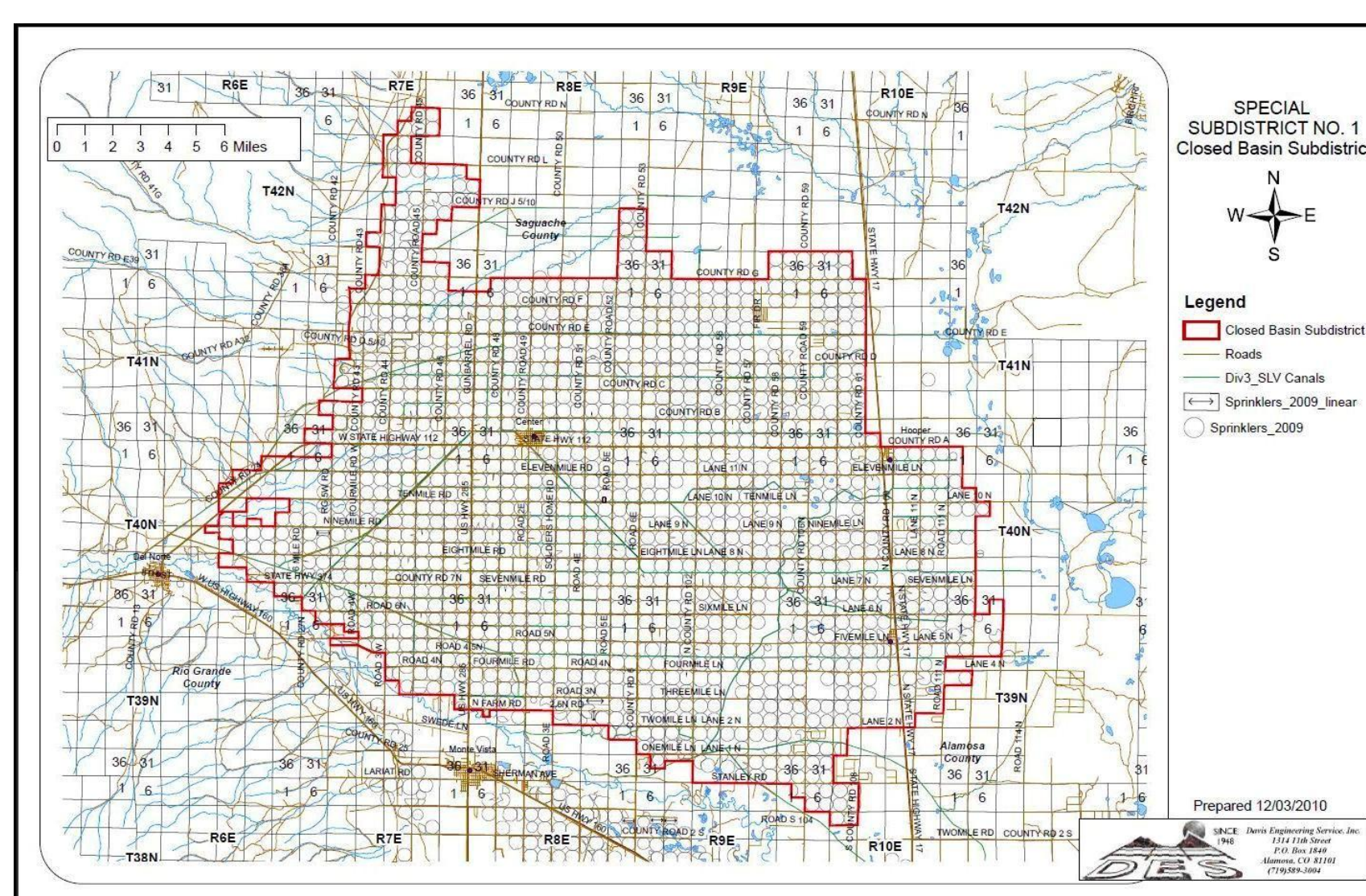


ALTERNATIVE CROPS, ALTERNATIVE MARKETS: CLIMATE SMART COMMODITIES IN THE SAN LUIS VALLEY

PROJECT INTRODUCTION

A large percentage of the state's agriculture is produced in the San Luis Valley (SLV) region of southern Colorado, making the area a cornerstone of the economy. However, the area has been under a lot of water stress, largely due to mismanagement of the underground aquifer. State officials have placed deadlines on water usage caps, and local farmers are scrambling to meet the requirements. Potatoes are the most widely produced cash crop in the SLV, and they are usually put into rotation with barley and alfalfa. All of these crops use upwards of 20 inches of water per acre in a season. Local CSU Extension agents have been working for multiple years on different aspects of alternative crops. Field trials have shown that the crops best suited to the climate of the SLV are dry beans (specifically pinto, Anasazi, and