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Colorado

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POTATOES

Nutrition

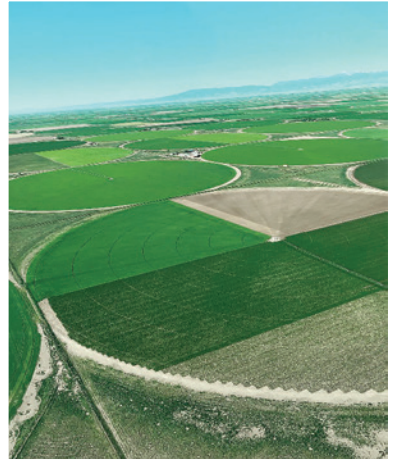
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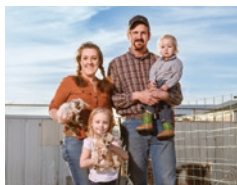


Find even more online about Colorado agriculture, from education to agritourism and more.



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



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



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FARM FLAVOR

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



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Fourth-generation farmer Steve Ela continues his family’s tradition of environmental stewardship at Ela Family Farms, founded in 1907.

Photo by Theo Stroomer

The Way

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

Colorado agriculture has always been resilient.

Part of our resilience is our willingness to pitch in to help our friends and neighbors when times are tough.

At Colorado Department of Agriculture, we walk alongside our farmers and ranchers, provide resources where we can, and are part of the effort to build even more resilience to the challenges we face. In this edition of *Cultivating Colorado*, you'll find a snapshot of the complex and wonderful world of Colorado agriculture. We bring you stories highlighting why our state continues to be at the forefront of this thriving, resilient industry.

Agrioltaics – the practice of combining solar energy generation with agricultural activities on the same land – maintains steady growth and brings people from across

the world to learn why Colorado is a leader in climate-smart technology. This emerging practice is complemented by advancements in soil health management. As the world deals with the effects of climate change, soil and water conservation are a top priority for farmers and ranchers. Conservation districts and local operations work together to ensure future generations are learning from the past.

Luckily, the future of agriculture is in great hands. Learn more about the STEAD School, a unique program on Colorado's Front Range that is encouraging and empowering youth to find their passions within agriculture. The school's efforts are just the beginning of a road that will hopefully lead them into careers where those passions can fully bloom.

A little like the blooms on the trees in Steve Ela's fruit orchards. As Colorado ag producers grow, raise and make food that feeds our state, CDA is committed to helping farmers like the Ela family access local, national and global markets. The story of Steve and his family's generations of work on the Western Slope is a powerful reminder that local families are at the heart of Colorado agriculture.

Coloradans everywhere are enjoying fresh, delicious local foods in their homes, grocery stores and favorite restaurants year-round. Colorado chefs highlight why eating isn't just a necessity, it's an art.

We're also preparing for next year, when we'll celebrate America's 250th and Colorado's 150th anniversaries. These combined celebrations will provide an opportunity for us to come together around our shared ideals.

I hope you find that these features connect you to the heart of agriculture. I invite you to settle in and see yourself in their stories.

Sincerely,

Kate Greenberg
Commissioner of Agriculture

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| Ag Profile |

Colorado Ag

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

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

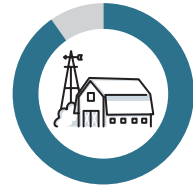
No. 1 for proso millet

No. 4 for wool

No. 5 for barley and peaches

No. 6 for winter wheat

No. 7 for dry edible beans



93% of Colorado farms and ranches are family-owned.

29.3M

Number of farm acres

35,000

Total number of farms and ranches



Colorado is home to **6,234 acres** of orchards.



Agriculture employs more than **195,000 people** in Colorado, about **5%** of the state's total workforce.

More than **30 million acres**, or **45%**, of Colorado are dedicated to farmland.

837

Average farm size in acres

In 2023, Colorado farm cash receipts totaled more than **\$9.2 billion**.

- Livestock and livestock products: **\$6.5 billion (70%)**
- Crops: **\$2.7 billion (30%)**



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

Agricultural Advances

Colorado is at the forefront of agricultural tech innovation, implementing the latest technology for efficiency, resiliency and accuracy. Advancements used on Colorado farms include precision agriculture for irrigation and planting, drones, internet-connected sensors, data analytics, satellite images, artificial intelligence-based advisory systems and much more.

For example, researchers at Colorado State University are working with farmers to schedule and monitor irrigation in the fields with sensors and satellite imagery. This update to the traditional center-pivot irrigation system helps reduce freshwater withdrawal by ensuring precise water usage across large fields and down to varied root zone depths. More efficient water usage can prevent erosion and nutrient runoff as well as improve yields.

Learn more about the university's work and ag technology advancements at source.colostate.edu/agriculture-technology.



Colorado exports **\$2 billion** worth of agricultural products annually.

Source: Colorado Department of Agriculture

Skilled Workforce, Strong Industry

Colorado ag is highly successful because of its skilled workforce. From cattle ranchers to brewers to ag educators, agriculture includes many different careers.

Major agricultural employers include Anheuser-Busch, Cargill, MillerCoors Brewing, Leprino Foods Company, Shamrock Foods and others. According to the Colorado General Assembly, as of 2022, the state's wine industry supported 28,000 jobs and contributed \$4 billion in economic activity. Top occupations include farmers, ranchers and other ag managers; farm workers and laborers for crops, nurseries and greenhouses; tractor-trailer truck drivers; sales representatives for wholesale manufacturing; and laborers and freight, stock and material movers.

Growing the Economy

In Colorado, agriculture is a highly impactful industry. It generates approximately \$47 billion each year and supports more than 195,000 jobs, which is 5% of the state's workforce. In terms of value added for the state's gross state product (GSP), agriculture and related industries accounted for nearly \$17 billion, or approximately 4.6% of Colorado's total GSP.

Top industries based on total economic output include livestock processing (other than poultry); beef cattle ranching and farming; breweries; bottled and canned soft drinks and water; and cheese manufacturing, among others.

Learn more about how agriculture impacts Colorado's economy at ag.colorado.gov.



What's Growing in Colorado

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

CATTLE & CALVES

\$5.1B

Cattle and calves are Colorado's leading agricultural commodity in terms of cash receipts. The state ranks No. 10 in the nation for cattle and calf inventory, which totaled more than 2.5 million, including 595,000 beef cattle, as of Jan. 1, 2025.



