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CSU Food Systems Spotlight



Monica Pless

Chaffee County Extension Director

Monica came to Extension in January 2024 after 20 years of farming and leading farmer/rancher training programs, most recently growing food in Salida for the school district and hospital with Guidestone Colorado. She has raised broilers and ducks, maple syrup and milk but primarily focuses on produce and tree fruit, including high tunnel and greenhouse production. She holds a Masters in Environmental Studies from Antioch University New England, where she started a time exchange, and a BA from Princeton University, where she researched parasites in house sparrows. She is passionate about working with the next generation of producers: from multi-generational 4-H families to new residents, to working with our hardworking ranchers and farmers to support them in running successful, sustainable enterprises and helping backyard gardeners grow food and flowers.



Mark Your Calendar

Food Safety and Business Training for Colorado Cottage Foods Producers



Two trainings are being offered to support cottage food business.

Food safety - Learn how to safely produce food from home as a cottage food business. This course covers a variety of topics, including: basic food safety, foods that are permissible under the updated Colorado Cottage Foods Act, ingredient labeling, special considerations for food preparation at high altitudes, and safe food sampling best practices. Registration is \$55. For additional dates and to learn more, [check the website here](#).

The next CSU Extension Cottage Food Safety Trainings will take place on:

- December 11, 8:00am-11:30am, online [register](#)
- January 23, 9am-12:30pm, online [register](#)
- February 27, 9am-12:30pm, online [register](#)
- March 20, 9am-12:30pm, online [register](#)

Business Training - You've perfected your product, now it's time to cash in!! Whether you're targeting local farmer's markets, family and friends, or retail store shelves, this short-course will give you tools to consider your costs of production and your product-market fit. The training provides easy-to-use tools as you launch and grow.

- In-person, Salida - December 7, 5:00pm **register**
- In-person, Leadville - December 8, 5:00pm, **register**
- Virtual - December 11, 11:30am, online **register**
- Virtual - February 3, 5:30pm, online **register**

Idaho Food Business Foundations Workshop Series



Are you ready to launch your food business, grow your cottage food operation, or break into retail and wholesale? The Idaho Food Business Foundations workshop is a series covering everything from food safety to packaging, sourcing, and marketing—giving you the foundation to confidently produce, sell, and scale your product.

Workshop Schedule:

- December 2 – Sourcing Local: Regional Ingredients for Your Value-Added or Specialty Food Products
- December 16 - Marketing and Distribution – Reaching Your Customer
- January 6, 2026 - Packaging & Labeling: Getting Retail Ready

Cost: **\$50 per class** (Virtual and in-person options)

Bonus: Attend 5 or more classes and receive 4 hours of consulting FREE to help grow your business.

Register here.

2025 Soil Revolution Conference

Farmers and ranchers of all scales and production systems are invited to register for the *2025 Soil Revolution Conference*. Topics will cover on-the-ground solutions from producers spanning a variety of climate and soil conditions across the country. Both in-person and livestream options are available.



When: Thursday, December 11th, 8am - 5pm

Where: Boulder Jewish Community Center

Language assistance is available upon request in the registration form. For more information about the speakers and the conference, visit the soilrev.org or contact Trent Kischer at tkischer@bouldercounty.gov.

Register here.

Cultivating Connections, Sowing Success

Join the Colorado Department of Education, Colorado School Nutrition Association, Nourish Colorado, and Greeley-Evans School District for *Cultivating Connections, Sowing Successes*.



This will be a day for K-12 food service operators, Colorado's agricultural producers, and strategic partners to gather, learn, and connect around Farm to School in Colorado. You'll meet producers, learn strategies from peers, get connected with resources, and attend hands-on, informative sessions! You can plan to spend most of the day at this completely free event.

The event will take place on **Friday, December 12th in Grand Junction**. Be sure to get registered: <https://bit.ly/WesternSlope-FtS-Event>

Applications Open for Quivira Coalition's New Agrarian Program

Applications for Quivira Coalition's New Agrarian Program apprenticeship are open until **December 15th** or until all positions are filled.

