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2023 Edition | COagriculture.com



PUEBLO CHIE Turning Up The Heat

Hot, dry summers, with 30-degree temperature swings from day to night doesn't sound like a recipe for agricultural success, but we aren't talking about your average chile pepper either. In fact, according to agricultural expert Dr. Mike Bartolo, it's that unusual desert climate that makes Pueblo perfect for the pepper.

"The weather is generally hot and dry, which reduces pest pressure. The hot days are followed by relatively cool nights, which helps the chilies develop unique flavor components. Notably, Pueblo has one of the greatest variations in day/ night temperatures of anywhere in the country," Bartolo says.

And he should know. The "Pueblo Chile" as it's known today was bred from seed stock gifted to him by his late uncle, Harry Mosco, after whom the strain is named.

The Mosco strain is unique for several reasons. It tends to grow larger than others of the same type and has a significantly thicker outer wall, making it ideal for roasting without risking the fruit splitting open or the juices evaporating. Because of this, it maintains its bold, rich chile flavor, making the Pueblo Chile the "Powerhouse of Peppers".

A **SPECIALTY** CROP INDEED

While Pueblo Chile is extremely well known and popular throughout Southern Colorado and the I-25 Corridor, the brand is working on increasing awareness and market penetration. Thanks to a 2023 USDA Specialty Crop Block Grant, Colorado is going to be hearing a lot more about the Pueblo Chile. The grant will fund a Sales Consultant position to increase awareness in the wholesale markets, as well as allow the Pueblo Chile Growers Association to be represented at state and local trade shows and events.

In addition, Colorado Ag in the Classroom will be featuring the Pueblo Chile in their 2024 Literacy Project that includes a children's book and classroom activities for elementary schools across the state designed to increase agricultural literacy among K-12 students.



EXPERIENCE THE FLAVOR

The 29th Annual Chile and Frijoles
Festival is Southern Colorado's
premier Harvest Fest. Held on the
3rd weekend after Labor Day, over
150,000 attendees from across the
country flock into downtown Pueblo
to experience the one-of-a-kind
aroma of roasting Pueblo Chile.

September 22-24, 2023 pueblochilefestival.com

During harvest season, locals and visitors alike enjoy numerous farmers markets and farm stands, many of which are open daily from July through mid-October.

Plan your farm stand experience at pueblochile.org

Colorado Potatoes

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Discover facts and stats about agriculture in Colorado, including the average farm size and the number of family farms.



Cook With Colorado ProductsFind tasty recipes using Colorado's top products such as potatoes, beef and more.



Have a Field Day

Discover agritourism destinations from dairies to farm-to-fork restaurants.





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Photo by Ryan Dearth

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WEB DEVELOPER Eric Montzka

SENIOR EDITOR Hannah Patterson Hill ASSOCIATE EDITORS Rachel Graf, Hannah Nave Lewis, Carisa Ownby SPONSORED CONTENT EDITOR Susan Chappell CONTRIBUTING WRITERS Danielle Rotella Adams. Katie Alt, Nancy DeVault, Jodi Helmer, Kim Hill, Kelly Rogers, Rachel Stroop V.P./CONTENT & MARKETING Jessy Yancey V.P./CREATIVE SERVICES Laura Gallagher ART DIRECTOR Amy Hiemstra SENIOR GRAPHIC DESIGNERS Eliza Hawkins, Beatrice Herndon, Cynthia Hester, Emmylou Rittenour, Lindsey Tallent PHOTO DIRECTOR Alison Hunter PHOTO EDITOR Jess Spence SENIOR PHOTOGRAPHER leff Adkins STAFF PHOTOGRAPHER Nathan Lambrecht V.P./DIGITAL STRATEGY Richard Stevens

PRESIDENT Ray Langen CHIEF OPERATING OFFICER Kim Newsom Holmberg EXECUTIVE VICE PRESIDENT Jordan Moore SENIOR V P / RUSINESS DEVELOPMENT. Herb Harner INTEGRATED MEDIA MANAGER Heather Foust V.P./OPERATIONS Molly Morton V.P./SALES OPERATIONS Katie Middendorf AD TRAFFIC COORDINATOR Patricia Moisan SENIOR AD COORDINATOR/DESIGNER Vikki Williams SENIOR GRAPHIC DESIGNER Holly Bikakis MARKETING COORDINATOR Sarah Henderson

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CHAIRMAN Greg Thurman PRESIDENT/PUBLISHER Bob Schwartzman CONTROLLER Chris Dudley ACCOUNTING TEAM Maria McFarland, Lisa Owens DATABASE DIRECTOR Debbie Woksa **EXECUTIVE SECRETARY Kristy York** HUMAN RESOURCES MANAGER Peggy Blake

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Colorado Department of Agriculture:

COMMISSIONER Kate Greenberg DIRECTOR OF COMMUNICATIONS AND PUBLIC AWARENESS Olga Robak DEPUTY COMMUNICATIONS AND OUTREACH DIRECTOR Bethany Howell

Special thanks to all Department staff for their support. For more information about the Colorado Department of Agriculture, contact:

Olga Robak, Director of Communications and Public Awareness 305 Interlocken Pkwy., Broomfield, CO, 80021 (303) 869-9000, olga.robak@state.co.us

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Kate Greenberg was appointed as Colorado's first female Commissioner of Agriculture in December 2018. She is a strong advocate for conservation, agriculture education and farmland affordability.

Across Colorado, the landscape of agriculture is evolving in the face of new challenges and opportunities.

In addition to food, fuel and fiber production, agriculture is about stewarding our resources, embracing new technologies while honoring past practices, and preparing for a future different from the past. In Colorado, we are leading the way in adapting to these changes toward a more resilient and vibrant future.

The Colorado Department of Agriculture is committed to advancing agriculture through economic resilience, voluntary stewardship, supporting future generations, and enhancing

animal health and welfare. Soil, water and climate stewardship are at the forefront of our efforts in Colorado. That's why we have championed programs like CDA's Saving Tomorrow's Agricultural Resources (STAR), a soil health program available to producers across the state.

We firmly believe farmers and ranchers should have choices in the marketplace. At CDA, we are committed to diversifying market opportunities through our local food system and international partnerships.

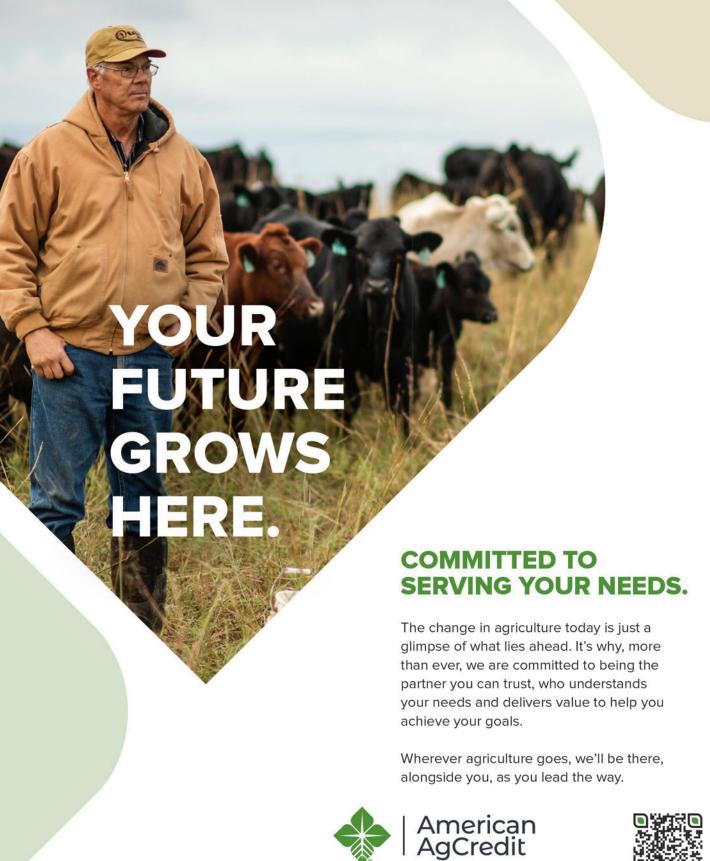
Our efforts also focus on ensuring agriculture is sustainable for future generations. We've expanded paid apprenticeships on farms and ranches, built a CDA internship program, developed a NextGen scholarship fund, are building support for agricultural workers and launched a first-of-its-kind beginning farmer loan program to help young people access land.