*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

\$737.5M

In 2024, Colorado farms harvested 1.18 million acres of corn for grain and 200,000 acres of corn for silage, yielding more than 136 million bushels of corn for grain and 4.5 million tons of corn silage. In 2023, Colorado farmers harvested 1,517 acres of sweet corn.

HOGS

\$119.8M

With an inventory of 540,000 hogs as of Dec. 1, 2024, Colorado ranks 15th in the nation for hog production.



PHOTOS, CLOCKWISE FROM TOP: ISTOCK.COM/BRANEX, GLOBALP; JACQUELINE NIX

FLORICULTURE \$129.4M

Colorado's floriculture industry includes the production of everything from bedding and garden plants to cut flowers, potted flowering plants, perennials and more. In 2023, Colorado was home to 103 floriculture operations with combined sales totaling more than \$129 million. Bedding plant sales totaled more than \$85.7 million, while flower sales totaled more than \$3.8 million.



HAY \$423.7M

In 2024, Colorado's hay harvest totaled more than 1.29 million acres, including 675,000 acres of alfalfa, and yielded over 3.4 million tons of hay in total, including nearly 2.5 million tons of alfalfa.



POTATOES \$266.7M

Ranking No. 6 for potato production and No. 2 in fresh potato exports in the U.S., Colorado produced more than 21.7 million hundredweight of the crop in 2024 from harvests spanning 53,700 acres.



CHICKEN EGGS \$109.2M

In 2024, Colorado farms produced 1.03 billion eggs from nearly 3.4 million laying hens.

DAIRY PRODUCTS & MILK \$1.1B

Colorado dairy farms produced more than 5.2 billion pounds of milk from 203,000 dairy cattle in 2024, equivalent to approximately 25,892 pounds (more than 3,000 gallons) of milk per cow. Colorado ranks No. 13 in the nation for milk production.



WHEAT \$335.5M

Colorado ranks sixth in the nation for winter wheat production. The state's 2024 winter wheat harvest encompassed 1.84 million acres, producing 64.4 million bushels of the crop.



[Find more online](#)

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

SORGHUM \$60.6M

Colorado ranks fifth in the nation for production of sorghum for silage and fifth for production of sorghum for grain. In 2024, Colorado farms harvested 17,000 acres of sorghum for silage and 460,000 acres of sorghum for grain.





Soil Solutions

HEALTHY SOIL IS PARAMOUNT TO KEEP
COLORADO AGRICULTURE THRIVING

Across Colorado, crops and livestock provide food, fiber and fuel. But beneath the soil's surface, there's just as much – if not more – happening to support Colorado's diverse agriculture.

It Starts With the Soil

Healthy soil contains organic matter, balanced minerals and living organisms needed to support healthy crops. Ryan Hemphill is

one of many producers who understands the complexity and importance of soil health. Hemphill operates an irrigated farm and cow-calf operation about two hours east of Pueblo in McClave. His water is sourced from the Arkansas River, and what he grows depends on irrigation and rainfall, including a mix of corn, milo, alfalfa, wheat, oats and cover crops.

“Soil health is based on five


foundational principles: minimizing disturbance, armoring the soil, having living roots in the soil as many days of the year as possible, diversity of plants and livestock integration,” he says. “These things can look different depending on where you live, so understanding your context is imperative.”

When paired with improved irrigation management, the principles boost soil structure and



Ryan Hemphill operates an irrigated farm and cow-calf operation in McClave.



 The Colorado Department of Agriculture collaborates with producers to support the critical work of building healthy soil through the Colorado Soil Health Program. Learn more at ag.colorado.gov/soil-health.

composition, leading to increased water filtration, reduced runoff and drought resilience.

“My operation is located in a semiarid desert,” Hemphill says. “We get about 13 inches of rain during an average year. Infiltrating and retaining water is very important for us, so armoring the soil is the most important principle on our farm.”

This armoring, or protecting the soil’s surface, uses a combination of old crop residue and living plants. It also prevents wind and

water erosion, retaining valuable organic matter and nutrients.

“I carry a thermometer with me during the summer and regularly measure soil temperatures on bare soil and armored soil during the heat of the day,” Hemphill says. “The temperature of soil that’s well-armored is usually 15 to 20 degrees cooler than bare soil during a summer afternoon.”

Production Practices

Hemphill says improving his farm’s soil has been a journey, and

he’s still learning what practices work best. For farmers who aren’t sure where to start, several organizations across the state can help.

Annie Overlin is the Eastern Colorado and San Luis Valley regional range specialist at Colorado State University Extension. She educates ranchers on soil health, providing resources like grazing and drought plans.

“Soil health starts with learning how the water cycle works,” she says. “Especially in a drought state

like Colorado, you have to understand soil biology in terms of water infiltration.”

Overlin has been conducting soil trials on different ranches in southern Colorado to measure a soil baseline and gather data on how certain practices increase nutrients and organic matter.

“We’re trying to figure out how to make the system more resilient,” she says. “A resilient system is easier to manage during a drought, which might keep a producer from having to sell their ranch. We’re still learning solutions. Maybe it’s doing things like feeding cattle seeds to reintroduce biology into the soil.”

Other organizations also work to provide resources to ag producers. This includes Rocky Mountain Farmers Union (RMFU), a grassroots organization supporting producers through legislative representation and educational

opportunities, as well as the Bookcliff, Mount Sopris and South Side Conservation Districts.

“Our members have long voiced support for innovative practices in cover cropping, reduced tillage, rotational grazing and more to increase organic matter in soil,” says Jen Ghigiarelli, RMFU membership coordinator. “We can help producers assess their operations and navigate complex changes in soil health. Many want

to make the changes but don’t know which cover crop mix will work best or are hesitant about the financial risk associated with shifting tillage practices.”

The Bookcliff, South Side and Mount Sopris Conservation Districts own a no-till drill that producers can rent, allowing them to seed their fields without tilling and without having to purchase another piece of equipment. They also provide other resources in the form of technical assistance and local support.

Consumer Benefits

Healthy soil is essential for producers, but it’s good for consumers, too.

