# Quarterly Food Systems Updates from Colorado State Agencies

## Q1 (Jan-Mar) 2025

As part of the quarterly meetings of the Colorado Food Systems Advisory Council (COFSAC), our members representing state agencies provide updates on new and ongoing policies and programs related to food systems. These high-level briefings are one of the ways our council's efforts support cross-sector collaboration and coordination, and timely communication across our Colorado food system initiatives.

# Colorado Department of Agriculture (CDA)

## Next Generation Ag Leadership Program

Next Generation Ag Leadership Program Applications will be open in the Spring 2025, the program provides grants to agricultural organizations and educational institutions that support developmental and training opportunities for the next generation of agriculturalists.

## Ag Workforce Development Program

More than 60 businesses have been awarded funding for 2025 internships. Interested interns will apply directly to businesses. Click here for more information.

## Community Food Access

Community Food Access Tax credit programs are on hold till March 2025 for the rule change process. Two tax credits available: Costly equipment for small food retailers and CO owned farms/ranches that serve low income, low access communities with access to healthy food. Second tax credit related to Consortium members for pallet break/delivery/related fees to access healthy foods in low income, low access communities. Three food hubs are working to support the Consortium with increased access and reduced fees (East Denver, Valley Roots, Farm Runners).

## Specialty Crop Block Grant Program

The Specialty Crop Block Grant Program is accepting 2025 Concept Proposals through February 17, 2025. Projects limited to defined crops: fruits, vegetables, tree nuts, horticulture and nursery crops. An informational webinar was held January 23, 2025, with a recording available online.

## Resilient Food System Infrastructure

Colorado made recommendations to USDA fall 2024. We are still awaiting notice of acceptance from USDA AMS. These grants are focused on non-meat and value-added processing. Click here for more information.

## CO Proud & Publications

CO Proud Find Colorado products, events, recipes and more. Cultivation Station features business development and related topics via podcast.

## CDA Strategic Initiatives

CDA now has a public resource to learn more about the agencies strategic plan and tracking of related work.

## CDA Rural Mental Health Toolkit and Resources

New and updated resources including Spanish resources. Click here for more information.

## Agricultural Stewardship Tax Credit

This tax credit is focused on encouraging practices on farm/ranch that include: increases soil health; improves water efficiency; creates a more diverse or beneficial ecosystem while maintaining productivity. Currently CDA is conducting outreach and seeking input on program design. The credit is scheduled to take effect in 2026.

## Cage Free Eggs

Requirements began Jan 1, 2025.

## Colorado Department of Education (CDE)

### Local Food Program

The Local Food Program Pilot has been extended to 24/25 school year with Nourish Colorado providing the technical assistance. 65% of funds have been utilized and sponsors are still tracking. Find the 23/24 Legislative Report here.

### Roadmapping Project

CDE is engaging in a farm to school road mapping project. CDE is conducting a series of regional events and listening sessions to gather stakeholder input on farm to school opportunities and challenges within Colorado. We will be holding solution-based sessions in February and March.

### Patrick Leahy FTS Grants

CDE SNU applied for the Patrick Leahy FTS SA Grant to create a yearlong Farm to School Institute that will provide a cohort of 5 districts coaching and education to complete action plans to implement farm to school activities in their schools and communities.

### Local Food For Schools and Child Care

LFSCC-The USDA, Agricultural Marketing Service, has awarded funds to states for the purchase of local, unprocessed or minimally processed domestic foods for distribution to schools and childcare institutions participating in the Child and Adult Care Food Program (CACFP). The funds expand local and regional markets and emphasize purchasing from underserved producers and processors.

These funds provide an opportunity for state governments to strengthen their local and regional food systems, establish and broaden partnerships with schools, childcare institutions, and local networks to ensure distribution and use of fresh and nutritious foods in meal programs.

$5,921,730 for CDE-planning for district usage of funds in 25/26 and 26/27 school years, anticipate educational opportunities in March and April and an opt-in process in May 2025. The funds can only be used in the School Breakfast Program and National School Lunch Program.

$1,748,064 to CDPHE for early childcare-year one planning, year two and three implementation.

