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CSU Food Systems Spotlight



Karla Melgar Velis

Small Acreage Management Specialist, Front Range

Karla has worked as the small acreage specialist since 2023, focusing on providing private landowners the tools and resources to become good stewards of their land by preserving their natural resources and implementing conservation practices. Karla is passionate about meeting landowners where they are and helping them create management plans for their properties. She is also passionate about local food systems and

helping beginning farmers and ranchers get started. Karla has experience in nutrient management and utilizing animal waste as a means to supply nutrients to the soil and prevent water pollution.



Mark Your Calendar



2025 Colorado Regional Food Convenings

The goal of the Colorado Food Summit is to bring together diverse food system stakeholders in order to find opportunities to leverage food policy in support of a shared food vision for Colorado. In

order to raise awareness of and lift regional voices in statewide food and agricultural visioning processes, we are holding regional gatherings across Colorado throughout 2025. Themes emanating from these conversations will be used to guide the content of the statewide Colorado Food Summit, which will be held in December 2025. Find the most up to date information [here](#). Scheduled convenings include:

- March 3rd, **Western Region, Montrose, CO**
- March 5th, **Western Region, Craig, CO**
- March 7th, **Mountain Region, Salida, CO**
- March 11th, **Eastern Region, Sterling, CO**
- March 14th, **Southern Region, Pueblo, CO**

10th Annual AgriSummit Conference

Guidestone is hosting the 10th annual AgriSummit Conference. This year's theme is *Nurturing Connections, Nourishing the Future*. The event will offer



educational sessions, networking opportunities, and discussions focused on local food production, food access, and agritourism in Colorado. All Friday sessions will include simultaneous interpretation in Spanish.

The event takes place from **March 6th-March 7th** in Salida, CO. Scholarships are available to cover any travel, childcare, or personal costs, as well as to support beginning, young, and aspiring producers.

Learn more, apply for a scholarship, and register here.

In addition to hosting this event, Guidestone is partnering with the NWRM Regional Food Business Center and the Colorado Grain Chain for the CO Grain Summit (listed below) in Salida on March 8th. Registering for both events discounts each event by \$10.

The Colorado Grain Summit

The Colorado Grain Chain and NWRM Regional Food Business Center invite those who grow, produce, handle, and buy grain products to the Colorado Grain Summit. This conference features networking sessions, expert panels, and keynote speeches, aiming to inspire businesses using local grains to envision pathways for sustainable growth and increased market impact. The summit will take place on **March 8th** from 8am-5:30pm at the SteamPlant Event Center in Salida, CO.



Learn more, buy tickets, or apply for a scholarship here.

If you represent an organization that provides resources and information that support grain stakeholder attendees and would like to have a resource table, reach out to audrey@coloradograinchain.com for more information.

Colorado Farmers Market Association Annual Conference

The Colorado Farmers Market Association (CFMA) is hosting their Annual Conference from **March 7th-9th** in Trinidad. The conference includes informational sessions, farm tours, local food and drinks, and the opportunities to connect with the farmers market community.



All events will be in-person, but purchasing access to program recordings will be possible after the event.

CFMA members receive a 20% discount on tickets. Conference tickets are on a sliding scale and limited scholarships are available. Early bird tickets are available until February 18th, with tickets ranging from \$90 to \$175.

Register on [Eventbrite](#).

Colorado Agritourism Association Agritourism as a Springboard for your Business



Join the Colorado Agritourism Association virtually on **March 13th from 9:00am-11:30am**. Anyone interested in agritourism is invited to attend.

Agenda:

- Agritourism Trends in the U.S. - Lisa Chase, University of Vermont/NET
- Income Generation for Farms and Ranches- Panel discussion
- Tools of the Trade
- Community Partnerships and Agritourism - Panel discussion

[Register here for the meeting.](#)



Sun Soil Water Summit 2025

The Sun Soil Water Summit is a weekend-long gathering focused on bringing the community closer to the food system. There will be a variety of events to celebrate local leaders, educate peers, and uplift local entrepreneurs.

