



COLORADO FOOD SYSTEMS  
ADVISORY COUNCIL

# ANNUAL REPORT

2023

Presented to:

Governor Jared Polis

Kate Greenberg, Commissioner of  
Agriculture

House Agriculture, Livestock, and  
Natural Resources Committee

Senate Agriculture and Natural  
Resources Committee



[www.cofoodscouncil.org](http://www.cofoodscouncil.org)





# | EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

In 2023, the Colorado Food Systems Advisory Council (COFSAC) underwent the Senate Bill 23-159 Sunset Review. The Review outlined the council's purpose to grow local, regional, and statewide food economies within which producers have access to new markets and low-income populations have access to fresh, affordable, and healthy foods. Duties of the council are to collaborate and coordinate with agricultural producers, relevant state and federal educational institutions, nongovernmental organizations, and consumers to connect state and federal agencies and to provide Colorado agricultural producers, including fruit and vegetable producers, with viable market opportunities. Areas of focus include:

- 1) Examining best practices to advance or improve distribution systems and develop new markets for Colorado agricultural producers,
- 2) Conducting research regarding national best practices regarding food and nutrition assistance, direct and intermediated market development, institutional procurement, and farm-to-school programs, and
- 3) Serving as a resource for research and support at the request of the governor, members of the general assembly, or any state agency in connection with the council's purpose and duties.

The legislative language is reflected in COFSAC's mission and vision.

The sunset review created the impetus to review the working groups. It was decided to disband the agricultural lands and water and narrow working group to focus on post farmgate activities. Energy was directed towards the institutional procurement working group and attention on the successful implementation of the local food program as part of the Healthy School Meals for All.

**MISSION: COFSAC PROVIDES COMMUNITY-INFORMED, RESEARCH-BASED POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS TO STATE LEADERS TO ADDRESS COMPLEX FOOD SYSTEMS CHALLENGES.**

**VISION: COFSAC IS A TRUSTED PARTNER COLLABORATING WITH POLICY MAKERS, THOUGHT LEADERS, AND COMMUNITIES TO CREATE A HEALTHFUL, PROSPEROUS, EQUITABLE, AND RESILIENT COLORADO-BASED FOOD SYSTEM.**

The strategic plan which began in 2022 and wrapped up in 2023, highlighted a need for a communication and strategic relations working group. This group is charged with continuing to build connections and partnerships between COFSAC, state agencies, legislators, and other food system leaders across the state.





Finally, an ongoing need for policy related professional development opportunities for food and agriculture leaders, both COFSAC Council Members and others, was identified and a working group was convened.

The council's most significant contribution in statewide engagement was the coordination and support of two farm to loading dock events, and three sessions at the 2023 Colorado Food Summit.

## | PRIORITIES FOR 2024

### Institutional Procurement

Following up on research and implementation support strategies identified during the farm to loading dock events, particularly on coordination with our state agency and NGO partners to identify where our council's unique capacities can best support the successful implementation of the Healthy School Meals for All initiative.

### Strategic Relations

Continuing to establish clear, regular, and high-value channels of communication and consultation with lawmakers and state agencies.

### Membership and Engagement

Identifying and developing strategic partnerships with other food-system aligned initiatives, councils, institutions, organizations and stakeholders. Through this work, we have identified a need to support professional development of food system leaders across the state.

In the coming year, COFSAC will collaborate with the CSU Food Systems Institute and the Family Leadership Training Institute to develop professional development and capacity building opportunities for individuals across the state interested in taking on additional food system leadership roles.

We continue to see a distinct need for a cross-sectoral, multi-stakeholder and multi-institution council that can provide a balanced perspective on key challenges and opportunities facing the state.





# ANNUAL REPORT 2023

Per the requirements of House Bill 18-1236, this update on the work of the COFSAC (**Colorado Food Systems Advisory Council**) is being provided to update Governor Jared Polis and his office, the Speaker of the House of Representative, the Minority Leader of the House of Representatives, the President of the Senate, and the Minority Leaders of the Senate, the Commissioner of Agriculture, and the House Health and Environment Committee, Senate Health and Human Services Committee, House Agriculture, Livestock, and Natural Resources Committee, and Senate Agriculture and Natural Resources Committee..

