June 2012

ARPR 12-01

Agricultural and Resource Policy Report

Colorado State University Extension

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http://dare.colostate.edu/pubs

Colorado Attitudes About Agriculture and Food: 2011 Executive Summary[1]

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Highlights from 2011 Update

This summary highlights some key findings of the 2011 Survey on Public Attitudes about Colorado Agriculture. The study's figures, tables and discussion are based on the responses of 504 Coloradans who participated in an online survey in August 2011.

There are several categories of questions in this study, including:

- The role of agriculture as an economic driver and contributor to quality of life;
- The interface between agriculture and natural resources, including wildlife, water, outdoor recreation, animal welfare, land use planning, and protection of agricultural land;
- Various food-related issues including pesticide use, food safety, including respondents' interest in local and Colorado Proud food producers;
- Perceptions about the credibility of information on agriculture and food from these sources; and
- Interest and participation in agritourism.

This report focuses on the current opinions and attitudes and, in the majority of cases, how these vary from previous surveys conducted in 1996, 2001 and 2006. However, future analyses may examine the connection between opinions regarding one set of agricultural issues and their relationship to other food system issues.

In this overview, we will focus on several highlights from each section.

1) When Coloradans were asked what agricultural product had the most economic significance, corn was most commonly mentioned (22% of all respondents), followed by cattle/beef (16%), wheat (13%), and fruits and vegetables (12%). This varied from previous years when beef/cattle was most commonly mentioned (see Table 1).

2) We also asked how important agriculture was relative to other economic sectors in Colorado (see Figure 1). Although agriculture (20%) rated higher than the high tech sector (18%),

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Table 1. Agricultural Product With the Most Economic Importance for Colorado (Frequency of answers and share of total responses by year).

Crops	2011	2006	2001	1996
Corn	113, 22%	79, 13%	44, 9%	102, 10%
Wheat	68, 13%	93, 15%	88, 18%	195, 29%
Beets	10, 2%	22, 4%	24, 5%	40, 4%
Cattle or Beef	82, 16%	107, 17%	103, 22%	219, 22%
Vegetables	9, 2%	13, 2%	4, 1%	10, 1%
Peaches	26, 5%	15, 2%	7, 2%	10, 1%
Melons and Fruit*	24, 5%			
Alfalfa Hay	10, 2%	11, 2%	7, 2%	15, 2%
Potatoes	15, 3%	17, 3%	15, 3%	28, 3%
Don't Know	120, 24%	125, 20%	93, 19%	107, 11%

*Included in 2011 because of increased frequency of write-ins for this product in the other responses.

education (18%), and mining (11%), tourism was most commonly mentioned as the most important economic sector (33%).

Note: The order in which the questions appeared to the respondents were shuffled from survey to survey to prevent order bias.

3) Overwhelmingly (86%), respondents indicated that the presence of ranches, farms and agriculture was moderately to very important to the quality of life in Colorado. Figure 2 shows that this is a noticeable decrease from the last few years, however—from 96% in 2006 and 95% in 2001.