Apprenticeships take place on working regenerative ranches and farms across the Intermountain West. These 8-month, full-time, paid apprenticeships include housing and immerse the apprentice in the daily work of an operation. The New Agrarian Program provides support such as:

- Travel reimbursements to two regional in-person gatherings
- Education stipend
- Monthly supplemental education webinars
- 1:1 check-ins with a coordinator
- Networking opportunities to kick-start a career in regenerative ag
- Free attendance to Quivira's annual REGENERATE conference.

Apprenticeships begin in March/April 2025 and run through November 2025. You can learn more at www.quiviracoalition.org/newagrarian. Submit your application as soon as possible to be considered for sites still hiring. Contact newagrarian@quiviracoalition.org with questions.



New Online Course for Aspiring Farmers, Ranchers, and Food System Workers: Exploring Your Farm Dream



**COLORADO STATE
UNIVERSITY**

Exploring Your Farm Dream is a new online course offered by the CSU and the Colorado Building Farmers Program for people looking to equip themselves with the knowledge, skills, and business strategies for a future in agricultural production. This self-paced course is designed for learners who have limited experience in agriculture. Visit the course website [here](#) for more information.

Participants can expect to:

- Learn from CSU Extension faculty instructors with expertise in agricultural business management
- Get access to strategic personal and business planning insights, tools, and resources
- Assess preparedness for starting a farm-based business aligned with your resources, skills, and goals
- Explore a variety of different pathways and business models in ranching, agriculture, and food systems

The course consists of 10 modules, which learners will have access to for a full year. Registration costs \$150. [Register for the course here.](#)



BUILDING FARMERS
COLORADO STATE UNIVERSITY
EXTENSION

Pre-Register Now! **Colorado Building Farmers and Ranchers Business Development Course** **Jan 20 - March 10, 2026**

The CSU Extension Principles of Business Planning and Management program is a series of evening classes designed to help New Farmers and Ranchers build a farm business and provide Intermediate and Experienced Farmers and Ranchers with tools and ideas to refine and enhance their business management, production, and marketing skills. This class is intended for new and intermediate level farmers and ranchers in Colorado, and will be offered in English/Spanish via live simultaneous interpretation. All class materials will be provided in English and Spanish. Learn more & preregister here: <https://col.st/2vg7i>;

El programa de Extensión de CSU (Universidad Estatal de Colorado) de Principios de Planificación y Gestión Empresarial es una serie de clases por la tarde diseñadas para ayudar a los Nuevos Agricultores/as y Ganaderos/as a construir un negocio agrícola y proveer a Agricultores/as y Ganaderos/as

Intermedios/as herramientas e ideas para refinar y mejorar sus habilidades de gestión empresarial, producción y marketing. Esta clase es para agricultores/as y ganaderos/as nuevos e intermedios en Colorado. Clases estarán ofrecidos verbalmente en ingles/español a través de interpretación simultánea en vivo y todos los materiales del curso estarán proporcionadas en inglés y español. Aprender más y preinscribirse aquí: <https://col.st/e1e02>



Climate Resilience Course

Farmers and ranchers in the West: strengthen your climate resilience strategies this winter with Farmer Campus's live Climate Resilience Course. Six online workshops with expert speakers run **Tuesdays, January 27 – March 3, 2026**, paired with a flexible five-module online course. Learn practical tools, build a Climate Resilience Action Plan, and connect with peers across the West.

Enroll here: <https://farmercampus.com/courses/climate/>

Save the Date: Colorado Grain Summit March 7, 2026

Join us on March 7, 2025, at the SteamPlant in Salida, Colorado, for the Colorado Grain Summit! The Colorado Grain Summit aims to inspire businesses using local grains to envision pathways for sustainable growth and increased market impact. This single-day conference will feature curated networking sessions, expert panels, and keynotes highlighting innovative success stories across the grain supply chain. Our goal is to create an environment that fosters partnerships, provides pathways to market expansion, and connects grain producers with businesses across Colorado. Mark your calendars and stay tuned for updates!



Click [here](#) to learn more; Sign up [here](#) for event updates

Interested in sponsoring this event? Click [here](#).

