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Agriculture

PLUS

Exploring
Ag Careers

Investing in
the Future

Commodities
from Farm
to Table

Vital Vets

Colorado organizations address veterinarian shortages



WATER PROJECT LOAN PROGRAM

INVESTING IN COLORADO'S WATER SUPPLY

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BEFORE YOU APPLY

CWCB meets with each loan applicant to discuss the planning process for each project.

HOW TO APPLY

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More than \$10 Million:

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For more information:

cwcb.colorado.gov/water-project-loan-program

ELIGIBLE PROJECTS

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- Reservoirs
- Ditches and canals
- Pipelines
- Diversion structures
- Groundwater wells
- Water rights purchases
- Flood control projects
- Hydro projects

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Agricultural	Municipal	Hydro
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*Note: Rate reductions are available for shorter terms. Interest rates move with the market. See the CWCB website for current rates.



COLORADO

Colorado Water Conservation Board

Department of Natural Resources

For more information, contact:

Matt Stearns, 303.866.3441 ext. 3257
matthew.stearns@state.co.us

Learn more at cwcb.colorado.gov

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Colorado Agricultural Leadership Program

Developing leaders that will become a strong, unified voice for agricultural issues since 1984.



WHO WE ARE

The Colorado Agricultural Leadership Program is a competitive two-year program that develops and enhances the leadership capabilities of diverse men and women committed to the future of Colorado's agricultural and rural communities.

WHAT WE ARE

11 seminars with 41 days of intense training and over 135 speakers over two years. CALP fellows produce the Colorado Agriculture Forum, complete a personal project, travel around the State of Colorado, to Washington D.C., nationally and internationally to study agricultural issues, political processes and leadership development.

WHY WE ARE

To answer the call to create and nurture leadership skills of agricultural individuals through a hands-on, interactive program dedicated to producing graduates with the vision and commitment to lead change and ensure the sustainability of Colorado's agricultural economies and rural communities.

www.coloagleaders.org





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Colorado State University offers many opportunities for students, like Zoey Silver, interested in a veterinary career.

Photo by Ryan Dearth



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8%
fewer carbon emissions



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less water



7%
less energy



Real Flavor. Real Nutritious. Real Pork.

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¹Source: University of Arkansas. 2018. A Retrospective Assessment of US Pork Production: 1960 to 2015, page 2.

²U.S. Department of Agriculture Nutrient Database Release 18, 2006 Revised USDA Nutrient Data Set for Fresh Pork.

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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.

Over the past few years, we've learned a lot.

For instance, through a 2022 statewide survey, we've learned that agriculturalists – both in rural and urban areas – are beloved and necessary members of our communities and that Coloradans consider agriculture a vital and thriving part of our state economy.

One of our goals at the Colorado Department of Agriculture is to increase awareness of the many different types of agriculture careers. Whether you enjoy flying drones, studying the growing conditions of grape varieties, taking care of two-legged or four-legged critters, or just being part of a rural community, there is likely a job in agriculture that needs you.

As we welcome new generations of agricultural professionals, we're also asking the older generations to offer support, answer questions and pass on their knowledge to ag's future leaders. Forging the link from one generation to the next takes time and care, as well as physical, mental and emotional support for everyone involved.

Agriculture isn't easy, but it can be an immensely rewarding career path in many ways. The Colorado Department of Agriculture is determined to provide pathways that maximize education, funding and on-the-ground opportunities to move Colorado forward into the coming years.

Processing the food we grow and raise is another challenge for Colorado producers. Ag communities and organizations do their best to communicate what it takes to grow crops and raise livestock, and many consumers are interested in knowing that their food, fiber and fuel are high quality and part of healthy farming and ranching practices. But we often don't talk about processing, a critical piece enabling food products to reach consumers.

In this issue of *Cultivating Colorado*, we want to showcase the people who turn raw materials into finished products. We want to highlight the process of how meat goes from ranch-raised cattle to a delicious and nutritious steak. Both consumers and producers are increasingly interested in climate-smart agriculture, and we'll share stories of producers finding new markets through their investments in stewardship.

There is a certain magic to the growing and processing of food and fiber from beginning to end. Let us give you a glimpse behind the curtain and introduce you to the people whose energy is dedicated to making Colorado agriculture a livelihood that all Coloradans can be proud of.

Sincerely,

Kate Greenberg
Commissioner of Agriculture



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Colorado Ag

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

Colorado's Ag Production Rankings in the U.S.

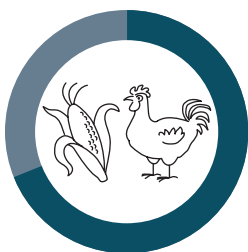
- No. 1** for proso millet
- No. 3** for sheep and wool
- No. 4** for peaches
- No. 4** for barley
- No. 5** for winter wheat
- No. 7** for potatoes

35,900

Total number of farms and ranches

30M

Number of farm acres



In 2022, Colorado farm cash receipts totaled nearly **\$9 billion**.

Livestock & Livestock Products: **\$6.4 billion (71%)**

Crops: **\$2.6 billion (29%)**

Colorado is home to **27,746** female producers. Women make up **41%** of Colorado farmers. In 2022, **69%** of all farms in the state had at least one female decision maker.

836

Average farm size in acres



Colorado produced nearly **1.3 million** pounds of honey from **12,722** honeybee colonies in 2022.