## APPOINTED COUNCIL MEMBERS

(AS OF 12/23)

### Co-Chair, Ann Cooper, Grand Junction

Rep. institutional procurement, educational setting

### Co-Chair, Nicholas Marquez, Aurora

Rep. expertise in federal food nutrition service programs

### Julie Moore, Aurora

Rep. food wholesalers or food retailers, direct market retailer

### Elizabeth Marron, Saguache

Rep. expertise in rural community and regional development, or community and economic development programs

### Marci Cochran, Pueblo

Rep. of federal food assistance program

### Derrick Hoffman, Greeley

Rep. agricultural production, sells AG products to public schools/school districts

### Tessa Hale, Boulder

Rep. institutional procurement, healthcare setting

### Tamaan Osbourne-Roberts, Denver

Rep. nutrition expert, licensed physician, or registered dietitian

### Al Goodman, Aurora

Rep. food wholesalers or food retailers

### Michele Meyer, Steamboat Springs

Rep. of food distributor or food hub

### Angelika Sunie, Pueblo

Recipient of the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program

### Juli Babcock, Hotchkiss

Rep. of specialty crop production and as a specialty crop producer

### Larry Pollart, Sterling

Academic specialist in economic systems, agriculture, or health care

### AJ Roche, Greeley

Representative of a food bank

## STATE AGENCY REPRESENTATIVES

(AS OF 12/23)

### Krista Garand

Rep. Colorado Department of Education

### Amanda Laban

Rep. Colorado Department of Agriculture

### Joan Brucha

Rep. Colorado Department of Public Health and the Environment

### Karla Maraccini

Rep. Colorado Department of Human Services

### Dawn Thilmany

Rep. Colorado State University Extension

### Greg Thomason

Rep. Office of Economic Development and International Trade

## STAFF

The council received staff support from Dr. Libby Christensen and Alex DeJoy, as Coordinator and Administrator, respectively. Both Dr. Christensen and Ms. DeJoy are CSU employees. Dr. Christensen is also the statewide Food and Agriculture Specialist with the Office





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of Engagement and Extension, and Ms. Dejoy is housed in the College of Agricultural Sciences. This year, the council also enlisted consulting support for key council activities, as discussed in the appropriate sections of the report.

## | MEETINGS & EVENTS

The Colorado Food Systems Advisory Council held four quarterly meetings during the 2023 calendar year in February, May, September, and December. It hosted three of the meetings as online public meetings using Zoom and held an in-person meeting on the CSU SPUR campus in December. All meeting dates/times were published via the COFSAC website: <https://cofoodsystemscouncil.org/>

Additionally, COFSAC's working groups held 22 public working group meetings in 2023: Ten on Institutional Procurement, eleven on Communications and Strategic Relations, and one on Conserving Agricultural Land and Water.

## | MEMBERSHIP UPDATES

The sunset review resulted in significant changes to the language around COFSAC members including the number of seats and the appointment process. One additional seat was added – a member who is a representative of a food bank. The number of seats appointed by the governor or the governor's designee changed from sixteen to five. The remaining twelve seats are to be appointed on a rotating basis in the order listed in the legislation as new positions or vacancies arise, appointed by the speaker of the House of Representatives, the Minority Leader of the House of Representatives, the President of the Senate, and the Minority Leader of the Senate. Communication with these offices began in August.

In 2022 informed by the internal assessment, the Council members and staff worked with the Governor's office to revise the announcement, recruitment, and nomination protocol for open council seats to increase the transparency, equity,

and diversity of council seat recruitment. It resulted in greater geographic and demographic diversity of council representation. The 2023 membership appointment process changes could undermine this revised process.

Eight seats were vacant in 2023 due to resignation, expiration, or existing vacancy. One of these seats was to be appointed by the Governor's office and seven by leaders of the General Assembly.

