



COLORADO
Department of Agriculture

Colorado STAR Program

Cindy Lair, Colorado Department of Agriculture
Conservation Services Division
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Theory of change I

The goal is the widespread adoption of soil health practices



Multiple barriers exist to the adoption of new practices (eg economic, social, equipment)



Programming is needed that reduces many barriers to adoption at the same time:

- Technical assistance
- Incentive payments
- Soil and economic research
- Education, outreach and communications
- Market signal
- Peer-to-peer learning

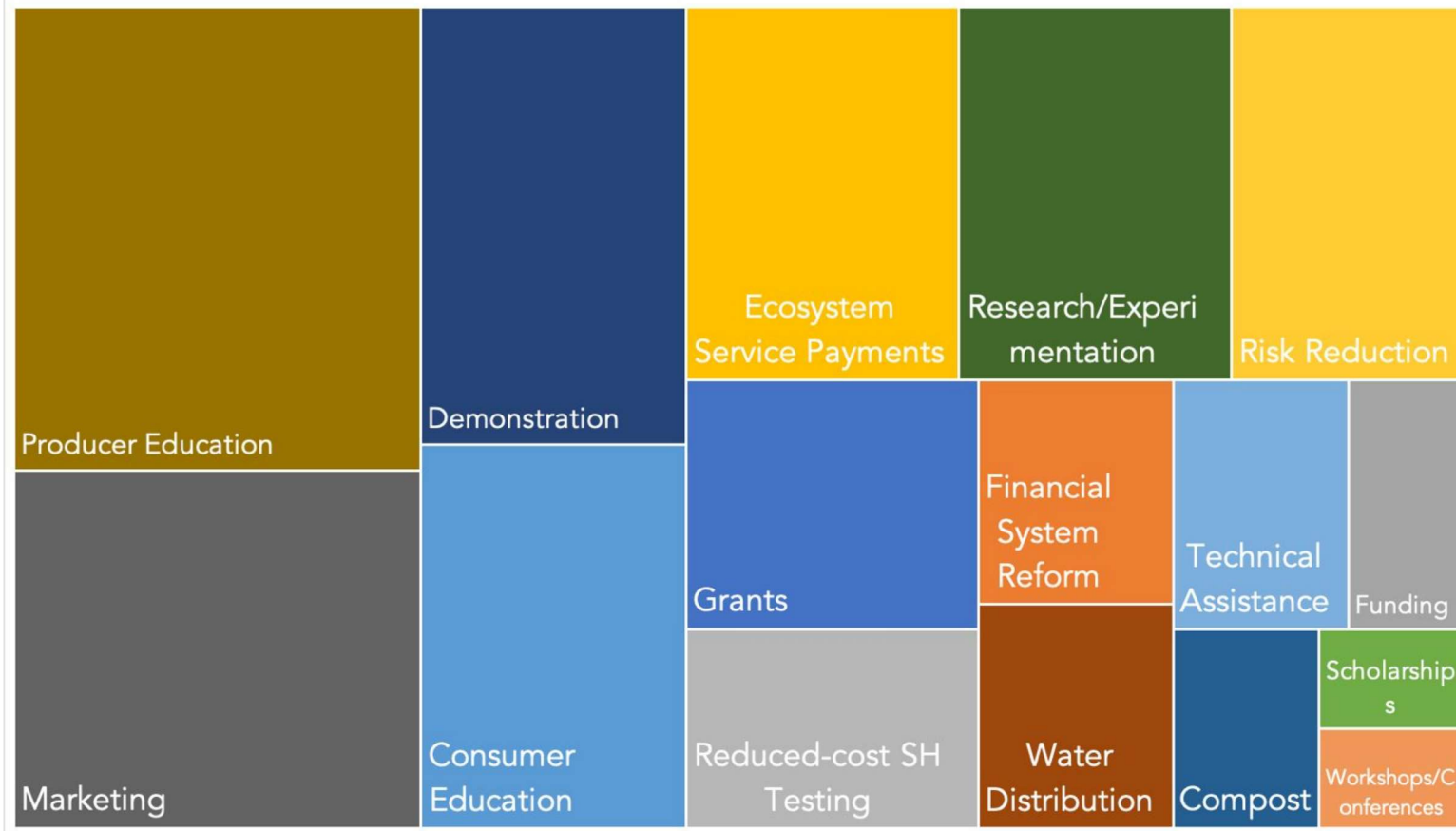


**COLORADO
COLLABORATIVE
FOR HEALTHY SOILS**

Stakeholder Engagement



How should CDA use funds for soil health?



