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## Team Spotlight



**Dr. [Ray Miller](#)**  
**Assistant Professor, Department of Economics**

Ray joined CSU in 2018 after completing his postdoctoral work as a Research Associate at the Harvard Center for Population and Development Studies. He is currently a Research Associate in the Regional Economic Development Institute and in the Columbine Health Systems Center for Healthy Aging. He is also a Co-PI for CSU's Economic Development Administration University Center. Ray's research applies frontier data methods to address pressing public policy issues. His areas of focus include health and education policy, social insurance, rural-urban dynamics, population aging, and the inequality of health and economic well-being among older populations.



**[Jeff Engell](#)**  
**Extension Western Regional Specialist- Vibrant Communities**

Jeff joined CSU Extension in June 2023 as a Western Region Specialist, focused on economic and community development across 16 counties of Western Colorado. He brings to his role a diverse background in private sector consultancy and public sector engagement.

Following undergrad at CSU and a brief period in private banking, Jeff moved overseas to complete a master's in economics at Lund University in Sweden. Wishing to stay abroad following graduation, he went on to China to teach

economics and finance in Beijing. After four years in the classroom, Jeff started his own consultancy and relocated to Turkey, engaging domestic and foreign partners in building entrepreneurial capacity throughout the country and region. These efforts led to further opportunity to work on long-term multilateral development projects in North and East Africa, Eastern Europe and the Middle East.

Eventually moving back to his home state of Colorado at the start of the pandemic, Jeff joined the Colorado Small Business Development Center (SBDC) network, first as a consultant in Eastern Colorado and more recently as the director of a center in Western Colorado.

## Mark Your Calendar

### **2024 Colorado Brownfields Communities Grantwriting Workshop**

**8:30 AM - 5 PM MDT, May 2, 2024**

CSU REDI is partnering with Downtown Colorado and Kansas State University to present a workshop on our new and evolving partnership to provide Technical Assistance to Brownfields in Colorado with support from KSU's Center.

Join us in Denver for the conference (attendance from a larger, multi-state region, hosted this year in Colorado).

[More information and registration.](#)

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### **2024 Economic Development Week**

**May 6 - 10, 2024**

Join EDCC & DCI along with our state and federal program partners, OEDIT, DOLA, CWDC, Manufacturer's Edge, USDA & EDA, as we celebrate Colorado's #EconDev ecosystem!

Organizers are hosting three virtual webinars:

- **Webinar I:** The how-to create your Economic Development Week Celebration | Time: TBA
- **Webinar II:** Telling Your Community's Story - Tuesday, May 7, 2024 | 10 - 11 a.m.
- **Webinar III:** Making the Pitch - Thursday, May 9, 2024 | 10 - 11 a.m.

We encourage you and your community to share accomplishments, network, and learn how to champion vitality in Colorado. Participate by:

- Joining our daily social media conversations
  - Tagging EDCC and DCI in your posts about Economic Development Week
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### **Economic Summit**

**May 23, 8:00 AM - 3:00 PM, 2024**

**Colorado Mountain College; 1275 Crawford Ave, Steamboat Springs**

Join the economic development community for the 30th annual Routt County Economic Summit, a pivotal event bringing together students, community members, businesses, and elected officials to gain crucial insights into our regional and national economy. This landmark occasion provides a platform to understand the factors

influencing our financial positions and quality of life, while also exploring untapped opportunities for economic growth and community enrichment.

Colorado Mountain College; 1275 Crawford Ave, Steamboat Springs, CO 80487

[More information and registration](#)

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## National Association of Community Development Extension Professionals (NACDEP) Conference

**June 17 - June 20, Houston, Texas**

Learn from colleagues at this year's NACDEP conference. There may be resources to help you attend. Contact [Dawn.Thilmany@colostate.edu](mailto:Dawn.Thilmany@colostate.edu) if you are interested in attending.