Applications were solicited between September 7th and October 18th. Twenty-one applications were received and reviewed by an applications committee. One application was submitted via the Governor's office. On October 28, 2023, the application committee submitted recommendations to the appropriate appointment office for the following seats: 1) Recipient of the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program, 2) Representative of statewide anti-hunger organization, 3) Academic specialist in economic systems, agriculture, or health care, 4) Representative of a local nonprofit community organization engaged in farm-to-school programs or local food systems, 5) Representative of a food bank or pantry, 6) Representative of a statewide healthy food systems organization, 7) Representative of specialty crop production, and 8) Representative of institutional procurement from an educational setting. As of December 2023, five seats were filled in November 2023, with three remaining seats to be appointed.

### Members appointed to partial terms:

**Angelika Sunie**, of Pueblo, Colorado, to serve as Recipient of the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program in a term ending October 31, 2025, occasioned by the resignation of Cydne "Michelle" Bradford of Monte Vista, Colorado.

### New members appointed to full terms ending October 31, 2026:

**Juli Babcock**, of Hotchkiss, Colorado, to serve as representative of specialty crop production and as a specialty crop producer.





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**Larry Pollart**, of Sterling, Colorado, to serve as academic specialist in economic systems, agriculture, or health care.

**AJ Roche**, of Greeley, Colorado, to serve as Representative of a food bank.

**Members who were renewed to full terms ending October 31, 2026:**

**Ann Cooper**, of Grand Junction, Colorado, to serve as Representative of a local, nonprofit, community organization engaged in farm-to-school programs or local food systems.

## | AREAS OF FOCUS FOR 2023

While the Institutional Procurement, Strategic Relations, and Membership and Engagement working groups continued ongoing research and engagement efforts, the council concluded a comprehensive strategic planning effort.

### Strategic Planning

In 2023, COFSAC concluded a strategic planning process supported by Government Performance Solutions. We underwent an inclusive, comprehensive process of engaging the council, partners, state thought leaders, policy councils, and other stakeholders to identify challenges and opportunities. Insights gathered through that process allowed us to craft a refined vision and a set of high-priority efforts that establish COFSAC as a force for food system transformation in our state and region.

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**MISSION: COFSAC provides community-informed, research-based policy recommendations to state leaders to address complex food systems challenges.**

**VISION: COFSAC is a trusted partner collaborating with policy makers, thought leaders, and communities to create a healthful, prosperous, equitable, and resilient Colorado-based food system.**

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This process initiated renewed energy and strategic action on the part of the council. We retained one topical area of focus from previous work (Institutional Procurement), initiated two internal/administrative working groups (Strategic Relationships and Membership and Engagement), identified other topic areas to monitor, and developed consulting or supportive relationships with other councils and initiatives.

## | INSTITUTIONAL PROCUREMENT

### Focus and Rationale

Colorado is slated to receive substantial funding through federal grants and state legislation that will support producers, technical assistance providers, and food hubs/aggregators in their efforts to expand institutional procurement of Colorado grown, raised, or processed products. Along with these investments, Colorado voters recently passed the Healthy School Meals for All Program, which in addition to providing universal access to school meals for students attending public school, includes The Local Food Program. The Local Food Program will provide participating K-12 school districts \$0.25 per lunch served during the previous year to reimburse purchases of Colorado-grown, raised, or processed food and agricultural products. It is currently estimated that the program will result in approximately \$9 million annually in additional procurement of Colorado food and agricultural products.

In addition to the funds for direct procurement, there is an additional \$5 million dollars available annually. These funds will be available in the form of a grant to a statewide nonprofit to assist with the promotion of Colorado products to participating School Food Authorities and to assist them with preparing meals using basic ingredients with minimal reliance on processed products. Grants may be used for training, technical assistance, physical infrastructure for School Food Authorities, growers' associations, and other organizations that aggregate products for producers, as well as for education, outreach,





and promotion for schools and growers to engage with school communities (HB 22-1414).

### Research and Engagement

To better develop strategies to deploy these resources, the Colorado Food System Advisory Council, Nourish Colorado, CU Boulder, CU Denver, and the Colorado State University Food System Institute conducted a landscape assessment of existing and proposed technical assistance available in the state. The assessment focuses on technical assistance delivery to pre-loading dock groups including farmers, ranchers, food hubs, intermediaries, and processors. The assessment includes stakeholder convenings and interviews.

