



COLORADO STATE UNIVERSITY
COMMUNITY AND ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT



Team Spotlight



Willie Wilkins

Willie Wilkins serves as the CSU Community and Economic Development Specialist for the Mountain Region. He has worked for CSU Extension since October of 2018 and served the Mountain Region since 2022. His work emphasizes community efforts to build resilience, foster belonging, and enhance well-being.

His leadership, communication, and mentoring skills have strengthened local initiatives and professional development efforts across Colorado and beyond. Willie co-leads the Community and Economic Program and Research Unit, Workforce & Economic Development Work Group, serves on CSU Extension's Awards Committee, and is affiliated with the Regional Economic Development Institute. He has collaborated with the College of Business, the Center for Environmental Justice, the Center for Public Deliberation, and the Family and Leadership Training Institute (FLTI).



Rebecca Wasserman-Olin

Rebecca Wasserman-Olin is a PhD student in Agricultural and Resource Economics at CSU, where she conducts research on food systems, agricultural policy, and regional economic development. Her work focuses on linking economic analysis with real-world decision-making to support resilient regional food economies. Rebecca brings over a decade of experience in food systems, including positions at Cornell University, UW-Madison, and CSU, along with ten years as a vegetable farmer.

Her current projects include the economic impact of farm-level challenges such as wheat stem sawfly infestations in Colorado and municipal food procurement policies. With a background as both a researcher and a vegetable farmer, Rebecca is dedicated to producing accessible, stakeholder-driven research that strengthens farm viability and informs agricultural policy.

Mark Your Calendar

Shared Kitchen 101 Workshop

April 29, 8:00 a.m. - 4 p.m., MDT

In-person at the Sky Ute Casino Colorado 172, Ignacio, Colorado

Our Shared Kitchen 101 Workshop is a comprehensive educational program designed to provide individuals, community leaders, and organizations with essential knowledge and resources to explore the world of shared kitchens. This workshop is tailored for those interested in understanding, planning, and potentially launching shared-use kitchens in their communities.

- Contact Dawn.thilmany@colostate.edu if you are in the SW Colorado region and interested in participating.

New this year: an Online version of the Shared Kitchen workshop, May 6 and 7 from 9 a.m. - 1 p.m.

We customize each agenda to reflect the needs of those in the room. To confirm your registration, and help us build the agenda, please fill out [this survey](#) by April 21.

Supply Chain Program Webinar for Food Safety Modernization Act

May 2, Virtual



National Association of Community Development Extension Professionals (NACDEP)

NACDEP is an organization dedicated to improving the visibility, coordination, professional status, and resource base of community and economic development Extension programs and professionals.

[Learn more](#) and consider joining if you want to be more involved at the regional or national level.

Save the Date for the [2025 NACDEP Conference](#)

- June 9 - June 12, 2025
- Charleston, West Virginia

Planning to attend? Let us know!



For your fall planning calendar

Economic Development Council of Colorado's (EDCC) 2025 DRIVE | LEAD | SUCCEED ANNUAL CONFERENCE

October 2025
Pueblo Convention Center, Pueblo, CO

CSU is now an institutional member and sponsor for EDCC's Annual Drive|Lead|Succeed Conference, which is geared towards nurturing the growth of Colorado's economy by offering essential resources by:

1. Uniting leading industry influencers and thought leaders to exchange invaluable insights and tackle distinctive challenges.
2. Introducing innovative tools and solutions to address pressing economic issues within Colorado's professional economic development community.
3. Cultivating meaningful collaboration and facilitating the exchange of fresh ideas among Colorado's Economic Development professionals, business and non-profit leaders, government officials, and beyond.

New this year

EDCC is joining forces with the Rocky Mountain Workforce Development Association (RMWDA) to provide a platform for essential knowledge sharing and networking to support Colorado's vibrant and growing economy. Take advantage of this one-of-kind opportunity to learn from Colorado's Workforce Development ecosystem! We think our stronger partnership with EDCC is timely given this new focus on the workforce.

Interested in attending? [Reach out to REDI](#) or the Community and Economic Development PRU team.

[View the full events calendar](#)

National Extension Tourism Network National Conference

Save the Dates: Oct. 7-10, 2025
Meredith, New Hampshire

We have a growing team of CSU personnel focused on the Outdoor economy, including the role of tourism in our state. We encourage you to consider joining and attending events from our peers across the US, including this fall's conference.

Upcoming Webinars

Wednesday, April 23, noon Eastern | U.S. National Data

First in the series, Dr. Schmidt and Dr. Entsminger will provide a briefing on nation-wide findings covering the entire U.S.

[Register for the Zoom session, U.S. National Data briefing webinar](#)

Wednesday, May 14, noon Eastern | Agritourism in Maine

In this session of the briefing series, Dr. Entsminger and Dr. Schmidt cover findings from Vacationland, summarizing results from Maine respondents and comparing the state to the nation.