“We’ve done a lot of research on soil biology and forage quality,” Overlin says. “Healthy soil leads to more nutritious forage and thus nutrient-dense beef. Farmers can get top dollar, and consumers get a premium product.”

Ghigiarelli adds that the market is more robust than ever, with consumers demanding transparency in food production.

“Many Coloradans seek out products labeled as organic, locally grown or regeneratively farmed,” she says.

Ultimately, healthy soil leads to healthy food, healthy land, healthy ecosystems and healthy economies, benefitting all throughout the agriculture cycle.

– Rachel Stroop

“
“A resilient system is easier to manage during a drought, which might keep a producer from having to sell their ranch. We’re still learning solutions.”

– Annie Overlin, Colorado State University Extension



Jen Ghigiarelli with Rocky Mountain Farmers Union supports producers through educational opportunities.

A Double Dose of Commemoration

Plans for Colorado's 150th and America's 250th anniversaries are underway



The Colorado State Fair and Colorado Department of Agriculture gear up to celebrate Colorado's 150th anniversary alongside the U.S.'s 250th anniversary in 2026.



- A digital passport coming soon to **colorado.com** will encourage residents to visit sites, such as state parks, for rewards, badges and offers throughout the year.
- Select cities, including Denver, Colorado Springs and Fort Collins, will host anniversary celebrations, such as parades, community picnics, concerts and more.

The Colorado State Fair promises an extra special lineup to mark the milestone year.

“Because of its significance, the Colorado State Fair will be, in part, positioned as the culmination of yearlong anniversary celebrations,” Wiesenmeyer says.

Colorado Department of Agriculture has been planning their own way to celebrate these important anniversaries, with the theme “Setting Colorado’s Table: 150 Years of Agricultural Legacy.”

– Nancy DeVault

[Find more online](#)

For more information about the upcoming celebrations, check out SettingColoradosTable.com.



In 2026, exciting events are in the works to observe Colorado's 150th and the nation's 250th anniversary, or, if you like tongue twisters, sesquicentennial and semiquincentennial, respectively and together the SemiSesquiQuinCentennial.

“Colorado is called the Centennial State because we became the 38th state 100 years after the signing of the Declaration of Independence, so we’re thrilled to be part of this double celebration,” says Andrea Wiesenmeyer, general manager of the Colorado State Fair.

To honor Colorado's unique history as part of the broader American story, the America 250-Colorado 150 Commission is leading celebratory efforts. Here are the emerging plans:

- A Colorado 150 exhibit at History Colorado Center in Denver will showcase several artifacts, immersive storytelling and interactive displays.
- The Colorado Register of Historic Properties plans to add 150 new and revised sites to their record.
- A statewide oral history compilation will chronicle the stories of present day Coloradans.
- A relevant documentary series for classrooms will help educators meet academic standards and inspire students.
- A digital learning platform will house educational resources for users to explore Colorado's history.
- Themed commemorative drone shows will take place throughout the state.
- The Colorado Outdoor Recreation Industry Office will coordinate a themed 14er Climb Summit to challenge adventurers.
- The National Western Stock Show plans to integrate special exhibits, heritage tributes and events honoring the state's agricultural legacy.



Steve Ela is the fourth generation to run Ela Family Farms, a 100-acre organic orchard founded in 1907.



Generational GROWTH

Ela Family Farms sustainably maintains a century farming tradition

On the Western Slope of the Rocky Mountains, Ela Family Farms has cultivated delectable fruit for more than a century. Founded in 1907 and now led by fourth-generation farmer Steve Ela, the 100-acre orchard is a model of organic agriculture, environmental stewardship and community connection.

Ela Family Farms became a 100% organic-certified orchard two decades ago, but Ela assures the feat took time, research and curious cooperation.

“We first shifted to organic with peaches and pears, then moved to certifying apples and so on,” Ela says. “It was a 10-year venture.”

Environmental Evolution

The farm has always prioritized environmental stewardship in some form, with Ela acknowledging his grandfather, uncle and others for

their innovative improvements.

Ela says Colorado Department of Agriculture-supported research projects have also empowered Ela Family Farms to make better agriculture decisions. He encourages fellow farmers to pursue opportunities aided by funding from CDA and the U.S. Department of Agriculture’s Transition to Organic Partnership Program.

“Once the farm became organic-certified, we shifted our approach to view the farm as a complete ecosystem – where we need to manage the whole and not just the parts,” says Ela, who has a master’s degree in soil science from the University of Minnesota. “That mindset led us toward more soil building, putting in solar panels, further digging into our insect and disease programs, and figuring out how we could use our off-grade as well as our primo fruit.”

Instead of conventional pesticides, Ela Family Farms utilizes pheromone mating disruption and natural predators to manage pests. This approach maintains ecological balance and reduces chemical inputs.

The orchard also employs complex cover cropping with legumes, such as alfalfa and clover, to enhance soil fertility and structure. These practices helped increase soil organic matter to between 3.5% and 5%, well above regional norms. Efficient drip and sprinkler irrigation systems conserve water, while solar panels supply about 80% of the farm’s electricity needs.

Furthermore, Ela Family Farms is a near-zero waste operation. For example, blemished or surplus fruit is transformed into jams, applesauce, dried fruits and ciders, among other artisanal goods. And the remaining scraps are repurposed as animal

feed for a neighboring pig farm.

“It’s funny how you take those small incremental steps and then, suddenly, look back and realize how close you are to what originally seemed impossible,” Ela says. Nowadays, he’s confident that

more innovative improvements are indeed possible.

Consumer Connection

Ela Family Farms grows apples, cherries, peaches, pears, plums, rhubarb and tomatoes. These

products find their way to the tables of Coloradans via farmers markets, community supported agriculture (CSAs), restaurants and retailers, such as Marczyk Fine Foods in Denver. Kevin Hickman, Marczyk’s director of supply chain, says stocking shelves with Ela Family Farms’ products grants customers access to the best local produce.

“Ela Family Farms is a little higher in elevation in Hotchkiss,” Hickman says. “Because fruit gets direct sun and warmth during the day and slightly cooler night temperatures compared to other local growers, the fruits’ sweetness and juiciness uniquely develops.”

Marczyk’s customers purchased 12,855 pounds of Ela Family Farms produce in 2024, plus hundreds of pints of an exclusive ice cream called Ela Apple Cider Float.