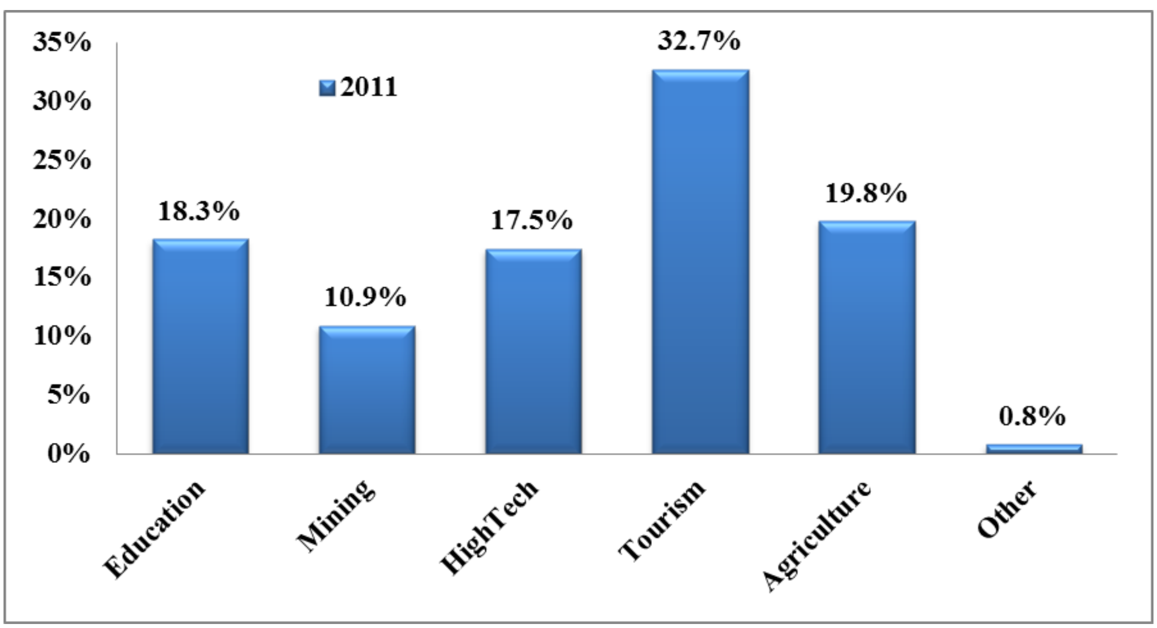


Figure 1 Economic Sectors Designated as Most Important to Coloradans.