Bolita), Proso millet, and rye. Economic analyses of the crops led to the discovery that profits will only be made if the crops are sold to a niche, high-value market (such as organic or heirloom) or if they are locally processed. My work this summer picked up from there. I worked with one other intern from Adams State University to help develop the processing and markets for the future of sustainable agriculture.



INTERNSHIP GOALS

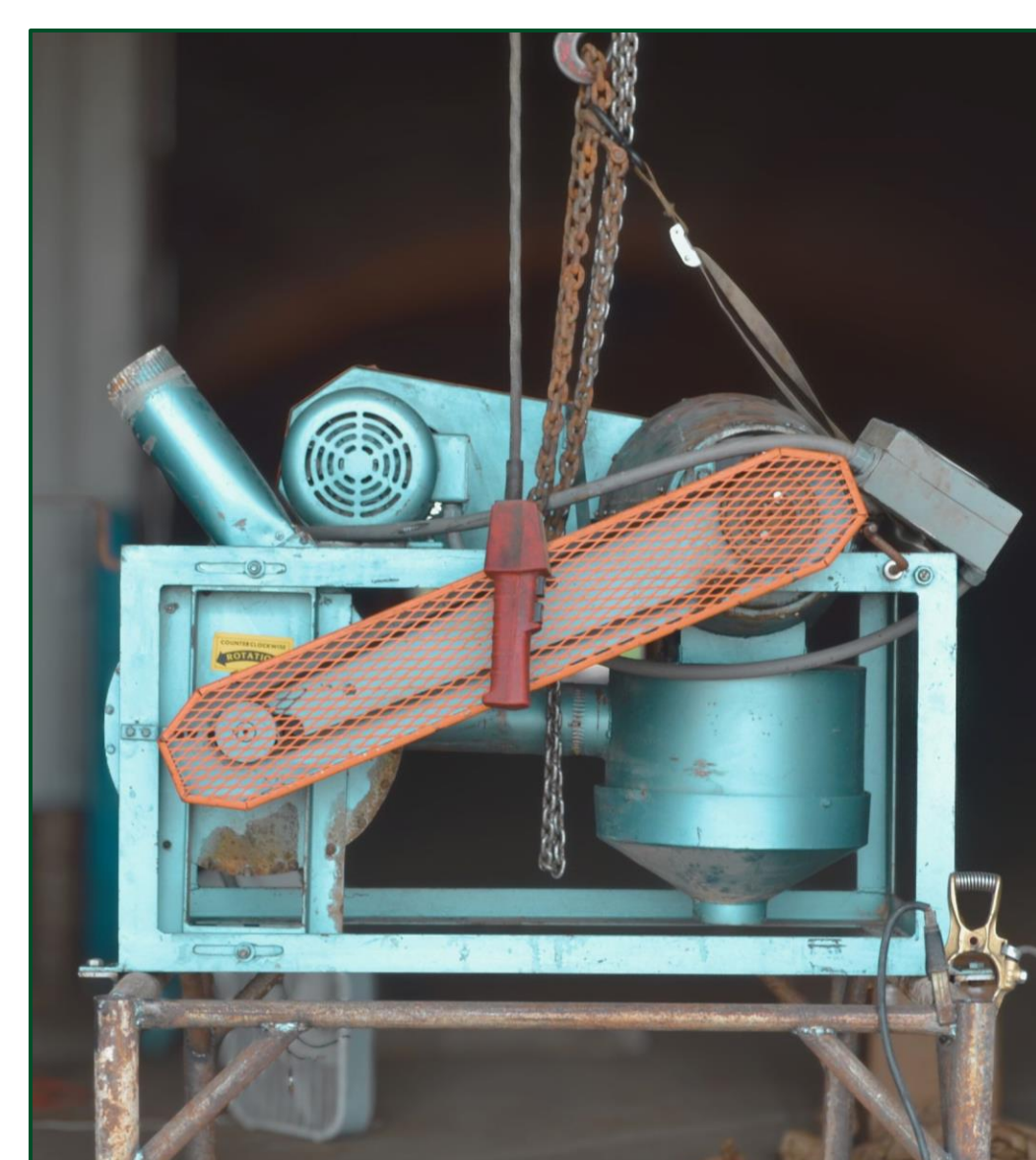
1. Develop a market analysis detailing the specifics of dry bean production in the San Luis Valley. Sections include Market Trends and Dynamics, Demand, Transportation, and Processing.
2. Create "Bean Bootcamp" agenda: four educational sessions aimed to inform growers how to start growing dry beans in the SLV.
3. Finalize "Meeting in the Middle" project, a collaboration between Tumbleweed Bread (a local value-added producer) and Jones Farms Organics (a regenerative organic farm growing high-value crops).