\$47B

Colorado's agriculture industry contribution to the state's economy each year

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Source: U.S. Department of Agriculture



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INVESTING IN AMERICA

COagriculture.com

Find even more online about Colorado agriculture, from education to agritourism and more.



Shop in Season

When will your favorite fruits and vegetables be available? Download a produce calendar showing what's ripe right now in Colorado.



Stay Informed

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



Cook With Local Products

Find tasty recipes using Colorado's top products such as sweet corn and more.



Have a Field Day

Discover agritourism destinations from wineries to Christmas tree farms.

Read the Digital Magazine

OPTIMIZED FOR ONLINE:

Each article can be read online, as a web article or within our digital magazine.

SHARE THE CONTENT:

Embed our digital magazine in your website to offer compelling information about Colorado agriculture to your site visitors.



FARM FLAVOR

To learn more about what's growing in Colorado, visit FarmFlavor.com.



Ag in the City

As more and more agricultural land is developed, urban farming offers an opportunity to grow fresh produce in backyards, school gardens and other urban spaces and has become increasingly popular across the state – especially in Denver.

Groundwork Greens is an 1,800-square-foot hydroponic greenhouse that grows more than 4,000 pounds of fresh produce annually, helping to combat food deserts in surrounding communities where fresh food is often difficult to find within a walkable distance.

Ullr's Garden grows hyper-local greens through a vertically integrated system. The farm uses a hydroponic system to produce the equivalent of a 10-acre farm on a 7,500-square-foot lot.

Denver Urban Gardens is a nonprofit that oversees 200 community gardens, 66 school-based community gardens and 20 food forests across six metro Denver counties. DUG programs also provide access, skills and resources to help people grow food in community and regenerate urban green space.

Awareness About Regenerative Ag

To keep Colorado's food supply safe, secure and sustainable, Colorado State University is working on an initiative to advance the science of regenerative agriculture.

Regenerative agriculture includes specific practices like no-till, cover crops, multiseason rotation, managed intensive grazing and others to increase economic viability by sustaining soil and livestock health. Producers who use these practices can create a variety of benefits, including climate-resilient production systems, improved water and nutrient cycling, greater biodiversity, and improved yield consistency year over year.

Dive deeper into regenerative agriculture to learn why it's so important for the long-term health of the state's industry at agsci.colostate.edu.



A Salty Situation

While you might never consider the Colorado River to be saltwater, the shales of what used to be an ancient seabed add salinity to this sweet water source that provides water to more than 40 million people. High levels of salinity (dissolved salt) in the Colorado River can reduce crop yields, limit viable crops and make land unsuitable for agricultural purposes. The Natural Resources Conservation Service, private landowners, the Bureau of Reclamation, Colorado's State Conservation Board and several local conservation districts are installing irrigation improvements to mitigate salinity through the Colorado River Basin Salinity Project.

Source: USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service



Adding Extra Value

Fresh meat, produce and row crops are just a few of the top commodities in Colorado's diverse agriculture industry. When these products are amended or enhanced, they become part of the value-added industry, transforming an already valuable product into something more.

Common value-added products include meats made into jerky, fruits and vegetables made into jams and preserves, or wheat milled into baking flour. The enhancements generate new product lines, increase income and diversify operations and income for producers.

Value-added products are so important for Colorado's agriculture economy that the Colorado Department of Agriculture and U.S. Department of Agriculture offer grants to help producers enter the industry, purchase processing equipment and maximize community impact.

Learn more about value-added products and resources for producers at ag.colorado.gov.

What's Growing in Colorado

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



CORN \$748.3M

In 2023, Colorado farmers harvested 1.02 million acres of corn for animal feed and 235,000 acres of corn for silage, which yielded more than 123.8 million bushels of corn for grain and over 5.7 million tons of corn for silage. Farmers across the state also harvested 3,285 acres of sweet corn (for human consumption) in 2022.

*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.



CATTLE & CALVES

\$4.5B

Cattle and calves represent Colorado's No. 1 agricultural commodity based on cash receipts. The state's inventory of cattle and calves totaled 2.61 million as of Jan. 1, 2024, including 643,000 beef cows. Colorado ranks No. 10 in the nation for cattle and calf inventory.



WHEAT

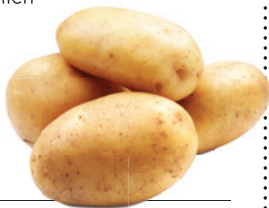
\$347.8M

Colorado's 2023 winter wheat harvest spanned more than 1.8 million acres, producing more than 74.6 million bushels of the crop. Colorado ranks No. 5 in the nation for production of winter wheat.

POTATOES

\$264.5M

Colorado ranks No. 7 in the U.S. for potato production. The state's 2023 potato harvest encompassed 54,800 acres, which produced more than 21 million hundredweight of the crop that year.



PROSO MILLET

\$72.4M

Colorado ranks No. 1 in the U.S. for production of proso millet. In 2023, Colorado farmers harvested 370,000 acres of the crop, producing a total yield of nearly 11.7 million bushels, equivalent to more than 59% of the nation's total proso millet crop that year. Proso millet is used for human consumption, livestock feed and birdseed.