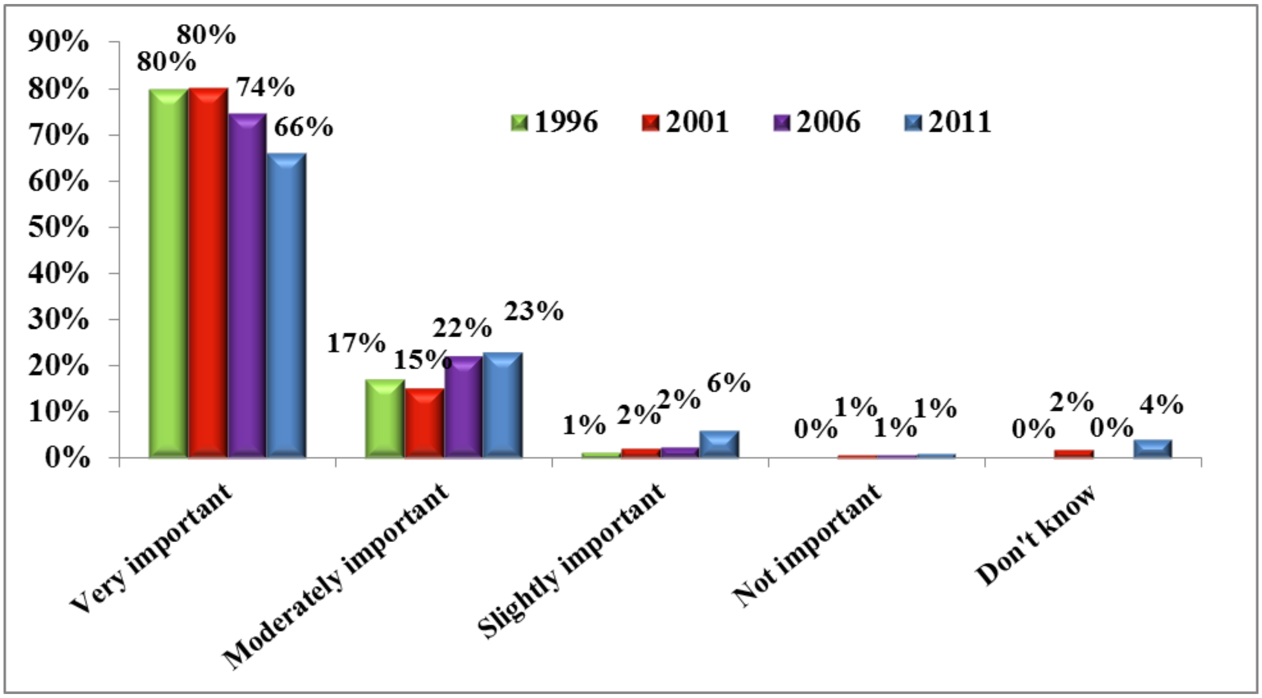


Figure 2. Importance of Farms, Ranches and Agriculture to Quality of Life in Colorado.

4) Turning to natural resource issues, Figure 3 shows that almost 98% mentioned that maintaining water and land in agriculture was very or moderately important, and 80% would support purchasing development rights to maintain those lands.

5) Further, since providing water to agriculture can mean constraints on other uses of water, respondents were asked which uses of water would be their top priority in a dry year—lawns and landscaping; rafting and fishing; agriculture; and maintaining in-stream flows. Figure 4 shows that 77% indicated that agriculture should be the top priority for water allocation in a dry year (similar to previous years' responses), while 9% said in-stream flow levels should be the top priority (significantly less for this category than in prior years—18% in 2006; 17% in 2001; 23% in 1996. Both lawn and landscaping and rafting and fishing were seen as low priorities for water use (between 2% and 3%—consistent with previous years).

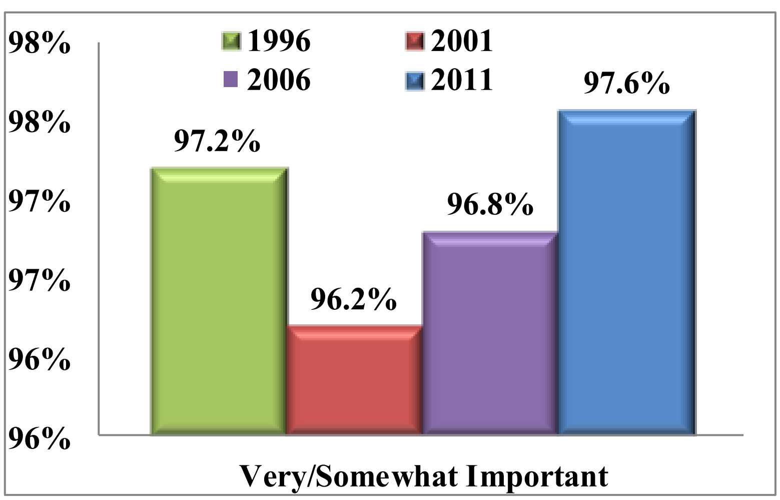
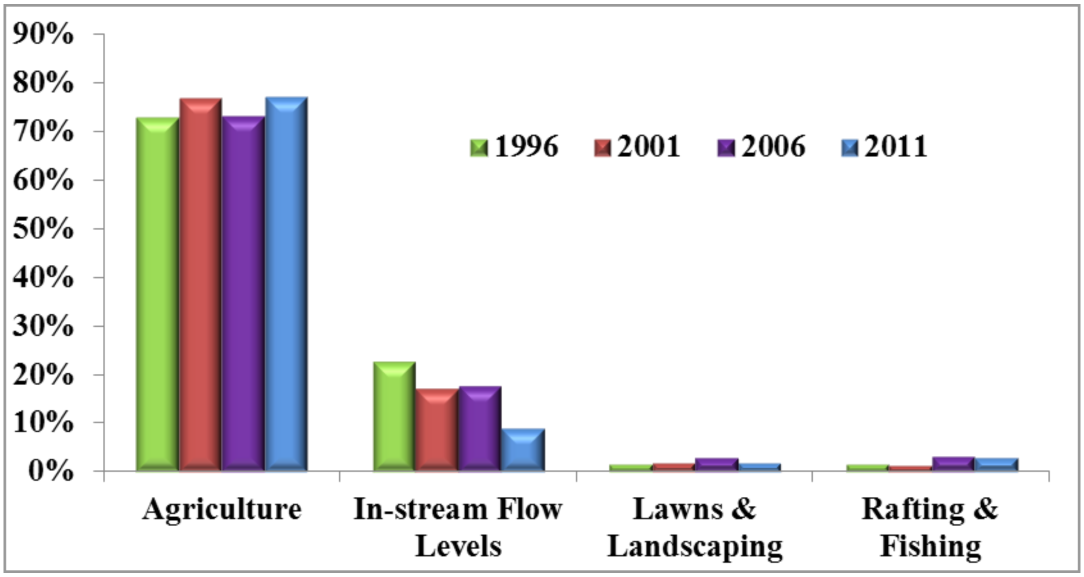


