



COLORADO
Department of Agriculture

STIMULUS REPORT

2020 - 2022

Table of Contents

About CDA	<u>Page 3</u>
Message from the Commissioner	<u>Page 4</u>
Overview of Recovery Funding	<u>Page 5</u>
Individual Program Overview	<u>Page 7</u>
Move the Needle Grants	<u>Page 8</u>
Colorado Proud Grants	<u>Page 10</u>
Drought Resiliency Grants	<u>Page 11</u>
ACRE ³ Grants	<u>Page 13</u>
Soil Health Grants	<u>Page 15</u>
Farm-to-Market Grants	<u>Page 17</u>
Agricultural Event Grants	<u>Page 20</u>
Mental Health Grants	<u>Page 21</u>

[Review the 2020 CDA COVID recovery report here.](#)

About the Department of Agriculture

MISSION

CDA's mission is to strengthen and advance Colorado agriculture; promote a safe and high-quality food supply; protect consumers; and foster responsible stewardship of the environment and natural resources.

VISION

Our vision is that Colorado agriculture be strong and vibrant, a key driver of the state's economy, and recognized worldwide for its safe and abundant supply of high-quality food and agriculture products.

CORE VALUES

RESPECT

We recognize differences in people and communities touched by our work and treat all with dignity.

PROFESSIONALISM

We represent the Department proudly and hold ourselves and each other accountable.

PARTNERSHIP

We bring people together and use our collective knowledge to continually achieve better results.

SERVICE

We care about each other and our customers and strive for every interaction to be a positive one.

PROACTIVE

We are forward-thinking in our work and take early action to address emerging needs.

Agriculture is Important to Coloradans

98

PERCENT

AGREE

- Colorado's food and ag industries are essential to the state's future economic resiliency.
- Ranches, farms, and ag are vital to Colorado's quality of life.
- It's important to maintain land and water for ag purposes in Colorado.

2022 Public Attitudes About Colorado Agriculture survey

Photo by Shelby Chesnut



Message from the Commissioner

Since the pandemic, more than \$76 million in state and federal recovery funds has come through the Colorado Department of Agriculture to support our farming and ranching communities. CDA used this opportunity to help build greater resilience, vitality and opportunity for Colorado agriculture and food systems.

This report provides an overview of how CDA put federal and state dollars to work. The scope of the efforts presented in this report goes far beyond the numbers: the grants featured here are a cross-section of the hundreds of projects that helped advance opportunities for rural Colorado while expanding access to new markets, advancing equity, and funding voluntary, farmer- and rancher-led regenerative agriculture practices.

In the summer of 2022, I had the opportunity to visit some of our grant recipients. One of these visits was to the Ute Mountain Ute Tribe Farm & Ranch Enterprise. By utilizing recovery funding from CDA's ACRE³ Program, the Ute Mountain Ute Tribe Farm & Ranch Enterprise-Bow & Arrow Brand is working to install 10 hydroelectric turbines that harness the energy of irrigation water to provide clean energy powering the Farm's center pivot irrigation and milling operation. Once the project is completed, it will mean an annual savings of \$42,000 and 345 tons of CO², savings which benefit the Tribe's finances and the environment.

The projects featured here have made a positive impact on ag communities and their benefits will continue into the future. From improving irrigation infrastructure and energy efficiency to advancing producer-led soil and climate stewardship practices and the ag events that bring our communities together, the hundreds of producers putting CDA's recovery grants to work are helping build a stronger future for Colorado agriculture.



*Commissioner
Kate Greenberg*

Commissioner Kate Greenberg

Photo by Luke Munchrath



Overview of recovery funding

CARES Act

From the The Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security Act (CARES Act) and through the Governor's Office, CDA received an allocation of \$332,000 to support Colorado agricultural processors and manufacturers. The funding was distributed through a competitive grant process.

The [Move the Needle Grants](#) helped stimulate Colorado's food and agriculture value chain, particularly related to food processing and manufacturing, which continues to be constrained by a lack of funding for business start-up and/or expansion. Funds were awarded based upon the project's expected economic impact, potential for creating new jobs, and focus on building resilience in Colorado's food and agriculture value chain.



Photo by Luke Munchrath

Colorado Stimulus

In 2021, Colorado's general assembly and Governor Polis unveiled a \$700 million state economic stimulus plan.

As lawmakers divided up the funding, CDA saw more than \$76 million go through our doors in support of the state's agricultural industry.

Under the stimulus plan, funding boosted agriculture and rural communities, including \$30 million in loans and competitive grants for farm-to-market and processing infrastructure investments and millions toward conservation projects to mitigate and prepare for the ongoing drought.

2021 State Stimulus Legislation

[SB 21-203](#): Appropriates \$2.5 million to expand market opportunities for Colorado Producers through the Colorado Proud program.

[SB 21-234](#): Appropriates \$1.88 million to engage in activities that promote the State's ability to anticipate, prepare for, mitigate, adapt to or respond to drought. There is also \$15,000 per Conservation District (\$1.125 million total).

[SB 21-235](#): Appropriates \$5 million to expand agricultural efficiency and soil health initiatives, including \$3 million to the ACRE3 program of which at least \$150,000 towards agrivoltaics and \$2 million for Soil Health activities of which at least \$1 million will go through Conservation Districts.

[HB21-248](#): Appropriates \$30 million to create an agricultural revolving loan and grant program, \$5-10 million is for agricultural processing loans or grants and \$10-20 million in loans to farmers and ranchers.

[HB 21-1262](#): Appropriates \$35.5 million for Agricultural Events of which \$2 million will go to Local County Fairs and other agricultural events. There is also a non-discretionary allocation of \$28.5 million to National Western Stock Show for event support and construction of the National Western Stock Show Campus and \$5 million to the Colorado State Fair.

