

Colorado Food Systems Advisory Council Summer Tour

In order to become more acquainted with Colorado's food systems, current issues, and to get a breath of fresh air, the Food Systems Advisory Council went on a mini-tour of Colorado in the summer of 2011. Along the way, the Council met with local and regional food policy councils and local leaders, visited farms and markets, hear about farm-to-school efforts, and learned firsthand about Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Programs (SNAP) and Women, Infants, and Children (WIC) efforts at farmers' markets. This report summarizes the Council's stops on the tour as well as what some of the primary learning and "take-aways" were from their visits.

Common themes that we heard throughout the tour that are reflected in this summary include:

- Concern for the future of agriculture
- Land and water use issues are persistent in agriculture
- Some areas of Colorado need resources to extend their growing season
- High cost of labor and lack of workers is a serious challenge for producers interested in initiating and growing their business
- Need for more commercial kitchens in order for producers to generate additional income through the sale of value-added products and access to additional food safety education and training
- Call for balance between food safety regulation and cottage industry opportunities
- Additional education and outreach may help connect food assistance clients to local markets
- Interest in connecting with other regional groups and stronger communications with state groups
- Most areas need additional access to capital, resources, technical assistance

The Council wishes to extend a hearty thank you to the many individuals and organizations that welcomed us, taught us, shared with us, and, of course, fed us some incredible food!

Day 1: August 11th 2011

Delaney Farm in Denver

About Delaney Farm:

(<http://dug.org/delaney/>)

A project of Denver Urban Gardens, in partnership with the City of Aurora, DeLaney is organized as a Community Supported Agriculture (CSA) farm easily accessible to the residents of Metro Denver. The broad goals of DeLaney are to:

- Provide healthy, locally produced food for people of all economic levels, including helping challenged populations improve their nutrition and their access to healthy food.



- Use and model organic growing practices that protect our environment and reconnect people with the land that sustains them.
- Provide nutrition education to all shareholders and involve them in DeLaney programs as partners in growing, preparing, cooking, tasting, sharing the produce they grow at DeLaney.

Take-Aways from Group Discussion

Council members took much away from this unique urban CSA. Members reflected on the interesting model partnership with WIC (a long-standing partnership with Tri County Health Department that developed a farm shareholder program with their WIC clientele), as a program that could inform other organizations. Much could be learned from this successful model to help develop other, community-minded local CSAs that bring fresh produce to more low-income families.

Council members heard about several tools and resources that could support such organizations, including:

- Sharing of successful models – in written form and in-person sharing.
- Increased access to available resources for program development (i.e., finding and applying for grants and other funding is hard, even for experienced practitioners!).
- Help for aspiring farmers, who grow out of community farming programs, to find employment and land to develop their careers in agriculture.



Summit County Food Policy Council in Breckenridge

About Summit County Food Policy Council
http://www.highcountryconservation.org/sustainable_foods.htm#FPC

As a joint effort to explore local food issues, the Summit Prevention Alliance and the High Country Conservation Center created a Summit County Food Policy Council (FPC). The FPC determined three main focus areas: health and nutrition; local and environmental benefits; and food security, access, and hunger. In general, the FPC includes individuals from the community that have a strong interest in food, including how it’s produced, processed, and distributed.

Take-Aways from Group Discussion

The group discussed several issue areas of interest and potential efforts that could advance the local food system movement, including:

- Help communities use agriculture as a means to increase personal income.
- Identify best practices of land use language, which fosters agricultural production for small and mid-size growers (especially those dependent on municipal water resources/rates).

- Better understand the role of transportation in food security. I.e., How can we continue to maintain our transportation network in Colorado to be sure our isolated rural and mountain towns have access to food?
- Make the case that economic development funds could be used to support community access to jobs in agriculture and entrepreneurial incentives to produce food.

The group also discussed the need to create effective ways for regions to communicate with each other and with state councils in order to share information and resources on topics such as:

- Food production knowledge
- Working models for producing at altitude
- Model land use code
- Best practices for food policy councils
- Grant opportunities
- Meeting alerts and policy (e.g., Farm Bill) updates