Background

- HB21-1181: Creates a voluntary soil health program in CDA funded by gifts, grants, & donations + a State Soil Health Advisory Committee (effective September 6, 2021)
- SB21-235: Gives CDA \$2M for voluntary soil health practices



HOUSE BILL 21-1181

BY REPRESENTATIVE(S) McCormick and Will, Amabile, Bernett, Bird, Esgar, Froelich, Hooton, McCluskie, Michaelson Jenet, Titone, Cutter, Duran, Gray, Jodeh, Lontine, Mullica, Ricks, Snyder, Valdez D.; also SENATOR(S) Simpson and Winter, Bridges, Buckner, Coram, Fenberg, Ginal, Gonzales, Jaquez Lewis, Kolker, Moreno, Pettersen, Priola, Sonnenberg, Garcia.

CONCERNING THE CREATION OF A VOLUNTARY SOIL HEALTH PROGRAM, AND,
IN CONNECTION THEREWITH, MAKING AN APPROPRIATION.

What is STAR?

- Free and voluntary tool to:
 - Help producers assess where they are on their soil health journey
 - Inspire producers by identifying new practices
 - Structure conversations around soil health
- Complete the STAR Field Forms as part of the producer consultation
- Works synergistically with the research parts of the program



Saving Tomorrow's Agricultural Resources (STAR)

★ 1 Star (Average)

A field with practices similar to what 80% of fields of that type are doing in that region.

★★ 2 Stars (Above Average)

A field beginning to implement soil health principles.

★★★ 3 Stars (Great)

A field implementing multiple soil health principles.

★★★★ 4 Stars (Excellent)

A field implementing several soil health principles.

★★★★★ 5 Stars (Ideal)

A field implementing all five soil health principles.



Why STAR?

- Reward producer effort for doing the right thing
- Scientifically rigorous: Developed by a diverse committee of scientists, producers, NRCS, and others
- Flexible and adaptable
 - Looks at soil health holistically
 - Many pathways to improve soil health
 - No prohibitions
- Encourages experimentation and continual improvement
 - Field-based (except for Grazing Lands)
 - Annual process
- Not overly burdensome for producers or administrators (hopefully!)
- Potential for a market signal



Colorado STAR and STAR Plus

Colorado STAR

- Any producer in Colorado can go on the CDA website and complete a STAR Field Form to receive a 1-5 STAR Rating.
- The first 100 participants receive a free soil health test.
- Currently available for 11 types of production including alfalfa; non-alfalfa hay; annual grasses, grain and legume crops; hemp for flower, seed and fiber; orchards; potatoes; specialty row crops; sugar beets; vineyards; and grazing lands.
 - CDA is developing partnerships to provide marketing and other opportunities for STAR participants.