As we forge a new path forward, we want to make it easier for Colorado producers to connect with their communities. Our Community Food Access program is increasing the availability of Colorado products by helping small food retailers and small family farms increase their ability to provide healthy, nutritious food where it's needed most.

This issue of Cultivating Colorado tells the story of the changes our ag producers are facing and their grit in the face of these challenges. The stories within these pages show those in agriculture who are driven by a deep passion and love for the land and their way of life. I hope you join me in supporting the hardworking and dedicated Colorado producers, workers and community members who continue to show leadership in responding to the ever-changing demands of growing and raising food for us all.

Sincerely,

Kate Greenberg Commissioner of Agriculture





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Colorado Ag

An overview of the state's food, farming and agribusiness sectors

Colorado production rankings in the U.S.



No. 1 for proso millet



No. 2 for wool



No. 5 for winter wheat



No. 6 for potatoes

39,000

Total number of farms and ranches

28,839

Total number of female producers, or 42% of farms

In 2021, Colorado farm cash receipts totaled **\$8.3 billion**.

Livestock & Livestock Products: \$5.69 billion (69%)

Crops: **\$2.61 billion (31%)**





31.8M

Number of farm acres

815

Average farm size in acres

Colorado exports around \$2 billion in agricultural products annually.

95% of Colorado farms and ranches are family-owned.

Colorado agriculture employs more than **195,000** people.

Sources: Colorado Department of Agriculture, U.S. Department of Agriculture



Update your plate with

THE nutritious EGG!

DGA SCIENTIFIC REPORT RECOMMENDS EGGS

The Dietary Guidelines for Americans Advisory Committee recently issued recommendations for birth to 24 months old and specifically recommended eggs as an important first food for infants and toddlers, as well as for pregnant and lactating women.

The DGA's Scientific Report also highlighted the importance of a nutrient plentiful in eggs – choline – while recommending eggs as a *first food for babies* to reduce the risk for an egg allergy. The Advisory Committee additionally encourages eggs for *pre-teens* and *adolescents*.



Learn more about our organization and more about the incredible, edible egg at www.coloradoeggproducers.com





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Proso millet is excellent in many dishes as well as a key component in birdseed. In 2022, the state produced 9.35 million bushels.



Colorado's nursery and greenhouse industry contribution to the state's economy each year

Source: U.S. Department of Agriculture

Fun on the Farm

Looking for something fun to do this weekend? Head outside.

Colorado offers a wide range of agritourism destinations, from dude ranches and wineries to farmers markets and U-pick spots. Visitors can enjoy a day of fun while experiencing the state's beauty and learning about its agricultural heritage.

There's something for every season. In the spring, stop by one of the state's many breweries and enjoy a local beer outside. Summer brings county fairs and farmers markets filled with fresh produce. In the fall, visit a local corn maze or pumpkin patch. Winter offers local Christmas tree farms and more.

Ready to dive in? Visit ag.colorado.gov for more information on agritourism destinations across the state.



Got Beef?

Cattle and calves rank as Colorado's top commodity, accounting for 52% of all agriculture cash receipts. The beef industry alone accounts for \$4.2 billion in cash receipts. The state is home to 13,000 beef cattle producers and is the largest exporter of fresh and frozen beef in the U.S.

Supporting the industry are the Colorado Cattlemen's Association - which is the principal voice and advocate for Colorado beef production - and the Colorado Beef Council.



Loud and Proud

Thanks to the Colorado Proud program, finding local food, businesses and products has never been easier. The Colorado Department of Agriculture offers this free marketing program to help consumers easily identify products that are made, grown and raised in Colorado.

Producers who join (at no cost) gain free promotion, have permission to proudly display the logo on their goods, and directly connect buyers with locally raised food and fiber. Additionally, the Colorado Proud website features an easy-to-use search function where visitors can type in a business name or product they're looking for and find fresh, local options. Learn more at coloradoproud.com.

What's Growing in Colorado

A glimpse at the state's leading ag products based on cash receipts*



*What are cash receipts?

Defined by the U.S. Department of Agriculture's Economic Research Service, cash receipts refer to the total amount of crops or livestock sold in a calendar year.



CORN \$642.2M

Colorado farmers harvested 1.33 million acres of corn in 2021, including 1.15 million acres of corn for grain and 180,000 acres of corn for silage. The 2021 harvest produced 148.4 million bushels of corn for grain and over 4.4 million tons of corn for silage. Sweet corn production in Colorado totals around 133 million pounds each year.



\$162.2M

Ranking No. 16 in the nation for hog production, Colorado had a hog inventory totaling 620,000 as of Dec. 1, 2021.

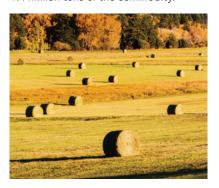
WHEAT \$410.7M

Colorado's winter wheat harvest covered more than 1.8 million acres. in 2021, producing nearly 70 million bushels of the crop and contributing to the state's ranking as the fifth-leading producer of winter wheat in the U.S.



HAY \$537M

Colorado ranks No. 9 in the nation for total hay production. In 2021, farmers across the state harvested more than 1.4 million acres of hay, including 780,000 acres of alfalfa, producing more than 4.4 million tons of the commodity.



CHICKEN EGGS \$89.4M

In 2021, Colorado farmers produced nearly 1.56 billion eggs from more than 4.8 million laying hens.





PROSO MILLET \$67.6M

Colorado ranks No. 1 in the nation for production of proso millet, a grain crop used for human consumption, livestock feed and birdseed. Colorado farmers harvested 425,000 acres of proso millet in 2021, resulting in a production of 9.35 million bushels.

POTATOES S209.5M

of the crop.

Boasting a near perfect environment for growing potatoes in the San Luis Valley, the largest alpine valley in North America, Colorado is the second-largest exporter of fresh potatoes in the nation. In 2021, Colorado farmers harvested 52,400 acres of potatoes for a total production of more than 21 million hundredweight

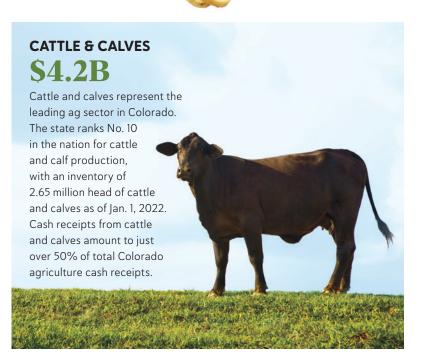
FLORICULTURE \$111.5M

Colorado's nursery and greenhouse industry contributes more than \$2 billion to the state's economy annually, including more than \$110 million in floriculture cash receipts in 2021. The floriculture sector comprises the cultivation and sale of cut flowers, potted flowering plants, foliage plants, potted herbaceous perennials, annual bedding and garden plants, and more.