Holy Terror Farm in Paonia

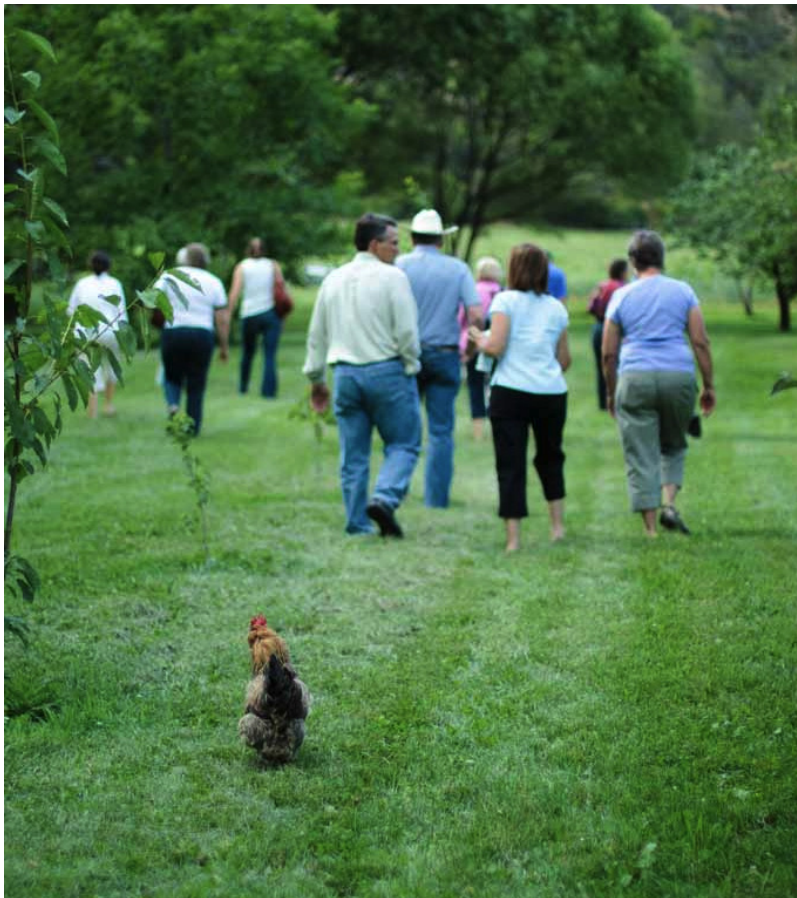
About Holy Terror Farm:

An experiment in motion of Colorado eco-agriculture, showcasing different types of potential agricultural styles from city-scaled gardens to larger concepts such as self-sufficiency in grains and legumes. The farm is growing over 200 varieties of specialty crop fruits and 300 varieties of heirloom vegetables, including rare items such as pecans, almonds, figs, paw paws, persimmons, wheat, oats, quinoa, cranberries, pinto beans and 50 varieties of heirloom tomatoes. The farm also runs a non-profit web-based farmers market, with pickup and delivery to food desert mountain towns, managing and marketing for over 40 chemical-free Western Slope farms and businesses.

Take-Aways from Group

Discussion:

- Support on-farm research of multi-use farms, which incorporate energy efficiencies through nutrient cycling and direct marketing of products.
- Better understand the food safety requirements for on-line sales of value-added farm products.
- Promote the use of commercial kitchen space at school to support value-added producer projects.
- The online farmers market connecting farmers to local consumers is a great idea and should be implemented in other places (www.localfarmsfirst.com).



Ela Family Farms in Hotchkiss

About Ela Family Farms Farm:

<http://www.elafamilyfarms.com/>

Ela Family Farms is a fourth generation, 100 acre organic fruit farm in Hotchkiss, CO that has grown fruit in Western Colorado for over 100 years. These fruits include three varieties of sweet cherries, fourteen varieties of peaches, twenty two varieties of apples, three varieties of pears and seven varieties of plums, as well as heirloom tomatoes and berries. Ela Family Farms primarily markets their fruit on the Front Range at six farmers markets, through CSA shares, to specialty food markets, and as value added products and to Whole Foods Markets.

Take-Aways from Group Discussion:

- The controversial immigrant worker process in Colorado continues to be a barrier for some producers. A more manageable system that allows for farmers to have access to their skilled labor force and incentivizes employment in agriculture is needed.
- Direct markets can be more profitable than wholesale distribution for producers and are one way for Colorado producers to make a liveable salary.
- Vertical integration captures more of the market dollar for the producers and their families.



Delicious Orchards with Western Colorado Food and Agriculture Council, local farmers, community advocates, in Paonia

About Western Colorado Food and Agriculture Council (WCFAC)

<http://www.deliciousorchardstore.com/>

WCFAC is an all-volunteer 501(c)(3) organization that work with issues within the community food system. They partner with farmers and consumers and strive to improve the community's acceptance of healthy food choices and to improve the local and regional economy.



Take-Aways from Group Discussion:

- Increase access to resources regarding joint use of commercial kitchens and community kitchens.
- A cottage food industry law which allows for the processing of low risk food items in a home kitchen for direct sale may have an impact in rural, agriculture based communities, but may harm businesses that have already invested in commercial

kitchens due to current legislation.

- Farmers need access to capital to develop value-added products to supplement their farm incomes and access to certified commercial kitchens to process their products to be sold to the public.
- Producers need value-added food processing education: on-line courses on food safety and licensing requirements.
- Food safety education needs to be very accessible: available for all CO residents who would like the training and very affordable (if it's not affordable – food safety comes out of the business plan).
- Identify ways to use the CO Proud label to market value-added products for small-scale producers.
- Support was expressed for Farm to Family pilot project in Mesa County, which allows farmers to redeem WIC fruit and vegetable vouchers.