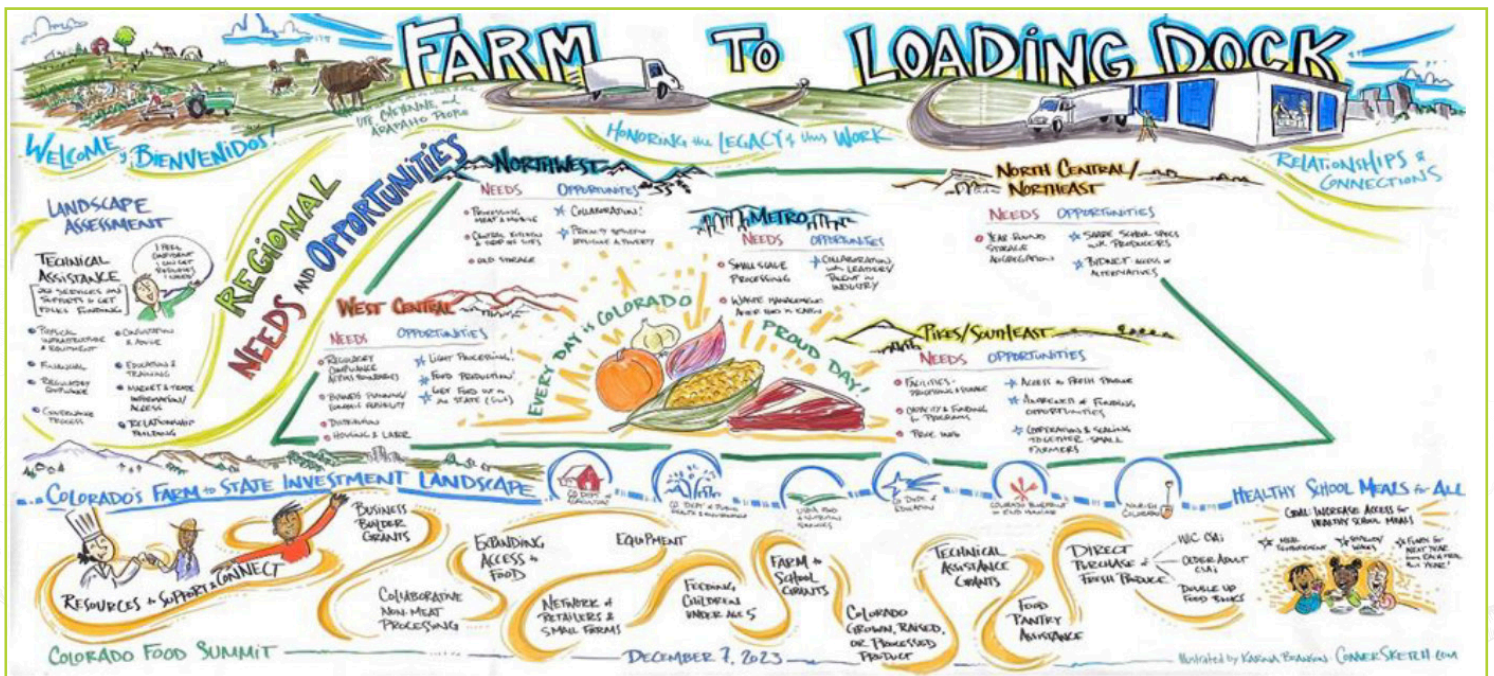
To kick off the project, the partners hosted an event at CSU Spur on April 21, 2023, which attracted seventy-seven participants including distributors, farmers and ranchers, government representatives, non-profit organizations, school food authorities, and university partners. During the meeting, stakeholders were asked to identify additional research needs. This information was used to design a research project utilizing a mixed method approach including secondary data analysis and interviews. Working with students from CSU, CU Boulder, and CU Denver, 56 interviews were conducted with 38 technical assistance providers, 10 food hubs, and 8 producers. Results were shared

and next steps were identified at a statewide stakeholder engagement event on December 7, 2023, held with the Colorado Food Summit. There were 131 participants.

### Recommendations and Next Steps

COFSAC role in next steps supporting farm to loading dock efforts center on continuing to provide community-informed, research-based recommendations to most effectively implement institutional procurement programs that advance and improve distribution systems and develop new markets for Colorado agricultural producers. This will be accomplished through continued effort to support coordination across state agencies and deployment of resources.