Subject areas of Community Development include:

- Economic development
- Diversity and inclusion
- Human capacity building
- Community resilience and sustainability
- Infrastructure
- Natural environment
- Building capacity within government and organizations

[More information](#)

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## [2025 Southern Rocky Mountain Agriculture Conference](#)

**Save the date: February 4 - 6, 2025 in Monte Vista**

Organizers of the Southern Rocky Mountain Agriculture Conference (SRMAC) partnered with CSU REDI to assess the economic impacts of this important event on Monte Vista as well as the larger region. In the future we will share the economic impact analysis and white paper on CSU REDI's website (if you are curious about what we found) including feedback from several community presentations.

## Funding, Program and Educational Opportunities

### National Agritourism Survey: Share with Producers in your Region

CSU is happy to continue our partnership in support of the [National Agritourism Network](#). The 2024 National Agritourism Survey is now collecting responses. From all agricultural operations that welcome visitors—whether for on-farm direct sales, educational programs,

By participating in this [survey](#), you'll help us pinpoint the types of support farmers like you require—whether it's getting business assistance, developing networks, applying for grants, or navigating zoning and liability issues.

If you have questions about this survey, please contact [Claudia Schmidt](#), Penn State Extension Specialist.

Thank you for your time spent distributing and/or [taking this survey](#).

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### Rural Energy for America Program (REAP) Funding Available

USDA Rural Development has grant funding available to help agricultural producers with renewable energy or energy efficiency improvements through our Rural Energy for America Program.

Grant funds for up to 50% of the total project costs are currently available for installation of renewable energy systems and energy efficiency improvements for agricultural producers and rural small businesses.

Applications for [Rural Energy for America](#) are accepted anytime, with quarterly funding competition deadlines through September 30, 2024.

Upcoming deadlines are:

- June 30, 2024
- September 30, 2024

Agricultural producers with at least 50% of their gross income coming from agricultural operations can apply for REAP; they can be located in rural or nonrural areas. Small businesses that are located in an eligible rural area are also eligible to apply.

REAP Renewable Energy System (RES) funds can be used for systems such as:

- Small and large solar or wind generation
- Geothermal for electric generation or direct use
- Hydropower below 30 megawatts
- Biomass (for example: biodiesel and ethanol, anaerobic digesters, and solid fuels)

REAP Energy Efficiency Improvement (EEI) funds can be used to buy, build, and install EEI such as:

- Electric, solar, or gravity pumps for sprinkler pivots
- Switching from a diesel to an electric irrigation motor
- Lighting, insulation, doors, windows, cooling or refrigeration units
- High-efficiency heating, ventilation, and air conditioning systems (HVAC)

In Colorado, send applications, inquiries and other requests to [SM.CO.REAP@usda.gov](mailto:SM.CO.REAP@usda.gov)

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## 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.

For more information on this program in Colorado visit [here](#).

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## Master of Public Policy and Administration Program

International organizations, government agencies, and nonprofits are actively seeking skilled professionals to lead teams and develop policies that improve people's lives. The [Master of Public Policy and Administration \(MPPA\)](#) prepares students for public sector or nonprofit leadership through an interdisciplinary curriculum that integrates research-based academic theory with real-world experience.

With professionally focused students in mind, the MPPA program offers classes on weekday evenings or [online](#). Students currently working in the field can maintain their career momentum while engaging with a diverse student cohort and MPPA faculty, leading researchers and educators who bring their firsthand public service experience to each class. Faculty will lead in-depth discussions, facilitate hands-on learning experiences, and connect students with the world class city of Fort Collins, recipient of the prestigious Malcolm Baldrige National Quality Award.

Graduates of the MPPA program will be ready to work as executives, managers, analysts, and planners in a wide range of public sector agencies and nonprofit organizations.

## Recent News - March 2024

### Americans have \$1.3T in credit card debt; Inflation-adjusted record 'in striking distance'

#### Things to note:

- As of March 8th, consumer debt on credit cards have grown to new heights, the highest it's ever been.
- Personal savings are also down to a low of only 3.8%
- CSU economist [Stephan Weiler](#) stated that the rising level of revolving credit debt and high spending, shows confidence among consumers.

[Click here](#) to read more.