Overview of recovery funding, continued

NIFA Mental Health Funding

In June 2021, CDA applied for \$500,000 in funding through a USDA National Institute of Food and Agriculture (NIFA) grant to support mental health services in rural communities.

CDA applied for the grant with five partners: Southeast Health Group, Colorado AgrAbility, La Plata Family Centers Coalition, Colorado Farm Bureau, and Rocky Mountain Farmers Union's AgWell program. Each of these partners drafted a budget request and a narrative application for the grant and the application was submitted by CDA on behalf of all partners.

The grant supports the vitality and mental wellbeing of Colorado's agricultural workers and producers through community-based efforts that help manage the increasing stresses on our agricultural communities.

CDA was awarded the grant, with the start of the grant scheduled for September 1, 2021 and an end date of August 31, 2022. In April of 2022, CDA applied for a no-cost extension of the grant's spending authorization, to continue work until August 31, 2023. Additionally, in August 2022, NIFA announced that additional funding would be available as part of this grant. CDA received an additional grant amount of \$59,606, which was divided up between the partners according to the original share of the grant. From that funding, \$10,000 of CDA's portion of the grant was dedicated to purchasing radio ads in agricultural communities to increase awareness of mental health services in rural Colorado.

ARPA - American Rescue Plan Act

During the 2022 legislative session the General Assembly appropriated \$14.6 million if federal funding for capital construction/maintenance for the Colorado State Fair and to establish a new Community Food Access Program.

State fair funding will pay for needed upgrades to the fair grounds, including a new roof, HVAC, and windows for the Palace of Agriculture. It also funds fire sprinklers and code upgrades for the 4-H complex. The total appropriation for the state fair was \$6.6 million.

CDA is honored to develop a new Community Food Access Program in FY 22/23. This \$8 million program will provide \$25,000 grants for small food retailers and farms to purchase equipment that increases access to healthy food in low-income, low-access neighborhoods. This program will also work to reduce costly distribution feeds to small food retailers.



Individual Grant Programs

01 | Move the Needle Grants
Funding: ARPA

02 | Colorado Proud Marketing Grants
Funding: State Stimulus

03 | Drought Resiliency Grants
Funding: State Stimulus

04 | ACRE³ Grants
Funding: State Stimulus

05 | Soil Health Grants
Funding: State Stimulus & Others

06 | Colorado Agricultural Future Loans
Funding: State Stimulus

07 | Farm-to-Market Infrastructure Grants
Funding: State Stimulus

08 | Agricultural Events Grants
Funding: State Stimulus

09 | Mental Health Grants
Funding: Federal USDA/NIFA grant



Rio Grande Farm Park (STAR Program)



Nola Naturals (Move the Needle)

01 | Move the Needle Grants

The Governor's Office allocated \$332,000 from the The Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security Act (CARES Act) funding to CDA to stimulate Colorado's value-added food production. CDA used a competitive grant process administered by the Markets Division and the Colorado Agricultural Value-Added Development Board to review 64 applications requesting a total of \$3.5 million, before selecting the final grantees.

The initial review and scoring of all applications conducted by an interdisciplinary team of the Department of Agriculture, Colorado State University, and the Colorado Food Systems Advisory Council.

Recommendations of the review team were put before the Colorado Agricultural Value Added Development Board. Upon consideration of the recommendations of the review team, the Board endorsed the recommendations and received final approval from the Commissioner.



Barley and malt processor Root Shoot Malting, Berthoud, CO, was one of the seven grant recipients. Photo courtesy of Root Shoot Malting/Facebook.

FAST FACTS

Funding Source:

Governor's appropriation from CARES Act funding.

Project administration:

Markets Division, Colorado Agricultural Value-Added Development Board

Project leads: Danielle Trotta, Colorado Proud Program Manager; Tom Lipetzky, Markets Division Director

By the numbers:

- Total for all projects funded: \$332,000
- Number of grants disbursed: 7
- Number of projects funded: 7
- Highest approved amount: \$100,000
- Lowest approved amount: \$17,000
- Number of counties receiving funding: 7

Project highlights

Jojo's Sriracha

Funding use: Additional processing capacity

Jolene Collins of Jojo's Sriracha moved her specialty sriracha processing operation from Denver to Pueblo to make the most authentic, delicious, local sriracha, by living and working only a few miles away from where her main ingredient, the legendary Pueblo chile, is grown.

As demand for this wholly local product grew, so did the need for more efficient machinery, which the Move the Needle grant helped fund. The large capacity blender and masher entirely revolutionized Jojo's processing capabilities to help her serve customers across the state quickly and efficiently.

Jojo shares her community's pride in the Pueblo chile and is a proud supporter of the Pueblo Food Project, helping other entrepreneurs with the ins and outs of small business management.



“No farmers, no food.’ We need to prioritize the importance of our farmers and also water, that it’s going to the people who are growing our food.”

Jolene Collins
Owner and Operator of JoJo's Sriracha



Nola Naturals

Funding use: Equipment, property upgrades, payroll expenses

As one of the few certified exempt poultry processing facilities in the state, Nola Naturals is a great fit for the Move the Needle grant stimulus funds through Colorado Proud. Their free range poultry offer a local option for healthy, tasty birds for consumption.

Nicole "Nick" Perchess and her family are the heart, soul, hands, and feet of Nola Naturals, involved in every step from farm to table. It's hard work but well worth it, especially when they are now able to grow their capacity for processing by employing more staff and increasing production while addressing the gap between producers and consumers.

They also work hard so that agriculture is sustainable for the next generations, implementing new ways of caring for the land, the water, and the soil.

Knowing that food access is a challenge for many Coloradans, Nola Naturals is actively involved in their community by hosting dinners dedicated to empathetic, seasonal eating, knowing exactly what is on the plate and educating others on what it took to get it there.

