning recovery – includes work and harvest – share harvest model – get to schools – shared with growers and county	Community/ nonprofit (community-drive and organized, garden project of South West Colorado)	Government (city, Pine River Valley city garden and library), nonprofit/community (local resident champions), private sector (three springs

		real estate development – twin buttes), CSU Extension
Systematic impact		
1. Pine River Shores and/or its model – support for food security, place-based organizations (e.g., food banks, cooking matters, Pine River Shores) – replication – more of what they do, bring to more communities, similar model in other communities	Community/nonprofit (institutional leadership to propagate share, state? Food policy coalition/networks, family resource center, association - share across state)	Community/nonprofit (Pine River shares, cooking matters, food banks/pantries, CO trust, CO Health Foundation)

Key takeaways: To support the low-income and working poor community members in the region, the group identified the need for education, the need for an organization that can support businesses/nonprofits in the community that focus on food security issues, and increased access to affordable local food (e.g., orchard planning recovery, subsidized local food).

Southwest Next Steps

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

Investments/programs/projects	Regional Lead Organization/Contact
Expand registered apprenticeship in sustainable agriculture	TBD
Local, private, and/or regional funding for workforce development and education initiatives	TBD
Workers’ rights center	TBD
Address exemptions from labor protections for workers across the food system	TBD
Expand production of local value added products	TBD
Utilize tourist economy to market local products	TBD
Hire/develop labor force to harvest and process seasonal abundance, market and distribute value added products	TBD
Utilize agriculture trust for farm land purchases	TBD
Create pathways to careers in agriculture and leadership development, including preschool, elementary, and middle school ag education	TBD
Creative ideas to supplement production and marketing and distribution	TBD
Marketing program for seconds	TBD

Incentives for retirees to lease land to beginning/next generation farmers	TBD
Support keeping water in agriculture	TBD
Mid-scale farmer incubation programs, including affordable land access and supporting agricultural entrepreneurs	TBD
Ag revolving loan fund to support next generation of farmers	TBD
Increase food education/knowledge to enhance self-sufficiency in the community	CSU Extension
Orchard planning recovery to increase food access	TBD
Support for food security, place-based organizations (Pine River Shores and/or its model)	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.