



COLORADO STATE UNIVERSITY  
ENGAGEMENT AND EXTENSION

February 2026, Issue 7

Community



Economic Development



## Team Spotlight



### Anders Van Sandt

[Anders Van Sandt](#) is an Assistant Professor of Rural Economic Development in the Department of Agricultural and Resource Economics. Dr. Van Sandt works closely with Extension professionals and rural stakeholders across the state. He has served in leadership roles in several academic associations (AAEA, WAEA, Hatch multistate project), and his work is published in top-tier field journals. His research and outreach focus on rural economic development, rural health access, and community resilience, with particular emphasis on business location decisions, healthcare service availability, and the role of community capitals in shaping diverse rural development pathways.

## Henry Williams

[Henry Williams](#) is a Ph.D. student in Economics at CSU, specializing in economic impact analysis and climate change economics. Through work with CSU Extension and the CSU Regional Economic Development Institute, he has led economic impact studies of the Pathfinder Park Event Center in Florence, Colorado, as well as the Colorado State University system. His current research focuses on incorporating PM2.5-related mortality from fire smoke into social cost of carbon estimates and evaluating the sensitivity of those estimates to the value of a statistical life.



### Mark Your Calendar

## DOWNTOWN COLORADO inc.

### Upcoming opportunities with Downtown Colorado:

#### [Small but Might Development Webinar](#)

This webinar highlights the potential of small-scale redevelopment projects to drive significant community change. It examines case studies where limited budgets, community goals, and sustainability practices align to create impactful developments. The module also covers public and private funding strategies, crafting a compelling project pitch, and conducting follow-up assessments.

- **Event Type:** February 25, 2026, In-Person Event
- [Click here to learn more and register](#)

#### [URBAN RENEWAL 201](#)

- **Location:** Erie Social Club
- **Event type:** In-Person Event, March 5, 2026, 1:30 p.m.- 5:00 p.m.
- [Click here to learn more and register](#)

#### [SMALL SCALE – BIG IMPACT | BUILDING COLORADO'S FUTURE THROUGH SMALL SCALE DEVELOPMENT](#)

- **Location:** Grand Junction
- **Event Type:** In-Person, March 31, 2026, 9:00 a.m., In-person Event
- [Click here to register online](#)

#### [CO CHALLENGE ACCELERATOR WORKSHOPS](#)

- **Location:** Downtown Grand Junction
- **Event Type:** In-Person, March 31, 2026, 9:00 a.m.
- [Click to learn more and register online](#)

#### [2026 IN THE GAME VIBRANT DOWNTOWN EVENT](#)

- Come see the CSU REDI team at In the Game, headquartered in Downtown Grand Junction, April 1 – 3, 2026. This is an in-person event and a great
- [Click here to learn more and register online](#)



## COLORADO AGRICULTURE FORUM February 26, Westmister

The mission of the [Colorado Agriculture Forum](#) is to provide educational programming that is current, relevant, and diverse in a collaborative environment as a way for industry leaders to stay appraised of current trends and policy issues facing the industry.

To contribute to a healthy and viable agricultural industry in Colorado, this annual event shall seek to:

1. Facilitate a spirit of community to enhance Colorado agriculture's competitiveness.
2. Encourage positive awareness of the diversity and quality of Colorado agriculture.
3. Encourage interaction amongst producers, distributors, retailers, agricultural professionals and other industry segments.
4. Present future-oriented, cutting-edge topics that promote communication and understanding across the entire industry while considering the uniqueness among industry segments.
5. Relate and connect a global outlook to state and local agricultural production, business, and policy issues.

[Click here to learn more and register online](#)

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## National Association of Community Development Extension Professionals

June 15-18, 2026  
Wichita, Kansas

NACDEP is an organization dedicated to improving visibility, coordination, professional status and resource base of community and economic development Extension programs and professionals.

[Learn more](#) and consider joining if you want to be more involved at the regional or national level.

[Click here to learn more about the conference](#)

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# Economic Development Council of Colorado's (EDCC) 2026 DRIVE | LEAD | SUCCEED ANNUAL CONFERENCE

**September 27-30, 2026**  
**Chamonix Hotel, Cripple Creek**

CSU is an institutional member and sponsor for [EDDC's Annual Drive | Lead | Succeed Conference](#), which is geared towards nurturing the growth of Colorado's economy by offering essential resources that:

- Unite leading industry influencers and thought leaders to exchange valuable insights and tackle distinctive challenges.
- Introduce innovative tools and solutions to address pressing economic issues within Colorado's professional economic development community.
- Cultivate meaningful collaboration and facilitate the exchange of fresh ideas among Colorado's Economic Development professionals, business and non-profit leaders, government officials, and beyond.