[Register for the Zoom session Agritourism in Maine briefing webinar](#)

Funding, Program and Educational Opportunities

Rural Jump-Start Program

The Rural Jump-Start Program is a collaborative effort by the state, local governments, Institutes of Higher Education (IHE), and economic development organizations (EDO) to incentivize new businesses to start in or move to rural, economically distressed counties in Colorado, which are referred to as Rural Jump-Start zones, and hire new employees.

Rural Jump-Start began in 2016 as a tax incentive program for businesses located in a Rural Jump-Start zone, and in 2021 a grant program was created. Tax benefits include relief from:

- State income tax for the new business.
- State sales and use tax for the new business.
- County personal property tax for the new business.
- Municipal personal property tax for the new business (in participating municipalities); and
- State income tax for qualified new hires

Grant benefits are dependent on the business' location. The Rural Jump-Start Program will accept applications for the tax benefits through December 31, 2030, and for the grant benefits through June 30, 2028.

If you are a business interested in participating in this program, [review all program qualifications, discussed in greater detail under the Business Eligibility section](#).

Join CSU's [College of Liberal Arts](#) at the upcoming "Hot Takes" panel discussion.

April 25, noon, LSC 312: **"The Shifting Economy: What It Means for Colorado, Campus, and the Country"** with economics faculty exploring economic trends and their implications

[View CLA's full calendar of upcoming events.](#)

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.

[More information on this program in Colorado.](#)

Colorado Wyoming Climate Resilience Engine (CO-WY Engine)

[CO-WY Engine](#), funded by the U.S. National Science Foundation, is thrilled to announce the launch of its Engine-specific startup support program, aimed at empowering climate resilience startups across the Colorado and Wyoming region and the United States, and growing a diverse innovation ecosystem in the region.

This program offers a range of tailored services designed to help startups address the challenges bringing climate technologies to market and drives commercial growth in the emerging climate resiliency marketplace. The Engine startup support program is one of many means the Engine will deploy to build and sustain a nationally leading ecosystem in climate resiliency.

Comprehensive startup services include:

1. Customized, personal support
2. Startup specific training
3. Access to Engine R&D and Translation grant funding (for CO-WY based startups only)
4. Introductions to Engine partners (Corporates, Universities, National Labs)
5. Partially-sponsored Internships
6. Pilot opportunities
7. Support for grant submission
8. Expert Mentors and Advisors
9. Investor introductions
10. PR/Communications support

Are you interested in applying to the CO-WY Engine startup services? [Learn more about startup services included and submit an application.](#)



Reports

In addition to these reports, we continue to update our [webpage](#) to share reports and updates from our work with community partners. Visit our new website highlights for [Community Based Projects](#).

March 2025 Report

Battle Scars: Trends in Wildfire Size and Impact across Colorado

[Thomas Gifford](#), [Edward Barbier](#)

Key Findings

- Wildfires in Colorado have increased in both frequency and size since 1990, with especially rapid growth in the 21st
- A small number of large fires accounts for the vast majority of burned acreage, with the top 1% of wildfires by area accounting for nearly 50% of total burned acreage.
- Of the 10 largest fires in state history, 8 have occurred since 2012, with 3 occurring in 2020 alone.
- Some counties, including Larimer and Grand, have seen over 15% of their total land area burned, often due to exceptionally large fires.

[Download PDF Report to read more](#)

February 2025 Report

Regionalizing the Food Dollar: Exploring Distributions across Sectors and Places

[Phil Watson](#), [Gregory Alward](#), [Dawn Thilmany](#)

Key Findings

- Farmer's share of the US Food Dollar averaged 11.6% in 2020, but that varies greatly across states, with Colorado's farm share being just over 12%.
- Food service, food processing and retail services capture the highest share of the US food dollar, and those numbers vary by location as well, but highlight the role agricultural production can play in broader agribusiness activity.
- For an additional \$1 of food demand in Colorado, it contributes another \$0.72 in economic value to the surrounding community.

[Download PDF Report to read more](#)

January 2025 Report

The Economic Impact of the Ute Theater in Rifle, CO

[Jeff Engell](#), [Prasiddha Shakya](#), [Tim Komarek](#)

Key Findings

- The Ute Theater provides economic benefit and social enrichment to Rifle, Colorado and surrounding Garfield County.
- Using input-output modeling, we estimate the economic impact of the Ute Theater to be:
 - Total Output: \$657,070
 - Value Added: \$120,750
 - Labor Income: \$62,380
- Visitors from outside Garfield County contribute approximately \$41,067 in new economic activity per month through their attendance at the Ute Theater and subsequent spending.