P Find more online

Learn more about agricultural crops and commodities in Colorado online at COagriculture.com.



CCESS for All

COLORADO ORGANIZATIONS ADDRESS FOOD ACCESSIBILITY ISSUES CREATED BY FOOD DESERTS





Katie Belle Miller and her husband, Josh, along with their daughter, Adabelle, and son, Beauden, raise Texas Longhorns and other animals at Heritage Belle Farms.

oloradans deserve to fill their plates with fresh, healthy food, but for some residents, this simply isn't an option due to factors like geographical location, income or transportation.

Thankfully, many organizations, programs and grants are actively seeking to help overcome these barriers to improve access for those living in food deserts.

Rocky Mountain Food Collaborative

Katie Belle Miller was in search of another avenue to sell her products when she first started working with Rocky Mountain Food Collaborative (RMFC). Miller had already spearheaded her own local efforts by creating the SoCo Virtual Farmers Market - an innovative solution born out of pandemicfueled demand, which helped connect consumers with farmers and producers.

But as in-person farmers markets started reopening and demands for countless purchasing options decreased, Miller sought additional ways to sell the American Grassfed Association-certified beef from the Texas Longhorn cattle she raises on her property, Heritage Belle Farms.

Soon after reaching out to RMFC, Miller took a leadership role in the organization, which she still holds



today. As part of the steering committee and board of directors, Miller is working to help RMFC open a producer-owned grocery store in the Denver area.

"We saw the need for farmers and ranchers to really have the vast majority of say in operations for how a locally sourced grocery store should operate, so we are coining a new type of system," Miller says. "We're still developing the structure, but the goal is to return the most profit to farmers and ranchers, get rid of the middlemen and create a shorter supply chain."

Potentially, this producer-owned grocery store will be the first of many, as RMFC hopes to mimic and reproduce it across the region in the coming years.

Mountain Roots Food Project

For more than a decade, Mountain Roots Food Project in Gunnison Valley has worked to address food insecurity systematically. Their mission is divided into five focus areas: education and culture, food production, food security, food economy, and food policy.

"We recognized very quickly that in order to build a system, we have to work on all areas of the system simultaneously," says Holly Conn, executive director.

Essentially, these individual parts of the greater Colorado food system must be improved and integrated, which is precisely what Mountain Roots achieves through several programs.

Education is a huge component

of Mountain Roots' efforts. They run a districtwide farm-to-school program, which includes environmental science and nutrition classes for K-12 students. They also operate multiple school gardens and offer after-school and summer programs for kids.

Another key area of focus is community food security. According to a recent in-depth study conducted by Gunnison County, 30 to 40% of the county's population live above the poverty line but below the self-sufficiency index.







Mountain Roots Food Project works to address food insecurity through cooking classes, community gardens and hunger relief programs.

Mountain Roots is working to help this group they call the "missing middle" by addressing the challenges that arise for these residents, including offering cooking classes, running community gardens, and providing hunger relief with fresh produce and local protein.

"Our goal is to bring people through a food security continuum, building their health, selfsufficiency, and increasing engagement in their community and their food system," Conn says.

A Helping Hand

On the state government level, the Colorado Department of Agriculture provides numerous grants and resources to help address food access issues.

Recently passed legislation, House Bill 22-1380, created an \$8 million grant program to assist small grocery retailers and Colorado farmers in expanding their infrastructure to provide healthy food in communities across Colorado.

"Connecting consumers and producers is one of the basic tenets of our work," says Kate Greenberg, CDA commissioner. "Supporting a profitable and resilient agriculture in Colorado while increasing food access and equity will help build a more just, healthy and vibrant food system across our state."

- Kelly Rogers



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The Colorado Grain Chain seeks to increase market demand and awareness for locally grown grains

evin Poss' grandfather grew Scout 66, a cool-season wheat variety, on the family farm in Hugo. While grain production has changed significantly in the past three generations, Kevin continues growing the winter wheat variety.

"My father and grandfather both

sold their grains into the commodity system," says Kevin, a Colorado Grain Chain member. "We sell direct to consumer, and I am so grateful to my customers who make it possible for me to still carry on the family tradition of farming grains close to Hugo."

Kevin operates the farm Grains

From the Plains with his wife, Laura, and their seven children.

The nonprofit Colorado Grain Chain was established in 2019 to help members, like the Poss family, connect with each other and consumers to promote and sell

Colorado-grown heritage, ancient and locally adapted grains.

"Our strengths are in spreading awareness about Colorado's grains and the role consumers can play in supporting our local farmers, millers, bakers, brewers, maltsters, distillers and chefs," says Audrey Paugh, marketing and networking specialist for Colorado Grain Chain.

Links of Success

The idea for Colorado Grain Chain germinated at Grain School, a hands-on collaboration with the University of Colorado - Colorado Springs (UCCS) and the Rocky Mountain Farmers Union. Grain School provides educational opportunities around local grain



Colorado Grain Chain grew from Grain School, which provides educational opportunities centered around local grain.





production and the nutritional, culinary and community topics related to grain value chains.

It's evolved to include a co-brand allowing products containing at least 20% local grains - preferably whole grains - to use the "Colorado Grown Grains" label.

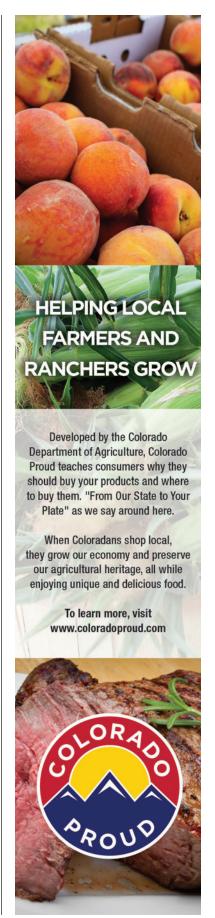
Nanna Meyer, associate professor at UCCS, hopes the Colorado Grain Chain will help increase local grain production and spark the development of regional grain hubs where farmers and processors can connect to improve efficiencies and augment quality and safety for grains from farm to table.

"In the grain space, we deal with crops like millets and maize that have been around for millennia," Meyer says. "It's a return to diversity, not only in the field but also in kitchens, bakeries, breweries and the ways people eat."

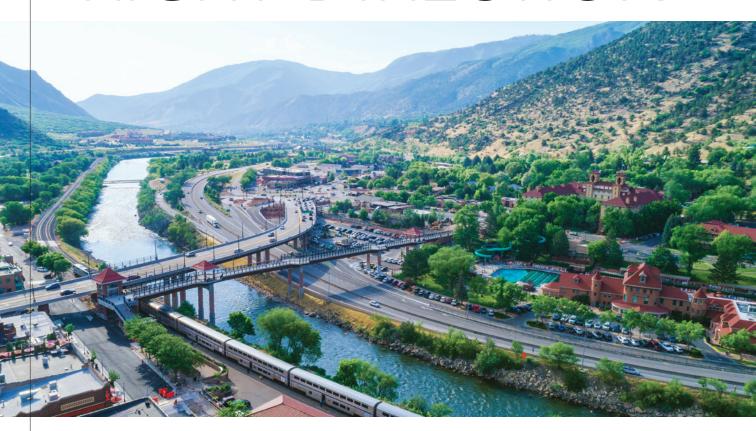
Laura Poss also hopes that building a local grain economy will support Colorado communities. The farm hosts a Wheat Harvest Festival in July welcoming attendees to learn more about local grain.