2025 National Sorghum Producers Yield Contest



Growers are invited to enter the 2025 National Sorghum Yield Contest. State and national winners will be selected from contestants in East and West regions across the Irrigated, Dryland No-Till, and Dryland Tillage divisions, with one overall winner chosen in the Food Grade category.

Sorghum growers can choose between two protocol options for yield verification, [read here to learn more.](#)

The entry deadline for the 2025 contest is November 26th. All completed forms must be received by the NSP office no later than December 3rd. [Click here to complete the entry form.](#)



2026 Roots of Renewal Conference

The Western Colorado Soil Health, Food and Farm Forum has a new name! You'll still find inspiring speakers, practical tools, and meaningful connections, we've just grown into a name that better reflects the future we're building together.

Roots of Renewal is for anyone with an interest in the future of agriculture. Whether you're looking to improve on or innovate existing practices, there are resources and networking opportunities for you.

The event will be held on **January 23-24, 2026** at the Montrose Pavilion.

Tickets on sale on [here](#).



2026 Researcher & Extension Meetup and Organic Conference

The Organic Farming Research Foundation (OFRF) invites you to register for a special Researcher & Extension Meetup on **Monday, February 9, 2026**, in Cheyenne, Wyoming.

This event will bring together organic-focused researchers, Extension professionals, and educators to connect, share knowledge, and lay the groundwork for future collaboration across the region. This event is free to attend. Register [here](#).

Following the meet-up, the **High Plains Organic Conference** will take place on **February 10th and 11th**. Conference registration is \$45 with meals included. If

you're interested in presenting research or helping shape a research-focused track, email communications@ofrr.org.



2026 Colorado Food and Agriculture Policy Summit

We're excited to announce the 2026 Colorado Food & Agriculture Policy Summit, to be held in person at CSU Spur in Denver on **Friday, February 27th, 8:30 AM–3:00 PM**. Registration is

free, and lunch will be provided.

The 2026 Summit will bring together leaders from across Colorado's food system to refine and prioritize statewide food and agriculture policy opportunities, building on insights from the 2025 Regional Event Series. Facilitated by the Keystone Policy Center, the event will focus on areas of alignment, needed dialogue, and the creation of a shared statewide policy platform that centers equity and cross-sector collaboration.

Capacity is limited, so attendance will be by invite only. If you would like to participate, please complete [this form](#) to indicate your interest.

Responses to the form are due by **January 5th**, and those selected for in-person participation will be notified by January 9th.

We will also host a required pre-Policy Summit webinar on Friday, February 5th at 12:00 PM. Register here:

<https://zoom.us/meeting/register/JIDkJKzRFC14FdMnQcjWA>.

2026 Sun Soil Water Summit

Join Pueblo Food Project, CSU Pueblo County Extension, and partners to gather, learn, and share delicious food at the Sun Soil Water Summit. This weekend-long gathering at Pueblo Community College is focused on bringing the community closer to the food system. With several events celebrating local leaders, educating our peers, and uplifting local entrepreneurs, there is something for everyone at the summit.



- **Pueblo Food Systems Awards and Gala - March 20th, 6:00pm-8:30pm:** An evening of celebration as we honor leaders in the Pueblo Food System. We will enjoy local food, drinks, music, and an inaugural silent auction.
- **Community Led Summit - March 21st, 8:00am-4:30pm:** A gathering to learn, share, inspire, and catalyze community food systems change. This day-long conference will include keynote presentations, panel discussions,

hands-on breakout sessions, and delicious food. This summit will help community members, organizations, and producers gain knowledge to better engage with our food system.

- **Makers' Market and Happy Hour - March 21st, 4:30pm-7:00pm:** Conference participants can explore ideas, try products, and support local food businesses while enjoying local beer and wine at the Makers' Market and Happy Hour. Makers and community organizations interested in a table are welcome to share their products and ideas.

Registration will open soon. If you are interested in volunteering, complete [this form](#).

Center for Sorghum Improvement Seminar Series

The **Center for Sorghum Improvement (CSI)** at Kansas State University is hosting a monthly seminar series to engage researchers, industry leaders, and agricultural professional in meaningful discussions about sorghum research, from genetics to production practices to marketing opportunities.