Figure 3. Importance of Maintaining Agricultural Land and Water in Agriculture.

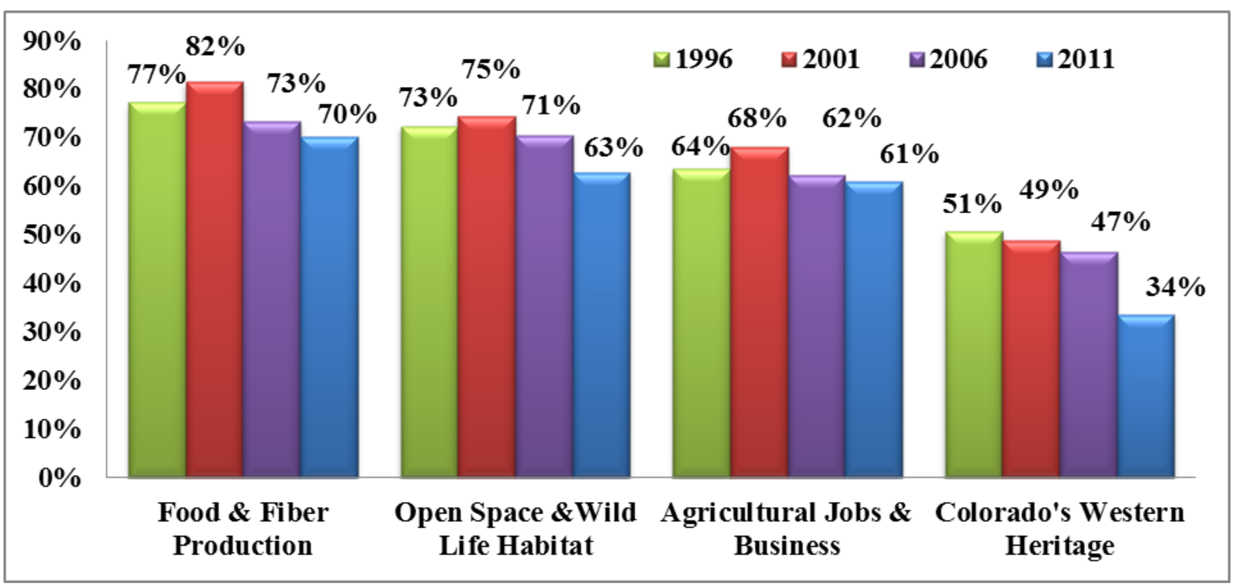


n 1996 = 951; n 2001= 450; n 2006 = 500, n 2011= 50

Figure 4. Top Priority for Water Use in a Dry Year.