"We are surrounded by grain farms on the Colorado prairie, so there are plenty of locally grown grains, but these grains are anonymously sent to feed mills and grain elevators and, in many cases, shipped across oceans," Laura says. "Growing the grains is not enough. Locally marketed grains build the community, keep the money circulating in the Colorado economy and help farms be economically sustainable at a smaller size, which means more farming and economic opportunities in the rural areas."

- Jodi Helmer



Flowing in the RIGHT DIRECTION



THE 2023 COLORADO WATER PLAN OUTLINES AN IMPROVED FUTURE FOR THE STATE'S WATER SUPPLY

rom the snowcapped mountains to the flowing rivers, water is one of Colorado's most vital resources, especially for the state's agriculture industry.

Increasingly, the water supply is at risk, thanks to challenges presented by population growth, climate change, major wildfires and drought.

The Colorado Water Conservation Board (CWCB) exists to conserve, develop, protect and manage Colorado's water supply, and its 2023 Colorado Water Plan presents a variety of actions to do so – calling on all Coloradans to be part of the solution.

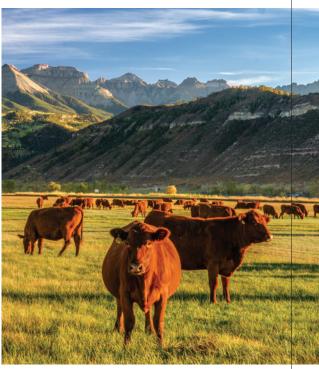
"The 2023 Colorado Water Plan is the result of several years of meaningful engagement and co-creation with water users in Colorado," says Russ Sands, Water Supply Planning Section Chief for CWCB. "It sets a strong foundation for collaboration on the state's important water challenges."

The first edition of the Water Plan was published in 2015. The 2023 plan builds off its original framework, with updates that provide a clearer blueprint on actions that Coloradans can take to do their part in conserving water.

The Water Plan describes current challenges around water conservation and supply, then presents proposed partner and agency actions to help mitigate them, including opportunities through the Water Plan Grant Program.

In fact, it features more than 50 examples of projects and initiatives that can happen at the grassroots level to protect Colorado's water





The Colorado Water Conservation Board is working to conserve, develop, protect and manage Colorado's water supply.

supply – giving people ideas for the perfect starting point.

The CWCB are stewards of the plan, but they rely on partners to help carry out the goals, including federal, state and local governments, as well as Colorado tribes and other state entities.

The Water Plan includes four key action areas, including Vibrant Communities, Thriving Watersheds, Resilient Planning and, finally, Robust Agriculture.

In Colorado, the agriculture sector uses approximately 90% of the state's water, and about 17% of it is sourced from groundwater.

Moving forward, innovations are needed around water supply to help sustain irrigated agriculture and increase its profitability while simultaneously stretching available water supplies.

The Water Plan supports many issues related to cities, streams and people, including significant support for what the plan calls "Robust Agriculture." This includes actions that emphasize support for peer-to-peer learning between farmers



"We're excited for all Coloradans who have innovative solutions to come forward with their project ideas."

- Nora Flynn, Senior Agricultural Specialist for CWCB

and ranchers, facilitate collaborative water-sharing agreements, and integrate soil health, water conservation and other adaptive practices that increase economic outputs with less water use.

Additionally, partner actions include storage that helps with augmentation plans, rehabilitation of aging of agricultural storage facilities, and on-farm efficiency improvements.

One of the best ways Coloradans can help achieve these goals is through the Water Plan Grant Program.

"The Water Plan Grant Program is key to making progress on the goals and actions within the Colorado Water Plan," says Nora Flynn, Senior Agricultural Specialist for CWCB.
"We're excited for all Coloradans who have innovative solutions to come

forward with their project ideas."

Both government and private entities can apply for a grant in one of several categories, including agricultural projects that support the Water Plan.

One past project included the Colorado Master Irrigator program, which teaches farmers and farm managers in the High Plains Aquifer region irrigation management practices that contribute to conservation and are more efficient.

Find more information

You can learn about past projects and how to apply for a grant at cwcb.colorado.gov/funding/colorado-water-plan-grants. Read the full 2023 Water Plan at cwcb.colorado.gov/colorado-water-plan.



RECLAIM THEIR ROOTS

Indigenous women are restoring their agricultural heritage

rowing up on Cochiti Pueblo in New Mexico, Arielle Quintana often accompanied her dad into the fields where he grew chile peppers, pumpkins, melons, beans, peas and gourds. But the older she got, the less time she spent growing food and Quintana knows she's not alone.

"We have different songs that talk about women being the holders of seeds and caretakers of plants, and women traditionally participated in the planting and stewardship of food," Quintana says. "There are so many roles that Indigenous women had in farming and food systems that have been buried, erased or made invisible under colonialism."

In Colorado, Indigenous women are working to reclaim their traditional foodways. Organizations like Harvest of All First Nations, Frontline Farming and Spirit of the Sun are helping the movement by offering education, direct agricultural experiences, economic opportunities and advocacy.

"The idea that food is medicine is something that has been a part of our culture," says Denisa Livingston, community health advocate and food justice organizer with the Diné Community Advocacy Alliance (DCAA).



"The present issues have stemmed from historical inequities and have impacted our communities, and the work that comes from a burden is an opportunity."

Appetite for Change

In the Diné Nation, reclaiming traditional Native foodways required creative thinking.

Pre-colonization, the Diné Nation didn't have a word for junk food. Now, it's known as ch'iyáán bizhool, and it's causing harm as communities trade their traditional diets for foods that are carbonated, refined, artificial and processed (humorously referred to as CRAP).

The Navajo Nation passed the Healthy Diné Nation Act of 2014 to encourage healthier, traditional diets. Livingston notes that the so-called "junk food tax" made it more expensive to purchase unhealthy foods and directed revenue to community wellness projects, while a separate bill eliminated taxes on healthy foods and water.

DCAA also collaborated with other organizations to acquire and distribute heirloom seeds from different tribes, making it easier for women and families to grow traditional foods.

In Fort Collins, grassroots

Native community groups share resources, and The Growing Project, a nonprofit that promotes environmental and social justice in the local food system, operates a community garden that grows culturally relevant foods and distributes them to local families.

"Our belief is that everyone should

have access to locally grown food and culturally relevant foods, no strings attached, and that's especially hard for so many marginalized communities in Fort Collins," says Quintana, programs and garden manager at The Growing Project. "So how do we help to provide a space where that can happen?"

"We are a matriarchal society. Our clan system is led by women. Our grandmas and our mothers steward our cultural practices and the way we plant, grow, cook, prepare and preserve food."

- Denisa Livingston, Diné Community Advocacy Alliance community health advocate and food justice organizer



Denisa Livingston, community health advocate and food justice organizer with the Diné Community Advocacy Alliance, created and launched their Let's Eat In(digenous) campaign promoting Indigenous and local foods.

Cultivating a Bright Future

Sharing seeds and providing growing spaces are essential for helping Indigenous women reclaim their agricultural roots, but education also plays a key role.

"It's not necessarily about figuring out what the exact practices that Indigenous women did precolonization," Quintana says. "Some tribes have that knowledge, so sometimes that is the goal, but some tribes don't have that knowledge anymore. It's been erased."

