SAN LUIS VALLEY COMMUNITY FOOD & AGRICULTURAL ASSESSMENT

Alamosa • Costilla • Conejos • Mineral • Rio Grande • Saguache

2024

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ACKNOWLEDGING THE LAND & PREVIOUS INHABITANTS

The San Luis Valley Local Foods Coalition and Project Stewards recognize that the food system starts with the land. The land that surrounds us is part of who we are; it reflects our histories, our present, and our future.

We cannot explore the present or plan for the future of our food system without recognizing this past. We acknowledge that this land was stolen through genocide and slavery from the Comanche, Ute, Apache, Pueblo, Hopi, and Dine people. We also celebrate that many of these Native people still live here and still strive to protect the legacy of their land, water, culture, heritage, and people.

We recognize that this acknowledgment does not replace action. As current custodians of this territory, we commit to building meaningful relationships with historical stewards of this land and to deepening our understanding and acknowledgment of how this history impacts our food system today.

ACKNOWLEDGING

PARTNERS

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COMMUNITY INPUT & PROJECT STEWARDS

The assessment that follows was informed by the experiences and input of hundreds of community members, farmers/ranchers, and food business leaders who took the time to complete surveys and participate in community events.

We are especially grateful to the members of the Project Stewards, who provided their expertise and guidance on the process of this assessment including:

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The San Luis Valley Local Foods Coalition, supported by numerous partners, conducted a Community Food and Agriculture Assessment of the San Luis Valley from May 2022 through August 2023. This gathered survey results from 1,153 wide-ranging community members, food businesses, and farmers/ranchers. Further, 185 attendees of in-person summits held discussions in each of the six counties. The stories, opinions, and preferences they shared, combined with select secondary data, make up the findings presented in this report.

Some of the most striking findings have to do with Values. Community members, farmers/ranchers, and food businesses all share as high priorities: investing in a thriving local food and farm economy, and encouraging and supporting youth farming/ranching programs. Farmers/ranchers want to promote conservation practices to improve soil health and community members care that their food is affordable, that workers are treated safely, that their food is safe to eat, and that the food system supports the local economy.

When it comes to Producer Opportunities, three-quarters of farmers/ranchers are interested in growing their business, especially to local consumers and businesses. However, they are limited by a lack of water, as both water prices and the threat of curtailment increase; but they have hope in water conservation practices, finding additional outlets to sell local foods, and in value-added processing of their products. Food businesses are also interested in growing, but face permitting challenges, and are limited in the number of outlets selling local foods and in recruiting and retaining employees, especially because of rising housing costs. Both producers and food businesses believe that tourists are seeking an experience of local foods, and that SLV residents need education on the value of buying locally produced food.

Despite growing and raising lots of food during its short growing season, there are low rates of Healthy Food Access, because a lack of retail outlets and long transport distances increase the cost of food. There is a desire for more education on how to grow and cook healthy food, and for food system infrastructure such as community gardens and greenhouses, commercial kitchens, and storage facilities for perishable products.

Systemic issues, such as lack of affordable food, lack of multi-lingual support, and housing costs limit opportunities for Diversity, Equity and Inclusion, with Hispanic/Latino community members being less likely to be able to afford to eat balanced meals. There is an appreciation for the strong community support that does exist. To help resolve these issues, there is the desire for youth programs on gardening and nutrition education.

Increasing aridification, recurrent droughts, and the threat of water exportation are the primary Environmental and Water concerns. In response, there is increasing interest in water conservation and soil health practices.

The supply chain disruptions caused by the COVID-19 pandemic made purchasing food more difficult for over half of respondents and raised awareness of Emergency Food Planning. Food pantries, SNAP, and community meals are the primary sources for free or reduced cost foods, but residents still lack information about support available to them in an emergency. Coordination across the region, increased food system infrastructure, and education would support resiliency.

Finally, people in the San Luis Valley understand that a functional food system is rooted in Gratitude and Relationships, and that local food builds important community connections.

"Almost all responses about the market for SLV farms and foods reflects a desire to invest in the education, infrastructure, and programs that improve the availability and awareness of foods being grown in the Valley to locals and visitors." **~ Dawn Thilmany, Co-Director, Colorado State University Regional Economic Development Institute**

FOREWARD

This Community Food and Agricultural Assessment came about from decades of food and agricultural champions in the San Luis Valley. We stand on their shoulders as we continue the work to tend the land, shepherd the animals, raise our families, and build a rich agricultural community where good food is available to everyone who lives here. It wasn't that long ago that communities here supplied all their own food. As the Valley modernized, more dependency fell to food imports and big box stores. Growers became bigger and bigger, and their products became part of a robust national and even international export model leaving local eaters at the mercy of tenuous supply chains.