The community events are a fundraiser for the Pueblo Food Project. Scholarships are available for the main events only. Dual translation will be offered for all events except fly fishing. [Get your tickets here!](#)

Main Events

- Pueblo Food Systems Leadership Awards & Gala | March 14th, 6-8pm
- Sun Soil Water Summit | March 15th, 8am-4:30pm
- Makers' Market and Happy Hour | March 15th, 4:30-7pm

Additional Events

- Brewery Walk | March 14th, 8:30-10pm
- Fly Fishing on the Arkansas | March 14th, TBD
- Bird Crawl | March 15th, 7:30-8:30am
- Gagliano's Sausage Making | March 16th, TBD

[See the full weekend agenda here.](#)

USDA AMS Local and Regional Foods Resources and Research Webinar Series



A monthly webinar series highlighting local and regional foods research projects, resources, partnerships, and programs.

Upcoming Webinar: March 20, 2025, 11am

[Click here to register for the series.](#)

Past Webinars:

- Visualizing Food Systems Data
- The Promise of Urban Agriculture: Courses for Growers and Planners
- Key Findings from the Consumer Food Insights Series
- The Local and Regional Food Systems Resilience Playbook

[Click here for past webinar recordings.](#)



Food Safety Training for Colorado Cottage Foods Producers

Learn how to safely produce food from home as a cottage food business. This online 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 \$50; times are all in Mountain Standard or Daylight time. Click each date below to register and learn more about the program. For additional dates, [check here](#).

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

- March 5th, 1:00pm - 4:30pm, online, [register](#).
- March 14th, 12:00pm-3:30pm, online, [register](#).
- March 21st, 9:00am-12:30pm, online, [register](#).
- April 2nd, 1:00pm-4:30pm, online, [register](#).



Tools to Enhance Your Business Management Webinar Series

Join the Center for Farm Financial Management (CFFM) team at the University of Minnesota for a weekly webinar series aimed at enhancing business management skills. Throughout the series, the CFFM team will guide participants through the process of creating a business plan, providing tools they have developed to advance farm operations.

Upcoming topics:

- March 6th: Business Planning - Financials
- March 13th: Business Planning - Wrap Up
- March 20th: How much does it cost to grow? (Part I)
- March 27th: How much does it cost to grow? (Part II)
- *April 3rd: No Webinar*
- April 10th: Where should I market my products?
- April 17th: How much did that market make?
- April 24th: FSA Programs, Farm Answers, and USDA Beginning Farmer Programs
- May 1st: Putting it all together

The webinar takes place every Thursday at 1pm MT.

Register for the webinar here.



COLORADO STATE UNIVERSITY
EXTENSION

Cottage Foods Business Training: Passion Into Profits

Join CSU Extension for a training to successfully build a cottage foods business and turn your culinary passion into profit! CSU Extension is offering a short course with tools to ensure success for cottage food producers. The training provides easy-to-use resources for ensuring producers account for their costs of production and product-market-fit.

- March 4th, 11:00am - 2:00pm, in person Norwood, **register**
- March 11th, 10:00am - 12:00pm, online, **register.**

Farm to Loading Dock Webinar

On **May 16th, 2025 from 12:00 - 1:15 pm MT** please join us for an informative webinar about a research project that explored the partnerships, training, and resources needed to move food from Colorado's agricultural producers to wholesale institutional markets.

This research, which culminated in the **Farm to Loading Dock Landscape Assessment**, has been referenced in federal and state grant opportunities, informed statewide data collection strategies, and coalesced support for statewide coordination around training and technical assistance, among other applications. This webinar will cover the why, the how, and the process of completing this research, as well as how it is being utilized within Colorado and



how it could inform strategies in other states working to make farm-to-institution the easy choice. The discussion will also focus on various policy solutions currently being implemented or considered to address pain points, increase resource allocation, and strengthen and sustain Colorado's local food economy. Please [register here](#) and we look forward to taking action together!