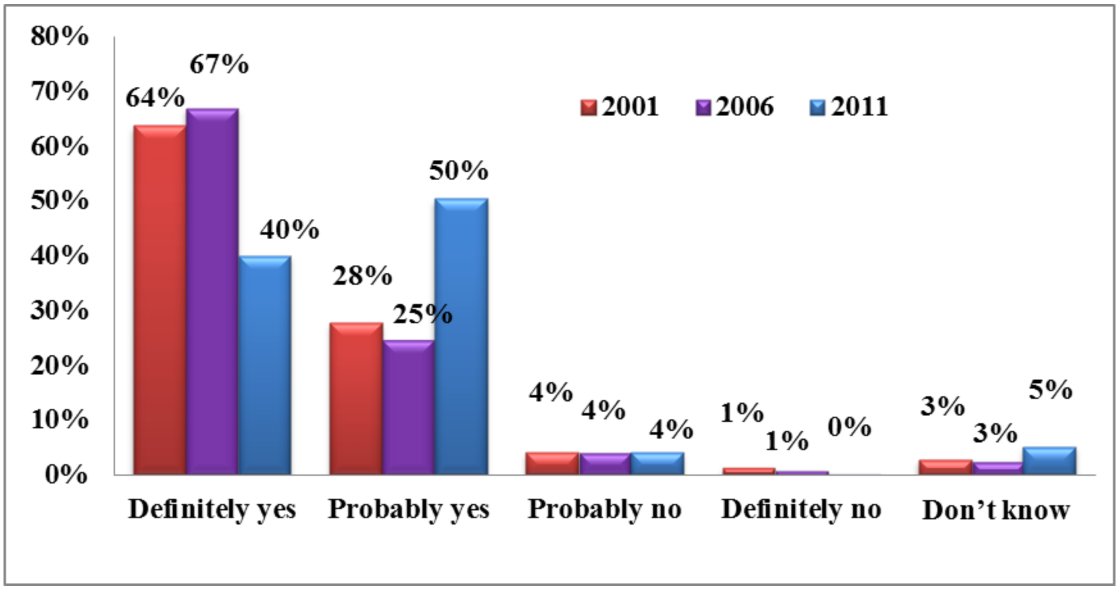
6) A majority of Coloradans felt that it was very important to protect Colorado's agricultural land and water for a variety of reasons (Figure 5) including food and fiber production (70%), followed by maintaining open space and wildlife habitat (63%), and maintaining jobs and businesses related to agriculture (61%). Only 34% thought that maintaining Colorado's western heritage was a very important reason for protecting agricultural land and water.

7) When asked about their interest in Colorado foods (Figure 6), more than 90% of Coloradans would definitely or probably buy more Colorado products if they were labeled as such or were more available. In a follow up question about whether they purchased Colorado products when shopping or eating out, 6.5% said "always" and 37% said "most of the time".



n 1996 = 947; n 2001= 445; n 2006 = 496, n 2011= 481

Figure 5. Share Who Responded a Factor Was Very Important to Protecting Agricultural Land.



n 1996 = 947; n 2001= 445; n 2006 = 496, n 2011= 481

Figure 6. Purchases of Colorado Grown and Produced Products if They Were so Identified.

8) In a new set of questions (Figure 7) exploring the interaction between agriculture and alternative energy, almost 88% agreed that the US should invest in technology that captures wind, solar and water energy, but only 59% agreed that the US should produce more ethanol and bio-based fuels.

9) When given a list of sources where they might receive information about agriculture (Table 2), respondents indicated that they were most likely to trust information from university and research organizations (45%), followed by the Colorado Department of Agriculture (38%), and then farmers and ranchers themselves (37%).