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### Confident consumers piling up debt, burning through savings

#### Things to note:

- The University of Michigan's [consumer sentiment index](#) has shot up 19% year over year.
- Americans "continue to feel more assured about the economy."
- The personal saving rate, currently under 4% has [Stephan Weiler](#) worried.
- Weiler noted that the savings rate dipped under 3% as people felt bullish about their finances right before the Great Recession in 2007.

[Click here](#) to read more.

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### Within steady inflation report, are there signs of hope for consumers?

#### Things to note:

- President Biden stated, [in a tweet](#), that "Inflation is down two-thirds from its peak and annual core inflation is near a three-year low."
- NAR Chief Economist [Lawrence Yun](#) mentioned that the national average for gasoline could even fall below three dollars per gallon for the first time in several years.
- [Stephan Weiler](#) said core inflation is "behaving itself reasonably well," and the housing increase "wasn't as bad as I think predicted."

[Click here](#) to read more.

## Regional Economic Development Institute (REDI@CSU) Reports

### March 2024

### Legalized Marijuana's Impact on Denver Housing Prices

[Jorgen Rasmussen](#), [Stephan Weiler](#)

#### Key Findings

- As the first state to adopt legal recreational marijuana, Colorado has served as the proverbial canary in the coal mine for this process.
- From January 2014 through February 2020, approximately \$2.1 billion dollars of recreational marijuana revenue was taken in by dispensaries in Denver County.
- We estimate that approximately 2% of the observed growth in the mean value of Denver County single-family homes in the above period is associated with legalized recreational marijuana revenue generated in that time.

[Download PDF Report](#) to read more.

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## February 2024

### Summary of Public Returns to the Colorado Conservation Easement Tax Credit Program

[Amy Greenwell](#), [Andrew Seidel](#), [Cole Crossett](#), [Drew Bennett](#), [Michael Menefee](#)

#### Key Findings

- Colorado has invested substantially in voluntary adoption of conservation easements. One of the state's principal efforts, the Conservation Easement Tax Credit program, includes about 2.3 million acres (3.4%) of Colorado's lands.
- More than one third of private lands enrolled in the program are grasslands, with more than one-quarter in shrub or scrub land, about 14% in evergreen forest and 9% in deciduous forest ecosystems. In addition, the tax credit program has enrolled 17% of the state's wetlands and 9% of it is used for haying ground.
- We estimate total cumulative public benefits of conservation easement credits to Colorado taxpayers is between \$35 and \$57 billion, translating to \$31 and \$49 of public benefit associated with every dollar invested in the CE tax credit program. If this value were captured in market transactions it would represent about 9-15% of state GDP.

[Download PDF Report](#) to read more.

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## January 2024

### Coloradans' Views on Farm Labor: A Closer Look at the 2022 Public Perceptions and Attitudes about Colorado Agriculture Survey

[Anita Alves Pena](#), [Dawn Thilmany](#), [Jonathan Cable](#), [Martha Sullins](#)

#### Key Findings

- Approximately 98% of Coloradans surveyed agreed that Colorado's food and ag industry is important to the state's future economic development.
- Over 75% feel that it is very or somewhat important that farm/ranch labor is treated fairly in terms of pay and working conditions when making food purchasing decisions.
- Over 50% of Coloradans agree or strongly agree that Colorado farmers and ranchers are responsible in their care for workers.

[Download PDF Report](#) to read more.

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## Colorado Futures Center Reports

### ColoradoCast: Economic Forecast Q1 2024

Our Partners at the Colorado Futures Center have released their Statewide Economic Forecast

#### Key Finding:

- This ColoradoCast shows the economy slightly gaining momentum and sustaining growth of two percent annual rate in the first half of 2024.

[Download the PDF Report](#) to read more.

## Across Our Communities

### Coming Summer 2024: CSU Extension Interns

CSU and the Office of the Provost continues its support of the [Extension Summer Internship Program](#). Look for these projects around the state in summer 2024 and reach out to REDI if you want to learn more.