Farm Facts



PEACHES

- » Peaches were considered a **symbol of long life** in China, where they originated.
- » Colorado ranks **No. 6** for peach production in the U.S.
- » There are more than **2,400 acres of peach orchards** in Colorado.
- » The top peach-producing Colorado counties are **Delta, Mesa, Montezuma** and **Montrose**.
- » Peaches make up **75%** of fruit production in Colorado.
- » Peak season for Colorado peaches is **August through September**.

Source: Colorado State University Extension



“We actually feel like our customers are part of the farm because what they buy changes what we grow,” Ela says. “And the farmers market experience isn’t just about selling fruit. It’s about getting to know people and sharing in each other’s lives. That makes the hard work much more interesting and worthwhile.”

Robin Woolums has purchased Ela Family Farms’ fruit via the market and CSA program for about 25 years.

“I’ve learned so much about growing fruit because Steve freely shares his abundance of knowledge,” she says.

Seasonal Support

Woolums also learned how essential the H-2A visa program is to maintain the local and nationwide agriculture labor force, allowing for U.S. farms to temporarily hire foreign workers to assist with harvest.

“It speaks volumes that dedicated seasonal employees work at Ela Family Farms year after year – this family farm treats all like family,” Woolums says.


Ela enjoys sharing the important role the H-2A workers play in Ela Family Farms, ensuring the family farm continues to see successful harvests season after season.

“The H-2A workers who come to our farm are skilled, dependable and hardworking,” Ela says. “They help ensure we meet tight harvest windows and uphold the quality our customers expect. Their role is vital to our success and has been for many years. Without them, our fruit would not get harvested and our farm would have failed.”

– Nancy DeVault

Find more online

To learn more about Ela Family Farms, visit elafamilyfarms.com.



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The Sun's THE LIMIT

Colorado farmers reap the benefits of agrivoltaics, which combines energy generation and agriculture



Sprout City Farms raises tomatoes and tender greens among other vegetables at Jack's Solar Garden in Longmont.

For Byron Kominek, the choice to integrate solar energy production into his family farm was born out of necessity.

“Haying 24 acres in Boulder County didn’t generate enough revenue to cover the farm’s bills,” says Kominek, owner and manager of Jack’s Solar Garden in Longmont. “Our family needed an alternative method for generating income.”

And so, it began. Jack’s added 3,276 solar panels capable of generating 1.2 megawatts of direct current. Under and around these panels, a variety of garden vegetables, medicinal herbs, berry bushes and grasslands grow.

Jack’s is also a research site for agrivoltaics, a term for combining solar energy production with agriculture, thanks to partnerships with the University of Arizona and Colorado State University, as well as support from Sprout City Farms, a Denver-based urban agricultural nonprofit.

“It’s definitely been a trailblazing kind of project,” says Meg Caley, co-founder and executive director of Sprout City Farms, describing the work her group is doing at Jack’s to grow market-ready crops like tomatoes and tender greens.

She laughingly likened farming around solar panels to working in an obstacle course. But a little struggle can reap significant benefits come harvest time.

“We have Swiss chard where the leaf is the size of your torso,” Caley says.

She explains how the shade provided by the panels helps take sun stress off leafy greens and, in some cases, can even extend growing seasons. Plus, crops like spinach and arugula end up sweeter and some bolt less.

Sprout City Farms is conducting

research about agrivoltaics, including climate-resilient impacts like decreased water usage. Caley notes the importance of such research, as much of Colorado stands to face a drier climate in the future.

Solar Grazers

Denver-based Namaste Solar has been involved in agrivoltaics since 2019. In addition to building the solar panels at Jack's Solar Garden, they've worked on projects integrating pollinators and solar grazing.

Through a 2023 grant from Colorado Department of Agriculture, the company partnered with Greenbacker Capital to introduce sheep grazing in an area where vegetation had overgrown.

Plants that grow too tall can pose fire risks and interfere with equipment, according to Julia Park, co-owner at Namaste. Normally, vegetation is managed through mowing, but letting animals chomp it reduces the carbon impacts associated with gas-powered equipment and provides extra income, as shepherds generally have to pay for grazing land.



“We are hoping that by combining solar and farmland we can see multiple benefits from the same piece of land, keep farmland in production and keep farmers farming.”

- Kristen Boysen, Colorado Department of Agriculture

“We’re excited to be able to participate in what feels like a burgeoning field, and we’re learning a lot through implementation,” Park says. “It feels very exciting to see all the new work that’s being done, especially since so much of it is close to home.”

Funding the Future

To help address cost barriers for farmers who want to explore agrivoltaics, CDA runs an annual Agrivoltaic Research and Demonstration Grant program that funded six projects across Colorado in 2024.

According to Kristen Boysen, managing director of CDA’s Agricultural Drought and Climate Resilience Office, this is part of a larger campaign by the state

to jump-start more renewable energy projects to mitigate climate challenges.

She notes that the goal of Colorado’s agrivoltaics push is to bring the benefits of solar to communities while maintaining workable farmland.

“We are hoping that by combining solar and farmland we can see multiple benefits from the same piece of land, keep farmland in production and keep farmers farming, which is good for all sorts of reasons,” Boysen says. “This isn’t like a silver bullet. It’s not going to work everywhere, but agrivoltaics can be an opportunity to create new partnerships and outcomes that help farmers and their communities.”

- Tina Deines



Julia Park, co-owner at Namaste Solar, installs solar panels at Colorado farms, such as Jack's Solar Garden.



PHOTOS, FROM LEFT PAGE: SPROUT CITY FARMS; RYAN MARANVILLE; COLORADO AGRIVOLTAIC LEARNING CENTER

Yes, Chef

Colorado chef farmers are stewards of the land and flavor



Chef Hosea Rosenberg owns Blackbelly, which has locations in Boulder and Denver.

Colorado's culinary landscape is blossoming thanks to forward-thinking chefs who are not just cooking exquisite meals but cultivating agriculture movements.

Among these industry innovators, chefs Eric Skokan and Hosea Rosenberg stand out for their hands-on commitment to field-to-fork ethos, each bringing unique flavors to the table.