[Download PDF Report to read more](#)

December 2024 Report

Irrigators' Perspectives on Water Management and Adaptation in the San Luis Valley

Stephen Lauer, Steven Smith, Jonah Allen, Larry Brown

Key Findings

San Luis Valley Producers:

- Decisions are driven by both yield/profit and impact on future generations
- Are more sensitive to policy changes than to drought
- Prefer to change technologies rather than crops
- Are divided on whether current groundwater rules have a positive impact
- Agree that current groundwater rules are legitimate and are being followed
- Believe that current groundwater rules have a disproportionate impact on certain groups
- Support a broad variety of policies to manage groundwater

[Download PDF Report to read more](#)

Colorado Futures Center Reports



COLORADO FUTURES CENTER

The Colorado Futures Center is an independent, nonpartisan and academically grounded 501(c)(3) organization dedicated to informing about economic, fiscal, and public policy issues impacting community economic health and quality of life in Colorado and beyond.

Our Partners at the Colorado Futures Center regularly release their Statewide Economic Forecast, [ColoradoCast](#), and recently released the [ColoradoCast for the first quarter of 2025](#).

The first quarter ColoradoCast is affected by the data release schedules, particularly for the index that is being forecast. Because of this, the first quarter outlook uses data only through the end of December. This forecast, which shows the Colorado economy maintaining the strength it showed in the previous ColoradoCast, does not yet incorporate the early policy actions of the new administration. Instead, it demonstrates that a “stay the course” set of policies likely would have resulted in healthy growth in the state. In subsequent quarters, this ColoradoCast will be used as a benchmark forecast to assess the impacts of federal policy on the state.

Our Communities

CSU Extension interns coming around the state summer 2025

CSU and the Office of the Provost continues its support of the [Extension Summer Internship Program](#). Look for these projects around the state this summer. Reach out to REDI if you want to learn more about this summer's activities.

Do Improved Fairgrounds make Economic Sense (i.e. more cents)?: Analysis of Park, Grand and Teller County Fairgrounds

We are building off previous work in Fremont County that studied the local contribution to the economy from the Creation of Pathfinder event center and look at projecting the economic contribution to three counties based on improvements to their existing fairgrounds. These fairgrounds with improvements will host events and activities they currently do not have the capacity to do. The goal is to collect data and use IMPLAN to provide contribution analysis thus showing the benefits of the facility improvements and economic benefits to these communities. Additionally, we hope to use previous work in this field to develop a template/tool kit for future inquiries of this nature.

Economic Contribution Analysis of Big Game Hunting in Rural Colorado

'The 2023 Economic Contributions of Outdoor Recreation in Colorado', conducted by Southwick Associates for Colorado Parks and Wildlife (CPW), in conjunction with Colorado State University, outdoor recreationists in Colorado generated a total economic output of \$65.8 billion, contributing \$36.5 billion to the state's Gross Domestic Product. The sector supported over 404,000 jobs, accounting for 12% of Colorado's labor force, and generated \$22.2 billion in salaries and wages. In the survey, outdoor recreation was segmented into five broad categories; trail/road, water based, winter, wildlife related (to which hunting is included), and other. For this internship, we will build upon this prior work by taking a more granular look at the economic contribution of big game hunting as a sub-segment of the broad category 'wildlife related' to assess its specific economic contribution to Colorado's economy.

The Changing Economic Contributions of Agriculture and Food in Larimer County

This internship is a partnership between Extension, the Department of Agricultural and Resource Economics, and the Larimer County Agricultural Advisory Board to frame and conduct an analysis of the economic contributions of agriculture to the county as well as the region. The Intern will learn about data collection and methodology for these types of studies and learn about the community's needs and how to present the results of the research to the community. The intern will have the opportunity to consider different relevant policies and programs and how they could impact the economic contribution.

About Us - Community and Economic Development

Connect with CSU Centers

Join this network of CSU centers and institutes who align through their interests in connecting and elevating communities through engaged social science and humanities scholarship. The collaborative has identified a particular focus on assessing and supporting the engagement, resilience and health of urban and rural Colorado communities through integrated learning, research and outreach programming.

Want to make sure you get communication for this group? Add your contact information by visiting the [online membership list](#). Visit the [Family Leadership Training Institute](#) website to learn more about their work in Colorado.

Learn more about some of CSU's engaged institutes and centers at [Engaged Institutes - Learn | CSU's Office Of Engagement & Extension](#).

Stay Connected

Find us on social media, get community and economic development related questions answered via email, forward to a friend, or submit your contributions to our newsletter!

Visit the [Regional Economic Development Institute website](#) and sign up for updates (see the bottom left sign-up prompt).

NEWSLETTER TEAM CONTRIBUTORS

[Dr. Dawn Thilmany](#), [Dr. Anita Alves Pena](#), [Dr. Rebecca Hill](#), and [Sabina Regmi](#)

Missed a past newsletter? Find back issues [here](#).

Not already receiving this newsletter directly? Sign up for future editions [here](#).



COLORADO STATE UNIVERSITY
ENGAGEMENT AND EXTENSION

learn.colostate.edu