View the seminar schedule and subscribe to the mailing list [here](#).

For more information or to directly receive seminar notifications, contact Sarah Sexton-Bowser, managing director, at sarahann@ksu.edu.



Farm Resilience Online Course

Learn practical strategies and tools to boost your farm's resilience amidst the challenges of climate change. This self-paced, online course is designed specifically for farmers and ranchers in the West, focusing on real-world solutions and hands-on techniques.

Join a community of like-minded individuals and gain the knowledge you need to secure your farm's future. CSU was fortunate to partner with this program to develop some of the content and decision tools.

Enroll today and deepen your journey towards climate resilience and sustainability.



Funding Opportunities



Committed to the future of rural communities.

FY2026 Value-Added Producer Grant Webinar

Join for this informational session about the upcoming Value-Added Producer Grant application cycle. NSAC will host USDA Rural Development's Rural Business & Cooperative Services to offer an overview of the grant program, updates to the application process, and answer questions from attendees. The webinar will take place on **December 10th at 12pm MT.**

Register here!

Even if you are unable to make the webinar, register using the link so you can receive a recording of the session. Reach out to Hannah Quigley at hquigley@sustainableagriculture.net with questions.

FACT's Fund-a-Farmer Grants

FACT's Fund-a-Farmer grants are now open!

Two grant opportunities are available:

- Fund-a-Farmer Welfare Improvement Grant (up to \$3,500)
- One Fund-a-Farmer Systems Change & Innovation Grant (up to \$10,000)



The deadline to apply is Saturday **January 3, 2026 @9:59pm MST**. Grant awardees are announced at the end of February 2026 with fund dispersal the 2nd week in March. Projects should be completed by June 1, 2027. [Click here for more details.](#)

You can apply for either grant or both. If you are awarded both grants you will only receive funding for one. Additionally, These grants are very competitive, so each farm or individual can only be awarded a grant once every 2 years. This means if you received a grant in 2025 you'll need to sit this year out, You are, however, eligible to apply for a Systems & Innovation Grant if your project fulfills the criteria.

Healthy Food for Denver's Kids Grant

The Denver Department of Public Health & Environment (DDPHE) is pleased to announce the seventh round of funding of the Healthy Food for Denver's Kids (HFDK) program to support healthy food and food-based education in Denver.



[Click here to learn more and apply!](#)

HFDK plans on funding approximately 12 contracts that range between \$250,000 - \$750,000 each for a three-year grant term (August 2026 - July 2029). They are currently accepting applications that support Denver youth ages 18 and under in the following program priority areas:

- Nutritious Food Access & Security
- Increasing Participation in Federal Nutrition Assistance programs
- Food Education

Eligibility forms and Letters of Interest (LOI) are **due January 5th, 2026 by 11:59 p.m. M.T. [Get started here.](#)**



News, Resources & Reading



Wallace Center
AT WINROCK INTERNATIONAL

The Wallace Center at Winrock International's Agriculture and Food Systems Strategy

The Wallace Center at Winrock International is proud to announce its new **Agriculture and Food Systems Strategy**, a bold vision and plan for the years to come.

As a national program of Winrock International, the Center's work is grounded in Winrock's mission "to empower the disadvantaged, increase economic opportunity, and sustain natural resources." Building on decades of leadership and trusted relationships, the Wallace Center is strengthening its role in this time of rapid change. With strong regional roots and national reach, they are deepening their impact by scaling innovation, channeling resources, and supporting lasting change through collaboration. This strategy ensures they remain grounded in their vision and values moving forward.

Through this strategy, the Wallace Center will support:

- Just economic opportunities by strengthening value chains, unlocking resources, and supporting fair markets
- Healthy agricultural ecosystems through regenerative practices that improve soil, water, and farm profitability
- Effective cross-sectoral collaboration to align investment, policy, and innovation for greater impact
- Resilient communities by uplifting local leadership, creating good jobs, and building long-term wealth

Cultivation Station: A Colorado Proud Podcast



COLORADO
Department of Agriculture

Cultivation Station is a business development podcast from the CO Department of Agriculture's Colorado Proud program. The podcast dives into the rich and diverse world of food and agricultural businesses. Whether you are just beginning to think about starting a food or ag business in Colorado, or your operation is up and running, there are many expert insights and insider tips to help you be successful.