## **New this year**

EDCC is joining forces with the Rocky Mountain Workforce Development Association (RMWDA) to provide a platform for essential knowledge sharing and networking to support Colorado's vibrant and growing economy. Take advantage of this one-of-kind opportunity to learn from Colorado's Workforce Development ecosystem! We think our stronger partnership with EDCC is timely, given this new focus on the workforce.

Interested in attending? [Reach out to the RED!](#) or the Community and Economic Development PRU team.

**If you can't attend a conference, [watch for virtual events from EDCC in Winter 2026.](#)**

## Regional Networking Roundtable

This inaugural event, hosted by EDCC and its Regional Board Directors, will bring together EDCC members and leaders from economic and workforce development, education, and research institutions to:

- Learn firsthand information about current initiatives, challenges, and opportunities from key stakeholders.
- Discover what your regional peers are working on, identify potential synergies, and build valuable connections.

Understand the critical resources needed to support your efforts and advance your region's economic growth.

[Click here for more details](#)

## Colorado Celebrates Economic Development Week

**May 4-8, 2026**

The Economic Development Council of Colorado (EDCC) and Downtown Colorado, Inc. (DCI) are once again teaming up in 2026 to bring an award-winning, week-long celebration of educational webinars and a social media campaign highlighting Colorado's Economic Development successes.

[Click here for more details](#)

## Funding, Program and Educational Opportunities

### CSU Extension Internship Programs

The [CSU Extension summer internship program](#) pairs Extension experts from around the state with on-campus University faculty who work together as mentors to provide students with meaningful, hands-on learning experiences where they contribute to applied research efforts across Colorado. These paid internship opportunities are available to any current CSU student, regardless of their academic major or college.

The following is the list of internships available specifically in Community & Economic Development and Food Systems:

#### Community & Economic Development

- A Multidisciplinary Approach to Park County Carcass Disposal Solutions and Feasibility
- Redevelopment Feasibility Study, Chaffee County
- CSU Extension History and Resource Creation
- CSU SPUR UAV Summer Program Instructor Internship
- Determining Routt County Residents' Value of Open Spaces, Views, and Environment
- The Economic Contributions of the Sedgewick Drag Strip
- Understanding Digital Communication Use, Its Opportunities and Challenges
- Working Watersheds Internship

## Food Systems

- AI-Powered Agritourism Chatbot: Collecting and Analyzing Data to Empower Agricultural Stakeholders
- Examining Policy and Program Options for Increasing Larimer County's Local Food Sales
- Larimer County Farmers' Market: Supporting Food Access and Local Agriculture
- Local Food Consumer Insights and Soil Health Outreach Internship: Assessing the Impact of Soil Health Education on Consumer Buying Behavior

**The deadline to apply for 2026 internships is March 1, 2026.**

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## Rural Jump-Start Program

The [Rural Jump-Start Program](#) is a collaborative effort by the state, local governments, Institutes of Higher Education (IHE), and economic development organizations (EDO) to incentivize new businesses to start in or move to rural, economically distressed counties in Colorado, which are referred to as Rural Jump-Start zones, and hire new employees.

Rural Jump-Start began in 2016 as a tax incentive program for businesses located in a Rural Jump-Start zone, and in 2021 a grant program was created. Tax benefits include relief from:

- State income tax for the new business.
- State sales and use tax for the new business.
- County personal property tax for the new business.
- Municipal personal property tax for the new business (in participating municipalities); and
- State income tax for qualified new hires

Grant benefits are dependent on the business's location:

- **If a business is located in a Rural-Jump Start zone**, businesses can receive a matching grant of up to \$15,000 as a newly established business.
- **If a business is located in a Rural-Jump Start zone that is also a [Tier 1 Just Transition community](#)**, businesses can receive a matching grant of up to \$25,000 as a newly established business.

The Rural Jump-Start Program will accept applications for the tax benefits through December 31, 2030, and for the grant benefits through June 30, 2028.

If you are a business interested in participating in this program, [review all program qualifications, discussed in greater detail under the Business Eligibility section.](#)

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## Leadership Skill Development Mini-Grant

The Western Rural Development Center (WRDC) funds proposals that present innovative research and educational outreach to advance rural development in the Western United States. Faculty/Staff from land grant institutions in the Western Region are eligible for the Leadership Skill Development Mini-Grant program.

[Click here to find more information](#)

## Community Facilities Loan & Grant Program

The USDA Community Facilities program provides affordable funding to develop essential community facilities in rural areas. An essential community facility is defined as a facility that provides an essential service to the local community for the orderly development of the community in a primarily rural area, and does not include private, commercial, or business undertakings.

This infrastructure funding will expand access to health care, education, and public safety while spurring community development and building sound infrastructure for people living in rural communities.

More than 100 types of projects are eligible for Community Facilities funding. Eligible applicants include municipalities, public bodies, nonprofit organizations, and federally recognized Native American tribes. Projects must be in rural areas with a

population of 20,000 or less.