Add these challenges to the fact that the San Luis Valley has one of the most complicated hydrological systems in the West between the interplay of snowpack, rivers, and creeks that feed the underground aquifers here. Indigenous first, and then settlers found a wet valley floor exuding artesian waters. This abundant system has suffered as the area continues to experience a 20 plus-year drought that shows no signs of letting up amidst over-appropriation of our precious water resources.

In a time of global warming and climate uncertainty, the San Luis Valley Local Foods Coalition's work to ensure a resilient food system along with many collaborators, is more important than ever. The coalition started because of residents' desire to access the abundance of foods grown and raised here - asparagus and beef, to yak and zucchini, and everything in between. Towards that end, they have launched the Valley Roots Food Hub, an aggregation and distribution service that represents over 100 family farms, ranches and food businesses and brings their product to the customers of Southern Colorado. They established the Rio Grande Farm Park, a 38-acre farm incubation and education center on the Rio Grande. Their Cooking Matters educators teach people to cook, and their Local Foods Local Places (LFLP) stakeholders created a 2017 plan to infuse the economy of the Alamosa area with locally-produced foods.

In 2022, Local Food Local Places allies realized that a plan for a healthy and resilient food and agricultural system that created prosperity for the producers of our food and met the needs of the people who live here was needed. They strategized to expand the Alamosa-centric LFLP plan to the six counties of the San Luis Valley and to update it with input from people of all walks of life here - from Crestonians with their alternative lifestyles to users of the People's Ditch acequia system in San Luis, from grass-fed beef producers and store owners in Antonito to potato farmers and restaurant owners near Monte Vista, from the mining and tourist-serving community in Creede to the warehouse workers in Center, from the educators and ecosystem advocates in Alamosa to the natural food grocers in Del Norte, all people were invited to participate.

In this report, you will find their ideas of what is working, what is not working, and what is our collective vision for the future. In a world of recalls and chemical-laden foods, diabetes and obesity, it is a refreshing experience to behold a plate of culturally-friendly, whole foods that express a taste of this place, an investment in our own family farms and ranches, all the while keeping our ecosystem healthy and intact for future generations to come.

Liza Marron
Executive Director
SLV Local Foods Coalition
& Saguache County Commissioner

INTRODUCTION

PROJECT BACKGROUND

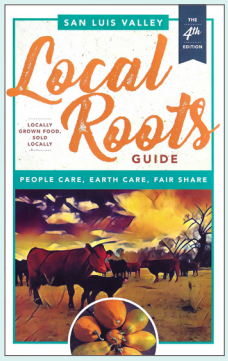
The mission of the San Luis Valley Local Food Coalition (SLVLFC) is to foster an equitable local food system that restores the health of the people, community, economy, and ecosystem in the San Luis Valley of Colorado. It began in 2009 as a grassroots gathering of residents, farmers, and cross-sector partners who came together to develop local food networks, educate the community, and promote programs and policies that would create a sustainable local food system for the region. SLVLFC has grown into a multifaceted organization with key program areas including the Local Food, Local Places program, the Valley Roots Food Hub, the San Luis Valley Cooking Matters program, the Local Roots and Bilingual Resource Guides, and the Rio Grande Farm Park.

The **LOCAL FOODS, LOCAL PLACES** program promotes economic development through local foods to create a "Taste of Place" as directed by community strategic planning. The program includes the Mobile Kitchen (MoKi) that visits a variety of Valley happenings from cultural and food events to farmers markets and offers local foods catering for special events including cooking demos and recipes.

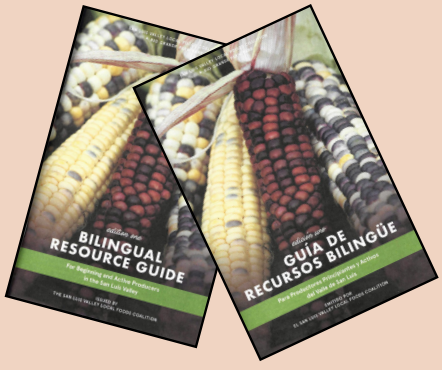
The **VALLEY ROOTS FOOD HUB** aggregates and distributes local/regional produce, meat, dairy, and value-added products from over 100 producers to restaurants, grocers, institutions, and families. The Food Hub sells its products online and in its new store in Mosca, Colorado. The Valley Roots Food Hub operates from Durango to Denver/Colorado Springs/ Pueblo under the Tap Root Cooperative brand.