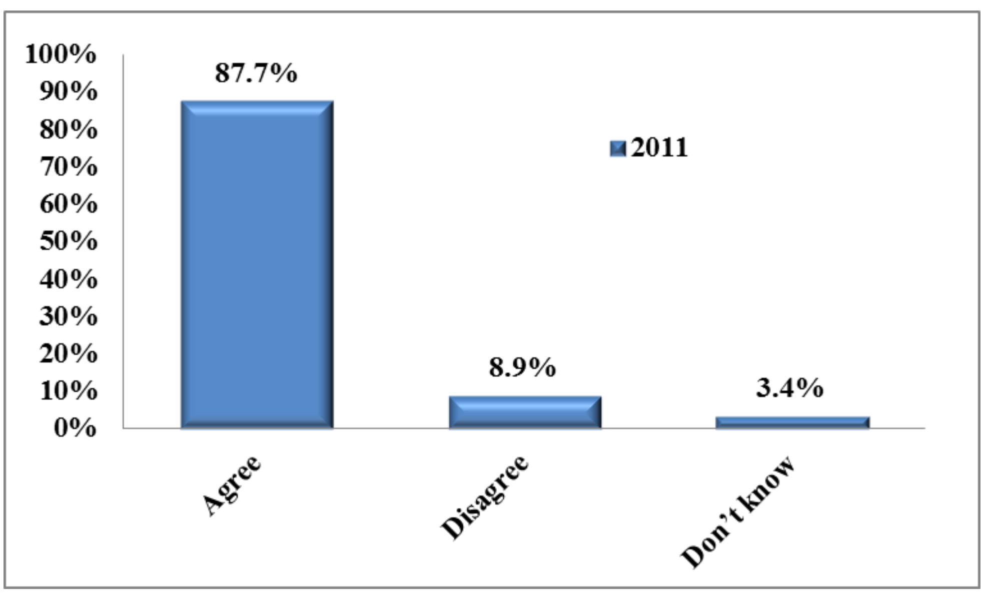


Figure 7. The United States Should Invest in Wind, Solar and Water-Based Energy.

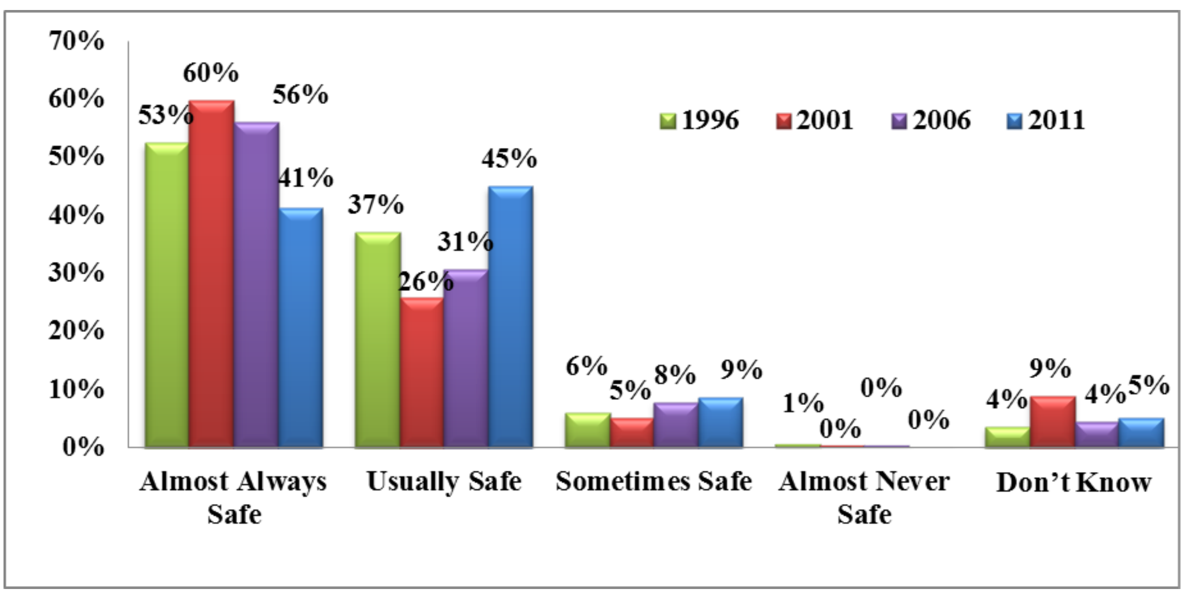
Table 2. Most Trustworthy Sources of Information About Agriculture.