TASKS AND OUTCOMES

1. **Market Analysis:** conducted research on every aspect of dry beans. This included conducting interviews with bean dealers across the United States, as well as talking to manufacturing companies and farmers currently growing beans. The information was then compiled into a report that will be shared with growers. This work has been occurring for the last few years and will continue as long as there is more data.

Summary of Interviews with Bean Dealers (2025)								
Company	Location	Main Products	Sales Markets	Contracting	Quality Standards	Cleaning / Certifications	Pricing Info	Opportunities for SLV Growers
Farmer Bean & Seed	WA, CO, ID	Pinto, Great Northern, Kidney, Black, Heirlooms	WA: 70-80% export CO: 70-80% domestic	Begin talks with buyers in Dec.	Weekly field visits; truck samples; moisture, damage, color, contamination checked	Dry clean + polish Organic & Kosher certified (WA, CO, ID)	Pinto: ~\$40/cwt GN: ~\$55/cwt Seed: \$80-90/unit	Strong interest in heirlooms & diverse beans; potential market for untreated seed from SLV
Adobe Milling	Dove Creek, CO	Pinto	Mostly Colorado-based/regional sales			Dry cleaning only	Market-driven; fluctuates during season	Local buyer with simpler logistics; could be a good fit for smaller SLV growers
Northern Feed & Bean	Lucerne, CO	Pinto, Black, Small Red, Blackeyed, Lima, Kidney	Majority in-state, some export		Hourly samples; polish for dark beans; customer-specific brightness expectations	Dry cleaning Organic certified	Pinto: ~\$40/cwt Offers untreated seed (w/ organic exemption letters)	Interested in expanded organic production; has cleaning infrastructure but faces transport barriers

2. **Bean Bootcamp:** contacted current professionals in the dry bean field to invite to speak at the event and collected educational material to give to attendees.
3. **Meeting in the Middle:** assisted Jones Farms Organics and Tumbleweed Bread with their collaboration, a grant received through the Colorado Department of Agriculture. This included creating a social media campaign for Tumbleweed, writing reports for the CDA, and partnering with the local university to create POS systems.