02 | Colorado Proud Marketing and Technical Assistance Grants



The legislation appropriated \$2.5 million to the Colorado Proud program, with \$372,000 funding competitive grants for Colorado Proud food and agricultural producers are looking to broaden their reach and expand into new sales channels.

A listening session was held on June 24, 2021 to hear feedback from Colorado Proud members and others interested in applying for the grant program. The program began accepting online applications for grants on October 1 and applications closed on November 1, 2021.

Any Colorado-based business was eligible to apply, but priority was given to proposals from Colorado Proud members and projects which intend to use the funding in the following specific areas: e-commerce and website development; packaging and labels design with most current Colorado Proud logo; marketing and promotion.

Other Projects Using SB 21-203 Funding

- **\$1.28 million** to strengthen awareness among buyers and consumers of Colorado agriculture and the wide range of products grown, raised, or made in Colorado, including the “From our State to Your Plate” TV ad campaign.
- **\$660,000** to provide new opportunities to increase sales globally and help support the growth and resiliency of Colorado food systems.

FAST FACTS

Funding Source:

Colorado Recovery Funding, [SB 21-203](#)

Project administration:

Markets Division, Colorado Proud Program

Project leads: Danielle Trotta, Colorado Proud Program Manager; Tom Lipetzky, Markets Division Director

By the numbers:

- Total for all projects funded: \$372,080
- Number of grants disbursed: 42
- Number of projects funded: 42
- Highest approved amount: \$10,000
- Lowest approved amount: \$2,070
- Number of counties receiving funding: 22

03 | Drought Resiliency Grants

This legislation appropriated \$3 million to prepare for, mitigate, adapt to, or respond to any event, trend, or climatological disturbance related to drought or climate. From this, \$1.125M was distributed to Colorado's 75 Conservation Districts (\$15,000 per district. Since then, two Conservation Districts in Colorado have merged).

A listening session to gather feedback and answer questions was held on June 24, 2021 for Drought, ACRE3 and Soil Health programs. The Drought Resiliency program accepted applications between September 1 and September 20, 2021.

The 21 competitive grants totaled more than \$1.58 million in requests for direct funding to agricultural businesses, tribal organizations, water management entities, and watershed improvement projects across the state. The competitive grants funded more than 130 projects involving irrigation, pasture, livestock distribution, or water diversion projects that promote environmental stewardship among ag producers and ag water users.

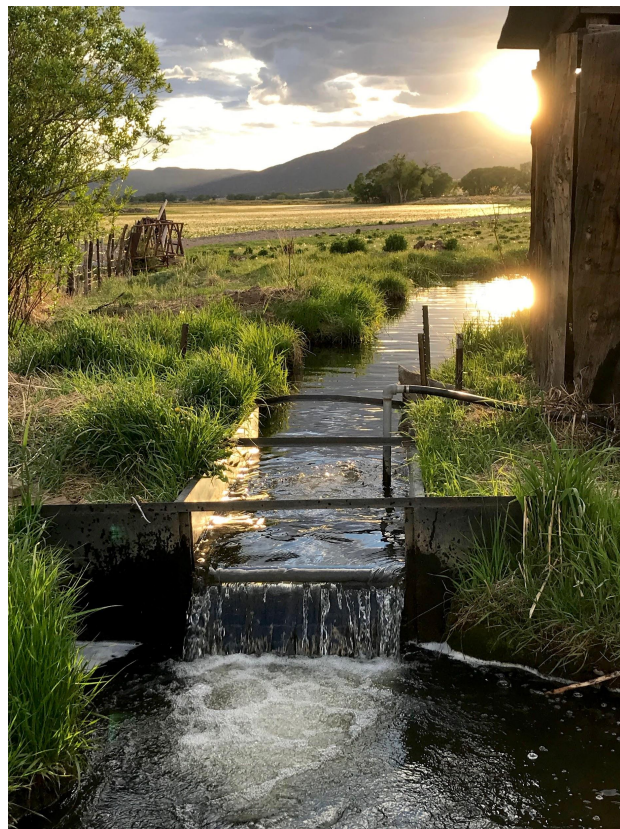


Photo by Rio de la Vista

FAST FACTS

Funding Source:

Colorado Recovery Funding, [SB 21-234](#)

Project administration:

Conservation Division

Project Leads: Les Owen, Conservation Division Director; Adam Ortega, Federal Land Management Specialist

By the numbers:

- Number of competitive grants disbursed: 21
- Number of projects funded: More than 130
- Highest approved amount: \$150,000
- Lowest approved amount: \$5,000
- Number of counties receiving funding: 17

Amount of funding distributed:

Total: \$1,800,965

- Competitive grants: \$1,580,980
- Grazing Advisory Boards: \$75,000
- Colorado State University: \$144,985

Project highlights

In the San Luis Valley, the **Rio Grande Headwaters Restoration Project (RGHRP)**, a non-profit organization whose mission is to restore the Rio Grande river and watershed health, partnered with the Billings Ditch Co. to identify and mitigate headgate and canal issues.

The drought stimulus funds gave RGHRP and their partner expanded capacity for improvements beyond the original project scope. Now, the infrastructure supports efficient use of flood irrigation, which additionally creates wetlands and wet meadows for wildlife use, and stabilizes the bank for improved fish habitat and aquatic connectivity. The timeliness of the funding created the opportunity for increased resilience and huge benefits to the agricultural community as they look towards a future with climate change.

In San Miguel County on the Western Slope, the **Farmers Water Development Company** received a \$139,315 grant to repair the slip of the Gurley Reservoir Dam. The improvements to the reservoir will allow it to be filled to capacity (approximately 3,199 acre feet) and support the needs of 210 agricultural shareholders on Wright's Mesa. This will help farmers irrigate longer into the season, allow the Town of Norwood to sell domestic water taps again, and give Norwood residents access to raw water services.