## USDA Equipment Grants

In this competitive grant process CDE awarded $129,026 to 9 sponsors for the purchase of a piece of equipment. These USDA funds support the quality of meals, including implementation of updated nutrition requirements for school meals.

## HSMA

The Technical Advisory Group legislative report was released in December. Another legislative report, focused on program implementation in SY2023-24, is forthcoming.

HSMA was a topic at the Joint Budget Committee meetings in December, and will be discussed further in the legislative session. View a summary of the program, and JBC staff recommendations, on pages 37-46 of the JBC Budget Briefing. For questions on HSMA, contact Jenny Herman at herman_j@cde.state.co.us

## S-EBT

Sponsor will complete mandatory data collection in Data Pipeline between Monday, Feb. 3 to Friday, Feb. 28.

Families should fill out a household income form for the most up to date eligibility status and have their current parent/guardian and address on file. The S-EBT outreach toolkit includes flyers and social media posts to communicate with families.

Please direct families with questions to the CDHS S-EBT webpage and the CDHS support center at 800-536-5298. For more information, visit the Summer EBT webpage and the S-EBT Data Collection webpage. For questions, contact Madeleine Breza at s-ebt@cde.state.co.us

## Colorado Department of Human Services (CDHS)

### Community Food Assistance Provider Grant Program

HB 24-1407 created the Community Food Assistance Provider Grant Program. The bill appropriated $3 million in FY 2024-25 to the Department to provide grants to food pantries and food banks to serve households seeking food resources. The Department has executed a contract with Trailhead/Blueprint to administer the program. The appropriation was divided among food banks and food pantries who applied to Blueprint for grant funds. The vendor issued funds to grantees in October. The Department will report annually through the SMART Act process.

### Summer EBT

The program provides resources to students to purchase food in the summer months, when school is not in session. It is jointly managed between the Colorado Departments of Education and Human Services. The inaugural round of Summer EBT benefits were issued to Colorado students in the summer of 2024. The majority of benefits were issued in July. In future years, benefits should be released at the beginning of students' summer breaks. The SEBT issuance period ended in January 2025 and we are in the grant closeout period and preparing for the Summer 2025 issuance. That issuance will begin in May 2025 to coincide with the end of the school year.

### SNAP Energy EBT

SNAP Energy EBT (previously known as "Heat & Eat") is set to launch in March 2025. The new program will provide one-time (annual) $21 cash assistance for energy costs to SNAP households that have not already received LEAP in the past 12 months. SNAP households that receive Energy EBT will be assigned the highest standard utility allowance in their SNAP budget, which may result in an increase to their monthly SNAP allotment. The benefits and program operation are supported through an energy bill surcharge received from Energy Outreach Colorado.

## eHIP (electronic- Healthy Food Incentive)

The program has officially been named the CO SNAP Produce Bonus program (also known as CSPB or Produce Bonus). It provides a dollar-for-dollar incentive that promotes the purchase and consumption of fresh fruits and vegetables among SNAP households, up to $60 per household per month. Qualifying purchases can be made at an array of participating pilot retailers and farmers markets. The program officially launched in July 2024. 25 merchants participated in the program through two pilot farmers markets (the Larimer County FM in Fort Collins and the Backyard Market locations in Colorado Springs), six independent farmers who sold at farm stands or non-pilot farmers markets, and four independent grocers. Most of the participating merchants closed for the season in October. The program is working to expand its footprint and secure new vendors for the 2025 season.

## SNAP

Program participation remains at an all-time high in Colorado and continues to increase. Colorado has had a nearly 7% increase in participation in FFY24. This can be attributed to a number of reasons including, but not limited to, housing costs, increase in utility rates, and inflation reflected in the all-food consumer price index, and relatively stagnant wages in Colorado, coupled with targeted and effective efforts to increase access of SNAP benefits to more households that qualify. Statewide timeliness has dramatically improved over the last year, reaching 90% timeliness in October and holding steady in November and December 2024. State and county staff are working collaboratively to continue to close the gap and issue all benefits timely.