FLORICULTURE

\$111.2M

Colorado's floriculture sector comprises the cultivation and sale of cut flowers, potted flowering plants, foliage plants, annual bedding and garden plants, and more. In 2022, sales of bedding plants in Colorado totaled more than \$70 million. Cut flower sales totaled more than \$3 million.



HAY

\$413.2M

In 2023, Colorado's hay harvest totaled 1.22 million acres, more than half of which (650,000 acres) was used to grow alfalfa. This yielded 3.12 million tons of hay in total, including nearly 2.2 million tons of alfalfa.

HOGS

\$150.2M

With an inventory of 580,000 hogs as of Dec. 1, 2023, Colorado ranks 15th in the nation for hog production.



CHICKEN EGGS

\$162M

Colorado farms produced 824.3 million eggs from more than 2.7 million laying hens in 2023. That's more than 300 eggs per chicken a year.



Find more online

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

DAIRY PRODUCTS & MILK

\$1.4B

In 2023, Colorado dairy farms produced more than 5.2 billion pounds of milk from an inventory of 197,000 dairy cattle, equivalent to nearly 26,000 pounds (or more than 3,000 gallons) of milk per cow.





BREAKING BARRIERS

Colorado agriculture careers are as diverse as the state itself

From livestock barns to the wine shelf, career opportunities abound throughout the supply chain of Colorado's multifaceted agriculture industry.

According to Rodger Ott, regional director for the U.S. Department of Agriculture's National Agricultural Statistics Service Mountain Regional Field Office, the state boasts a diverse livestock industry with farmers raising cattle, hogs, sheep

and more. Colorado is also known for crops like wheat, sorghum and barley, plus it leads the nation in proso millet acreage and production. This variety of products and processes offers opportunities for people of many skill sets and backgrounds to participate in the agricultural job market.

Not all consumers realize that bringing their food from farm to table requires countless workers

involved in production, processing, packaging, transportation, maintenance, economics, marketing and more. Many of these jobs don't require a background on a farm or generational agricultural knowledge.

From the USDA, the country's top agricultural organization, to local agribusinesses, people are needed with all types of backgrounds and skill sets.

According to the NASS 2022



PHOTOS, CLOCKWISE FROM LEFT PAGE: CAVE (1, 2), COLORADO DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE (3, 4)

Census of Agriculture, Colorado’s agriculturists represent many racial and cultural demographics. More than 3,600 producers identify as Hispanic, and hundreds of producers reported their race as Asian, Black or African American, American Indian or Alaska Native, and Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander.

Knowing that agriculture needs all kinds of people to help it thrive, Colorado’s Agricultural Workforce Development Program connects interns with agricultural businesses to provide hands-on experiences. In 2024, Gov. Jared Polis signed a state budget that allocated additional funds to this program.

Denver’s bustling city streets are home to a growing urban

“**While Colorado may not rival traditional wine-producing regions in terms of sheer volume, our viticultural endeavors contribute significantly to the state’s agricultural and economic fabric in many ways.**”

- Cassidee Shull, CAVE executive director

agriculture scene. Ott says that just \$1,000 in annual sales or sales potential qualifies someone as a farmer, according to the USDA.

Uncork Unexpected Jobs

If you look closely at any of your favorite products, you can probably identify the many hands that made enjoying it possible. For instance,

your glass of wine at happy hour can be traced back to the farmers who grew the grapes, the winemakers who created the blend and industry advocates who helped take it from vineyard to your table.

The Colorado Association for Viticulture and Enology (CAVE) is a nonprofit supporting grape

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farmers and winemakers across the state, including its 110 member wineries, through its promotional and lobbying efforts.

“While Colorado may not rival traditional wine-producing regions in terms of sheer volume, our viticultural endeavors contribute significantly to the state’s agricultural and economic fabric in many ways,” says Cassidee Shull, CAVE executive director. “Wineries, vineyards and associated businesses generate revenue through wine sales, tourism and hospitality, bolstering local economies and supporting livelihoods.”

Juliann Adams, a CAVE member, runs Vines 79 Wine Barn with her husband in Palisade. Adams was inspired by the family legacy of her Portuguese grandfather who concocted his own basement wines.

“We love the idea of working with the land and creating a product that we turn into something else we can share,” Adams says.

Adams and her husband Dan planted a vineyard in 2013 after identifying a spot with the ideal climate and airflow for grape growing. After success in the amateur circuit, they obtained their commercial permit in 2018 and opened a tasting room in 2020.

Visitors come from all over the world – including from France, Germany and Argentina – to try out Colorado wine.

Adams is proud to represent the industry and change the way people think about agriculture.

People might not always think of wine as an agricultural product, but as Adams says, “You can’t make wine without grapes.”

– Tina Deines

Find more online

For more information about Colorado agriculture and careers, visit COagriculture.com.



Vines 79 Wine Barn in Palisade welcomes visitors from all over the world to enjoy Colorado wine in their tasting room.

Career Fields

Tech and tools experts supercharge agricultural operations

Farming-solution specialists are fueling smarter and more productive operations in ways that lift communities.

Master of Science

Koby Dobbs is an operations expert who uses his passion for computer science and innovation to solve agricultural supply chain issues. He serves as the director of agriculture with the Ag & Food Lab, an organization dedicated to addressing social and community issues in agriculture, and works with Emerald Gardens, a microgreens producer in Bennett. He specializes in harnessing the power of geographic information systems (GIS), which captures, stores and analyzes data to optimize efficiency.