The Science of Flavor

Skokan, the visionary behind Boulder's Black Cat and Bramble & Hare, parlayed his quest for superior ingredients into a 500-acre certified organic farm, Black Cat Organic. It supplies roughly 95% of the produce and proteins for both restaurants, ensuring diners enjoy a taste of authentic farm-to-table fare.

Black Cat Organic raises hundreds of heritage breeds, such as Tunis and Karakul sheep, Mulefoot and Hereford pigs, and Freedom Ranger chickens, among others. Skokan's dedication to biodiversity is also evident in his cultivation of produce, including multiple varieties of diverse products at the farm.

"The farm boasts 10,000 tomato and 10,000 pepper plants each year," says Skokan, whose cookbook, *Farm, Fork, Food: A Year of Spectacular Recipes Inspired by Black Cat Farm*, was a finalist for the International Association of Culinary Professionals' Best American Cookbook. "If you counted up all the farm grows, we'd be well into the millions of individual plants that, year-round, stock our kitchens as well as farmers markets and CSAs (community supported agriculture)."

By making what he calls critical decisions on the farm for the past 20 years, Skokan discovered the best variety for one dish differs from the best variety of the same farm product for another.



Chef Eric Skokan of Boulder's Black Cat and Bramble & Hare operates a 500-acre certified organic farm, supplying the majority of produce and protein to both restaurants.



"I train my culinary team to cook in the moment without recipes," Skokan says, an approach that honors the farm's seasonal bounty. "We're very much like mad scientists, empowered to create new things that burst with flavor. It's incredibly fun and invigorating to experiment with fresh ingredients."

Shredding Standards

Rosenberg is similarly kicking slow food into high gear. Among his farm-to-table priorities, he brings a meticulous and humane approach to butchery at Blackbelly, with locations in Boulder and Denver.

"From a culinary standpoint,

Colorado produces some of the best lamb in the world," Rosenberg says. "I knew it was a perfect symbol for a restaurant that butchers whole animals, champions ranchers and aims to serve the best quality food we can."

The *Top Chef* Season 5 champion and his team ensure every part of the animal is utilized, reducing waste and honoring the life of the livestock. Most ingredients are sourced via partnerships with local farmers and ranchers.

"I believe that you should eat at places that respect the ingredients they serve," says Rosenberg, a 2025 James Beard

Foundation award semifinalist for Best Chef Mountain Region. “At Blackbelly – and our sister restaurant, Santo – we strive to tell a story through every ingredient we put on the plate.”

Blackbelly is nestled within a primarily industrial area, but Rosenberg seamlessly produced a “greenbelt” around the eatery.

“It’s flourishing, providing flowers for pollinators, garnish for our food and drinks, beauty to patrons’ eyes, and some comfortable shade to boot,” he says. “I’m very happy with

the colors, variety and conversation pieces that our gardens provide.”

Blackbelly also values its partnerships with organizations like Slow Food, the Grain Chain, Zero Foodprint and others that share its farm-to-table philosophy.

Farm-to-Fork Revolution

Together, Skokan and Rosenberg exemplify how chefs can be stewards of the land and advocates for sustainable practices. Their efforts have not only advanced Colorado’s dining scene but set a standard in the industry.

Both chefs’ restaurants have received recognition from the esteemed MICHELIN Guide, which awarded Blackbelly and Bramble & Hare a Green Star for Sustainable Gastronomy.

Whether through Skokan’s daily harvested, farm-fresh menus or Rosenberg’s artful food and skilled butchery, these chefs prove outstanding food and conscientious methods go together.

“A delicious and memorable meal can be quite pure and simple,” Skokan says. “I can just slice a fresh tomato and let its extraordinary flavor speak for itself.”

Rosenberg also shares that intent of informing and inspiring consumers.

“I feel it is my duty to help educate as many people as I can so we can all be a bit healthier, happier and save our planet,” Rosenberg says.

– Nancy DeVault

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Suite 1, Boulder

4324 W. 41st Ave., Denver

Phone: 303-247-1000 and
720-476-5812

blackbelly.com

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Location: 9889 N. 51st St.,
Longmont

Phone: 303-444-5500
blackcatboulder.com

BRAMBLE & HARE

Location: 1964 13th St.,
Boulder

Phone: 303-444-9110
brambleandhare.com

SANTO

Location: 1265 Alpine Ave.,
Boulder

Phone: 303-442-6100
santoboulder.com

🔍 Find More Online

For more information about farm-to-table dining, visit COagriculture.com.

Hosea Rosenberg focuses on farm-fresh menus at his restaurants, Blackbelly and Santo.





Watershed Moments

Colorado Water Conservation Board promotes agricultural focus in 10-year plan

The Colorado Water Conservation Board (CWCB) has accomplished an impressive feat with the Colorado Water Plan. In just two years, 20% of the objectives in this extensive 10-year plan have been completed.

“We’ve made some progress on almost all of the 50 agency actions listed in the plan and have already completed a few of them,” says Nora Flynn, CWCB senior agricultural water planning specialist. “We’re on track to finish all of our agency actions by 2033.”

The Colorado Water Plan is a blueprint that provides a comprehensive collaboration between Colorado’s regional leaders, water partners, agencies and residents.

Agriculture remains a vital component of the Colorado Water Plan, and the CWCB works hand in hand with the Colorado Department of Agriculture to help achieve its ambitious goals. Colorado farmers and ranchers are included in shaping multi-beneficial projects

to maintain irrigated lands while preserving essential ecosystems.

“Agriculture in Colorado is facing unprecedented challenges,” Flynn says. “To sustain irrigated farming, we need innovative solutions that maximize water efficiency, boost resiliency, and support both food production and profitability.”

Along with fostering partnerships, the CWCB provides grant support. During the 2024 fiscal year, just over \$5 million in Water Plan grants were awarded within their agricultural category. Grants involved water sharing partnerships and researching more drought-tolerant crops.

“The availability of water impacts how farmers and communities plan for the future,” Flynn says. “Many of the actions in the Colorado Water Plan provide tools and frameworks

to aid farmers and communities plan for the future and different water availability scenarios.”

Colorado’s agriculture conservation efforts, such as with drought-resistant crops, are detailed in the plan’s two-year progress report. For example, the San Luis Valley Rye Resurgence Project is examining the benefits of growing rye, which is less dependent on irrigation water.