Farm Resilience Online Course



Please consider joining this asynchronous, self-paced course now open for enrollment!

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-stay tuned for future opportunities!



Technical Assistance Funding to Land-Grant Universities

In 27 U.S. cities designated as urban priority locations, the USDA is funding the hiring of Urban Agriculture Extension Educators through land-grant universities' cooperative extension programs. These educators will provide technical assistance and connect producers to NRCS conservation planning and program opportunities. More details are available on the [USDA webpage](#).



News, Resources & Reading

Values-Based, Equity Centered Farm to Food Assistance Report



Wallace Center
AT WINROCK INTERNATIONAL

The Wallace Center's Food Leadership Network has announced 4 years of research, peer learning, and field building in the report "**Farm to Food Assistance: A Model for Values-Based, Equity-Centered Approaches to Transforming the Food System**". This report makes the case for how farms can transform food systems through food assistance programs. The Food Leadership Network highlights the most pressing challenges and offers recommendations for people looking to advance Farm to Food Assistance efforts across the country.



Announcing the Launch of Native Grown + Gathered

Native Grown + Gathered is an online platform supporting indigenous food sovereignty across the Northwest and Rocky Mountain regions. This platform brings together Native food producers, traditional food gatherers, and those committed to revitalizing traditional indigenous foodways to strengthen communities.

Through Native Grown + Gathered, you can explore

- A directory of Native-owned food businesses and producers
- Information on the upcoming Native Foods Expo
- Funding opportunities and educational resources to support Indigenous-led food systems

Visit the Native Grown + Gathered platform [here!](#)

Subscribe to *Rooted* Digital Magazine

Subscribe to *Rooted in Agroecology and Food Sovereignty*, a new international magazine featuring frontline experiences and perspectives from farmer leaders, indigenous people, researchers, and advocates. *Rooted* highlights transformative ideas and actions related to agroecology and food sovereignty and lifts the voices, perspectives, and knowledge of those at the forefront of action to transform food systems.

Rooted
in Agroecology and
Food Sovereignty

Read the first issue on Policymaking for Agroecology [here](#). In this issue, authors from Brazil, Kenya, the Indian Himalayas, and Switzerland share lessons learned and perspectives from movement leaders.

[Subscribe to the magazine here.](#)



Colorado Organic Grains Microgrant Awardees Announced

This past year, the Colorado Grain Chain distributed six \$5,000 grants to awardees of the Colorado Organic Grains Microgrant Program. The awardees are businesses in the middle phase of the organic grain supply chain. This round of grants is the first of a three-year Microgrant program. Each recipient shared innovative concepts that help make organic grain usage reach a larger audience and underscore the importance of organic grains in the food system.

[Learn more about each project and stay tuned for updates 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 winter-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.](#)

Manager Fellowship Available for Mid-Career Agrarians

The New Agrarian Program has launched its first-ever **Manager Fellowship**, a year-long training program to develop business, finance, and leadership skills in aspiring ranch managers and entrepreneurs. While the program was initially designed with our apprenticeship alumni in mind, we are excited to now offer limited spots to additional mid-career agrarians who are interested in joining us!



The Manager Fellowship began with a kick-off event on **November 21-24** at Paicines Ranch in California, and continues virtually as fellows attend Zoom workshops, chat with experienced mentor-coaches, and participate in cohort discussions. Ideal candidates have at least two years of production experience in agriculture, a serious drive for either entrepreneurship or higher-level ranch management, and a commitment to the program for the upcoming year.

Applications are currently open and are accepted on a rolling basis, so we encourage you to apply soon! Feel free to contact us with any questions at newagrarian@quiviracoalition.org.