“The GIS-related projects help us map out the physical and communal changes on the property,” Dobbs says.

Emerald Gardens utilizes GIS to determine best practices for microgreen propagation in the greenhouses and allows the gardens to conserve resources with information about the topography and irrigation management.

Emerald Gardens hosts several community education programs, including a training for immigrant and novice farmers on how to integrate sustainability tools into their agricultural practices.

“We’re injecting new life and perspectives into the agricultural sector by supporting the young and inexperienced farmers and those



Koby Dobbs,
Ag & Food Lab
director of
agriculture

who come from underrepresented groups,” Dobbs says.

Dobbs helps the future farmers learn computer-based resources to optimize their operations. He is enthusiastic about the rising appreciation for technology in agriculture and sees a future ripe with possibility.

“If you have an interest in any STEM field – use the skills you build in agriculture,” Dobbs says.

Passion for People

The industry’s demand for technological innovation is matched by its need for state-of-the-art equipment. Taylor Implement Company store manager Dean Michael is the head of hay and forage equipment after

working decades in businesses outside of agriculture.

“I had a steep learning curve when I was hired due to all the advancements over the past decades,” Michael says.

While his job is to help with equipment solutions, Michael and his team are also focused on keeping customer relationships at the heart of the operation.

“We are a small, family-owned company that still believes the customer is important,” Michael says. “From the customer that purchases a small tractor to the customer who buys 12 new combines every year, we strive to take care of all of them.”

“You won’t find better people in any industry like you can find in agriculture,” Michael says.

– Rachel Akers

MAKING THE Investment

Funding for small and midsize processors bolsters success





To keep Colorado’s agricultural supply chain strong and resilient, the state of Colorado, the U.S. Department of Agriculture and many organizations are intentionally investing in small- and medium-sized producers.

“We’re still feeling a lot of changes in agriculture relative to the pandemic,” says Kate Greenberg, Colorado commissioner of agriculture. “There were a lot of supply chain crunches that impacted the industry and prices. It raised a lot of awareness on what resilience really means within our food system and pushed us to build on diversification.”

Greenberg, who is in her sixth year as commissioner, says she’s come to firmly believe in diversification as a critical tool to keep Colorado’s industry prepared for anything.

Investments from grants and other types of funding for local,

“*The more people we have at different scales operating successfully, the more resources we can connect. We’re setting ourselves up to be as resilient as possible.*”

- Kate Greenberg, Colorado commissioner of agriculture

regional and value-added operations are crucial to diversification because they help maintain job stability, support all areas of the supply chain and expand opportunities for growth.

Investing in Ag

Audrey Gehlhausen of Billy Goat Hop Farm in Montrose is a direct recipient of this support. Gehlhausen and her partner, Chris DellaBianca, started their hop farm in February 2017.

It took about a year to produce

an initial crop as they were busy building a 32-acre hops trellis system constructed of 2,300 poles and 57 miles of cable. They had their first harvest in 2018, a slightly bigger crop in 2019, then COVID-19 hit.

“It was really tough,” Gehlhausen says. “That March, we sold nothing. A lot of breweries that we supplied were closing and it was very difficult to navigate what resources were available to us as a business owner and farmer.”

Thankfully, a neighbor farmer told Gehlhausen about the Farm

Audrey Gehlhausen and Chris DellaBianca of Billy Goat Hop Farm in Montrose received a Farm to Market Grant from CDA.

to Market Grant, a Colorado Department of Agriculture program funding processing projects.

“It was really exciting to find out about the grant because it specifically offered funds for equipment,” Gehlhausen says. “Hops involve a lot of processing, and the majority of all hops sold are pelletized, which makes them easier to store and last longer. In order to be competitive, we needed to pelletize our product.”

Billy Goat Hop Farm already had the basics for pelletizing hops but needed equipment that would make a better product with less labor. Gehlhausen was awarded

\$21,500, which they used to purchase a hammer mill, mixing tank and feed auger.

“Support from the CDA is huge,” Gehlhausen says. “Working with them on ideas that can be helpful for small farmers in the future and being able to get them implemented is amazing.”

From Colorado and Beyond

Greenberg says CDA organized funding for small farmers before federal or state funding was established. During the pandemic, CARES Act funding helped the state move the needle on grants for processing.

“We now have the Farm to Market Grants and participate in helping producers apply for the USDA’s Resilient Food Systems Infrastructure Program and Meat and Poultry Expansion Program,” Greenberg says. “In the food system, investing in a single business in a rural community can have a massive ripple effect that can benefit the community at large. We want to make sure we keep helping producers to scale sustainably.”

She adds that there’s a continuum of ongoing grants and resources at the state and federal level that producers can utilize such as the Colorado Agricultural Future Loan Program, which supports young and beginning farmers, as well as Colorado becoming one of the USDA’s Regional Food Business Centers, which will help grow and incubate agribusiness in the region.

“The more people we have at different scales operating successfully, the more resources we can connect,” Greenberg says. “We’re setting ourselves up to be as resilient as possible.”

– Rachel Stroop



Serving More Than Food

Meet professionals who support their communities through food



For a few Colorado professionals, the sixth love language is food as they strive to make fresh food accessible.