[Find the full list of podcast episodes here.](#)

Introducing the Poudre Valley Community Farms Land Access Bulletin



Poudre Valley Community Farms is launching a bulletin designed to connect producers with land and water access opportunities across the Front Range. Each issue will feature current listings and announcements that support long-term access and stewardship, intended for producers seeking land and landowners looking to connect with growers.

[Sign up for the bulletin here.](#)



Read the Report on Farmers Market Organizations

The USDA Agricultural Marketing Service (AMS) partnered with Emory University and Arizona State

University to research the varied structures of farmers market organizations to identify benefits, challenges, and services associated with externally managed farmers markets. The goal of the "Analyzing the Impacts of Farmers Markets Managed by Organizations" cooperative research agreement was to increase the general public's understanding of the diverse forms that farmers markets in the United States take and the breadth of their activities.

The project was conducted over two years (October 2022 to September 2024) and used mixed methods (an online environmental scan, listening sessions, focus groups, and semi-structured interviews) to explore the structures, activities, impacts and trends shaping farmers market organizations.

[Read the report here.](#)

List Your Business in USDA AMS Local Foods Directories



The USDA **Local Foods Directories** allow you to market your local food business to a wider nationwide audience. In particular, make sure your fall-season agritourism venture is featured on the USDA Local Food Directories! To create a new

listing, answer quick and easy questions about the status of your business so consumers can learn more about you.

[Click here to sign up for the directory.](#)



From Our Communities

2026 Specialty Crop Funding Priorities Survey

The Colorado Department of Agriculture is inviting all Colorado specialty crop stakeholders to provide input on their funding priorities ahead of the 2026 Specialty Crop Block Grant Program application cycle.

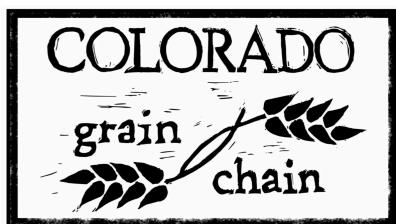


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Specialty crops are defined as "fruits, vegetables, tree nuts, dried fruits, horticulture, and nursery crops (including floriculture)." A list of plants commonly considered specialty crops is available from the U.S. Department of Agriculture.

Any Colorado specialty crop stakeholder may fill out the **6-question survey linked here**. Your input will help set new funding priorities for 2026.

The deadline to complete the survey is **Monday, December 1, 2025 by 5pm MST**.



Join the Colorado Grain Chain

Consumers and businesses are encouraged to join the Colorado Grain Chain (CGC). Heritage and heirloom grains are a great way to diversify, build soil, and add value to Colorado's agricultural abundance. Through the Colorado Grown Grains

Co-Brand strategy, the Colorado Grain Chain supports producers and makers with co-branded marketing materials, grain chain business access, and networking opportunities.

For more information, contact Audrey Paugh at connect@coloradograinchain.com or apply to become a member [here](#).



Connect with the Northwest and Rocky Mountain Regional Food Business Center

Although USDA terminated funding to the Northwest Rocky Mountain Regional Food Business Center, we are continuing to support our 131 Business Builder grant awardees in 6 states. Learn more about these grants [here](#).

Stay tuned for other Center updates here:

<https://nwrockymountainregionalfoodbusiness.com/>

as we adapt our programming and outreach to this new environment through continued collaborations with Center partners.



ABOUT FOOD SYSTEMS

at Colorado State University

Food systems are the connections between natural resources, the agricultural and food industries, and the buyers, consumers, and communities to which they contribute. Research, extension and education identify and inform opportunities to bridge how production, supply chains, and eaters respond to changing markets, policy, and the environment. At CSU, we focus on these key areas to train, influence, and communicate ways to connect food-related roles and foster healthy communities, economies, and individuals.





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