Quarterly Food Systems Updates from Colorado State Agencies

Q3 (July-Sept) 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)

For complete CDA updates, sign up for the CDA at a Glance emails

NextGen Ag Leadership Grant Program

Seven projects were awarded in 2025. The program provides grants to agricultural organizations and educational institutions that support developmental and training opportunities for the next generation of agriculturalists.

Agricultural Workforce Development Program

We will be launching the application for 2026 internships on October 1. The application cycle will be one month, closing on October 31. We are developing a plan for stakeholder outreach and promotion. If you have suggestions for businesses (farm/ranch/ag businesses), please email Michele Meyer <michele.meyer@state.co.us>

Colorado Agricultural Future Loan Program

Online interest form available for waitlist for loan eligibility. 75 applications were reviewed and prioritized for eligibility, sent to First SW Bank for loan process review and process.

Community Food Access Program

Tax credit programs are open with quarterly application review and tax credit certificates being issued. 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

2025 projects were approved and the state plan has been submitted to USDA.

Colorado Proud & Publications

- Check out the Cultivation Station Podcast
- CO Farm Fresh Directory and CO Hay Directory are published, available online in English and Spanish
- Farm to School Month is October, events being planned, with CO Proud School Meal Day on October 1, 2025. Please share this with schools in your community!

Colorado Department of Education (CDE)

Roadmapping Project

CDE is engaged in a farm to school road mapping project. After a series of regional events and listening sessions to gather stakeholder input on farm to school opportunities and challenges within Colorado, solution-based sessions were held. CDE is contracting with CSU to analyze the data and write the final report and recommendations.

The Local Food Program

$500,000 for sponsors, $150,000 for Nourish Colorado to provide technical assistance. The funding is for the purchase of Colorado grown, raised, minimally processed and value-added products. Funding is $0.05 per meal or a minimum of $1000.00. Sponsors are ineligible if more than 2,150,000 lunches are served in the prior school year. Priority is given to prior participants serving less than 1,250,000 lunches and have 25%+ qualifying for free and reduced lunches. Applications are due August 22, 2025.

Cultivating Connection Events

CDE in partnership with Nourish Colorado, Greeley School District and CSNA will be hosting two connection events for K-12 operators, producers, and strategic partners to gather, learn, and connect around farm to school in Colorado. Planning is underway for Adams 12 November 14th and Grand Junction December 12th. The event is free to attend.

Montana Farm to School Event

CDE will send two representatives to the Montana Team Nutrition and Montana Office of Public Education 2025 Mountain Plains Regional Farm to Child Nutrition Programs Summit in October.

Colorado Department of Human Services (CDHS)

Community Food Assistance Provider Grant Program

HB 24-1407 created the Community Food Assistance Provider Grant Program. $3 million was appropriated in FY 2024-25 to provide grants to food pantries and food banks to serve households seeking food resources. These grant funds were fully spent by food pantries and food banks; a final report will be submitted in the next month. $2 million is appropriated for the program in FY 2025-26. The Department has executed a contract with Trailhead/Blueprint to administer the program. The vendor anticipates issuing funds to grantees in early September. The Department will report annually through the SMART Act process.

Summer EBT (SEBT)

The program provides resources to students to purchase food in the summer months, when school is not in session. SEBT is jointly managed by 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. Issuance for FY25 began in May 2025 to ensure students had access to benefits before the end of the school year. As of late August, the $120 lump sum benefit has been issued to over 455,000 eligible students.

Energy EBT

The Energy EBT (E-EBT) program successfully launched in March 2025. It provides one-time (annual) $21 cash assistance for energy costs to SNAP households that have not already received LEAP in the past 12 months. The program qualifies recipients for the highest standard utility allowance in their SNAP budget to maximize benefits. As a result, SNAP allotments increased by $3.8 million from February to March 2025. As of June 2025, more than 315,000 E-EBT payments have been issued. These cases had a $94 increase, on average, in their ongoing monthly SNAP allotment. Provisions in H.R.1 will limit eligibility of the program; however, these changes will not be made until guidance from FNS is received.

Healthy Food Incentive (eHIP)

The program launched in July 2024 and has officially been named the CO SNAP Produce Bonus program (CSPB). 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. In 2025, four farmers markets with more than 30 participating fruit and vegetable farmers are participating in the program including: the Larimer County FM, the Wednesday Boulder County FM, the Durango FM, and the Backyard Market (in CO Springs). An additional 16 independent farmers have also been participating during the 2025 growing season. Currently, five brick and mortar locations are participating in the program; two additional brick and mortar retailers are slated to be added in the Denver Metro area in September 2025. As point of sale system updates are completed and tested, additional brick and mortar stores are anticipated to be added in the next year. The Produce Bonus redemption rate is 96.4%.