Aloha Fresh Food

Raised on a Hawaiian coffee and nut farm, Seraphina Hunter didn't think twice about subsisting off her mother's garden.

"Our household valued living off the land," Hunter says. "Now, this drives my passion to enhance fresh food access for everyone."

As part-time market coordinator for the Palisade Sunday Farmer's Market, Hunter and her team connect more than 5,000 customers with local growers, artisans and food truck vendors.

"Fostering a direct farmer-to-consumer exchange increases the sustainability of our farmers, as well as the quality of food on families' tables," Hunter says.

The market has won awards from 2023 America's Farmers Market Celebration, *The Grand Junction Daily Sentinel* and *USA Today*.

A Spoonful of Local

Families grapple with the question "What's for dinner?" Joy Rubey, a former architect turned farmer's wife and working parent, sought healthy meal planning and preparing strategies for her busy family.

"I began to question what we eat, how we grow food, how we build food resiliency and how we leave a healthier planet for future generations," Rubey says.

In 2011, she developed Acme Farms & Kitchen, a meal kit service that sold \$24 million worth of local food in the Pacific Northwest. Then, in 2022, Rubey launched Spade & Spoon, which delivered 47,000 meals last year in Colorado.

Unlike other brands, Spade & Spoon collaborates with 60 local farmers, ranchers and bakers for better food quality, stable markets, fair prices and distribution – all without a subscription.

"Families across the Front Range can enjoy tasty, deeply nourishing foods with each meal supporting

local producers," Rubey says. "We care how food is produced, how people and animals are treated, and the impact we have on our planet – now and in the future."

Through the Generations

The future is a focus for Gary Baysinger, owner of Mountain Meat Packing Inc., which has sites in Craig and Fruita on Colorado's Western Slope. The facilities process beef, swine, lamb and goat, and offer voluntary inspection for elk, yak and buffalo.

Mountain Meat Packing partners with food bank programs, such as Farm 2 Food Pantry, to increase food access.

Baysinger acknowledges that "old school" butchers who can fully break down a carcass, which limits waste, are a dying breed.

"We're now a three-generation, family-owned business with our fourth generation working here," he says. "These grandsons will, hopefully, carry on the torch."

– Nancy DeVault

Left: Spade & Spoon partners with local producers for meal kits. **Right:** The award-winning Palisade Sunday Farmer's Market

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Conserving Colorado

Developing and expanding water solutions for Colorado agriculture

Water is a critical resource, so farmers and ranchers are constantly exploring conservation techniques for their livestock and crop operations.

Water Community

In southern Colorado, Ronda Lobato is a member of the Costilla County Conservancy District (CCCD) Board and a sixth-generation farmer whose ancestors were some of the first settlers of Colorado.

In the mid-1800s, her ancestors were early adopters of acequias, a community-operated water channel system used to collect and distribute water for irrigation. They collect melted ice and snow and feed miles of ditches that intersect with creeks.

Lobato's legacy of water conservation methods made her a natural fit for the CCCD, which was originally formed in 1976 to prioritize and administer water usage.

Costilla County completed a watershed assessment that identifies 40 priority projects ranging from wildfire mitigation to grazing solutions in addition to water quality, healthy ecosystems and



addressing sediment issues to protect the viability of agriculture in the region.

"The district was formed initially for flood control and throughout the years it has evolved to include parks and recreation as well as flood control statutes," Lobato says. "Implementing constructive practices and efficient structures for water is vital. Working together as a community allows us to make an impact."

America the Beautiful

Colorado agriculture does its part to protect the country's fruited plains and spacious skies.

The Colorado Department of Agriculture

received a \$4 million America the Beautiful grant through the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation in 2022.

CDA and partners will also contribute more than \$1 million to the project, which is dedicated to supporting conservation initiatives in watersheds around the state.

More than 35 partners around Colorado will complete projects to strengthen ecosystem and community resilience. Most projects will include some work to mitigate nonnative, invasive plant species with goals of reducing wildfire risk, restoring native biodiversity and habitat, and conserving water.

Without native

predators, invasive species thrive unchecked. Invasive plant species can exacerbate water scarcity issues in Colorado, both directly through water consumption and indirectly through increased wildfire hazards since they outgrow more fire-resistant species and become fuel for fire as they dry out.

"Mitigating nonnative, invasive species is a vital piece of the puzzle when trying to accomplish these conservation goals," says Patty York, CDA noxious weed program manager. "These efforts greatly benefit the overall ecosystem health in Colorado."

– Danielle Rotella Adams

Left: Ronda Lobato is a Costilla County Conservancy District Board member and sixth-generation farmer. **Right:** Patty York works as the Colorado Department of Agriculture noxious weed program manager.



VITAL VETS

Colorado organizations address veterinarian shortages

Veterinarians are critical members of Colorado's agricultural industry.

In recent years, declining vet numbers have disproportionately impacted rural areas. But these vacancies also offer employment

opportunities for those willing to be part of smaller communities.

A Critical Role

Large animal vets fulfill a range of roles, including administering vaccinations, monitoring herd health

and assisting in emergency situations.

"Veterinarians play a pivotal role in food quality and safety through all aspects of livestock production," says Morgan McCarty, assistant state veterinarian for Colorado. "They are involved in the health and



At Colorado State University, curriculum has adapted to meet changing needs and help recruit potential veterinarians for rural areas.