Information source	Percentage of respondents citing source as most likely to be trusted
University and research organizations	45%
Colorado Department of Agriculture	38%
Farmers and ranchers themselves	37%
Farm and ranch organizations	29%
US Department of Agriculture	25%
Other federal government agencies	20%
Environmental organizations	15%
Food industry	5%
News reports in the media	4%
Social media	3%
Other *	1%

Note: *The most common response (from 17 open-ended responses) was friends, family, neighbors as a most trustworthy source of information about agriculture.

10) This survey asked about perceptions of food safety prior to the Listeria outbreak (Figure 8) and found that 39% of respondents said that food produced by Colorado farmers and ranchers was almost always safe, and 45% said it was usually safe. This is a decrease from 2006 where 56% said their food was almost always safe, but a significant increase from the number in 2006 who felt their food was usually safe (31%).

11) Figure 9 shows that many respondents are engaging in direct market purchases of agricultural products. For example, 87% have purchased food from a farmers' market, 65% have made food purchases from a roadside stand, and about one-third have bought food on a farm or ranch. In terms of deciding which factors were most important when shopping for fresh foods, three-quarters of respondents reported making their purchases based on product freshness (76%), followed by price (57%), and then food safety assurance (49%).



n 1996 = 951; n 2001= 450; n 2006 = 500, n 2011= 504

Figure 8. Safety of Food Produced in Colorado.

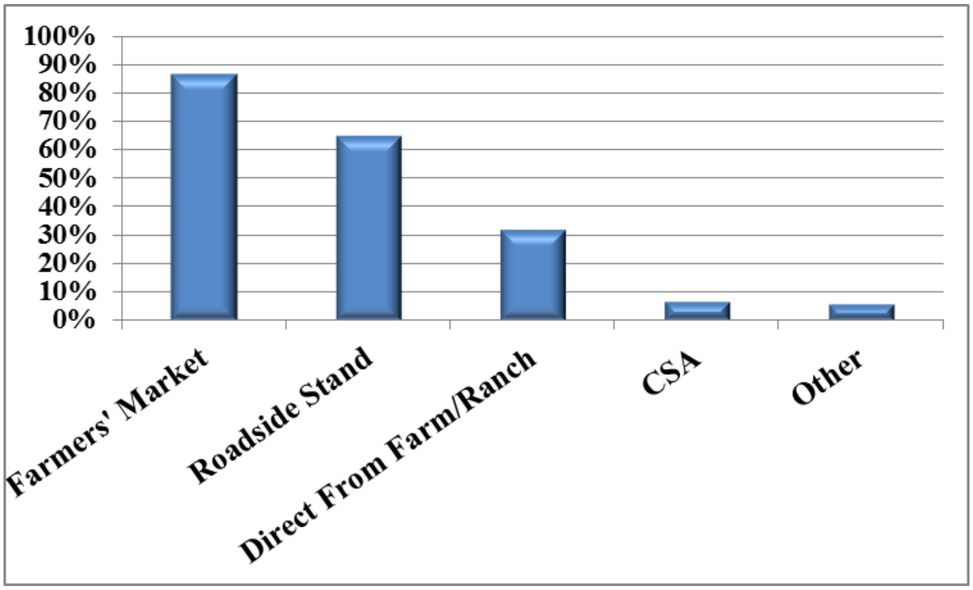


Figure 9. Consumers' Purchases of Food in Direct Markets (n=504).

12) To understand how respondents interpreted "local" when making their food purchase decisions, we asked them to define what production area they felt was local (Table 3). Overwhelmingly, 69% of respondents said that local meant that the food was produced in Colorado. Only much smaller percentages indicated any specific distance from their residence, with the smallest area being 50 miles.