The long-term goal of this working group is to develop a robust, actionable, and streamlined plan to conduct regular analyses of local food procurement by public agencies. By creating a baseline assessment of current procurement activities, this ongoing study will allow stakeholders to identify mid- and long-term benchmarks, assess progress over time and location, and other analysis to support positive impacts and the equity of local procurement initiatives.





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# | STRENGTHENING KEY STAKEHOLDER RELATIONSHIPS

## Focus and Rationale

The Strategic Relations working group focuses on establishing clear, regular, and high value channels of communication and consultation with state lawmakers and state agency staff.

## Research and Engagement

The Strategic Relations working group led the organization in a plan to build relationships with key stakeholders in Colorado. As part of the strategic planning initiative, members of the working group conducted extensive research to identify existing and ongoing initiatives and organizations, followed by generating a plan to build relationships and explore partnerships. The working group also conducted outreach to multiple key stakeholders to understand challenges and opportunities with an eye towards supporting expanded and deeper relationships in the future this included extending personal invitations to key stakeholders to COFSAC quarterly meetings and the 2023 Colorado Food Summit. The working group also organized three sessions at the 2023 Colorado Food Summit that featured key stakeholders.

The three sessions organized at the 2023 Colorado Food Summit were hosted under the Bringing Policy Down to Earth track, "A useful 101 for any food system stakeholder looking to be a more effective advocate. Learn foundational food and ag policy concepts and frameworks, how policy is affecting our ag and food systems, and practice skills to enable individual and collective impact. Come with the questions you've always wanted to ask but have never felt comfortable asking (because you thought you should already know the answer)." The three sessions included: "Telling your Story: How to Connect, Talk, and Influence Media and Elected Officials", "What the "Right to Farm" Means in 2023"", and "From Community Food and Agricultural Advocacy to City and State Policy".

## Recommendations and Next Steps

The working groups plan to conduct outreach to potential partners to assess needs and opportunities in the space, and from there it can identify where COFSAC can best serve as a thought partner, convener, or provider of other forms of support for timely initiatives. Specifically, we anticipate and will explore the need to identify points of commonality and potential collaboration.

# | ADMINISTRATION

Council and staff worked with the Department of Regulatory Agencies to complete the sunset review in 2023. The bill was introduced to the Senate on February 15, 2023, by Senators Hinrichsen and Pelton, with House sponsorship by Representative Boesenecker and Lindsay and was assigned to the Agriculture and Natural Resources Committee. The bill went through several iterations and was finally passed on June 6, 2023.

Significant effort was dedicated to transitioning staff leadership from Dr. Lilian Brislen to Dr. Libby Christensen in June of 2023. Dr. Christensen has worked with Alex DeJoy to learn internal administrative procedures and to become familiarized with the working group structure. Dr. Christensen is committed to continuing the improved administrative procedures, such as the provision of quarterly council budget updates, and redesigning the website and resource database, which resulted in improved transparency and public engagement with council activities.

Since 2022, to support broader and deeper insight into state food systems issues, the council requested quarterly updates from our state agency representatives on food system-related policies, programs, and opportunities. These reports are included in the written minutes and constitute the first comprehensive cross-agency compilation of food systems efforts. Written versions of these updates will be shared in future council communications efforts.





# COLLABORATIONS

Per its legislation, one of the council's key duties is collaborating with agricultural producers, relevant state and federal educational institutions, nongovernmental organizations and consumers to connect state and federal agencies to provide Colorado agricultural producers, including fruit and vegetable producers, with viable market opportunities local, regional, and state efforts to support Colorado's food system. To that end, the Colorado Food Systems Advisory Council and its members supported the following efforts in 2023.

## Colorado Food Summit

The council served as one of four lead organizers, along with the CSU Food Systems Institute, the Colorado Department of Agriculture, and the Colorado Blueprint to End Hunger on the 2023 Colorado Food Summit held on December 7th and 8th. The Summit hosted 675 food system stakeholders from across the state and our food system.