The **SAN LUIS VALLEY COOKING MATTERS** program is an evidence-based cooking program providing low-income families with the knowledge and tools to prepare food and eat healthy on a budget. The bilingual program, offered in English and Spanish, typically offers grocery tours and cooking instruction and shifted to offering virtual classes during the pandemic.

The **RIO GRANDE FARM PARK** includes a community park, farm plots for local families, agricultural and environmental education programs for youth, in addition to recreational opportunities. The Park also hosts a beginner farmer program that provides land, water, and training to new and aspiring farmers in regenerative agriculture and sustainable business practices, and is the current home of the Rio Grande Organic Growers Cooperative.



The **LOCAL ROOTS GUIDE** is a print and online directory published by SLVLFC to connect consumers to local producers and resources in the region. The guide lists the region's many farms, ranches, restaurants, and grocers who carry local foods, partner organizations, and related services.



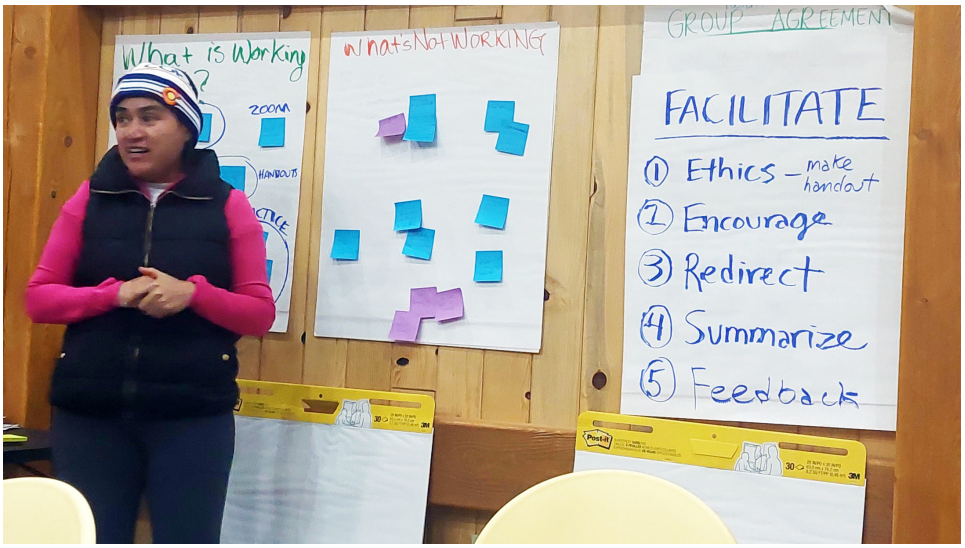
The **BILINGUAL RESOURCE GUIDE** is a print and online guide in English and Spanish for beginning and active producers in the San Luis Valley. It connects them to technical assistance and funding opportunities through federal, state, and local sources and was produced by the Rio Grande Farm Park's farmer education project.

The SLVLFC began to lay the groundwork for regional strategic food system planning with their collaborative programming, beginning with the 2017 Local Foods, Local Places Community Action Plan for Alamosa County. While this plan was focused just on Alamosa County, it became clear that a successful local foods strategy would need to engage and be informed by the entire six-county San Luis Valley. Then, in 2020, the COVID-19 pandemic caused significant economic hardship and food insecurity in the region and exposed the vulnerability of the conventional food system and its long, fragile supply chains. Together, these issues highlighted the need for a regional food and agriculture assessment that would guide future actions to create a more resilient food system in the Valley while ensuring the producers can be viable into the future in the face of enduring drought and climate change.

This work is also built off of earlier community engagement and research of the following projects:

- Direct Market Producers Who Produce Food Survey (2015) PDF
- From the Eyes of Community (2011) PDF

In 2022, SLVLFC embarked on this Community Food and Agriculture Assessment (CFAA) to learn the impact the regional food and agriculture system has on producers' viability and residents' health, economic opportunities, and access to quality and culturally appropriate foods. This was all intended to improve quality of life and to discover potential priorities to guide future work. With guidance and support from experienced consultants and regional partners, the CFAA included deep community engagement and participation of leaders throughout the six counties.



FOOD SYSTEM

When we talk about the "community food and agriculture system," we're talking about the process that food follows as it moves from the farm to table, represented here.

The food system includes farmers, ranchers, manufacturers, processors, distributors, retailers, restaurants, institutions that serve meals (schools, hospitals, food banks, and pantries), and all residents as consumers. It also includes the inputs and outcomes of each step — right down to the food waste we generate. The journey our food takes through the food system is influenced by natural ecosystems, research, community dynamics, education and outreach, funding, our culture, and our policies.

