



FOOD SYSTEMS

COLORADO STATE UNIVERSITY

Colorado Producers During COVID-19:

A closer look at
Aspen Moon Farms
Longmont, CO

aspenmoonfarms.com

The COVID-19 pandemic has brought on many unexpected challenges to producers and food supply chains across Colorado. This fact sheet series provides an in-depth look at changes and adaptations experienced by commodity groups and individual producers.

Aspen Moon Farms was started by Jason Griffith and Erin Dreistadt in 2009. They produce heritage grains, plants and seeds, and organic flowers and vegetables on 25 acres. Their operation is both USDA Certified Organic and Demeter [Certified Biodynamic](#), and their markets include a roadside farm stand, seasonal farmers markets in Longmont and Boulder, and a community-supported agriculture ([CSA](#)) program with over 900 members. The CSA also offers “add-ons,” such as certified organic fruit from Ela Family Farms in Hotchkiss. Fruit shares are available from mid-August to the end of October and include peaches, pears, apples, fresh cider and jam. In addition, the farm offers 10 weeks of fresh organic bouquets for sale and will soon be featuring local artisan bread from the Moxie Bread Company in Louisville.



Photos courtesy of Aspen Moon Farms

When the COVID-19 pandemic resulted in the first stay-at-home orders in March, the U.S. government deemed agriculture an essential business. Food markets changed dramatically as demand surged in direct-to-consumer markets but dried up in foodservice and wholesale markets. Farmers needed to quickly pivot to find new buyers and strategies for selling their products. Each of Colorado's 69,000 agricultural producers has been affected somewhat differently by the pandemic and, thus, their responses have varied.

COVID-19 Impact

Aspen Moon Farm responded quickly to the COVID-19 outbreak, ordering sanitation and safety supplies for on-farm operations, and dedicating nearly 30 hours to researching the virus and appropriate health precautions. The farm's primary source of income, the Boulder County Farmer's Markets, was delayed in opening until June. For now, the farm has decided to forego participating in the markets.

Dreistadt explained that the Boulder County Farmer's Market (BCFM) organization supports its farmers, but also must cover its costs. BCFM started an online store to provide another outlet for farmers to sell their products, but had difficulty managing it, ultimately needing to charge farmers a 30 percent fee on everything sold to cover administrative and personnel expenses. The usual fee for selling through one of BCFM's five markets is 3 percent or less.

In response to the delayed opening of farmers markets, Aspen Moon continued to sell through their roadside stand (albeit with shorter hours), developed an online store, and experienced a large increase in requests for CSA shares, from 250 to over 700. They now have a waitlist for summer and fall shares.

"We've been limiting our staff's hours, as it's really hard working in masks all day," Dreistadt said. "We can't work the long hours we have in the past and can't really meet some of the community's need by closing early."

In March, sanitation supplies were difficult to obtain, and Dreistadt also said some greenhouse supplies were unavailable due to the growth in home gardening in April. However, the renewed interest in home gardening created demand for Aspen Moon's starter plant business, an unexpected but positive impact. Dreistadt said it's been encouraging because they love helping people garden and connect to the food they produce.

“We never sold so many starter plants so fast before,” Dreistadt said. “We’ve sold out of a lot of different varieties and have not been able to meet our customers’ needs. All the herbs we planted in February couldn’t meet April’s demand.”

The farm took extra precautions with its staff, requiring any employee who recently went through an airport to stay home. Dreistadt said administrative tasks take longer because she and her husband are balancing the farm work and having their office staff work remotely. Although the farm typically brings on interns each year to help with the farm work, this year they put off hiring an intern until June, after they could learn how to navigate in the conditions of COVID-19.

Looking towards the future...

Dreistadt notes that increased starter plant and roadside market sales, as well as increased CSA membership, were a silver lining amid the stress of the pandemic. However, Dreistadt would really like to acquire infrastructure, such as storage and a permanent farm stand structure, since so many more community members are purchasing products directly from the farm. They anticipate needing to store winter crops, squash and potatoes, a little longer.

“The best thing for the farm is to sell everything quickly,” Dreistadt said. “since the cost of storage is really high.”

Dreistadt said the fall season will bring sales concerns since spring crops are minimal but, after July, products and sales usually triple. Typically, farmers market sales would absorb any overproduction, but there is uncertainty about farmer’s markets this fall. Although Aspen Moon has created its own online market, negotiating prices and quantities with consumers remains a challenge.

“There’s that gap of how to get the food to the people in the right timing without the farmer’s market,” Dreistadt said.

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