Other examples of projects include:

- **Restoring a historic water conveyance system** that supported 130 acres of irrigated pasture in Rio Grande County (grant amount \$42,000)
- **Expand the use of virtual fencing to enable rotational grazing** of cattle as a way to control livestock movements to improve watershed management and wildlife habitat in Eagle County (grant amount \$16,595).
- **Improving the effectiveness and efficiency of a water diversion structure** and construction of a control building for automation equipment in Logan County (grant amount \$100,000, covers about 10% of total cost of project).
- **The Colorado Master Irrigator (COMI) program**, which expanded into the San Luis Valley and the Republican River basin, trained more than 70 people statewide on how to integrate advanced conservation and irrigation management practices for production agriculture (grant amount \$150,000).

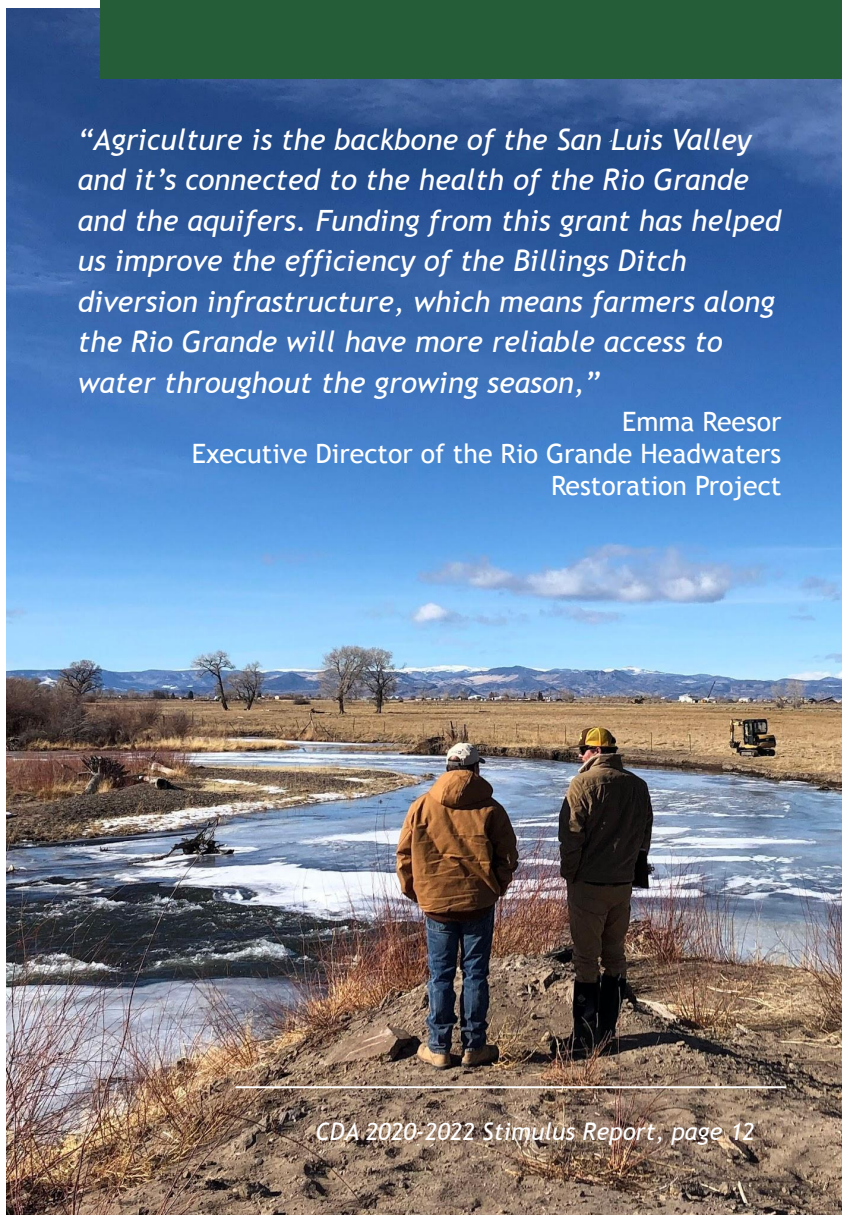
Other Drought Resiliency Grant Projects

The **CSU Extension Drought Advisors** and **Colorado Master Irrigator** trainings funded by the grants are preparing the next generation of ag leaders to save water, conserve energy, build soil health, enhance farm profitability and be prepared for difficult but likely circumstances such as anticipating, planning for, and managing drought impacts on their operations.

Additionally, \$75,000 was awarded to three of **Colorado's Grazing Advisory Boards** and \$144,985 was awarded to **Colorado State University** for programs that include training on drought management and the installation of soil moisture sensors to enhance drought monitoring capabilities of the CoAgMET system.

"Agriculture is the backbone of the San Luis Valley and it's connected to the health of the Rio Grande and the aquifers. Funding from this grant has helped us improve the efficiency of the Billings Ditch diversion infrastructure, which means farmers along the Rio Grande will have more reliable access to water throughout the growing season,"

Emma Reesor
Executive Director of the Rio Grande Headwaters
Restoration Project



04 | ACRE³ Grants

This legislation appropriated \$3 million to the ACRE³ (Advancing Colorado’s Renewable Energy and Energy Efficiency) program, of which at least \$150,000 was dedicated towards agrivoltaics.

ACRE³ promotes the development and implementation of renewable energy and energy efficiency projects for Colorado’s agricultural producers and processors. A listening session was held on June 24, 2021 for Drought, ACRE3 and Soil Health programs. The program has a rolling application period.