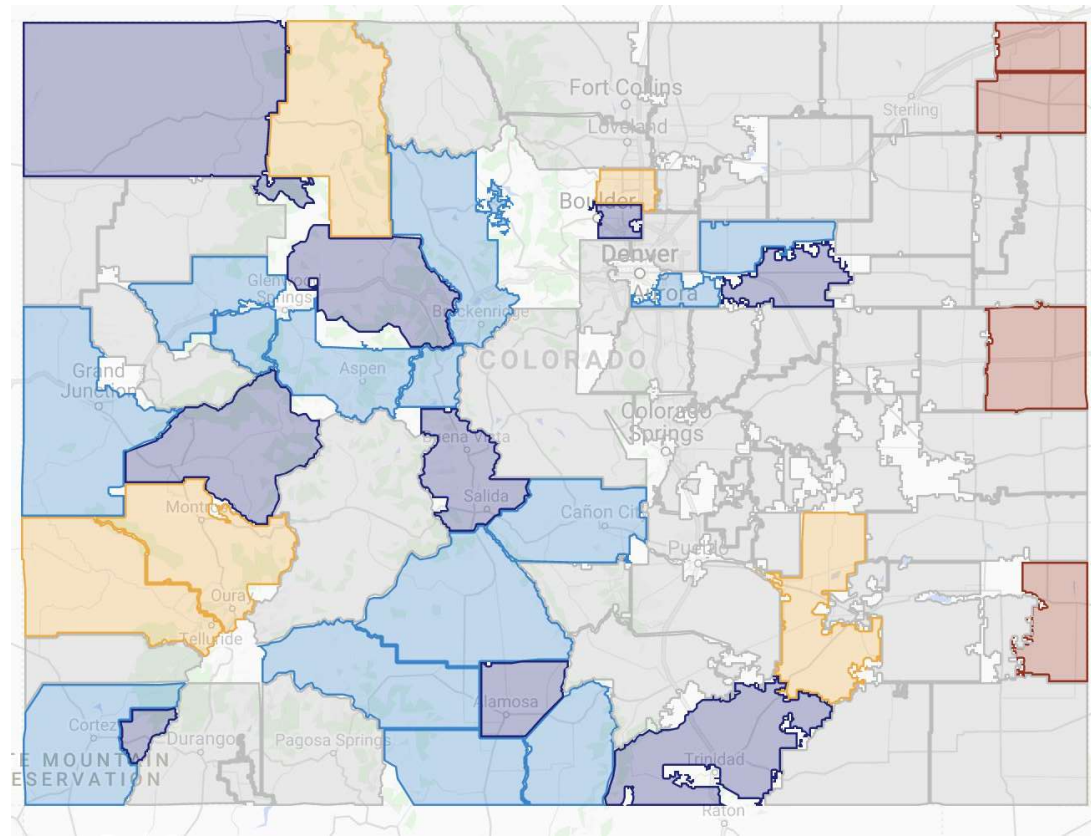
Colorado STAR Plus

- Provides three years of incentive payments to producers to try out new practices on one field as they gain familiarity and expertise with new practices.
- Conservation districts, eligible entities and technical assistance providers work with participants to provide four years of technical assistance.
- Soil sampling occurs in years 1 and 3; soil moisture probes installed in first year.
- Educational materials, outreach opportunities, access to new opportunities.
- Capacity support for conservation districts and eligible entities to implement this programming.

Colorado STAR Program supporters



Map of conservation district participation



CDA's "Expanding the STAR Program Across Colorado and The West" USDA Climate-Smart Commodities Grant - \$25,000,000

1. Empowers conservation districts and other entities to provide technical assistance to a diverse range of producers
2. Provides three years of financial and technical assistance to producers so they can gain familiarity and expertise with new practices as they consider adopting them across their operation
3. Quantifies and verifies carbon and water benefits on behalf of producers so they are empowered to participate in new market opportunities;
4. Develops the STAR rating as a market signal so participants earn more for products grown with healthy soil practices; and
5. Evaluates and validates carbon and soil-water research for the arid West.

Market development needed for the STAR program:

- Implement a market strategy to establish the STAR rating as a market signal
- Directly connect Colorado STAR participants with supply chain partners
- Integrate STAR with the Colorado Proud program
- Invest in market development for STAR at the national level

Theory of Change II

- Investing in conservation districts (and other eligible entities)
- Practice-based approach
- “Baby steps”: Three years to try out new practices
- On-ramp to other opportunities
- Soil for water
- Importance of on-farm economics to producer decision-making
- Connecting research and practice
- Education, communications, outreach, and peer-to-peer learning



Thank you!



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