GROWING

This food system phase encompasses all of the ways we produce food - saving seeds, building soil, farming, ranching, fishing, hunting, gardening, and so on.

BUYING

This step involves the purchasing of food - direct from farmers and at corner stores, grocery stores, farmer's markets, Community Supported Agriculture shares, restaurants, food trucks, food hubs, and so on.

TRANSPORTING

This is how food moves around the system. This consists of trips to processing facilities, on to packaging facilities, to retail outlets like grocery stores, restaurants or farmers markets, and then eventually, to our tables.

COOKING, EATING, & PRESERVING

This is the fun part! It includes all the food preparation activities we do at home or in retail settings to prepare food for eating and storing.

PROCESSING / PACKAGING

These are the activities where food is processed into other products (e.g., tomatoes into salsa) and then packaged for distribution and retail sale.

DISPOSING / REUSING

Food waste occurs at each part of the food system cycle, and this step considers what we do with that waste - feeding it to animals, repurposing, composting, or landfilling.

A community food and agriculture system isn't just about these transactional steps as food moves through the system. It starts with those who till the land and steward the animals, with a seed, a farmer, an animal and a rancher, or sometimes with a gardener, forager, hunter, or fisher. A community's food system is also characterized by the consumers in the food system and how equitably they can access healthy, affordable, culturally appropriate foods. People of color are the most commonly and significantly impacted by hunger, poor food access, diet-related health challenges, and other implications of underperforming or disconnected food systems.

The CFAA assessed the conditions and stakeholder relationships across the six counties of the San Luis Valley in each of these food system categories to better understand the forces shaping the regional food and agriculture system.