CDA partners with the Colorado Energy Office, the USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service-Colorado, and other partners to promote the [EQIP On-Farm Energy Initiative](#) for conducting on-farm energy audits. All EQIP-eligible Colorado dairies, irrigators, greenhouses, and cold storage facilities can receive technical and financial assistance from the ACRE3 program through the [Colorado Agricultural Energy Efficiency Program](#).



ACRE³ funding helped replace two 9-megawatt boilers at BrushCo, a greenhouse in Brush.

FAST FACTS

Funding Source:

Colorado Recovery Funding, [SB 21-235](#)

Project administration:

Conservation Division

Project Lead: Sam Anderson, ACRE³
Program Director

By the numbers:

- Total for all projects funded: \$3 million (\$2.72 million awarded as of 12/31/2022)
- Number of grants disbursed: 16
- Number of projects funded: 27
- Highest approved amount: \$466,667
- Lowest approved amount: \$2,500
- Number of counties receiving funding: 11

Project highlights

Altman Plants

Funding use: Building heating

Altman Plants is the largest provider of green goods to retailers in the United States. With locations throughout the United States, this company's Colorado location in El Paso County is a leader in Colorado's climate smart businesses. With 3,300 acres under glass, the facility grows and provides plants for larger, recognizable distributors such as Lowe's and Home Depot, throughout Colorado and into New Mexico and Texas markets.

A first time recipient of grant funding from CDA, Altman Plants used the funding to replace old boiler technology with some of the best in the world. Boilers heat the greenhouses as hot water goes through pipes at 130 degrees, then loses that heat in the greenhouse and gets reheated again. This cyclical system saves money on natural gas costs and increases the reliability of technology that is keeping young plants alive when outside weather reaches below freezing. Consistent temperatures allow the company to stay competitive against out-of-state businesses, since the majority of nursery and landscaping plants purchased in Colorado are from warmer climates like California or Mexico.

Altman Plants' Colorado operation also provides professional development to their employees who are learning that operations can minimize their impact on the environment if they think and act creatively.

Altman Plants hopes to continue to provide fresh plants, maintain hiring practices, and keep pollutants that impact air quality issues out of the atmosphere. General Manager Bobby Steinlein recognizes that Altman Plants has tremendous community impact - from beautifully decorating homes, to giving others the opportunity to learn more about the agricultural industry, Steinlein is proud of the work that has been accomplished through the company.

He explains, "When people can buy local, it's fresher and better."

Below: Altman Plants (El Paso County) used ACRE³ funding to install new boilers (left) to more efficiently heat their greenhouse (right), largest in Colorado.



Top ACRE³ Projects

ACRE³ funding helped BrushCo Farms greenhouse in Brush replace two 9-megawatt boilers with high efficiency boilers that will save more than 13.5 million cubic feet of natural gas per year (about 122,000 therms) and save more than \$100,000 in 2023. (705 tons/year CO₂e reductions)

Long's Peak Dairy in Galeton is using the funding to install a 600-kilowatt solar PV system that will save one million kilowatt-hours of electricity and \$49,000 per year. (915 tons/year CO₂e reductions).

At the Ute Mountain Ute reservation in Towaoc ("Toh-way-ok"), ACRE³ and USDA-NRCS funding paid for the design and installation of the first 3 of 10 small hydro-electric turbines in their farm irrigation system.

Together, these three turbines will recover 48 kilowatts of power from excess pressure in the irrigation pipelines, saving the tribe 140,000 kilowatt hours of electricity and up to \$20,000 per year. (132 tons/year CO₂e reductions)

05 | Soil Health Grants



This legislation appropriated \$2 million to administer voluntary soil health programs, with \$1 million going directly to Colorado’s conservation districts. A listening session was held on June 24, 2021 for Drought, ACRE³ and Soil Health programs. The application period was open between August 12 - September 15, 2021.

Together with conservation districts and partner groups, CDA uses the STAR Plus tool to run the STAR Plus soil health program. The STAR rating system allows ag producers to assess their soil health and function and identify areas for improved management.

A total of 125 producers were enrolled in the pilot program with the first growing season in 2022. Participants include early adopters, large scale farmers and ranchers, and producers that are brand new on their soil health journey. Among other commodities, STAR Plus participants raise corn, wheat, potatoes, fruit, vegetables, and cattle.

Total grant and stimulus funding received for the STAR program is \$5.58 million. Funding and support for STAR comes from Colorado General Assembly, Gates Family Foundation, Colorado Department of Public Health and the Environment, Colorado Water Conservation Board, National Fish and Wildlife Foundation, and the National Resources Conservation Service.

Funding Soil Health Research

STAR will fund installation of soil moisture probes across eight program and research fields representing a range of tillage, crop diversity, and operation types.

Environmental outcomes to be measured include gallons of water conserved per year, Lbs N and P avoided, and soil carbon impacts.

Additionally, Colorado’s investment in our soil health program helped secure a \$25 million Climate Smart Commodity Grant from the USDA.

FAST FACTS

Funding Source:

Colorado Recovery Funding, [SB 21-235](#)

Project administration:

Conservation Division

Project Lead: Cindy Lair, Colorado State Conservation Board Program Manager

By the numbers:

- Total grant and stimulus funding: \$5.58 million
- Total number of conservation districts enrolled in STAR Plus: 16
- Total number of other eligible entities: 3 (Colorado Corn, Audubon of the Rockies, and Dolores Water Conservancy District)
- Total number of producers enrolled in 2022: 125
- Number of acres enrolled under in STAR and STAR Plus programs: 24,473
- Number of counties receiving funding: 36

06 | Colorado Agricultural Future Loan Program

This legislation created a revolving loan program that supports beginning farmers, ranchers, and businesses that transform, package, process, store, or grade Colorado farm or ranch products.