Colorado nonprofit organizations want to change that.

Harvest of All First Nations, an Indigenous-led nonprofit, emphasizes traditional knowledge

through land reclamation

and regenerative

agriculture practices; food justice group FrontLine Farming emphasizes education to improve access for women and people

of color in Colorado; and DCAA launched a Let's Eat In(digenous) campaign to promote Indigenous and local foods.

Education and hands-on agricultural experiences are about more than just how Indigenous women grow food and feed their communities.

"We are a matriarchal society. Our clan system is led by women. Our grandmas and our mothers steward our cultural practices and the way we plant, grow, cook, prepare and preserve food," Livingston says. "Food is medicine' is part of our culture, a part of our practice, a part of our knowledge systems, and we can rebuild and reclaim our identity through healthful, traditional foods but also build toward the continuance of collective reconciliation, reparation and restoration."

- Jodi Helmer

Looking for LOCAL

Colorado food guides connect consumers and producers

For Coloradans across

the state, finding fresh, local food is easier than ever. Thanks to several local food guides, including the Palmer Land Conservancy (PLC) Local Food Guide and the Colorado Department of Agriculture Farm Fresh Directory, consumers have access to local farm-fresh products at their fingertips.

"The primary goal of our guide is to support our state's producers and to help consumers know who is growing their food," says Kristie Nackord, vice president of external affairs at Palmer Land Conservancy (PLC). "Farmers are the stewards of the land, and the more we support them, the more natural resources in our state will remain."

Local Food Guide

PLC's mission is to conserve natural resources like water and, ultimately, protect farming in Colorado. Its local food guide focuses on Southern Colorado and the extremely fertile farmland in Pueblo County, but they hope to expand to cover the entire state in the future.

Nackord says the first digital edition of the guide was released in 2020 during the COVID-19 pandemic to help consumers access local food during a time when grocery store shelves were empty.

"The 2022 edition was our first print guide, and we distributed 10,000 copies around the southern part of the state," she says. "We were really thoughtful about creating an appealing guide with excitement around local food, but also making sure we told producers' stories and shared the agricultural







Local food guides, like the Palmer Land Conservancy Local Food Guide and the Colorado Farm Fresh Directory, help consumers find local products.

history of the region."

Organized by county, the guide lists contact information for local farms, farmers markets and agritourism destinations. Several farmers are featured, and a map shows the exact locations of farms and markets. The guide also includes recipes that use local ingredients, like the Rocky Ford Melon.

"We've had a lot of gratitude so far around the food guide," Nackord says. "People are very appreciative that they can see what's around them and not have to go to 50 different websites."

For more information and to access a copy of the food guide, visit palmerland.org/find-local-food.

Farm Fresh Directory

CDA releases a Farm Fresh Directory each year as an extension of the Colorado Proud program.

"We started the Farm Fresh Directory about 40 years ago to help consumers be able to find farmers markets, U-pick roadside stands, and other events like the county and state fairs," says Danielle Trotta, Colorado Proud program manager. "We include information on whether the producer accepts food stamps or if they are handicap accessible. There's a lot of information that people may not know. Especially during COVID, we pivoted to help people know which producers were selling online and how they could still shop local while remaining safe at home."

The directory is released each June, and Trotta says it's also available in Spanish. To learn more, visit ag.colorado.gov/ category/farm-fresh.

- Rachel Stroop

Crops for CHANGE

Longstanding growers credit willingness to change for their sustainability

rom freeze to drought, pandemic to plant disease, Colorado farmers continually navigate fluctuating factors with grit and resilience. To weather such storms, crop producers attest that willingness to change is an occupational necessity.

"We combine what we've learned from our ancestors with technology advancements," says Michael Hirakata, co-owner of Hirakata Farms in Rocky Ford.

The adaptive approach has aided his family-run business for five generations, which intentionally produces just one variety of cantaloupes. But there's a backup plan.

"Our crop could lose its genetics or get a disease it can't handle, so we're always looking forward to seeing what the next change in our seed will be," says Hirakata, who also produces honeydew, watermelons and pumpkins.

Pandemic Pivoting

Colorado's leading fruit crops are apples and peaches, commodities grown at Peachfork Orchards & Vineyards. Susan Patton, who owns the Palisade property with

her husband Phil, says her mother first planted an apple orchard in the 1970s. They later added apricots, grapes, pears and pluots.

When Peachfork failed to sell some of its yields, the Pattons began winemaking.

"We sort out the smaller fruits to make juices and use any excess fruit - or even those less aesthetically appealing - to make wine rather than throw them away," Phil says.

This cuts back on waste and adds revenue.

When the pandemic crushed communal tastings, they branched out again.

"Peachfork became a Harvest Host site," Susan says. "This program's members can stay overnight at wineries or farms in their RVs for free."

The venture helped Peachfork stay viable when sales could have otherwise dropped.

"Guests tend to generously stock up on our wines and goods while staying on the premises," Phil adds.

Invaluable Innovation

Like many agriculturists, the Pattons also recognize that modernization, as they



did with solar power, is key for farming fortitude.

Hirakata agrees, "In this field, you're continuously learning. Our family has made mistakes over the years with that learning curve and that evolving education can be expensive."

Still, Hirakata says taking innovative risks is invaluable. Switching to drip tape, for example, was a productive change.

"The fruit is never really touched by the irrigated water, which is a source of bacteria, so a drier fruit is a safer product," Hirakata says, adding that GPS is a game changer. "I have a photograph from the 1920s with horse-drawn wagons pulling cantaloupes off the field. Now, with













Fun Facts

Colorado crops are as diverse as the growers throughout the state. Enjoy a few fun facts about the growers and farms featured in this story.

- » Hirakata Farms has 1,200 farm acres.
- » Described as sweet and juicy, the Rocky Ford Cantaloupe was first harvested in 1915.
- Peachfork Orchards & Vineyards' 2021 chambourcin won double gold at the 2022 Governor's Cup. Boasting notes of blackberry and plum, this medium-bodied wine is dry and smooth with earthy complexity.
- The Colorado Corn Administrative Committee works to showcase the \$40 billion economic impact of corn for the state, making it a top contributor to Colorado's economy each year.

Sources: Colorado Corn, Hirakata Farms, Peachfork Orchards & Vineyards

Phil and Susan Patton, middle, run Peachfork Orchards & Vineyards with their daughter, Sadie, and son, Joel.

efficient GPS technology, our tractors practically drive themselves."

Better Bushels

Nick Colglazier is a driving force in his own right. He worked on his family's Colorado farm before becoming involved in innovation.

"The Colorado Corn Administrative Committee (CCAC) started in 1987 by a vote of corn farmers to enact a one-penny per bushel assessment in order to further grain corn research, market development, outreach

and education," says Colglazier, executive director at CCAC.

Field corn accounts for nearly all of the corn grown in Colorado. It's primarily used for livestock feed and ethanol. Colglazier believes the latter has immense potential.

"The CCAC is advancing production practices and examining efficiencies to make our producers more sustainable without cutting into their bottom line," Colglazier says. "By researching and honing practices, the industry can feed and fuel the world while ensuring that

all parts of sustainability environmental, social and economical - are encompassed."

A 2021 study by Harvard University and partnering research scientists found that greenhouse gas emissions from corn ethanol are 46% lower than those from gasoline.

"We want to tell customers that ethanol is good for your car, your wallet and the environment," Colglazier says. "It's the right-now solution to cutting transportation pollutants and carbon emissions."