Day 2: August 12th

Guidestone and Chaffee County residents, farmers, and ranchers

About Guidestone and Landlink

<http://www.guidestonecolorado.org/>

Land-Link connects retiring farmers and ranchers as well as absentee landowners with next generation farmers. Guidestone assists with crafting the lease and equitable agreements between the landowner and the farmer. These agreements provide economically viable options for landowners that keep the agricultural heritage and water on their land intact. In addition, this program supports beginning farmers through an educational curriculum with a strong emphasis in financial planning, marketing strategies, business plans, food policy, legal issues, and production techniques.

Take-Aways from Group Discussion:

- Pairing individuals that want to go into farming but cannot afford the land or have not yet developed the necessary skills with farmers that are nearing retirement is a solution worth exploring more.
- Agriculture industry is concerned about the cost of land and water as demand for residential developments increase. Conservation easements that tie land and water together could offer part of the solution.
- Promote land-use codes for municipalities that support agricultural practices (food production).
- Understand the pros and cons for increasing public land use for agricultural purposes (in addition to grazing).
- Understand the barriers to making the H-2A temporary agriculture labor program more farmer friendly.
- There seems to be a lack of farming education for some who want to enter farming, and a need to use and expand farm extension programs to educate future farmers.

Canon City Prison

About the Canon City Prison

Colorado Correctional Industries (CCi) is a division within the Colorado Department of Corrections that is statutorily charged with working with as many offenders as possible, training them with meaningful job skills, and operating in a businesslike manner in order to reduce or avoid taxpayer funded prison program costs. The agricultural enterprises include a dairy, a goat dairy, farm operations, farm labor operations, aqua-culture (primarily tilapia and trout), a greenhouse, a vineyard, and wild horse training, among others.

Take-Aways from Group Discussion:

- Understand the market impact of subsidized programs on unsubsidized direct market farmers.
- Explore developing other models based on the prison program to be used for other populations such as veterans and those looking for job skills training.
- Possibility of learning from their tilapia farming operations to replicate for other institutions.
- Understand the barriers and opportunities for expanding this program to other correctional facilities (adult and youth) and half-way houses.
- CCi could potentially be a food hub for many school districts in the surrounding area.

Abbey Winery with Farmers' Market staff and leaders of community kitchen initiatives, Canon City

[\(http://www.abbeywinery.com/\)](http://www.abbeywinery.com/)

The Winery at Holy Cross Abbey is located on the pastoral and serene grounds of the Holy Cross Abbey.

Take-Aways from Group Discussion:

- There are a plethora of very good Colorado wines!



Day 3: August 13th

Canon City Farmers' Market and new The Kitchen Pantry

About Canon City Farmers' Market and The Kitchen Pantry

The Farmers' Market has a mission to supply fresh, locally grown seasonal produce that will help us eat healthy and support our local economy of farming, and accepts SNAP/Electronic Benefits Transfer (EBT), www.canoncityfarmersmarket.com. The Kitchen Pantry is a licensed commercial kitchen available to caterers, entrepreneurs, bakers and value added producers at hourly rates or monthly memberships, www.kitchenpantrycc.com.

Take-Aways from Group Discussion:

- Additional outreach and education is needed to connect people who use food assistance programs to local markets.
- Opportunities exist for State and County Departments of Human Services to promote farmers' markets that have EBT infrastructure, and farmers' markets can promote food assistance programs.
- Promote resources for the development of commercial kitchens to support value-added food production to increase farm sales.

Colorado Springs Farmers' Market

About Colorado Springs Farmers' Market

The Colorado Farm and Art Market is devoted to nurturing relationships between consumers and local producers of farm products, value-added food items, and fine crafts and art through the operation of cooperative urban markets. The organization also seeks to grow community across urban and rural boundaries and promote and sustain local and regional economies, <http://www.farmandartmarket.com/>.

Take-Aways from Group Discussion:

- There is a need to support direct marketing of Colorado agricultural products – if consumers know one farmer, they feel like they establish a connection to agriculture. This connection supports all farmers in Colorado.
- Increase availability and affordability of terminals at farmers markets in order to increase SNAP usage at farmers markets.
- Find ways to use the CO Proud Program to establish farmers market standards.
- Evaluate the use of the CO Proud Program to market Colorado-grown products to people using food assistance programs.
- Explore the potential for expanding a double-voucher program (a program where a local community foundation provided the market a limited grant to double all EBT purchases over the summer) across the state, a model that could be shared with other farmers markets using EBT.
- Establish ways to create significant institutional purchasing, i.e., large contracts between local farmers and schools or government institutions.
- More outreach is needed for the use of SNAP benefits at farmers markets to be successful for both participants and producers.
- Opportunities exist for County Departments of Human Services to promote farmers markets that have EBT infrastructure, and farmers markets can promote food assistance programs.



Our Route!