CDA partnered with First SouthWest Bank to provide financing opportunities to people who have the training and experience to succeed in an ag business but may have been previously unable to secure conventional lending.

The Program accepts alternative forms of documentation to qualify loans that conventional lenders may not consider. By providing ag infrastructure and operating loans to those who might not qualify for traditional lending opportunities, we are seeking to strengthen Colorado agriculture, expand diversity within farming, and increase participation from next-generation farmers.

Loan funds can be used for most business purposes, including, but not limited to: operating expenses, the purchase of land and equipment, business improvements, worker wages, and conservation projects.



Partnering with an ag lender

The loan program is administered by First SouthWest Bank, a community-based lender with more than 100 years of experience in serving Southern and rural Colorado, with key lending relationships across the state.

The bank works in close partnership with its nonprofit affiliate First SouthWest Community Fund, which provides risk mitigating gap funding to emerging and existing businesses and helps build the agricultural system in an equitable way.

FAST FACTS

Funding Source:

Colorado Recovery Funding, [SB 21-248](#)

Project administration:

Markets Division

Project Lead: Brian Coppom, Program Manager

By the numbers:

- Total funding available: \$23 million
- Number of loans disbursed: 27
- Number of loan applications: 40 (27 closed, 13 approved or in-process)
- Highest approved loan amount: \$750,000
- Lowest approved loan amount: \$6,825
- Number of counties receiving funding: 17

Data as of 12/31/2022

07 | Farm-to-Market Infrastructure Grants

This legislation appropriated \$2 million to strengthen local food systems and create greater supply chain resilience in Colorado agriculture. The funding was awarded through a competitive grant program to help farmers, ranchers, food processors and manufacturers improve local food systems and drive the development and expansion of agricultural value-added projects.

Farmers, ranchers, and agricultural processing businesses were eligible to apply if they are residents of and operate in the state of Colorado. The maximum grant award amount for any one project was \$150,000. Grant funds had to be used for agricultural processing projects, such as the transforming, packaging, sorting, storage, or grading of Colorado livestock, livestock products, agricultural commodities, plants, or plant products.

Applications were reviewed in two Award Periods, one ending on November 30, 2021 and the second ending February 28, 2022. Applications for each award period were reviewed after the period deadline. For each award period, \$1 million was available for grants, with up to \$2 million total to be awarded.



Offerings at Mountain Oven, in Paonia, CO, one of the Farm-to-Market Infrastructure Grant recipients. The bakery used their funding to increase capacity and efficiency of processing locally grown grains into finished flour products for regional distribution.

Photo courtesy of Mountain Oven Organic Bakery/Facebook

FAST FACTS

Funding Source:

Colorado Recovery Funding, [HB 21-1262](#)

Project administration:

Markets Division

Project Leads: Brian Coppom, Program Director; Tom Lipetzky, Markets Division Director

By the numbers:

- Total for all projects funded: \$5.9 million
- Number of grants disbursed: 79
- Number of projects funded: 79
- Highest approved amount: \$150,000
- Lowest approved amount: \$2,869
- Number of counties receiving funding: 40

Project highlights

Table to Farm Compost

Funding use: Purchase of new hauler and screener equipment

Table to Farm Compost has a simple mission: Recycle food scraps into compost to save the planet. How they are accomplishing that mission is actually a little more complicated: with big dreams, multiple partners, and a lot of work being done by just a few.

Table to Farm operates on four acres a few miles outside of Durango with a turned windrow compost facility. The staff, including director Monique DiGiorgio, consider themselves to be farmers of microbes, an important part of the agricultural community. Monique took on the business after the previous owner left, and in the ensuing years, has felt even more strongly about microbial impact. She and her staff know that different types of fungi and other organisms support various land types, increase organic matter, and make a meaningful contribution towards mitigating the climate crisis through soil amendment.

Ag producers know that no system exists separately from another. Composting is no exception. It provides an environment for microbes to create optimum soil health. The logistics of the operation include picking up and hauling food waste from both residential and commercial customers, using machinery like screeners to then turn those food scraps into rich, microbe-filled compost.

Healthy soil not only has the ability to provide more nutrients through microbial activity, it also has a more efficient water carrying capacity and more effective carbon sequestration.

Table to Farm also believes their business is firmly entrenched in agriculture.

“Composters are part of the agricultural industry,” explains DiGiorgio. “When people start composting, they realize that food waste is a substantial amount of what we’re throwing away. There is a mind frame shift about recycling, how you eat, what you eat, and becomes an eventual behavior change.”

Table to Farm is using their Farm to Market grant funds to significantly scale up their operations, from a more efficient hauler that provides 10 times more turning ability, to expanding their services from 800 city residents to approximately 6,000 county wide (not to mention the exponential diversion of food waste).

They envision a measurable impact within the community that will continue to grow, allow them to shoulder heftier remediation projects such as highway transportation and wildfire mitigation and transform waste reduction in La Plata county.

DiGiorgio’s vision includes keeping funds and resources re-circulating throughout the region, promoting creativity in project partnership, and remembering that just as in any natural resource stewardship endeavor, systems are holistic and interconnected.

“We all need to start connecting those dots together,” DiGiorgio said.



Photos courtesy Table to Farm Compost (Durango, CO)/Facebook

Project highlights

Westcliffe Cheese Company

Funding use: Support operations

Jerome and Ann Wheeler love their work. But even more than that, they love the animals who put the “family” in family operations.

The Wheelers own a herd of Saanen goats, a breed renowned for their high quality milk. The goats are not only great producers, they closely bond with their humans and have formed strong connections with each other and the Wheelers. Goats are highly social, so the operations often feel more like a way for the Wheelers to justify having the goats, rather than the other way around. Ann couldn’t imagine life without their herd.