“Veterinarians play a pivotal role in food quality and safety through all aspects of livestock production. They are involved in the health and well-being of livestock on the farm level and are critical in food safety and inspection at the harvest level.”

- Morgan McCarty, *assistant state veterinarian*

well-being of livestock on the farm level and are critical in food safety and inspection at the harvest level.”

The veterinary needs across Colorado vary by county and type of livestock. According to the U.S. Department of Agriculture, Colorado is third in the country in sheep production, 10th in cattle, and 15th in hog and pig production. Early detection of disease is paramount to protecting all types of livestock.

“Veterinarians are the first line of defense against disease threats, including foreign animal diseases,” says Dr. Maggie Baldwin, Colorado state veterinarian.

Falling Numbers

A recent shortage of large animal veterinarians has caused concern among farmers and ranchers across the state.

“For a number of years, the number of veterinarians in large animal livestock work has been declining,” says Diane Matt, CEO of the Colorado Veterinary Medical Association (CVMA). “Rural and underserved areas often experience more significant shortages compared to urban areas.”

Unpredictable hours, geographical challenges and financial concerns are among

the reasons fewer people are pursuing veterinary careers.

These challenges also impact vet techs who are vital to many veterinary operations.

According to Dr. Susan VandeWoude, dean of the Colorado State University College of Veterinary Medicine and Biomedical Science, many animal owners in rural areas report not having a vet within a hundred miles.

These communities hope that new vets will step into these open roles and become part of the unique fabric of the ag industry, ensuring the health and safety of animals.



Dr. Maggie Baldwin, Colorado state veterinarian, works with her team and other organizations to encourage new veterinarians.

Taking Action

Increasing awareness of the veterinarian shortage has prompted action at the local and state levels. At CSU, the College of Veterinary Medicine and Biomedical Sciences is refining its curriculum to meet changing needs and looking at ways to recruit potential veterinarians from rural areas.

Incentives like loan repayment programs through CSU and the Colorado State Veterinarian's Office encourage more people to consider a career as a veterinarian.

"We are looking at ways to involve students in externship experiences and other real-world experiences from the time they're admitted so that they develop technical skills and confidence along the way," VandeWoude says.

At Vida, an educational lab at the CSU Spur campus in Denver, an outreach and demonstration center promotes veterinary sciences to younger generations. Visitors can observe live surgeries on cats and dogs, observe equine therapy sessions and interact with practicing veterinarians.

Chancellor Tony Frank of CSU started a task force consisting of state veterinarians, representatives from CVMA and rural practitioners to address practical ways to recruit vets and improve the attractiveness of rural practices, with an emphasis on quality of life for vets and animals alike.

"We're really engaged in this at the state level, and I would love to see our educational programs align in ways that we can support our students graduating and going into rural areas that are in dire need of veterinary services," VandeWoude says.

- Wesley Broome



Incentives, like loan repayment programs, through CSU and the Colorado State Veterinarian's Office encourage more students to consider a veterinarian career.

Find more online

To learn more, visit colovma.org or vetmedbiosci.colostate.edu.

A Sense of Purpose

Two women find a path to pay it forward

Women contribute significantly to the strength of Colorado's ag industry, all while giving back to the community and building a future for the next generation.

A Veterinarian and Rancher

Each step in Dr. Kayla Henderson's life led her to become a mixed animal vet, specializing in both large and small animals. Growing up on her family's 500-acre ranch in San Luis Valley, she raised calves and a flock of 50 ewes and participated in 4-H, Pony Club and rodeoing.

She worked at the Alpine Veterinary Hospital during high school and spent nine summers at an equine hospital in Lexington, Kentucky. Henderson attended vet school and returned home thanks to grants from the Veterinary Medicine Loan Repayment Program, to help alleviate a shortage of mixed animal vets in the San Luis Valley.

"Most vets practice on small or

large animals, but then there are those of us out in the country that need to do absolutely everything," Henderson says.

Henderson went on to become a partner and owner at Alpine Veterinary Hospital and secured a grant from the USDA National Institute of Food and Agriculture's Veterinary Services Grant Program to upgrade the clinic's equipment.

Building Her Farm and Her Community

Stacia Cannon changed course from veterinary medicine to growing Topp Fruits LLC with her husband, Harrison, in Delta County. She simultaneously juggled the orchard, working for a local sheep rancher and working as a vet tech before deciding to focus her energy on the family operation.

The high-stress, high-stakes of a veterinary tech prepared her for the emotional roller coaster of farming.

"Working in the veterinary industry, I've witnessed people handle stress in both healthy and unhealthy ways," she says. "I was lucky to have mentors shape how I handle that mental fatigue, which has served me well in farming. In emergency situations, my husband says I'm really at my peak."

When a crisis arises on the farm, Cannon draws on her past to compartmentalize and finish the job.

Cannon serves her community by representing them in the boardrooms of an electric utility co-op, a broadband company, a regional land trust, an irrigation company, and serving on various agriculture, public land and natural resources committees. She believes it is her civic duty to connect her neighbors with vital resources and information and amplify their voices to local decision makers.

— Christiana Lilly



Dr. Kayla Henderson,
Alpine Veterinary Hospital
owner and veterinarian



Stacia Cannon,
former veterinary
tech and current
member-owner
and farmer at
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"I have learned so much and am well-equipped to enter the livestock production industry after earning my certificate."