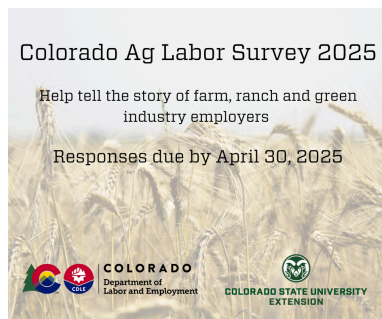
Promise of Urban Agriculture Courses Now Available

USDA AMS, in partnership with the Cornell Small Farms Program and Rooted, is offering the Promise of Urban Agriculture courses. The courses represent an innovative and holistic approach to support urban farming businesses and communities.

This project is informed by **The Promise of Urban Agriculture**, a 2019 national study of commercial farming in urban areas conducted by AMS and the **Cornell Small Farms Program**. With information from this study, the project team created The Promise of Urban Agriculture courses designed to educate both growers and planners on urban agriculture and the impact of city plans and policies.

The Promise of Urban Agriculture courses are available online. Click [here](#) to access the courses.

From Our Communities



2025 Colorado Ag Labor Survey

Do you employ workers for your Colorado farm, ranch, or green industry business? If so, you know the challenges of recruiting and retaining employees. Solutions to Colorado Ag and green industry workforce challenges depend on an accurate data-based understanding of the situation.

Please complete the Ag Labor Survey survey by **April 30, 2025**. Plan for 10 minutes if you are a vegetable producer, and 5 minutes if you are not.

[Take the survey here.](#)



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](#).

Black, Hispanic, and Tribal Producer Wholesale Marketing and Technical Assistance Survey

Farmers and ranchers who identify as Black, Hispanic, or Tribal and sell wholesale, either now or in the past, or plan to access wholesale markets, are encouraged to take this online survey. This project aims to understand the specific technical assistance needs of Black, Hispanic, and Tribal producers when accessing and scaling into wholesale markets. Responses from the survey will support identifying best practices, challenges, gaps, and associated issues to inform technical assistance providers, programs, policies, and institutions.

The survey should take approximately 10 minutes to complete: [click here to take the survey](#).

If you are an individual, organization, or institution providing technical assistance to Black, Hispanic, and Tribal producers, and are willing to participate in an interview, contact pratyoosh@vt.edu or washton@iit.edu. Please contact the project team with any questions or comments.



Check Out a Podcast by the North American Food Systems Network!

Check out the "Finding Your Future in Food Systems" Podcast Hosted by Vivian Le of the North American Food Systems Network! Episodes feature guest speakers who have carved out their own unique niche in the local food systems space. You can [click here](#) to listen to episodes.

New Consumer Food Insights Series Available

A new series of **Consumer Food Insights is now available**. The survey, conducted in Winter 2023, captured current food shopping trends as well as changes in U.S. consumer food behaviors since the COVID-19 pandemic began. Click [here](#) to access the new series, and in November, they will start posting regional data on market usage.



**Post COVID-19 Food Spending and Channels:
A Look at Trends and Consumers'
Changed Behaviors**



Connect with the Northwest and Rocky Mountain USDA Regional Food Business Center

The Northwest and Rocky Mountain USDA Regional Food Business Center (RFBC) is one of 12 Regional Food Business Centers funded by USDA, with the goal of improving local and regional food systems and better serving underinvested farm and food businesses. The Northwest and Rocky Mountain RFBC serves Colorado, Wyoming, Montana, Idaho, Oregon and Washington.

- Read our latest newsletter [here](#).
- Learn about open funding opportunities through our [Biz Builder grant programs](#).
- Find an event to launch or expand your business on our [calendar](#).

Learn more about the Center's educational and technical support programs for small- and mid-sized food and farm businesses, and sign up for updates here: <https://nwrockymountainregionalfoodbusiness.com/>.



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.



Stay Connected

Find us on social media, get farm or food systems related questions answered via email, forward to a friend, or submit your contributions to our newsletter!



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