

Inaugural Southwest Colorado Food and Agriculture Summit

11-2:30 pm MST Saturday, March 12
Kennebec Café, 4 CO Rd 1234, Hesperus, CO 813026

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Discussion Summary

The following is a summary of the themes that emerged during the topic discussions. It is important to note that the framework for the conversation was based on brainstorming. There was no consensus or agreement on solutions, rather, a broad opportunity for all voices to be heard without judgement.

Identified Successes

- Partner and leverage resources; collaboration
- Strong community, we come together as a family; we have grit
- Our consumers
- Amazing support organizations that support farmers/ranchers (e.g., CSU)
- Each Montezuma County child receives monthly education about farming
- Education is flowing to new and existing producers
- Marketing efforts are useful - social media, radio, newspapers, word of mouth, Local First, farmer's markets, sponsorships, Bob's Radio Show, press releases
- Product awareness; local recognition of ag
- People are willing to pay more – economic change
- During COVID people learned how to better produce for themselves (making bread, gardening, canning)
- Continuation of family legacy
- Pride in being part of the new/next generation of farmers
- Food access is finding funds and avenues for producers to connect w/ multiple populations
- Paying attention and coming together around policy
- Helping lots of people create new products, supportive food and ag community
- Filled the gap in the poultry industry
- We are the only game in town
- Creation of succession niche market of elite hogs, new cattle operations
- Listening/ability of next generation to bring ideas
- Creating a seconds market to support local farmers
- Incredible work ethic
- Turning challenge of COVID into a success/opportunity - SW food and ag has a pivot ability, flexibility - was able to pivot during COVID when non-regional food and ag wasn't able to
- Decentralized food system
- Bayfield garden expansion at Pine River
- Pride in self and work
- Willingness to take risks and make mistakes – fail forward

Identified challenges

- Climate change, weather events and drought

- Water
- Inflation
- Land, access, equity
- Public land access
- Pests
- Processing costs – both state and federal regulations – and access
- Burn out
- Rural/urban disconnect
- Skilled labor needs for processing – considering SB 87 impacts
- Food access has seasonality – need to process to extend product life
- Physical and mental health care
- New neighbors

Key Themes for Action

1. Enhance storytelling/messaging and education

Opportunities

- Messaging focus
 - Product awareness
 - Food and agriculture are on the forefront
 - There's a story to tell
 - Diverse perspectives and experiences are all important to highlight – this is interesting and important work
 - Important to look at the positive and challenging aspects
 - Pride in ourselves, in our hard work
 - Show how food and ag are a career
 - Share unique and diverse values
 - Consumer choice – show importance of buying local
 - Report on success connecting kids and fresh foods
 - Make it easy for consumers to find us
 - It takes work to grow food
- These avenues are already working to tell the story
 - Build on word of mouth
 - Use restaurant partners
 - More social media
 - Train staff, do more farm tours
 - Labeling with local highlight
 - Annual reports
 - Showcase local producers in high profile news, TV and radio
 - Recognize that this is a fun topic to provide education about!
 - Use QR codes on menus to share where the food is from

Next Steps/Key Actions

- Consumer education
 - Need more advocacy/education for the public to understand where their food comes from
 - Promote products from SW Colorado statewide and across the Country
 - Get urban and rural people talking and learning from each other; promoting their concerns and achievements
 - Create ag/food/water literacy courses that are available to all teachers.
 - Build on what's already working to tell the story better.
 -
- Producer education
 - Bring education to the producers – we need more information, connection and education on how to better access resources and how to use them.
 - Introduce more educational programs for food/ag workforce
 - Find more ways to listen to our consumers.
- Leverage coordinated education and outreach efforts
 - Pay for/invest in
 - Leverage existing groups, partnerships, and collaborate on grants (FFA)
 - Recognize the limited time available from food and ag
 - We're a small population with a lot at stake, we need help/more people to present our side and our story.