“Changes to our hydrology, population growth and values as Coloradans are all things that motivate updates to the Colorado Water Plan,” Flynn says. “To be relevant and actionable, we plan to continue updating the plan.”

To learn more about the Colorado Water Plan and its progress, visit cwcb.colorado.gov/colorado-water-plan.



“Agriculture in Colorado is facing unprecedented challenges. To sustain irrigated farming, we need innovative solutions that maximize water efficiency, boost resiliency, and support both food production and profitability.”

- Nora Flynn, Colorado Water Conservation Board

CARING *for the* CULTIVATORS

Farmers and ranchers find mental health support in community



Colorado's agricultural producers face a variety of stressors each day, many of which involve factors beyond their control. Dealing with unpredictable weather, market prices, tariffs and machine breakdowns all while planning for the future, farmers frequently carry these burdens without the support available in other industries.

Recognizing these unique stressors, several organizations throughout Colorado have developed resources to support the farmers and ranchers who are the backbone of their communities.

"Agriculture has so many variables that people have to manage," says Chad Reznicek, behavioral health specialist with Colorado State University Extension and the Colorado AgrAbility Project (CAP). "It is an incredibly

high-stress occupation."

Compounded with the emotional strains of succession planning, physical isolation and family dynamics, these stressors can exact a toll that often goes unaddressed due to continual job demands as well as the stigma around reaching out for help.

A recent documentary titled *Legacy*, directed by Steve Vanderheide and funded by the Colorado Department of Agriculture, Colorado Trust and Colorado Farm Bureau, highlights the individual stories of agricultural producers across the state. The 45-minute film provides an in-depth look at the mental health challenges affecting Colorado's rural communities, raises awareness about mental health challenges and encourages those needing help to utilize available resources.

Jacob Walter – who grew up on a ranch in Thatcher, less than an hour's drive from the New Mexico border – shared his own story in the documentary, which has been featured in film festivals and community screenings across the state. Since losing his father to suicide in 2016, Walter has become an advocate for rural mental health and de-stigmatizing the act of reaching out for help.

"When you're struggling with your mental health, it's actually a huge sign of strength to be able to seek out that help and to be able to help somebody else," Walter says.

Mental Maintenance

In recent years, efforts by several organizations, including Colorado Agricultural Addiction & Mental Health Program (CAAMHP) and CAP, have helped increase

At the Colorado Commodity Classic, a panel from the *Legacy* documentary spoke about the importance of rural mental health.



“Taking care of your mental well-being is as important as any other maintenance on your operation, and we are just really trying to normalize that.”

- Chad Reznicek, *Colorado AgrAbility Project*

awareness of mental health risks associated with agriculture jobs, along with providing resources to address those risks.

“It reminds people that there is a resource that’s available just for them, specific for them, with people who want to focus in on helping our producers,” says Kirsten Wulfsberg, a licensed professional counselor who has worked with CAAMHP for three years.

Programs like CAP and CAAMHP, developed by Colorado Farm Bureau, seek to provide education about mental health, including community training programs, stress management resources and therapy vouchers, helping producers and their families to take care of themselves while continuing to be stewards of the land.

“Taking care of your mental well-being is as important as any other maintenance on your operation, and we are just

really trying to normalize that,” Reznicek says.

Communities around Colorado have started grassroots campaigns to support the mental health of their farmers and ranchers.

The Coffee Break Project, run by the grassroots Ag Advisory Committee and with locations in southeast Colorado and the San Luis Valley, hosts presentations around the state using the COMET (Changing Our Mental and Emotional Trajectory) model. The project trains community members to check in on one another and provide support during difficult times.

“Reaching out for help or reaching out to support someone else who may need help are tremendous signs of courage and strength and deserve as much awareness as any of the other heroic acts that farmers and ranchers are engaging in on a daily basis,” Reznicek says.

- Wesley Broome

Mental Health Resources

If you or someone you know needs mental health support, please consider some of the listed resources offering a range of assistance, trainings and support for our farmers, ranchers and rural communities.

Colorado Mental Health Line: Call or text 988 as well as visit 988colorado.com.

Colorado Agricultural Addiction and Mental Health Program: Visit campforhealth.org/vouchers for resources.

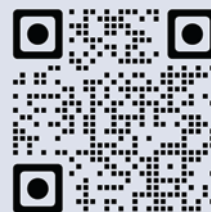
Coffee Break Project: To learn more about resources and also help in your community, visit thecoffeebreakproject.org.

Colorado AgrAbility Project: Check out agrability.colostate.edu for resources.

Colorado Department of Agriculture Resources: Visit ag.colorado.gov/mentalhealth for rural mental health resources.

Brothers Helping Brothers: Find support in the Gunnison Valley area at gunnibhb.com.

Find more online



Scan me!

To watch the full *Legacy* documentary, scan the QR code with your smartphone.

LEARNING BY DOING

The STEAD School transforms high school experience with agriculture



High schoolers like Allison Christoffersen at the STEAD School in Commerce City enjoy a project-based, agriculture-focused curriculum.

PHOTOS, CLOCKWISE FROM LEFT: THEO STROOMER (1,2); THE STEAD SCHOOL

High schoolers at the STEAD School in Commerce City, just outside of Denver, are getting their hands dirty – literally. The charter high school fosters tactile, project-based learning with an agricultural focus, readying students for real-life experiences.

“We wanted to create an environment where the learning is

tied to something in the real world, giving students autonomy and personal responsibility to work through challenging questions with our teachers, who we call guides, who are experts in their field,” says Mario Padilla, director of culture and a founding member of the STEAD School. “Students experience four different agricultural

pathways including food science, animal science, plant science and environmental science.”

STEAD stands for science, technology, environment, agriculture and systems design. After several years of planning, the school opened in School District 27J, which includes Adams, Weld and Broomfield counties, in 2021 with an inaugural freshman class of 145 students. The school, which sits on 8.5 acres, has added a new grade level each year and had its first class of graduating seniors in 2025.

“We have 96% of our students graduating and over 80% have been accepted to colleges,” says Amie Weldy, the STEAD school principal and founding member.

Weldy says the school literally started from dirt, as it was given land that used to be an old sunflower farm. She says the growth since opening has been amazing, not only in students but infrastructure as well.