The Summit also welcomed 55 young food systems leaders to the Colorado Department of Agriculture-sponsored Youth Summit. Hosted by 13 Young Leaders, the diverse participants included students from Colorado State University, Mile High Youth

Corps, Campo High School, Animas High School and Atlas Preparatory School.

Council members Hollis Glenn and Liza Marron made invaluable contributions to the organizing committee, and COFSAC staff provided key support to the process. Additionally, COFSAC working groups led the organization and facilitation of three sessions during the day (discussed above), and council members also participated in panel discussions, moderated sessions, and contributed to the two-day event. This event is an important step in bringing together diverse voices and perspectives from across the food system and laying a foundation for future collaboration.





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## Community Engagement Process

Working groups allow COFSAC to expand the breadth and depth of expertise and networks engaged in our work. COFSAC members engaged in active promotion and recruitment for working group membership, including by providing working group information on the COFSAC website and promoting engagement opportunities through organization newsletters, food systems-related list services, and word of mouth recruitment via professional networks.

Serving in their capacity as subject matter experts and directly impacted stakeholders, community members contribute to the working groups' efforts by actively participating in group meetings, assisting in the development and revision of issue briefs, and soliciting feedback from their broader networks, as appropriate.

The following organizations and agencies provided invaluable support to the working groups in 2023:

**Institutional Procurement:** Colorado Department of Agriculture, Colorado Department of Education, Colorado Department of Public Health & Environment, Chef Ann Foundation, Nourish Colorado, Donnell-Kay Foundation, Growing Gardens, and University of Colorado Boulder.

CSU Extension has a dedicated seat on COFSAC, partly to assure that the work of the council connects with the campus, county-based offices, and issue teams that complement the mission of COFSAC. This has opened new lines of communication in the CSU Extension organization, both directly with COFSAC and with the state agencies and broader partners that were tapped to help with working groups during 2023.

COFSAC continues to deepen its collaboration with state agencies in support of our mission of serving as a trusted thought partner. As examples, the COFSAC staff director was called on for a number of consultative roles, including serving on hiring committees for new food systems-related hires and providing recommendations for data collection and analysis.

## Local Coalition and Partner Engagement

COFSAC was a lead organizer, along with the CSU Food Systems Institute, the Colorado Department of Agriculture and the Colorado Blueprint to End Hunger, of the 2023 Colorado Food Summit. As part of the engagement and planning process for the summit, the organizing committee engaged local food policy councils and coalitions across the state to provide direct input into the content and design of the summit.

Through the summit, relationships formed between COFSAC leadership and staff from regional food policy councils (who collectively formed the organizing committee), establishing a strong foundation for future communication and collaboration. During 2024 and the first half of 2025, COFSAC will partner with these local food policy councils and coalitions to organize regional summits that will inform the 2025 Colorado Food Summit.







# | PRIORITY AREAS FOR 2024

The Council moves into 2024 with a renewed sense of purpose and focus, as well as clear priorities and strategies for realizing our mission and vision. Enacting the priorities and strategies developed through both the sunset review and strategic planning processes, the Council is pursuing the following initiatives:

## **Institutional Procurement**

We will engage with our state agency and NGO partners to identify where our council's unique capacities can best support the successful implementation of the Healthy School Meals for All initiative.

## **Strategic Relationships**

The Strategic Relationships working group is focused on establishing clear, regular, and high-value channels of communication and consultation with our principal stakeholders: lawmakers and state agencies.

## **Membership and Engagement**

The council continues efforts to identify and develop strategic partnerships with other food-system aligned initiatives, councils, institutions, and organizations. Through that work, we have identified a number of completed, in-process, or soon-to-renew plans and 'blueprints' that touch on food systems issues of interest to the council. For example, the Colorado Water Plan will be out for public comment, and leading nutrition security and anti-hunger organizations will embark on community fact finding and plan renewal. In the coming year, COFSAC will work to identify ways in which we can support the inclusion of food systems stakeholders in leadership roles across the state. COFSAC will continue to build partnerships with the CSU Food System Institute and the Family Leadership Training Institute to develop curriculum and programs to support the professional development of the leaders to set them up for success in their positions.

We continue to see a distinct need for a cross-sectoral, multi-stakeholder and multi-institution council that can provide a balanced perspective on key challenges and opportunities facing the state.



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