“Life with animals is so much better, they just enrich it,” she said

So when the goats produced more raw milk than they could sell, the Wheelers weren’t interested in reducing their herd. Instead, they decided to make and sell their own cheese. They are now a licensed milk barn and creamery who sells mostly to farmers’ markets, local stores, and restaurants.

While their business was growing, their capacity was not - the husband and wife employ only themselves. Spending 6 hours a day for both of them in the milking barn made everything else that needs to be taken care of on a goat dairy fall that much further behind. CDA’s Farm to Market grant’s \$11,000 went directly to expanding operations.

Purchasing additional stanchions (milking frames) meant they were able to cut their milking time in half and doubly increase milking production. This might not sound astronomical, but for a small operation, it made all the difference.

“It not only improved our business, it improved our lives. It would’ve taken years on our own,” Ann said.

The Wheelers purchase their goats’ alfalfa and feed locally and try to use local ingredients like Pueblo chiles from just down the road in their specialty cheese. While fully acknowledging that making and selling their own cheese is a dedicated, full time, at times exhausting effort, the Wheelers have come to enjoy the time that they spend connecting directly with consumers who sample, offer feedback or reactions, and hopefully then buy their wares.

They often take their customers by surprise when they explain that they don’t purchase materials from other suppliers, but use their own farm fresh goats’ milk, expressed that same day, to make the cheese that the customer is now enjoying. It’s a fulfilling circle.

“How often do you get to meet the people making the food that you’re eating?” Ann said.



Photos courtesy Westcliffe Cheese Co./Facebook

08 | Agricultural Event Grants

This legislation appropriated \$2 million for county fairs and agricultural events recovering from losses in 2020 caused by the Coronavirus pandemic.

Listening sessions were held on June 22 and July 29, 2021. County Fairs were eligible to apply for funding as well as Agriculture Events, if they were an already existing non-profit. Ag events had to show net losses for 2020. Applications were opened on August 13 and accepted until September 10, 2021. In the end, 49 projects were funded, sending stimulus dollars to 46 of Colorado's 64 counties.

One of the projects was the the Las Animas County Fairgrounds. The grant funding enabled the county to install cooling systems to offset the summer heat of county fair time and hire a programs coordinator to keep the community engaged.

When the fairgrounds aren't being used for livestock shows or auctions, they serve as a community gathering place and storage for a local food bank.

Ag Event Stimulus

While only a portion of the appropriation was used to fund grants for county fairs and other eligible events, HB 21-1262 also appropriated funds for the following projects:

\$25 million for campus construction of the National Western Stock Show complex.

\$5 million for Colorado State fair to fund Master Plan projects and other ground improvements

\$3.5 million for National Western Stock Show event support, majority of which was used for agriculture education events and to maintain and hire staff in 2022



Redeveloped Gate 5 entrance as captured by Shanna Lewis, CPR News

FAST FACTS

Funding Source:

Colorado Recovery Funding, [HB 21-1262](#)

Project administration:

Commissioner's Office

Project Lead: Jenifer Gurr, Chief Administrative Officer

By the numbers:

- Total for all projects funded: \$1.95 million
- Number of grants disbursed: 49
- Number of projects funded: 49
- Highest approved amount: \$69,034
- Lowest approved amount: \$13,832
- Number of counties receiving funding: 46

09 | Mental Health Grants

In the spring of 2021, CDA and five other partner organizations applied for a grant through the USDA's National Institute of Food and Agriculture (NIFA).

CDA's grant application included five partners: Southeast Health Group, Colorado AgrAbility, La Plata Family Centers Coalition, Colorado Farm Bureau, and Rocky Mountain Farmers Union's AgWell program. Each organization presented a proposal on how they would use the funds to expand current offerings and increase access to behavioral and mental health services across rural Colorado.

In September 2021, CDA was awarded \$500,000 from NIFA to support the vitality and mental wellbeing of Colorado's agricultural workers and producers through community-based efforts to manage the increasing stresses on our agricultural communities.

In July 2022, CDA was notified that NIFA will provide an additional \$59,606 towards the grant, which was split according to the share of the original grants. CDA's grant portion was invested in purchasing radio ad space in rural communities, to increase awareness of service availability.

Reach of Mental Health Services Funded by NIFA Grant in 2022

Goals Accomplished

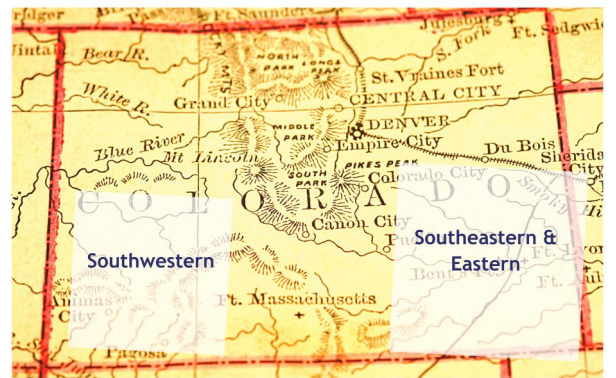
- Cultural Competency Training to Frontline Service Providers
- Community Centers for Support of Family & Friends
- Successful Awareness Campaigns for Professionals, Families & Friends
- Community Networking & Collaboration Opportunities

Ongoing Need-Based Goals

- Telehealth & Other Services that do not require internet connection
- Bilingual Resources, Providers & Training
- Targeted Outreach in Spanish Speaking Communities
- Expansion of Resources to Underserved Pockets of Rural Communities

Statewide Coverage via virtual services

With access to in-person services concentrated in two rural regions:



FAST FACTS

Funding Source:

United States Department of Agriculture's National Institute of Food and Agriculture (NIFA) competitive grant process

Project administration:

Markets Division

Project Lead: Alison Williams Helm, Grant Coordinator

By the numbers:

- Total for all projects funded: \$500,000
- Number of organizations funded: 5
- Highest approved amount: \$179,000
- Lowest approved amount: \$9,000
- Number of counties receiving funding: statewide reach of virtual services

Project highlights

La Plata Family Centers Coalition

Funding use: Develop new, culturally competent mental health awareness and coping materials and training for migrant workers

Working with the invisible immigrant communities of Southwest Colorado is Mariel Balbuena's second nature. As an immigrant herself, she has a unique understanding of the community. Entering a new culture and unfamiliar territory has its challenges, but she adds that being seen as an outsider, the language barriers, and the overall scrutiny toward immigrants is all very humbling and many times dehumanizing. La Plata Family Center Coalition's vision and mission are shaped by the community's self-identified needs, and mental health ranks as a priority need in this area of Colorado.

A team of an interpreter, a mental health provider, a worksite wellness instructor/coordinator and Mariel finds creative ways of connecting with the community. They can be found working side by side with immigrants and families, both in the fields and on the farm, where their intention is to develop a level of trust in casual conversation that can open the door to discussing their mental well-being. These windows provide a look into the fears, aspirations, obstacles and overall health and wellness of the farmworkers. The team supports one another in identifying candidates for services on the spot, by jumping in and out of each other's conversations, and by following through with proactive outreach.

In one initiative, Mariel identified that women in ag are recognized as the strongest supporters of a family's well-being, and often they carry the weight of stress in silence. The community's positive response led to a four-hour strength and wellness workshop, where 79 percent of attendees were immigrants and people of color. The Center also continues to grow their engagement with yoga and other creative forms of family therapy.



NIFA Grantee Projects

Colorado Farm Bureau - Colorado Agricultural Addiction and Mental Health Program (CAAMHP): Expand training throughout the state, provide cultural competency training for mental health providers.

La Plata Family Centers Coalition: Mental health support for migrant worker and families; Development of culturally competent mental health awareness and coping materials and training.

CSU & Goodwill Colorado - AgrAbility Program: provide assistive technology, support, and case management services to farmers and ranchers with a disability so they can continue to work.

Southeast Health Group - Coffee Break Project: Provide peer support Changing Our Mental and Emotional Trajectory (COMET) trainings to help members of the agricultural community look out for one another's mental health.

Rocky Mountain Farmers Union - AgWell: Implement COMET training across Colorado, give "Train the Trainer" training to providers in rural communities; Strengthen and promote AgWell to rural communities; Collaborate with La Plata Family Centers to create stress reduction training for migrant ag workers

Project highlights

Coffee Break Project

Funding use: Peer support trainings to help members of the ag community look out for one another's mental health

The Coffee Break Project started in 2018 in response to an inquiry to the Southeast Health Group about the increasingly high suicide rates among farmers and ranchers in the area.

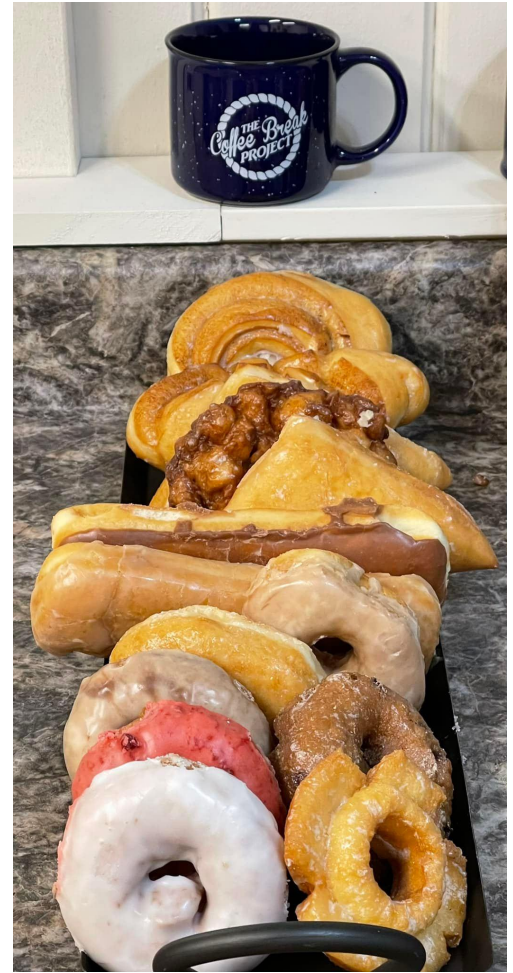
SHG formed a committee to host discussions about mental health in ag communities, which found that the culture was complicated and required a different approach in the area of mental health. With that, SHG turned to COMET (Changing Our Mental and Emotional Trajectory), a training tool to guide them in working with rural communities.

From ranchers, farmers, and their families, to counselors and other school district staff, everyone walks through the doors of the Coffee Break Project.

“For some people the coffee and donuts we offer are their only meals. Some are drug users, unhoused, or interventionists - the building is a multipurpose facility mall, 8,000 square feet and there are barbers, peer support services, substance abuse centers, a shower house. People go around the mall for services from door-to-door,” explained J.C. Carrica, CEO of Southeast Health Group.

The Coffee Break Project became an information hub, like a live health navigator, where people can be listened to, heard, and directed to resources available, including a warm hand-off to licensed professionals as needed.

Whenever the opportunity arises, they train members of the community to hear the right words and respond effectively. When friends struggle more than they're willing to talk about, it's important to understand how to take that conversation further. The program facilitators get creative with outreach, putting together snack boxes with literature inside. Every effort opens the door to more.



DO YOU LOOK AFTER YOUR NEIGHBORS AS CLOSE AS YOUR CROP OR HERD?



COLORADO
Department of Agriculture