- Otero College Student





Seeding Success

Colorado's innovative programs help beginning farmers and ranchers

Land access is one of the top issues facing young farmers, and several Colorado organizations are working to overcome this barrier.

The Perfect Match

Guidestone Colorado's Land Link Program works to provide innovative solutions to the challenges of agricultural land access. The program maintains a database designed to match landowners and land-seeking producers to facilitate land transfer, long-term lease agreements, land succession and mentorship.

It also connects farmers and ranchers to business planning resources, hosts farm visioning courses, helps farmers and ranchers navigate agricultural water rights and lease agreements, and advertises funding opportunities.

Landowners can find resources and technical assistance providers to help evaluate the conservation, financial and community benefits of supporting land access for the next generation of producers.

"Our goal is to support the often

complex process of securing fair and affordable land access for producers," says Emma Lietz Bilecky, Colorado Land Link director. "We want to help create a vibrant future for agriculture and working lands across our state."

Money Matters

In partnership with the Colorado Department of Agriculture, First Southwest Bank created the First Southwest Community Fund (FSWCF) to foster opportunities for Coloradans. Kristy Esquibel, chief credit officer, explains lack of capital and access to credit are often barriers for beginning producers.

In addition to low interest loans, which are difficult for underserved or beginning farmers and ranchers to access through more traditional channels, the nonprofit provides education on all aspects of running a business, from human resources to accounting.

FSWCF executive director Rosy Aburto McDonough calls it "the technical assistance and support that will help them

develop as business owners."

This program has deployed more than \$20 million since August 2022 to ag operations across the state.

Ag Legislation

As farmland values have soared, beginning farmers must overcome yet another hurdle in their access to land. Tyler Garrett, Rocky Mountain Farmers Union (RMFU) director of government relations, cites competition from corporations and developers as key barriers to land access in Colorado.

Some of RMFU's recent efforts have been aimed at passing agricultural tax credit bills. These tax credits could benefit beginning or underrepresented farmers or ranchers and allow them to use money that would otherwise have gone to taxes on improving and expanding their operations.

"It's another way for a beginning farmer or rancher to access land and build equity," Garrett says. "It could really help them start or expand their business."

— Jodi Helmer

Left: Rocky Mountain Farmers Union supports beginning farmers by working for tax incentives and other efforts. **Right:** Emma Lietz Bilecky, Colorado Land Link director, works to help landowners and producers join forces for agricultural success.

Harvesting CONNECTIONS

Colorado's agribusiness forges direct paths from farm to table



In a time when businesses strive for more transparency in their supply chains, local Colorado companies work to bridge the gap between producers and consumers.

With more than 36,000 farms and ranches producing cattle and calves, corn, wheat, and many other commodities, consumers have access to a vast array of homegrown products to nourish themselves and their families.

Spirit Hound Distillers

Spirit Hound Distillers in Lyons was founded in 2011 and focuses on showcasing the flavors of Colorado with local ingredients.

In a state renowned as the fourth highest producer of barley nationwide, the distiller also enjoys ready access to top-tier local barley, further elevating the quality of its authentic Colorado spirits and connecting the state's consumers

to locally produced commodities.

"When we started Spirit Hound, one of my tenets was, 'We should be using Colorado grain.' One hundred percent grain-to-glass," says Craig Engelhorn, Spirit Hound Distillers head distiller and co-founder.

"In those days, the only Colorado maltster was the Colorado Malting Company – the Cody family in the San Luis Valley. We became fast friends, and they supplied all our

malt. They still supply all our peated smoked malt, and we also get grain from Proximity Malt, which is also supporting Colorado agriculture.”

Spirit Hound’s craft spirits pair Rocky Mountain snowmelt water with raw honey from a neighboring apiary and locally sourced botanicals.

“We’re lucky to live in Colorado,” Engelhorn says. “Colorado’s agriculture has everything from Palisade peaches to high country rye. We have grass-fed beef that’s unrivaled and an extreme range of products we should be proud of.”

Their efforts have been recognized worldwide, with Spirit Hound’s Straight Malt Whisky winning “Whisky of the Year” in 2022 and 2024 at the London International Spirits Competition.

Stagecoach Meat Company

Less than 100 miles from Spirit Hound, nestled on the high plains just east of Denver, is Stagecoach Meat Company in Wiggins. Under the joint ownership of Kris and Jessica Musgrave and Travis and Stacy Cowan, the meat processing company caters to the needs of as many as 200 ranchers. They process quarters, halves and wholes of cattle for direct sale to their customers.

An impressive 79.5% of Colorado’s ranching operations and farms are proudly family-owned. Drawing from their upbringing in that setting, the Musgraves and Cowans thrive in their role as connectors between the dedicated cattle ranchers and the consumers.

“My husband and I were born and raised in agriculture,” Jessica Musgrave says. “My parents are still farming, so we know firsthand the fight and the drive to keep production not only on the farming side but also on the



Spirit Hound Distillers focuses on using Colorado ingredients.



ranching side. It's super important to Colorado's food chain."

And Stagecoach Meat Company is a strong advocate for Colorado's agricultural industry. "Everybody likes locally raised products," Musgrave says. "But everyone doesn't understand the time and energy it takes to grow the food we put on our table. Agriculture is a personal investment of time and energy, and we definitely want to support that and continue to support local producers."