- Nancy DeVault



PLANTING CARBON

-A WINNING PARTNERSHIP FOR AGRICULTURE AND THE COMMUNITY-

A dynamic new land use

is underfoot in Northeast Colorado. Instead of planting seeds, a Colorado company has big plans to bury carbon dioxide deep underground, helping to clean the state's famous blue skies while bolstering the region's ethanol industry.

Carbon America, the first vertically integrated carbon capture and storage super developer, or CCS, has proposed a project that would permanently remove 350,000 tons of carbon dioxide annually – equivalent to taking 70,000 passenger vehicles off the road – from Sterling Ethanol LLC and Yuma Ethanol LLC.



Fermented corn is used at the plants to produce ethanol – a renewable fuel made from plants to oxygenate gasoline to reduce air pollution. The projects will enable the two locations to reduce the carbon intensity of ethanol production and increase their competitiveness in the market while improving local air quality.

Carbon America is on a mission to quickly and safely capture and store as much carbon dioxide as possible. The end-to-end developer will finance, build, own and operate the commercial carbon capture and sequestration projects, which will safely catch 95% of the carbon dioxide released during the fermentation process of ethanol production.

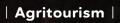
The projects transport captured carbon dioxide via an underground pipeline to EPA-regulated and carefully monitored sequestration sites, which use sandstone and rock layers to permanently trap the gas at least 4,000 feet below the surface.

This exciting project will provide new economic opportunities for Colorado's ethanol and agricultural industries, benefitting local corn growers who sell 36 million bushels of field corn to the plants annually.

"Our success is linked to fostering mutually beneficial partnerships with our stakeholders – including communities, landowners, local governments and regulators – to deliver CCS projects that provide environmental and community benefits while supporting good-paying jobs and regional economies," says Carbon America CEO Brent Lewis.

The project, which will be eligible for federal tax credits designed to reduce carbon emissions, is currently targeted to be commercially operational in 2025.

Carbon America CEO Brent Lewis, left, and Yuma Ethanol General Manager Dave Kramer, stand in front of the ethanol plant's corn silos.



ADVENTURES

Agritourism invites visitors to step into agriculture



hose who trek to Colorado for winter fun in the snowcapped Colorado Rockies might be surprised to know the \$40 billion role agriculture plays in the state's annual economy. With 1,056 Colorado farms indicating they offer agritourism according to the 2017 Census of Agriculture, opportunities to experience Colorado agriculture abound.

Shepperly Farm Petting Zoo

When Ashley and her husband, Jason, moved to Cañon City in 2018 from Colorado Springs, their motive was simply to provide more space for their children. After receiving her first animal as a birthday gift, each passing holiday brought with it a new creature.

Based on the frequency of visits from neighbors and calls from local schools asking to visit her growing horde, including a donkey, goat, pig and others, Ashley soon realized there was little opportunity for children in her area to engage with livestock.

It's not just those in her community who love to visit, though. More than a million tourists come through Cañon City each summer for the Royal Gorge Bridge & Train, and many stop to learn about the more than 80 animals at the Shepperly Farm Petting Zoo through hands-on education.

The Shepperlys may offer education to others, but the animals have given new life to them.

"Before all of these animals, I was very OCD (obsessive-compulsive disorder) and high anxiety," Ashley says. "They have completely transformed me as a human, and I want to gift that to others."

Alongside helping Ashley cope, the animals have lent healing paws and hooves to her husband. After 52 surgeries due to combat wounds,





Jason is considered 100% disabled.

"The animals have provided him the motivation he needs to continue getting up each day and taking care of them," Ashley says.

Zapata Ranch

Zapata Ranch sits on a 100,000acre property bordering the Great Sand Dunes National Park in the San Luis Valley. Owned by The Nature Conservancy (TNC) and managed by Ranchlands, a family business that manages ranches, Zapata Ranch focuses on sustainable ranching practices and offers numerous educational experiences through their hospitality programs.

Zapata Ranch is home to 2,000 head of wild bison as well as a herd

Above: Ashley Shepperly and her husband, Jason, welcome visitors to Shepperly Farm Petting Zoo in Cañon City for hands-on educational experiences.

♥ If You Go...

1. Lone Creek Farms

3879 N. State Hwy. 83, Franktown admin@lonecreekfarm.com (303) 800-1243

Ionecreekfarms.com

2. Shepperly Farm **Petting Zoo**

3420 Grandview Ave., Cañon City info@shepperlyfarm.com (719) 220-0258

shepperlyfarm.com

3. Zapata Ranch

5305 CO-150, Mosca stay@ranchlands.com (719) 378-2356

ranchlands.com/pages/ explore-zapata-ranch





of Black Angus cattle. Ranchlands began managing the land, bison and cattle for TNC in 2004 and began offering hospitality on the ranch in 2009.

What began as a financial necessity at the time became a unique opportunity.

"It has grown and become an incredible platform for education, bringing people from all demographics, from all over the world to ride, to learn, to feel, to experience and to really enjoy the magic of this incredible corner of Colorado," says Kate Matheson, ranch manager.

Matheson credits the pandemic with a huge upsurge in visitors to the ranch.

"Zapata Ranch became a very safe open place to connect with friends and family again," she says. "It was a chance to be exhilarated and to feel the fresh air when we'd all been penned up."

Thanks to shows like Yellowstone, Matheson says she has also seen a heightened interest in the West over the last few years.

"The best way for people to truly

understand how special and unique these landscapes are is to offer them the chance to be immersed in them," Matheson says.

Lone Creek Farms

Half an hour outside Denver, Lone Creek Farms' owners Brad Witherell and Luis Suarez have worked, along with their families, for years to create a wholesome place for others to enjoy the outdoors. As the population continues to increase around them, the duo felt it important to preserve land for agriculture.

"We hope to maintain our property as ag to expose our youth to traditional farming practices," Suarez says.

Lone Creek's first Fall Festival was in 2018. Located between Parker and Castle Rock, they operate mid-September through October, inviting the community and families around them to participate in an agricultural lifestyle via their Fall Festival and Slaughter Gulch.

The festival provides a familyfriendly experience with an

> emphasis on elementary school children. Visitors enjoy live shows, attractions and unique experiences. Their Fall Festival is the only one in Colorado featuring pig races.

The Slaughter Gulch event is geared toward older kids and adults with an outside haunted trail, haunted houses and a fright-filled corn maze.

While exciting and fun, these opportunities also introduce participants to agriculturally focused outdoor activities.

- Katie Alt



FAIR FUN The Colorado State Fair weaves history and ag into fun at one of the nation's oldest state fairs

For 11 days each

August through early September, nearly half a million Coloradoans venture to Pueblo to enjoy carnival rides, agriculture exhibits, live music, parades, rodeos and more at the Colorado State Fair.

Dating back to 1872 before Colorado was a state - the fair is rooted in agriculture, where visitors can enjoy Colorado's delicious local products in fair favorites like fries, sausages and beer in addition to specialties like sloppers - open-faced cheeseburgers smothered in Pueblo green chile.

Fair competitions are a big draw for both competitors and audiences alike. They range from animal competitions showcasing livestock to food competitions such as pies, canning, homebrew beer and hobby wine. General entry competitions are open to both amateurs and professionals and include, needle and porcelain art, floriculture, quilts, and dolls. The fine arts competitions allow people to experience art gallerylike exhibitions, with unique pieces by emerging and professional artists.