# Colorado Department of Public Health and Environment (CDPHE)

## Colorado Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants, and Children (COWIC)

The WIC Farmers Market Nutrition Program (FMNP) closed out the FY24/25 season. In total, 15,824 WIC participants received $30 coupon booklets, and $131,195 in coupons were redeemed at 20 authorized markets. The Colorado WIC FMNP redemption rates for the duration of the program are:
FY22: 17%
FY23: 19%
FY24: 23%
FY25: 28%
As a reminder, CDPHE decided to pause participation in this program starting next year due to the high administrative burden, low ROI, and to focus on the expanded Cash-Value Voucher Benefit (CVB) which provides better opportunities to give WIC families access to fruits and vegetables.
Colorado WIC's (COWIC) quarterly snapshot for Winter 2025 is now available. Quarterly snapshots provide updates on recent data, the current state of COWIC, and key trends we are tracking, such as enrollment numbers and benefit redemptions.

## Child and Adult Care Food Program (CACFP)/Colorado Food Program (CFP)

The Child and Adult Care Food Program has a new name and look, now known as the Colorado Food Program! The program stays the same; only the name has changed. This change reflects the commitment to building trust and fostering engagement within the community by creating a name and identity that clearly communicates the mission.
New Locally Produced Foods Program for CACFP - On October 1, 2024, the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) announced an investment of $1.7 billion for the purchase of locally and regionally produced foods for child nutrition programs and domestically produced foods for emergency food assistance. For the first-time, $200M is earmarked for child care for local food purchases. This funding will be administered by the USDA's Agricultural Marketing Service through State agencies, likely similar to the administration of the 2022 $200 million Local Food for Schools program. CDPHE's CACFP is working closely with the Department of Education on an application that is due April 30, 2025. The state intends to explore creative program delivery models in the coming months in an effort to find a way to bring these funds to Colorado. More information will be forthcoming.

## Healthy Eating Active Living

CDPHE colleagues attended the 2024 Colorado Food is Medicine Summit in December and were represented on a panel for a session titled "State Policy for Food is Medicine and Health First Colorado Members (Medicaid). Other panelists included Colorado's Medicaid director, representation from a managed care health organization for Medicaid members, and Kaiser Permanente's director of Medicaid. Information was shared about the current food access programs currently taking place out of CDPHE (excluding WIC and CACFP) and about the ongoing conversations with the Department of Health Care Policy and Finance as they explore waivers related to health-related social needs (HRSN) including housing and nutrition supports for specific populations. Examples of nutrition supports could include medically tailored meals, pantry stocking, and/or fruit and vegetable incentive and produce prescription programs.

CDPHE held the first Farm to Child Collaborative meeting since staff transition in March. Thirty-one Collaborative members from state and federal agencies, local public health, community organizations, and ECE providers attended. Nourish Colorado, Food System Hackers, the Department of Education, CACFP, and CDEC shared organization updates related to advancing Farm to Child efforts since the Collaborative last met in March. USDA Mountain Plains Regional Office and National Farm to School Network staff joined to share information on the recently released USDA Local Food for Child Care funding announcement to include for the first time $200 million for child care facilities to purchase local food.

CDPHE, in partnership with the Department of Education, applied to the Vermont Food Education Every Day (FEED) Farm to School Institute Adaptation Program. The Adaptation Program supports teams in their efforts to adapt, develop, and launch a Farm to School Institute Program. Participation in this Adaptation Program complements CDE's Farm to School Grant activities. Notification of team selections will be made mid-February.

## Office of Economic Development and International Trade (OEDIT)

### OEDIT Hiring Soon

The Rural Opportunity Office will be hiring an Eastern Plains rural representative as well as a department director.

### Rural Business Development Grants

Applications are due Feb. 28th. You can also access the required documents and applications toolkit through Grants.gov . OEDIT rural staff is assisting USDA rural to promote and help with the Q&A portion.

### Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy

A state-wide CEDS (Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy process is underway. This project is lead by OEDIT with the support of regional economic development partners.

### OEDIT Representative

OEDIT representative, Greg Thomason has been replaced by Wendy Stewart Martinez, South Central & Eastern Plains region.