2. Bring funding resources to the region (and help people access them)

Opportunities

- Partner and leverage resources
- There's money out there, ARPA, Cares Act, and IIJA
- There's interest, engagement from the philanthropic community to support
- Food funding is flowing for local procurement – intermediary focused; need to make connections
- USDA – FSA
- NRCS - EQUIP
- Need to make it easy to find and capacity support to apply for opportunities
- Collaborate locally to advocate for federal opportunities

Next Steps/Key Actions

- Identify gaps
 - Grants or co-op for freezer or cooler space
 - Grants for expanding food processing capacity
- Encourage a SCBGP grant application from the region, they always seem to be front range focused
- Collaborate on grants
- Connect ag with food security – increase retail EBT options

3. Bolster local purchasing of food and ag products

Opportunities

- Tribal communities (Navajo, Mountain Utes, and Southern Utes) are investing in agriculture. See problems associated with conventional food system. Already have relationships with tribes in terms of renting land for range but there are barriers to accessing the tribe as markets.
- Diversified production in the region. Possibility to offer consumers with full basket of goods. Producers can really work together; interest in one product can be shifted and diversified into other products.
- Within 100 miles radius of Farmington, UT there are 7 million people.
- Major opportunity to connect the dots.
- Systems exist to support producers, but many of them are one size fits all.
- General sense that households need to be prepared for future disruptions (political/the next toilet paper). Need meat in the fridge, and having the tools needed to prepare food.

Next Steps/Key Actions

- Create more distribution options (co-ops); infrastructure
- Create more processors in our area
- Support conversion of Russel Stover facility in Montrose to support regional agriculture
- Streamline ordering of products for buyers like restaurants/grocery
- Buy with collaborators
- Connecting farmers directly to restaurants
- Systems to support producers need to be more varied and responsive to the needs of the diversity type of production (example FSA program).

4. Come together as a community to build on innovation/creativity

Opportunities

- Stick with our community, family and friends
- Food businesses are expanding and willing to help
- Be a good listener
- Increase buying power – co-ops
- Mentorships
- We're positioned for ongoing creativity, come together to do that more
- Growing processing opportunities (meat, Russel Stover) – commissary kitchens, value-add
- Regenerative ag – food, clothing, other ideas
- Consumer focus on all around impact – buy product, feel good, support others
- Online sales

Next Steps/Key Actions

- Keep this momentum moving, create opportunities to meet more as a region
- Connect food and agriculture to the organizations working among the sectors and encourage participation
- Have more social events
- Get leadership of the agricultural groups together
- Continued conversations like this with multiple sectors represented in our local food system; bring in more diversity.
- Seek out partnerships that compliment your product
- Help with waste from stores that can be used to feed people

5. Improve policy, regulatory and economic barriers

Opportunities

- Collaborate to help our voice to be heard – be part of the conversation
- Get creative for land access
- Conservation easements alternative for leasing land
- Help navigating different state rules for processing
- Navigate implementation of SB 87
- Be more visible
- Bridge urban and rural divide
- Engage with the schools/school boards
- Push to extend school nutrition programs
- Educate the policy makers
- Solar energy
- To get involved in the local area

Next Steps/Key Actions

- Review state regulations with the following questions in mind:
 - Does this allow for new ag business and food producers? Do they inhibit small/mid-size producers?
 - Find areas for streamlining, making easier for producers and manufacturers to comply.
 - E.g., Please change to egg wording, under cottage, up to 250 dozen without a license. Current wording confuses people, they think it means they don't need the class which is a certificate not a license.
- More civic engagement
 - Engage with local policy makers and staff – invite them to our meetings
 - Get more visibility in the state for the benefits of ag.
 - Encourage a state focus on agriculture, not Front Range vs. West Slope
 - Let our local policy makers know that how policies impact us
- Find solutions to water supply challenges
 - Expand water storage
 - Advocate for water protection for ag

- Engage in land/water speculation conversation to people know the impacts
- Create incentives to conserve water
- Processing
 - Promote deregulation for easier on-side/mobile processing and butchering facilities.
 - Meat processing legal at a state level not USDA.
- Prevent loss of land due to development
 - Explore opportunities with land conservation, easements and leasing.
 - Promote better opportunities to expand production when property is being sold – when property is being sold, have a process that if land is staying I ag that the buyer may get a discounted price, if property is going to development or other use like recreation, than cost goes up and financial difference can be distributed over previous owners.
 - Engage/be aware of county land use planning
- Get labels on products to say where the product is actually from, to promote buying local.
- Need more co-op power: buying, marketing, insurance.
- Accessibility
 - Less regulation more education – if you educate us we can grow/raise/butcher/manufacture without the need for so many laws/licenses.
 - Provide free community college for all to create true equity and accessibility in agricultural education.
 - Expand support to native communities in our region with water, agriculture, infrastructure and housing.
 - Advocate for affordable housing for ag/restaurant workers