"Our beer and wine competitions are different from other competitions," says Trisha Fernandez, general entry and fine arts



Left: Hollis Glenn, Celebrity Slopper Eating Champion; Right: Geoff Esper, the World Slopper Eating Champion, ate 33 sloppers in 8 minutes at the Colorado State Fair.

coordinator. "All judges are certified by the Beer Judge Certification Program."

Steeped in History

Originally held by the Southern Colorado Agricultural and Industrial Association, the fair sat on a 100-acre site north of Pueblo where horse shows and races were all the rage, with approximately 1,400 in daily attendance.

In 1888, the fair moved to 50 acres of land in Pueblo near Mineral Palace Park.

Now expanded to 102 acres, the fair has paved streets and historical buildings that support activities and entertainment while preserving its history and agricultural past.

Celebrating its 150th anniversary in 2022, the fair has seen many changes.

"Fairs used to be where people gathered to talk about agriculture," says Scott Stoller, general manager. "Now, only 1% to 2% of people are involved in agriculture, so the fair is a place where people come to learn about agriculture, which is important since 100% of people rely on food and fiber."

A Bright Future

Looking ahead, the fair has a 25-year

facilities Master Plan with an emphasis on agriculture that includes a permanent ag space with interactive activities for year-round learning.

"We started building our Colorado Proud Farm Trail in 2022 and working on commodity cubes activity centers that focus on geographic areas of Colorado and their agriculture, like Palisade peaches and San Luis Valley potatoes," Stoller says.

Other new fair elements include climate-friendly green spaces and a new show barn for the livestock competitions.

Mark your calendar for the next Colorado State Fair, Aug. 25 through Sept. 4 to experience all the fun and excitement while learning about Colorado agriculture. Visit coloradostatefair.com to learn more.

- Danielle Rotella Adams





Youth learn about agriculture's importance at Colorado ranches and farms

eet three Colorado organizations with a common goal: introducing youth and their families to the joys of the outdoors while teaching them the importance of ecosystems that nurture all life, from seeds to steers.

Nighthawk Ranch

The first in their families to go to college, Tom and Dorothy Evans vowed if they ever had the means,

they'd give back to others. That vow was upheld in 2012 with Nighthawk Ranch.

Located west of Colorado Springs, the ranch welcomes youth ages 10 through 18 who are recovering from cancer. Small by design, the ranch only accepts six or seven kids for each of the weeklong camps.

"We want one-on-one attention," Tom says. "And because we are small, we can take almost anybody.

We've had kids missing legs, missing arms and those who are terminally ill. I've strapped oxygen tanks onto horses for trail rides."

The equine program is integral to the camp. Although most have never ridden horses before, every camper rides every day.

"Every kid gets to feed the cows, bottle feed a calf and, on Fridays, I put the kids on a cattle drive," Tom says of campers' experiences





Nighthawk Ranch, above, offers an equine program, opposite page, and other adventures for youth recovering from cancer. Below and left: Guidestone Colorado in Salida.



on the working ranch.

Campers also build a log cabin and can sleep in it.

"We try to give these kids a nature experience and help them understand the importance of agriculture in their lives," Tom says. "A lot of this occurs with animal contact, but overall, we're pushing the concept that if you never ever give up and you work hard, you can be and do anything you want."

Guidestone Colorado

Based in Salida, Guidestone Colorado offers experiences on local farms and ranches to help individuals develop an appreciation for where food comes from and what it takes to produce local food.

Of their summer programs,

Pioneer Camp, Ranch Camp and Kids in Ag Camp are the most popular, says Andrea Coen, the nonprofit's executive director.

"The camps are very hands-on, engaging and playful, so kids are learning by helping care for the horses, cows, chickens and our

"I strongly believe that positive experiences in childhood make an impact in adulthood regarding the value, not just of a local food system, but also of open spaces and ecological systems."

- Andrea Coen, Guidestone Colorado executive director



donkey named Delbert," she says. "They're spinning wool and learning how to make butter, but they're having so much fun they don't always realize how much they're learning."

These experiences – from getting their hands in the soil to meeting ranchers raising animals are the most impactful way for kids to learn, she adds.

"I strongly believe that positive experiences in childhood make an impact in adulthood regarding the value, not just of a local food system, but also of open spaces and ecological systems," Coen says. "It's much bigger than just food with regard to taking care of the planet we live on."

Colorado Kids Ranch

JD Chapman's original agritourism venture, a pumpkin patch, has grown to Colorado



Colorado Kids Ranch in Monument offers an array of activities including hayrides, a farm animal petting area, straw mazes, pony rides and more.

Kids Ranch – 40 acres of outdoor activities such as hayrides, a farm animal petting area, straw mazes, pony rides and more.

The Monument-based ranch is a safe place where families can spend time together outdoors, Chapman says.

He also hosts Colorado Farm Camp. Kids in first through sixth grade learn how to take care of farm animals, make jelly, collect eggs, and plant squash and cabbage seeds.

"A large number of kids don't realize where food comes from," Chapman says. "At Farm Camp, kids get direct exposure."

Opportunities abound for fall thrills that could bring in more revenue, but Chapman focuses on a safe haven for kids to immerse themselves in agriculture.

"Sometimes income is not the most important thing," Chapman adds. "We could be making more money, like offering horror attractions during the fall Pumpkin Patch, but that doesn't jell with what we do. We focus on having a safe place for kids."

Chapman also started Johnny Pumpkinseed, a nonprofit offering free admission to the farm's play area for foster care and special needs children and their families ensuring everyone can enjoy the wonders of agriculture.

"We feel this population is often overlooked," Chapman says. "If we can be part of generating moments of joy, we feel that has value."

- Kim Hill

Farm to School

If getting out to the farm isn't an option for some kids, Colorado Proud brings farmers to school. School Meal Day brings agriculture to the classroom and lunch table, celebrating farmers and ranchers throughout the state and connecting K-12 graders with agriculture. Colorado Proud and the Colorado Departments of Agriculture and of Education invite schools throughout the state to welcome

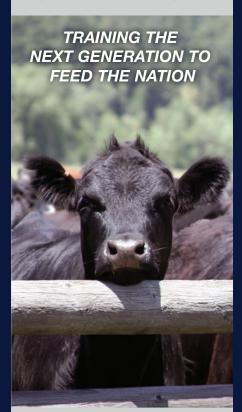
farmers and ranchers

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with students and
teach them about
agriculture at this
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AWARD-WINNING CATTLE RANCHERS AT MAY RANCH LEAD THE WAY IN ENVIRONMENTAL STEWARDSHIP

fter a wildfire destroyed thousands of acres on the May cattle ranch near Lamar, Dallas May saw firsthand the visual evidence of proper land management during the recovery process.

"Within days after the fire, the grass was already greening in one of our pastures that's been heavily grazed," Dallas says.

However, an adjacent pasture that had never been grazed was spotty, with a few patches of grass, bare ground and invasive weeds sprouting in the exposed spots, even months after the fire.

"This is a striking example of what I've said for years," Dallas says. "Cattle are a huge benefit to grasslands, as long as they are intelligently grazed."

That means allowing cattle to move along the land, their

hooves breaking the soil and disturbing the grass, which then drops seeds onto the ground. When the animals defecate, they further spread seeds and fertilize the soil in a cycle necessary to stimulating vegetation health and growth.

Family Tradition

Four generations of the May family - Irene, Deb, Dallas, Bon and their families - all live and work on the ranch and have the same philosophy: Operate an economically viable cattle ranch and work to preserve the wildlife habitat.