[More information on this program in Colorado.](#)



## Reports

In addition to these reports, we continue to update our [webpage](#) to share reports and updates from our work with community partners. Visit our new website highlights for [Community Based Projects](#).

### January 2026 Report

[Economic Analysis of Groundwater Curtailment in Colorado's Republican River Basin](#)

Rebecca Hill, Dale T. Manning, Jordan Suter, Innocent Vomitadyo

#### Key Findings

- An agreement between the states of Colorado, Nebraska, and Kansas, related to the Republican River Compact, requires that 25,000 acres in Colorado's South Fork Focus Zone be removed from irrigated production by 2030. Failure to comply with this requirement could result in the curtailment of all groundwater irrigation across the Republican River Basin in Colorado.
- Agriculture, including irrigated crop production (primarily corn and alfalfa), is critical to the economy in the region, representing more than 25% of total revenue and almost 20% of employment.
- This study examines four different land-use scenarios to describe future economic impacts, should groundwater irrigation be curtailed

[Download PDF Report to read more](#)

### December 2025 Report

[Colorado Farmer Strategies for Addressing Wheat Stem Sawfly Risks: Strategies and Regional Patterns from a 2023 Producer Survey](#)

Sabina Regmi, Rebecca Hill, Rebecca Wasserman-Olin, Adam Osterholzer, Punya

Nachappa

### Key Findings

- Past Infestation and Threat Perception: Sixty percent of farmers reported past wheat stem sawfly infestation, and 86% viewed it as a threat, indicating widespread awareness and concern among Colorado wheat producers.
- Prevention Practices: The most adopted prevention measures were increasing crop diversification (46%) and planting semi-solid or solid-stem wheat varieties (44%), while practices like insecticide use and edge trap cropping were least utilized.
- Regional Differences: Farmers in the Front Range and Northeast areas with higher infestation history reported greater concern and higher adoption of prevention strategies compared to those in the South, where infestation and adoption rates remained low.

## November 2025 Report

[Food Assistance and Resilience in Colorado: The Changing Role of SNAP](#)

Anders Van Sandt

### Key Findings

- As of September, over 600,000 Coloradans (10%) received SNAP benefits in 2025.
- County participation varies from under 2% (Pitkin County) to over 35% (Costilla County).
- 47% of SNAP households have children, 36% have seniors, and 47% have disabled peoples.
- Cutting SNAP benefits by 20% will lower Colorado's annual GDP by about \$35 million.

[Download PDF Report to read more](#)

## October 2025 Report

[What Does the Community Value? Assessing Priorities for the Fairground Upgrades in Park County, Colorado](#)

Sabina Regmi, Rebecca Hill, Tim Komarek, Willie Wilkins

### Key Findings

- Top Priorities for upgrades: The livestock barn and indoor arena ranked as the highest priorities, followed by the horse barn and community dining/event hall.
- Amenities that Matter Most: Year-round restrooms were strongly supported, while other options like cafés and childcare were ranked lower.
- Visitor Profile: Nearly half of fair attendees stayed overnight, with most choosing campgrounds or RV parks underscoring the fair's role in local tourism and visitor spending.
- Preserving Current Structures: Respondents indicated a strong preference for keeping the current Joe Linch Arena as long as possible

[Download PDF Report to read more](#)

## Colorado Futures Center Reports



The Colorado Futures Center is an independent, nonpartisan and academically grounded 501(c)(3) organization dedicated to informing about economic, fiscal, and public policy issues impacting community economic health and quality of life in Colorado and beyond.

Our Partners at the Colorado Futures Center regularly release their Statewide Economic Forecast, [ColoradoCast](#), and recently released the ColoradoCast for the [fourth quarter of 2025](#).

This fourth quarter 2025 ColoradoCast, delayed by the federal shutdown in late 2025, shows the state economy maintaining and even gaining strength through May 2026. This forecast comes in the wake of the Philadelphia Fed concurrent index for November indicating almost 4.5 percent annual GDP growth in Colorado. This is a significant acceleration from the previous month's 2.43 percent. Consistent with the latest national data, there is a developing disconnect in Colorado where the economy, as measured by GDP, is projected to gain strength even as the trend in employment growth is slowing.

While the 2,700 jobs added by Colorado in November 2025 was slightly above the average growth rate that the state had been experiencing through the first 10 months of 2025, it lagged the average job growth for the longer post pandemic period. Similarly, nationally the most recent GDP report showed an acceleration in growth to 4.3 percent even as employment growth nationally slowed significantly. This ColoradoCast, which is projecting the Colorado economy to grow at rates above 4 percent for the first part of 2026, is consistent with the latest projections for

national GDP to accelerate.

## Stay Connected

Find us on social media, get community and economic development related questions answered via email, forward to a friend, or submit your contributions to our newsletter!

Visit the [Regional Economic Development Institute website](#) and sign up for updates (see the bottom left sign-up prompt).

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Not already receiving this newsletter directly? Sign up for future editions [here](#).



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