“Our location is nestled between a rural and urban area,” Weldy says. “We wanted to bring a new style of education to the district. There’s no application process, and everyone is welcome – even outside of the district. We have a diverse population of students, and that’s part of the fun.”

A New Way of Learning

Students spend time learning in a variety of environments, which include two greenhouses, a 1-acre farm with a small orchard and seasonal plantings, and two large workshop buildings with chickens and bees. The school is planning to build an animal science center for larger animals such as goats and pigs. The students also participate in agricultural activities, including animal stock shows, field trips and local internships. Most days, the students work with the resources



Sierra Jaramillo and Colin Green planting one of the raised beds at the STEAD School



Colin Brunner checks one of the school's beehives

the school's ag space provides.

"We have an internal food service, and students cook food for us every day using what we've grown," Padilla says. "They serve close to 300 people each day, supplementing with fresh produce."

Although the STEAD School has an agricultural focus, Padilla says it's important to note that they're not training students to be farmers. They still hit the traditional high school curriculum, just with an agricultural emphasis. The model of project-based learning provides real-world skills that translate

to a variety of careers.

"Our whole foundation is based on the understanding that project-based learning works for kids," Weldy says. "The traditional setting most of us had as kids didn't work as well or inspire passion. We know that when kids leave here, they'll have the critical-thinking skills to problem-solve and adapt."

Community Collaboration

The STEAD School has received tremendous feedback and support from the community as it has grown. Partnerships have allowed for more internship and learning opportunities, and Weldy hopes to continue those in the future, highlighting subjects like

renewable energy, agricultural research and more.

Weldy and Padilla are both excited about the future and understand the bigger role the school plays for Colorado's – and the nation's – ag industry.

"Agriculture bleeds into everything we do," Padilla says. "We have to educate the next generation on what agriculture is and how it ties into their lives every single day."

– Rachel Stroop

Find more online

To learn more about the STEAD School and its mission, visit thesteadschool.org.



The ABCs of Agriculture

— Colorado Agriculture in the Classroom encourages ag literacy —



Agriculture is becoming more visible and accessible to students each year thanks to programs like Colorado Agriculture in the Classroom (CAITC). The nonprofit provides free resources for pre-K through 12th grade classrooms, connecting students to food, fiber and natural resources through stories.

“If you were to ask students where their food comes from, most would say the grocery store or McDonald’s,” says Jennifer Scharpe, CAITC executive director. “It’s so important that students understand everything we use daily comes from agriculture or natural resources. The goal of our program is to have informed citizens so they can make better choices in life and be the innovative minds to help solve challenges around our food system in the future.”

Ag in the Classroom consists of several programs like the *Colorado Reader*, a student activity newspaper, as well as activity books focused on a particular topic, such as cattle or corn. Teachers can sign up for a free subscription and receive classroom sets and an educator guide. Activities like writing prompts or hands-on experiments complement the books. The resources tie into existing curriculums, helping teachers incorporate agriculture without having to reinvent the wheel.

“Students sometimes struggle with skills like writing,” Scharpe says. “But if you’re writing about the path of a Colorado peach, that’s a lot more interesting and engaging.”

Seeds of a Story

A relatively recent addition to the program is the Literacy Project.



Allison Rea, an urban farmer in Pueblo who works with Pueblo Food Project, visited several classes and read *Seed, Sprout, Spice! All About Pueblo Chiles*.

Each year, a new featured topic and book are chosen, then kits – which include the book, educational resources and supplies for hands-on projects – are distributed.

In 2024, the chosen book was *Seed, Sprout, Spice! All About Pueblo Chiles*. After talking through the idea with Scharpe, family members McCall Knecht, Rachel Allnutt and Sierra Linke worked together to write, illustrate and publish the book.

“We all grew up just outside of Granby on a ranch that our great-great-grandparents homesteaded,” Knecht says. “Sharing about where food comes from and accurately depicting farming and ranching is something we all do on a daily basis. When the opportunity came to share a Colorado Proud vegetable in such an impactful way, how could we say no?”

The Literacy Project kit for *Seed, Sprout, Spice!* reached 1,130 classes and 23,300 students.

“We sourced about 950 pounds

of frozen Pueblo chiles from local growers to send to classes,” Scharpe says. “And Pueblo chile seeds so students could grow their own. We’ve had teachers tell us that students still have their plants from last year.”

The hands-on activity for the 2025 book, *Cattle, Corn, and Courage – The Story of Dr. John Matsushima* by Rachel Gabel, included the book, a short video from 103-year-old John Matsushima, educational resources, a virtual field trip and more.

The Literacy Project, as well as all CAITC programs, emphasize the importance of starting agricultural literacy young.

“We are all connected to agriculture,” Linke says. “We have a responsibility to understand where our food comes from. What better way than to integrate it into the classroom where students are learning? These young people will be the future leaders of our state.”

– Rachel Stroop

Future Leaders LEVEL UP



FFA OPPORTUNITIES PREPARE THE NEXT GENERATION WITH LEADERSHIP AND LIFE SKILLS FOR THE WORKFORCE

The Colorado FFA Foundation's motto clearly states its goal: developing the next generation of leaders who will sustainably feed, clothe and fuel the world.

"We truly believe this and work toward it every day," says John Stahley, Colorado FFA Foundation executive director.

A vital aspect of developing the next generation of leaders is

helping FFA students understand the vast breadth of careers within the ag industry.

"A little over 1% of the population is involved in production agriculture, but nearly 30% of jobs in the United States touch agriculture in some way," Stahley says.

To help students visualize those employment possibilities, FFA offers multiple programs and opportunities, including supervised

agricultural experiences, or SAEs, where students participate in work-based learning. Good leaders communicate well by explaining and defending their ideas, and they also work collaboratively.

"These aren't just traits students learn at FFA conferences or other leadership events," Stahley says. "They are skills infused into the classroom every day, developing leadership abilities so students

Ryder Smith, Emily Rossi and Tim Bedell show meat products made in a food products class.



John Stahley

become great employees and great employers, hopefully in the ag industry.”

From Project to Profit

In South Routt County, Soroco High School ag teacher Jay Whaley also believes critical leadership skills include presenting and

defending ideas when speaking publicly. Leadership Development Events, or LDEs, and SAEs are just part of the ambitious, multifaceted ag education program at Soroco, where 80% of the 100-member student body has joined FFA.