#### **Contribution Analysis of Pathfinder Event Center on the Local Economy**

Henry Williams is a doctoral student in economics in the College of Liberal Arts. The goal is to quantify the contribution of Pathfinder Activity Centers to the local economy. The scope will include collecting various data points to assess operating costs and revenue generated. Using impact analysis procedures, Henry will evaluate the direct, indirect, and induced contributions to the local economy from the presence of the Pathfinder Activity Center.

#### **Economic Contribution Analysis of Colorado Search and Rescue (CSAR)**

Sarah Stoddard-Cameron is majoring in Environmental Resource Economics, hoping to pursue a career in public policy. Topics of interest include the ongoing transition from current energy resources to renewable energy sources and land use and optimization. Over the past year, she has served the state of Colorado through the Governor's Office, working on a variety of initiatives and efforts, including accompanying the Governor on a statewide listening tour.

#### **Economic Contribution Analysis of the Ute Theater in Rifle, CO**

Prasiddha Shakya is a PhD student in the Department of Economics. During his time at CSU, he coordinated the management of complex projects with CSU colleagues and external partners, including the U.S. Department of Agriculture. As he nears graduation, he is excited to be a part of this program to gain field experience and learn more about the unique challenges faced by Western Colorado and our state's rural communities.

#### **REDI@CSU Economic Research in the Mountain Region**

Joshua Dickhausen is a senior economics student studying the correlation between short-term rentals and neighborhood supply, as well as housing and rental prices in mountain resort areas. The findings will shed light on the constraints that short-term rentals in resort areas can place on affordable housing.

#### **Strengthening Emergency Management and Fostering Community Resilience in Yuma County**

Lexi Potter, a master's student in public health, will support program planning and execution for the Yuma County Office of Emergency Management, with a focus on assisting the Yuma community in developing viable emergency plans.

#### **Economic and Community Contribution Analysis of the Forest Product Industry in Colorado**

Nara Chung, a PhD student in the Department of Economics, will work with identified forest product companies in Colorado that have received public funding through state or federal programs to compile both qualitative and quantitative information on the economic and ecological contributions these companies provide to the communities in which they operate.

## 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.

[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.

- Link to the March [newsletter](#)
- [News and events](#) from across the region
- New [grant programs](#)

## Learn about the Family Leadership Training Institute

***Promoting Leadership Development, Increased Civic Capacity and Equity in All Policies***

The [Family Leadership Training Institute of Colorado](#) (FLTI) is a nonpartisan, multi-sector, and community-driven collaborative that seeks to bridge the gap between local residents and decision-makers in order to foster the co-creation of programs and policies that reflect diverse community voices.

**Key Outcomes for 2023: [Final Impact Report](#) released for the programs related to the Colorado Engaged Communities Initiative**



**Family Leadership Training Institute (FLTI):** 9 cohorts in 7 communities | 78 graduates

Our signature leadership development and civic engagement training consists of approximately 120 hours of class and individual project time and is designed to increase civic participation and promote greater collaboration between individuals, families, institutions, public administrators, and elected officials as they seek strategies to respond to emerging social, health, and economic issues in their communities. In September, our 3-day intensive training yielded 32 new FLTI-certified facilitators throughout the state.

**Civic Learning Labs:** 4 cohorts in 3 communities, 1 statewide | 76 graduates

Our experimental, short term leadership development and civic engagement trainings that are co-created with

community organizations provide accessible learning opportunities for emerging leaders and are designed to be responsive to a given community's unique needs. Civic Learning Labs typically range from 6-12 sessions that are 2-3 hours each.

**Rural Action Project (RAP):** 10 Rural Communities | 9 Community-Driven Projects

In partnership with CSU's [Center for Public Deliberation](#), OEE collaborated with 10 rural communities to pilot the RAP initiative in 2023. RAP is a 3-part community conversation series that culminates in a collaborative project selected and implemented by participating community members.

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## Community & Economic Development

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Mission: To empower people to build resilient, vibrant, and healthy communities and economies by enhancing their well-being, leadership, civic engagement, and economic development.

We do this by:

1. Creating resilient communities and economies
2. Developing leadership and civic engagement
3. Promoting community health and wellbeing

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