Top 1-3 Messages to Convey at Summit

Needs

- More funding for agricultural infrastructure.
- More processing ability locally, for both personal and commercial use.
- More animals, rotated on pasture, not less.
- Infrastructure to support future economy and opportunity.
- More accessibility/awareness of product:
 - To help with producer with an outlet/market.
 - People want to eat local and need places to find it.
- Better opportunities to expand production when property is being sold. Agriculturalists cannot afford what land is valued at.
- Ranchers and farmers need better prices on their product. Agriculturalists don't even make the minimum wage requirements. Expenses keep climbing yet income is the same it was decades ago.

SW Colorado food/ag is vibrant and diverse

- SW Colorado is a strong, productive resource for our area and the state
- Food production/processing is the backbone of our state
- SW Colorado has a vibrant food community.
- Let's not forget the 4-corners area of Colorado has a lot to offer!
- We are strong together!
- We are from all walks of life!
- We are worth standing up for!
- Don't forget about us!
- There is a connection to ag even if you live in an urban area
- Focus on all/diverse areas of ag
- We have a lot more in common than we think
- One of SW agriculture's greatest strength is when we come together: we realize how much we have in common and where we overlap
- We need to expand the sense of ag community – who is part of it.
- We want to collaborate and work together.
- We all eat.
- We are all consumers in one form or another.

Ag is a solution to climate change

- Highlight environmental benefits of responsible/regenerative agriculture
- Expand conversations about sustainability in SW Colorado ag and help shine a light on how many producers in this region are working toward soil regeneration and drought mitigation.

Keep rural and small operations voices heard

- Don't forget that SW Colorado is part of the state!!
- We may be in the minority, but our challenges and opportunities are as important as communities on the Front Range.
- Rural areas need more information, connection and education on how to better access resources and how to use them.
- Thank you! For all the grant opportunities for us smaller farmers.
- Don't forget about us little guys. We love what we do providing food for our community and we need support.
- People from ag need to be heard and appreciate what they do.
- Understand the negative impacts of federal policy (inflation, rising fuel costs) and do what we can do lessen that.

We need to be nimble and flexible

- Our local area is gaining in population of wealthy, health-conscious consumers. We should pivot to meet their food choices.
- There are a lot of opportunities for SW Colorado food and ag

Agenda Overview

Anticipated Outcomes

- Build connections and relationships across the various food and agriculture sectors in the Southwest region.
- Increase awareness of the efforts taking place across and within each food/agricultural sector.
- Identify core challenges and opportunities that are distinct and overlapping within each sector.
- Inform policy makers and resource groups of SW Colorado's food and agriculture position, opportunities and challenges.
- Engage in a productive, enjoyable and motivating day that positions individuals and groups within SW regional food/agriculture to move forward in maximizing the whole sector's impact.

Discussion Topics

1. **Topic - Success:** What are you doing within SW food and agriculture that you are most proud of? What enabled your success? How do you currently share/communicate your successes and to whom?
2. **Topic - Opportunity:** What is the greatest opportunity that SW food and agriculture have in moving forward in the coming 1-3 years? How do you think we should approach this opportunity?
3. **Topic - Challenges:** What is the greatest challenge that SW food and agriculture have in moving forward in the coming 1-3 years? What is the biggest threat to our success? What do you think we should do to address these challenges?

Meeting Evaluation

- The food was fabulous.
- The meeting design – World Café with table hosts – was a great structure.
- The questions were thoughtful.
- People appreciated the diverse audience and ability to engage with people with different perspectives than themselves.
 - In future meetings, it would be nice to move people around a little more so they could get to know more people.
- Liked the opportunity for connections and networking.
- In future meetings, it would be great to have more policy makers/staff listening.
- In future meetings, it is important to have the Tribal representatives at the table.
- Other evaluation feedback (from notecards):
 - I thought this was helpful to hear a different perspective.
 - I became aware of some local business that I was unaware of.
 - How can we keep this momentum going and meet more as a region?
 - Repeat this event in the future (feedback expressed by multiple people)
 - Create a website or some way to cultivate the connections we made today.
 - Bring in more diversity.