In recent years, Soroco and nearby Hayden High School received a \$1 million grant from Colorado’s RISE (Response,

Innovation and Student Equity) Education Fund. The grant funding helped the school add a meat lab, a commercial kitchen, a storefront to sell the foods the students produce and a catering business.

Steers and hogs butchered under U.S. Department of Agriculture inspection are brought to the meat lab, where students learn to fabricate retail cuts, smoke and



“A little over 1% of the population is involved in production agriculture, but nearly 30% of jobs in the United States touch agriculture in some way.”

- John Stahley, Colorado FFA Foundation

Opposite page: The 2024-25 Colorado FFA State Officers; Back row: Aidan Datteri, treasurer; Aunica Naranjo, executive committee; Brock Miller, executive committee; Jacob Brooks, sentinel; Sheldon Collin, vice president; Westen Burkhart, executive committee; Front row: Gracelynn Farago, executive committee; Baylie State, FFA advisor; Windsor Leighty, president; Natalie Wright, reporter; KaCee Jo Saffer, secretary

PHOTOS, CLOCKWISE FROM LEFT: JIMMY POWELL; MOLLY SMITH; JOHN STAHLEY

cure bacon, and even prepare sausage products such as bratwurst.

“We’re one of only a few Colorado ag programs that processes meat products,” Whaley says.

Student-made foods and other local items are sold in the storefront located at the school. This work-based learning helps students understand not only the breadth of potential ag-related careers but also the financial advantages of vertical integration.

“For every food dollar a consumer spends, only about 9 cents goes to the farmer or rancher,” says Whaley, citing the USDA’s Food Dollar Series he teaches.

Students learn the advantages of marketing ag products direct to consumers, thereby capturing more of the dollars spent on food.

Skills for Success

Great leaders display confidence in themselves and their organizations. For Natalie Wright, who serves as a state FFA officer, the greatest lesson from her FFA experiences has been building confidence both in herself and her future in agriculture.

“As a freshman in high school, I was terrified of people and couldn’t talk to a stranger,” she says. “But because of the competition opportunities FFA offers, along with support from family and



As a state officer, Natalie Wright makes presentations throughout Colorado.

friends in my community, I came out of my shell, which boosted my confidence.”

Now Wright makes presentations at middle and high schools around Colorado as a state officer. The Bayfield High School graduate uses her state role to help other students gain confidence as well.

“If we can help one kid believe in themselves and that FFA is a community, or if we can plant a seed in one kid’s mind about the importance of leadership, that person takes those ideas to the chapter level, and then the whole tree grows,” she says.

The confidence and leadership skills FFA members learn filter into the workforce, building stronger advocates for agriculture and beyond.

“I want to spread the word there’s potential for everyone, whether they have a career in agriculture or they become advocates on the importance of agriculture and FFA,” Wright says.

– Kim Hill

Find more online

To learn more about Colorado FFA, visit coloradoffa.org.

PHOTO: NATALIE WRIGHT

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Safeguarding Supper

Colorado Department of Agriculture works to protect the food on your plate



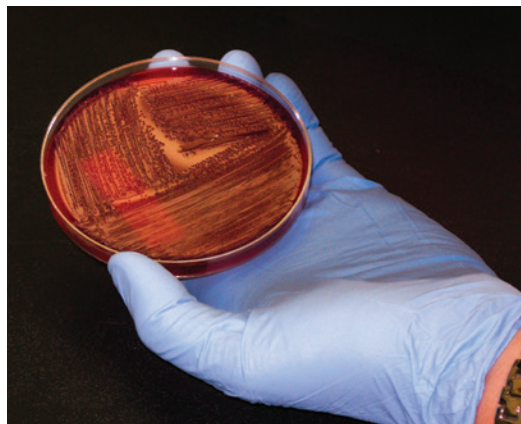
Providing safe, nutritious food for consumers is a top priority for Colorado farmers and the Colorado Department of Agriculture. CDA helps minimize foodborne illness risks by educating farmers on food safety, screening for potential risks, and quickly addressing outbreaks if and when they occur. Several programs and laboratories support these efforts, ensuring the food reaching consumers is top quality and as thoroughly vetted as possible.

Safety First

Monitoring food meant for consumption begins at the ground level – literally – in fields and pastures. The food safety programs at the CDA, which encompass egg dealers, custom meat processing, produce safety and laboratory services, is responsible for protecting food safety and consumers.

“I don’t know of a farmer who doesn’t think about making sure his produce is safe and fresh,” says Duane Sinning, who oversees the first three food safety programs. “We’re here to help protect consumer health and the farmers’ financial interest.”

Top fruits and vegetables like Rocky Ford melons, Pueblo chiles, Palisade peaches, onions and carrots are frequently consumed raw, leading to an increased risk of foodborne illness. By conducting inspections and maintaining a



database of Colorado farms, the program helps mitigate the risk of outbreaks, which can be devastating for farmers and consumers alike.

Because production in Colorado is so diverse, CDA works with farms of all sizes. Even small farms can benefit from resources provided online and in person through this free program to support their dedication to food safety.

Science Meets Agriculture

At CDA’s Division of Laboratory Services, the work to ensure food safety never stops. The

Biochemistry Laboratory tests thousands of samples collected by CDA inspectors annually, helping to ensure the safety of human and animal food, grain and hemp as well as groundwater and surface water.

“Our main goal is most definitely protecting the consumer and protecting our environment,” says Kristi McCallum, CDA laboratory manager who dedicated 27 years to food safety before retiring in June 2025.

The lab is critical in identifying pathogens during an outbreak. It also works with federal and state partners to build strong surveillance programs that assess risks by looking at weather patterns and past data to predict and anticipate when and where an outbreak might occur.

The lab utilizes real-time PCR-based testing to identify pathogens that may be linked to illnesses, with a quick turnaround to mitigate their spread. With a dedicated team of 14 scientists, the laboratory staff is passionate about protecting consumers and working with farmers to ensure safe food and water for all.

“I think it’s really important to find an issue before there are any illnesses and be able to act quickly with our results,” McCallum says. “Every single person deserves healthy, safe food.”

– Wesley Broome



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