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 FFY25. 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, achieving 95% in June 2025. State and county staff continue to work collaboratively to maintain timely benefits issuance. Meanwhile, the Department and counties are also working closely together on implementation of changes in H.R. 1, including work requirements and narrowed eligibility for non-citizens. The Department and counties are also working to address funding gaps created by H.R. 1, including the cut to administrative funding effective October 1, 2026 and the potential State share of benefits based on the State's payment error rate (PER), effective October 1, 2027.

Colorado Department of Public Health and Environment (CDPHE)

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

WIC caseload through July continues to grow slowly but steadily.



Colorado WIC Snapshot: Summer 2025 is available and includes key trends, plus additional State and National updates.

Modern WIC Act & Expiring Waivers in 2026 - The COVID-era waivers that allow WIC to certify participants and to issue benefits remotely/virtually expire September 30, 2026. The Modern WIC Act of 2025 (H.R.1464) aims to permanently integrate remote service options into the WIC program. A similar bill (H.R.2424) was introduced in 2023, but failed to make it out of committee. The current version has 15 Democratic Sponsors, and 1 Republican Sponsor (Rep Don Bacon R-NE). Though there is some time before the existing waivers expire, in the absence of congressional action, WIC would revert to requiring in-person visits to certify and issue benefits.

As Congress is out on August recess, we are awaiting the passage of the Agriculture Appropriations Bill through the Senate and as law prior to October 1, resulting either in a Continuing Resolution or shutdown. In the event of an October 1 shutdown, WIC food benefits would be turned off at 12:01 am October 1, 2025. Local agencies and CDPHE WIC would continue to operate at full levels through at least October 31, 2025.

Colorado Food Program (CFP, formerly the Child and Adult Care Food Program (CACFP)

Each year the USDA updates CACFP rates which are effective from July 1 to June 30. This year, updated CACFP rates were released on 7/24/2025. Two rates remained the same from last year (Supplement for fully paid Centers and Tier II Homes), all other rates increased.

As Congress is out on August recess, we are awaiting the passage of the Agriculture Appropriations Bill through the Senate and as law prior to October 1, resulting either in a Continuing Resolution or shutdown. In the event of an October 1 shutdown, the Colorado Food Program would continue to operate as normal through at least October 31, 2025.

Healthy Eating Active Living

CDPHE is supporting work with the Food Bank of the Rockies to adopt and implement the Healthy Eating Research (HER) Nutrition Guidelines to improve the quality of foods in food banks and pantries in order to increase access to and promote healthier food choices. As of May, 60% of donated food and beverage items have been ranked according to the guidelines. Food Bank of the Rockies identified nine partners interested in implementing the HER Guidelines, including Tin Shed, Kaizen Food Rescue, Mountain Resource Center, Halo Community Outreach, Integrated Family Community Services, Benefits in Action, Arapahoe Community College, Sewall Child Development Center.

In collaboration with the Colorado SNAP Produce Bonus Program and the Center for Science in the Public Interest, CDPHE assisted in the development of a customer survey to identify awareness of, use of, and experience with the Colorado Produce Bonus Program. Survey collection began in August at participating farmers' markets. The results of the surveys will inform future strategies to increase program participation and redemption.

CDPHE and CDE participated in the Vermont Food Education Every Day (FEED) Farm to School Institute Adaptation Program in June, 2025. CDPHE and CDE are continuing to collaborate on opportunities to adapt, develop, and launch a Farm to School Institute Program that would also include childcare centers associated with a school district.

Office of Economic Development and International Trade (OEDIT)

Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy

State-wide CEDS has been completed and uploaded to the EDA

Rural Opportunity Office

OEDIT's Rural Opportunity Office (ROO) Eastern Plains representative replacement is Wendy Stewart Martinez.

Colorado Office of Film, Television, and Media Initiative

COFTM, the Southern Ute and the Ute Mountain Ute Tribes have partnered to create a film workshop for students to learn how to use cameras, interview, production planning, how to edit and about the art of storytelling. The Colorado Office of Film, Television and Media (COFTM) promotes Colorado to the film, television and media industry locally, nationally and internationally, while bringing a spotlight to the uniqueness of its small communities and rural areas. COFTM is responsible for providing clients and constituents with government liaison services, location scouting assistance, crew and resource referrals, and incentive options.

Colorado Startup Week

OEDIT's business office will present a panel discussion on the quantum industry in Colorado at Colorado Startup Week. This panel, hosted by the Colorado Office of Economic Development and International Trade (OEDIT), will feature leaders from academia, government, and industry. Colorado's quantum ecosystem is growing fast. The Elevate Quantum coalition was recently selected as one of 12 federally designated Regional Technology and Innovation Hubs (Tech Hubs) and is positioned to receive up to $900 million in federal funding. Additionally, Colorado's state government has invested $74 million in the industry, which is expected to bring in tens of millions more in federal funding and create thousands of new jobs. Panelists will discuss how Colorado is poised to become a global leader in the quantum field.