It's a modern mix of environmentalism and financial survival. Their herd of approximately 800 head of purebred, grass-fed Limousin cattle can be traced to a single heifer Dallas received on his 13th birthday.

They could run more cattle on their land, which would help the bottom line, but the Mays are committed to preserving the wildlife habitat and not overworking the land.

Intelligent land management extends to their 4,500 acres of farmland, where corn and alfalfa are grown and primarily sold to dairies.

"As we deliver those crops, we backhaul compost for fertilizer on our farmland operation," Dallas explains.

In the fall, they plant cover crops. When harvested, this also serves as supplemental cattle feed. The Mays are gradually replacing flood irrigation with more efficient pivot sprinklers, which improves water usage.

And the never-grazed pasture that was slower to recover after the fire? The Mays left the pasture alone







because a creek runs through it, and beavers have built dams, forming ponds and wetlands. Trees thrive along the creek bank.

"It was a wildlife paradise," says Dallas, who also serves as a Colorado Parks & Wildlife commissioner.

His wife Brenda, an appointee to the board of Great Outdoors Colorado, notes the beavers "have created a whole wetland infrastructure on our ranch, which is a habitat for many different species. Plus, water is such a precious resource we have to protect it, and the beaver have a natural way of doing that in our streams."

Now, cattle will graze that area to help it recover to its natural state.

Successful Stewards

This eco-friendly land management has earned praise locally and nationally. Ducks Unlimited has paid the Mays with carbon sequestration credits to let the prairie grasses remain.

"We did a conservation easement on our ranch, which restricts the way the property can be used, so it's guaranteed that carbon will never be released," Dallas says.

Discoveries of the black rail, lesser prairie chicken and other bird species led the Audubon Society to make May Ranch a certified bird-friendly ranch.

In 2021, the ranch won the prestigious Leopold Award, named for author and naturalist Aldo Leopold, which recognizes recipients for improving soil health, water quality and wildlife habitat. Researchers from the Denver Botanic Gardens identified more than 90 plant species at the ranch never before documented in Prowers County.

Leaving the prairie dog population undisturbed provided an opportunity to release black-footed ferrets, once thought to be extinct. The mammal's resiliency makes it a favorite of Brenda's. She says the May grandchildren even helped

with a recent release of black-footed ferrets onto the ranch, a memory Brenda treasures. In fact, the kids' school brought three busloads of children to watch as part of their study of ecosystems.

Commissioner of Agriculture Kate Greenberg applauds the Mays for their work.

"The Mays are an excellent example of farmers and ranchers investing in their business in a way that nurtures and connects the whole of what they operate, everything from production to soil stewardship to water conservation and the restoration of rare species on their property," Greenberg says. "They are holding a complex system together and raising incredible food while they're at it."

- Kim Hill



"We did a conservation easement on our ranch, which restricts the way the property can be used, so it's guaranteed that carbon will never be released."

- Dallas May, May Ranch owner



Drought DEFENSE

Colorado organizations help landowners transition for the future through climate resilient ag techniques

olorado is experiencing an extended drought with the increasingly dry conditions going back more than 1,000 years. According to the World Health Organization, more than 1 billion people live in water-stressed regions, and that number is expected to double by 2050 when Earth's population is estimated to grow to 9 billion people.

The recently approved Colorado Water Plan specifically identifies robust agriculture as a top-level priority for the entire state, including established farms and ranches, crops, local food, ditch companies, acequias, and urban agriculture. According to the plan's executive summary, if no new water projects or strategies are implemented, modeling for the driest periods shows Colorado communities could need 230,000 to 740,000 acre-feet of additional water per year by 2050. The upper-end need is about enough water to fill 370,000 Olympic-sized swimming pools each year. Water will be needed across the state.

Landowners in Colorado are addressing the climate crisis by partnering with soil health advocates to implement farmerand rancher-led solutions for Colorado agriculture to thrive, even with less water.

Bolstering Soil Health

Adopting climate resilient agriculture practices is one of the most effective ways farmers and ranchers can make soil and water improvements on their land.

"Regenerative agriculture has a unique focus on soil health, and I think it is the future of agriculture," says Brenna Simmons-St. Onge, executive director of The Alliance Center, a nonprofit that created the Regenerative Recovery Coalition, which provides connections and funding to landowners in









partnership with Restore Colorado.

Regenerative agriculture methods are used across the state, but prioritizing their use on a large scale is critical for production.

Composting, planting cover crops and adding animal grazing improve soil health, water quality and retention while helping to maintain soil nutrients.

"The healthier the soil, the more nutritious the food being grown will be, and the more water is retained, which requires less water for irrigation," Simmons-St. Onge says.

Since launching in 2020, the coalition has worked to direct federal funding from the American Rescue Plan Act to support communities across Colorado, and their crowdsourced policy ideas have influenced 44 new state laws.

Funding and Restoration

Transitioning to regenerative agriculture techniques comes with upfront costs. These can be offset by grants offered through the U.S.

Department of Agriculture, but more funding is needed to effectively implement long-term change. That's where Restore Colorado and Zero Foodprint (ZFP) come in.

After seeing initial success in California, Restore Colorado, a pilot program launched in Boulder County in 2022, has partnered with the USDA, Colorado Department of Agriculture, ZFP and Mad Agriculture as well as the Regenerative Recovery Coalition







to connect Colorado soil healthfocused producers with businesses.

Restaurants and food and beverage companies in the program offer their customers an optional 1% fee, with the money going to a fund to help farmers and ranchers invest in regenerative agriculture practices.

"Each dollar invested in the program creates about \$40 in benefit," says Anthony Myint, ZFP executive director.

Since 2021, ZFP has awarded 11 grants for more than \$100,000 in Colorado and plans to make available an additional \$200,000 for statewide application started mid-March.

"Our goal is to raise \$5 million annually by 2025 to reinvest in Colorado food production," Myint says.

ZFP is actively working to expand the Restore Colorado program to new regions and create further collaborations between producers committed to soil health and climate-minded consumers.

Water Improvements

Another organization focused on regenerative agriculture and water conservation is the Mancos Conservation District in southwestern Colorado, which works holistically with landowners who want to improve their water infrastructure, land and production.

"We first listen to agriculture producers and landowners to understand their issues and to identify barriers and then provide technical assistance in the areas of data, science and engineering

Top: Mancos Conservation District's Watershed Coordinator Sensa Wolcott, District Manager Neva Connolly and Executive Director Gretchen Rank; Bottom: Regenerative Recovery Coalition assists landowners to incorporate regenerative agriculture methods throughout the state.



to create solutions," says Gretchen Rank, executive director of the Mancos Conservation District.

The Mancos district coordinates with local, state and federal partners to engineer and install irrigation diversions and infrastructure to address

water conservation and efficiency while providing fish passage. This offers multiple agricultural and environmental benefits while improving riparian areas.

"Landowners have seen their land change over time and recognize that their main assets are their land and

water - not just the products they produce. If they care for their water and land, higher yield production will follow," Rank says.

Since 2015, Mancos has funded nearly \$12 million through the U.S. Department of Agriculture's Natural Resources Conservation Service and other grants to support water implementation projects benefiting landowners and the broader community. The district is also part of the CDA's STAR Plus Program, which administers financial and technical assistance to producers employing soil health practices in their operations.

"It's important for farmers and ranchers to know that they aren't solely responsible for financing the transition to regenerative methods," Myint says. "By working together, we can make the change happen."

– Danielle Rotella Adams



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