



FOOD SYSTEMS

COLORADO STATE UNIVERSITY

Colorado Producers During COVID-19:

A closer look at
Silver Reef Organics
Wellington, CO

<https://silverreeffarms.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.

Silver Reef Organics is a 100% certified organic farm founded in 2013. The farm produces barley, pinto beans, winter wheat, grain corn for poultry, and corn silage for organic dairies. They are dedicated to sustainability and have implemented on-farm initiatives such as precision agriculture, alternative manure sources, cover crops, tractor GPS and drone technology. They are heavily involved in local causes and participate in several agricultural and water associations in Larimer County.



Photo courtesy of Silver Reef Organics (@silverreeffarm on Instagram)

COVID-19 Impact

Silver Reef has not experienced any supplier disruptions, and their vendors continue to make deliveries every day. The farm practices regenerative farming, which involves laying manure and cover crops after each harvest. These practices help increase nitrogen levels in the soil. Schreiner explained that, even though their input usage has not changed from previous years, the pandemic does seem to be causing companies to increase their price on cover crop seed mix contracts.

Furthermore, sales are a concern. The farm's corn, pinto bean and wheat contracts have been put "on pause" since April. Buyers have used their contracts' "catastrophe" clauses to temporarily step back from them, causing Schreiner to wonder if and when buyers will return to purchase crops that are already planted.

To alleviate market uncertainty, Schreiner began an "end-user project" in May where the farm is reaching out to new potential buyers of organic corn and wheat, so the business can maintain anticipated crop sales and profits. Silver Reef has always bypassed selling to grain elevators, who typically offer less than the farm would receive from selling directly to buyers, such as food stores and other farm operations.

Silver Reef has maintained the health of its core labor force by using proper PPE and social distancing, but the farm has not been able to procure its typical temporary summer labor force due to COVID-19. The farm's pinto beans are hand-weeded by 30 laborers from June until the end of August. However, this year the farm will not be able to hire labor through the H-2A program (temporary agricultural workers) because of international border closures.

Looking towards the future...

The farm is pivoting to robotics and automation, and has purchased three pieces of equipment for weeding since the pandemic started. As a business owner, however, Schreiner says he is disappointed he can't create jobs from his farm this season.

"I am pretty involved with and passionate about the immigration reform bill," Schreiner said. "Until Congress can figure out a way to pass it, we will continue to have issues with farm labor."

As an entrepreneur, Schreiner and other farmers understand the risks of disruptions to labor, supply chains and markets. He explained that, through hard work, good things will come in the long term, and that farmers are resilient.

"We have obstacles we will overcome and we are still here to feed America," Schreiner said. "We know prices aren't great right now, but I believe the American consumer will pay us for crops the right way when everything is under control and we'll be able to flourish again."

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