A millet dehuller purchased for Jones Farms Organics with the CDA Climate-Smart grant



One of the Jones' rye fields, where Tumbleweed sources their rye from

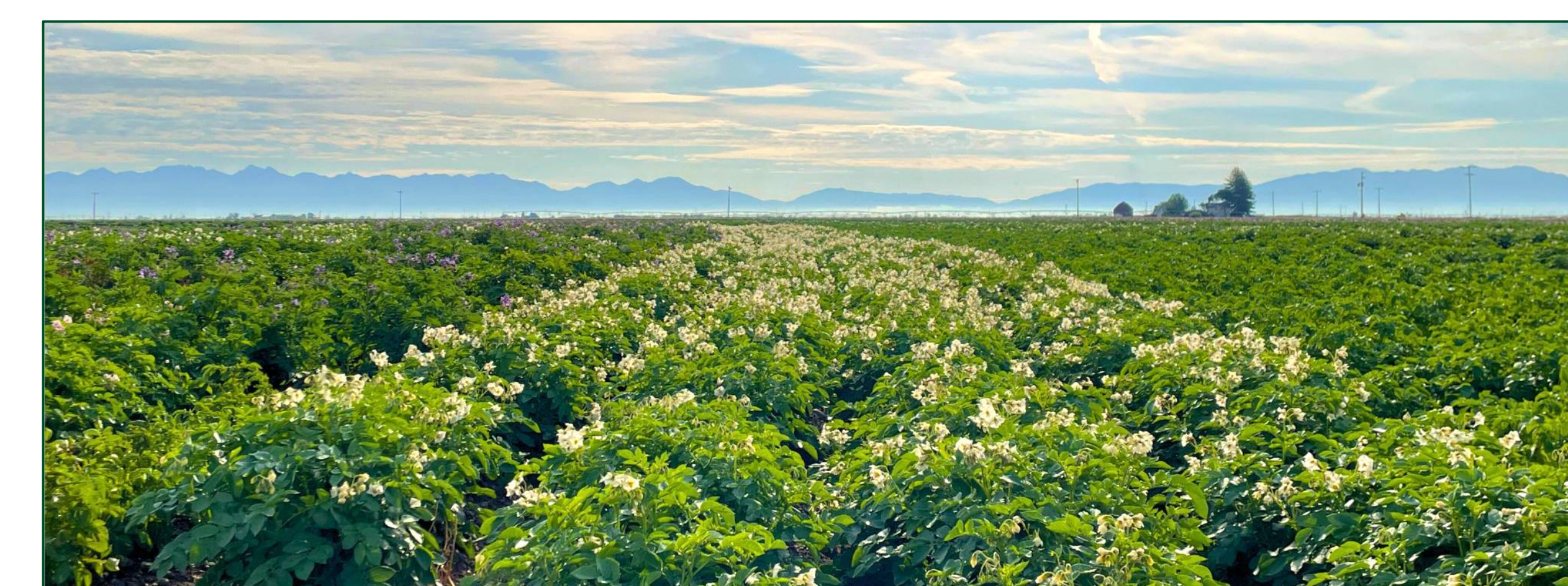
EDUCATIONAL TAKEAWAYS

Sustainable agriculture and conservation share many of the same principles: both are focused on preserving resources and allowing future generations to continue to enjoy the resources we have now.

Most of the barriers to sustainable agriculture come from the market side. Many farmers are willing to grow different types of crops, but they want to be guaranteed a fair price and profit. If a stable demand for these climate-smart crops can be created, then growers will likely integrate them into their rotations.

APPLICATIONS TO CONSERVATION

Agriculture is one of the biggest water consumers across the world, so creating ways to lessen that water consumption can be a huge win for conservation. Having a large demand for these climate-smart crops means that farmers are able to grow more sustainably while still generating profits.



A field of San Luis Valley potatoes, shadowed by the Sangre de Cristo mountains. Many people in the SLV rely on potatoes, and if current agricultural practices don't change, then they will lose their livelihood.

NEXT STEPS

The market analysis will continue to be developed and added on until the Bean Bootcamp in October and November, where it will be shared with growers as a helpful guide. The Southern Rocky Mountain Agriculture Conference will take place in February 2026. The market analysis, as well as any other work on alternative crops in the SLV, will be presented there. Local processing and markets for alternative crops will continue to grow as the deadlines for water conservation loom.