13) Figure 10 illustrates what respondents planned for agritourism visits: 70% of respondents said they would participate in agritourism once or fewer times per year. When asked about their motivations for participating in agritourism, half (51%) indicated that agritourism provided something different or unique to do, followed by their desire to support farm and ranch businesses. This is roughly equivalent to the proportion of respondents who targeted their food purchases toward supporting the local economy and local farmers and ranchers. In other words, roughly a third of respondents seem to consistently prioritize supporting agriculture through both food and recreation purchases.

Table 3.

Definition of local	Percentage of respondents
Produced in Colorado	69%
Produced within 100 miles	11%
Produced in the county where you live	10%
Produced within 250 miles	5%
Produced within 400 miles	2%
Don't know	2%
Other*	1%

* Other responses included the following: 50 miles; Colorado and surrounding states; it didn't have to get on an airplane to get to me; and within Weld/Larimer counties.

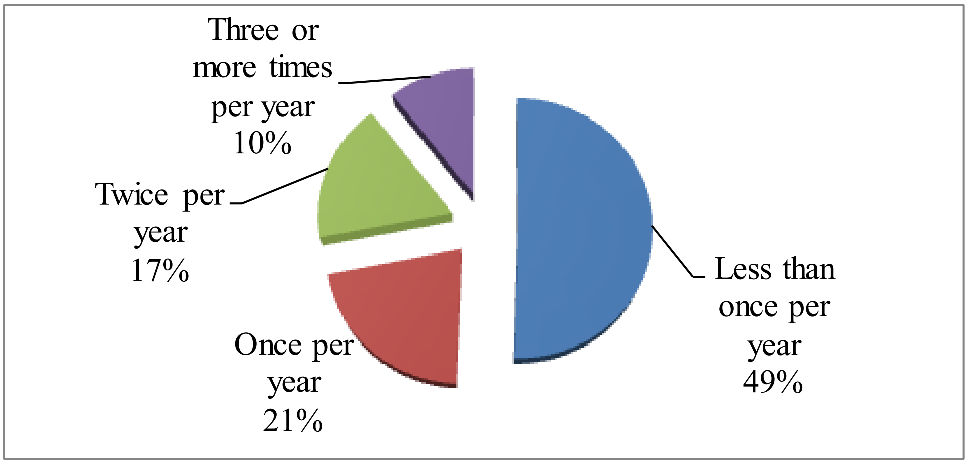


Figure 10. Frequency of Participation in Agritourism.

14) As a follow-up to surveying CSU did in early 2007, we asked respondents to share their willingness to participate in recreational and educational opportunities on Colorado's farms and ranches, by selecting the activities in which they were most likely to participate on their next trip in and around Colorado (Table 4). Similar to our previous survey, farmers' markets and harvest and food festivals ranked the highest out of all activities, followed by historical sites and museums.

Table 4. Preferences for Agritourism Activities in Colorado.

	Mean
Farmer's markets	2.20
Historical museums and sites (ag history, pioneer cabin sites)	2.68
Harvest and food festivals	2.77
Outdoor recreation (hunting, fishing, snowmobiling)	2.79
Winery tour, visit and/or tasting	2.94
Agritainment: corn maze, pumpkin patch, petting zoo, u-pick.	2.96
Special events (weddings, retreats, family reunions)	2.97
Rodeo or livestock based activity (Stock Show, county fair)	3.02
Educational tours and activities	3.14
Bird watching, wildlife viewing, photography, painting	3.15
Hay rides / sleigh rides / horseback riding	3.24
Farm dinners	3.28
Farm or ranch stay (guest ranch, Bed & Breakfast, get-a-way)	3.37
Other	3.93

Note: Means are based on a five-point Likert scale where 1 equals very likely to participate, and 5 indicates no anticipated participation in that activity.