Colo-Pac Produce

Drive west on Interstate 76 to Denver, and you'll find Colo-Pac Produce, a company bringing producers and consumers together since 1929. Originally a tomato processor, the company has expanded to include a wide variety of produce. Jake Trujillo, vice president



Stagecoach Meat Company in Wiggins works with as many as 200 ranchers to process Colorado cattle.

of Colo-Pac, oversees food service and sales in the growing company.

He's most excited about his partnership with Nourish Colorado on a farm-to-school program providing the state's youngest generation with healthy produce, including peaches, pears and

apples, for a promising future.

"I've been working really hard fighting to supply school districts with all fresh produce grown in Colorado," Trujillo says. "It's a good feeling to know you're helping these kids get the nutrition they need."

– Julie J. Novara

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Advocating for Ag

Discover nontraditional agriculture careers in Colorado

A career in agriculture doesn't always mean becoming a farmer. The industry boasts a variety of careers, from radio broadcasting to international exports.

Agriculture Journalism

Lorrie Boyer grew up raising and showing horses but always wanted to be a writer.

"I graduated from Colorado State University with a degree in technical journalism with an emphasis on agriculture," she says. "One night, I heard an ad on the local radio station for an on-air assistant. It turns out they were also looking for an agricultural news director."

Boyer's mother always said she should be on the radio, so she applied. Now, 27 years later, Boyer is an award-winning broadcaster with Fort Morgan-based KSIR radio. She also reports weekly on RFD-TV and produces three podcasts.

Boyer never gets bored covering topics like the federal Farm Bill, crop insurance, conservation programs and more.

"I learn something new every day," Boyer says. "I might go from talking about specialty crops to what's going on for that year's harvest. The next hour, I'm talking about weaning cattle."

International Markets & Trade

John Addison and Ashley Warsh are a two-person team with Colorado Department of Agriculture's Markets Division who help ag producers and business owners explore new markets across the globe.



America's Food and Beverage Show in Miami, Florida



Lorrie Boyer

College graduates can learn about opportunities through the National Association of Farm Broadcasting's scholarship program and continuing education grant. To learn more, scan the QR code.



"We cover all the main commodities that Colorado produces," Warsh says. "Our work also entails advocating at state and federal levels to identify trade barriers and find solutions."

To do well in the role, it's essential to be a good listener, problem-solver, and spot opportunities in supply and demand. Flexibility is also key.

"We have to work long, unusual hours," Addison says. "In Europe, 10 a.m. is 3 a.m. in Colorado; 7 p.m. is 9 a.m. the next day in Taiwan."

Colorado exports more than \$2 billion in agricultural products each year to approximately 115 countries in many different time zones. In 2023, Colorado sent \$632 million in ag exports to Mexico and \$525 million to Canada, its top export recipients. The state also sent \$3.7 million worth of ag exports to the United Kingdom.

Addison and Warsh work to ensure companies of all sizes and influence have access to existing and emerging market opportunities.

– Rachel Stroop



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Nutrition Mission

Passionate advocates for food equality find meaningful work in agriculture

Young agriculturists in Colorado take winding paths to satisfying careers in modern agriculture.

Passion for Food

Peyton Foley apprenticed at small organic farms in three different countries, finding his first paying job in agriculture through one of them. At a permaculture site in the highlands of Guatemala, Foley's management responsibilities included running a 10-acre farm of bananas, coffee, ducks, chickens, cattle, sheep, pigs, vegetable beds, a greenhouse, fishponds and a food forest.

He says that role taught him the importance of integrity, dignity and balance – values he strives to impart in his current work at Mountain Roots Food Project, which promotes resilient food systems in the Gunnison Valley.

As director of food security, Foley oversees all program operations, including a free produce program for those experiencing food insecurity, a cooking course focused on inexpensive homemade meals and five community gardens. He also leads and mentors a team of AmeriCorps



Top: Peyton Foley, food security director, and Isabel Rosenstein, food security coordinator, at Mountain Roots Food Project; Bottom: Flower beds at the Rio Grande Farm Park education center

service members.

“I work with everyone from master agriculturists to people dipping their toes in the water for the first time,” Foley says. “I love working with people passionate about food: where it comes from and how to produce it, feeding the soil, and ensuring

future generations are blessed to eat the fresh produce they grow.”

Collective Good

San Luis Valley Local Foods Coalition (SLVLFC) seeks to restore health for people, the community, the economy and the ecosystem through fresh,

healthy produce from community gardens, grower sales and donations to local food banks. This work is personal for Meg Mercier, who experienced food insecurity as a child.

“I hold that project close to my heart,” Mercier says of the incubator program that supports families to grow food free of charge on-site at the Rio Grande Farm Park (RGFP).

It's one of several projects Mercier oversees as director of operations and development for the Farm Park.

“It's my job to keep all the wheels turning – managing all farming, education and volunteer programs – and ensure that community interests are kept at the heart of everything we do,” Mercier says.

She joined RGFP as an AmeriCorps VISTA member and returned three years later to the Farm Park for the director position. Mercier says she's most effective in a job with a meaningful mission.

“The Farm Park's origin story is one of radical community care for the sake of the people as well as the environment,” she says. “I enjoy the work of keeping that legacy alive for the benefit of future generations.”

– Kim Hill



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