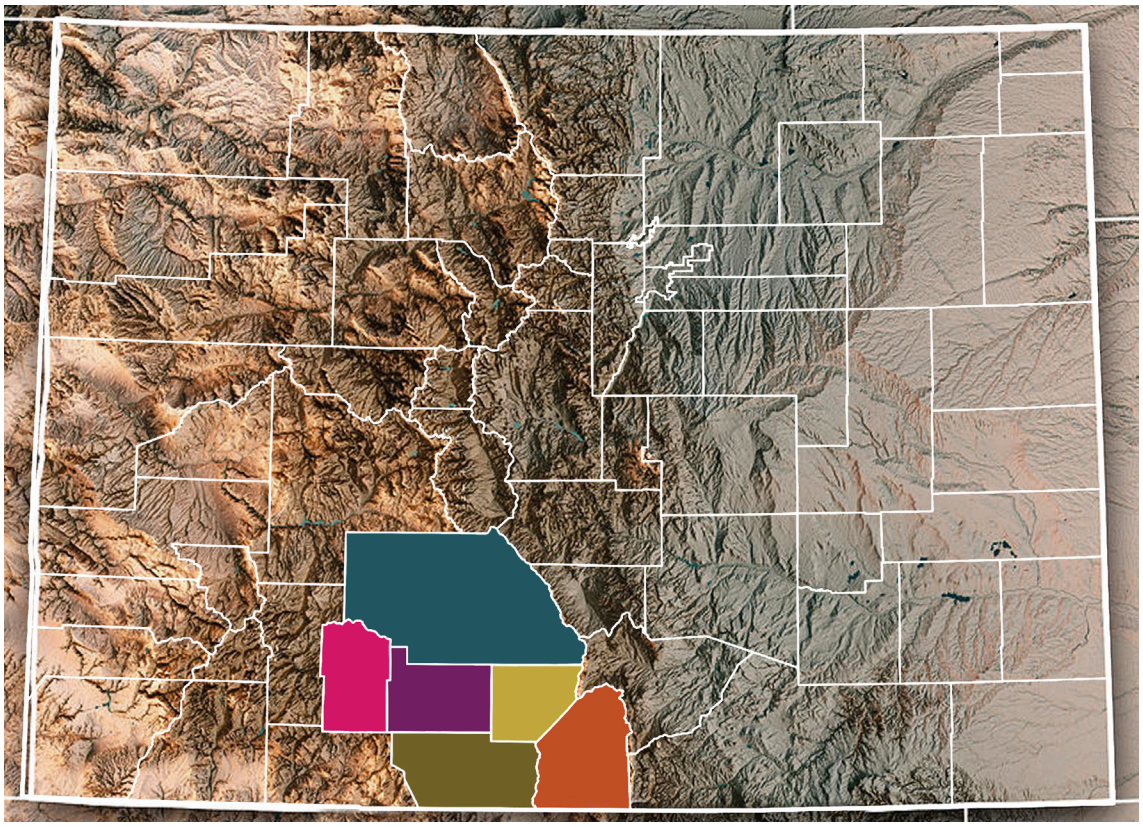
SAN LUIS VALLEY

The San Luis Valley is located in south-central Colorado and comprises six counties: Alamosa, Conejos, Costilla, Mineral, Rio Grande, and Saguache. The San Luis Valley is the largest alpine valley in North America and is bordered by the Sangre de Cristo Mountains to the east, the San Juan Mountains to the west, and the Sawatch Range to the north.

Human settlement of the San Luis Valley dates back at least 10,000 years. Since then the land has been stewarded by the Comanche, Ute, Apache, Pueblo, Hopi, and Dine peoples. This Indigenous history has been challenged by periods of occupation and oppression by Spain, Mexico, and the United States.

The 8,000–square mile region is vast and sparsely populated, but is interconnected in critical ways. It comprises a large scale food production system and watershed of the Rio Grande. Its economy is heavily dependent on both agriculture and tourism.

This assessment is focused on the San Luis Valley as a whole. This focus is born out of respect for its regional history and recognition of its shared natural resources and geographic isolation, and is intended to uplift the full diversity of San Luis Valley voices to best communicate the needs of its producers and residents.



ALAMOSA
CONEJOS
COSTILLA
MINERAL
RIO GRANDE
SAGUACHE

CLIMATE & WATER

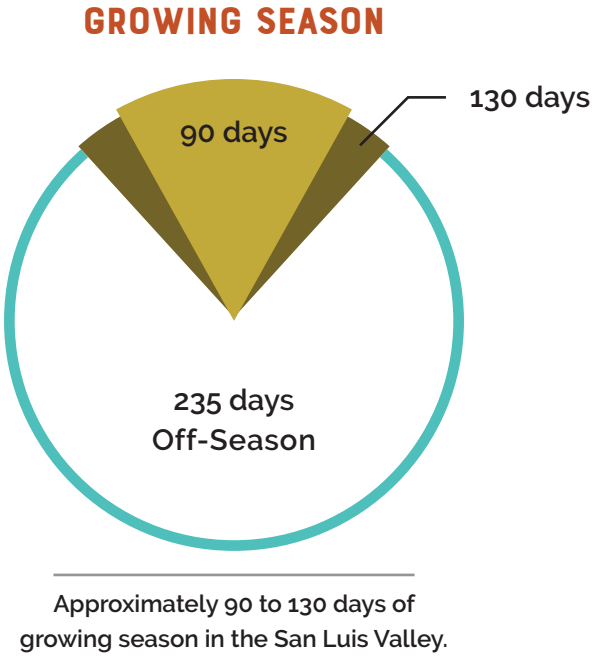
Climate within the Valley is characterized by dry air, clear and sunny conditions, and large swings in daily temperatures, resulting in extreme lows and highs that affect growing conditions. The mountains that surround the Valley form a barrier against atmospheric moisture, meaning the Valley floor is the driest place in Colorado, typically receiving only 7–10 inches of precipitation per year. Recent years have had milder winters and warmer summers than in the past. This is representative of the trend of climate change and an extended drought cycle. This leaves the Valley with a growing season of approximately 90–130 days.[1]

The southwestern United States is experiencing unprecedented climate change pressures as a result of human activity and interference with natural ecology. Like much of the Southwest, the San Luis Valley region is particularly threatened by the onslaught of aridification (the long-term process of a region becoming increasingly dry) due to a combination of climate and human factors negatively impacting the water cycle. Future droughts are expected to increase in frequency, duration, and intensity, requiring all land users (residential and farmers) to make do with less water.

The Valley contains great natural diversity dependent on access to water. The Rio Grande is the lifeblood of the Valley's wildlife, landscape, and agricultural vitality. Canals from the Rio Grande and its major tributary, the Conejos River, supply one of the state's most important farming areas with water. In the north end of the Valley, Saguache and San Luis Creeks quench the land.

Snow-fed groundwater aquifers are another key source of water in the Valley's desert climate. Climate change factors such as drought and decreased precipitation combined with human activity, such as irrigation overuse, deplete these aquifers.

1 *San Luis Valley Development Resources Group and Council of Governments, "2021 Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy," August 15, 2021, www.slvdrg.org/comprehensive-economic-development-strategy/.*



Approximately 90 to 130 days of growing season in the San Luis Valley.

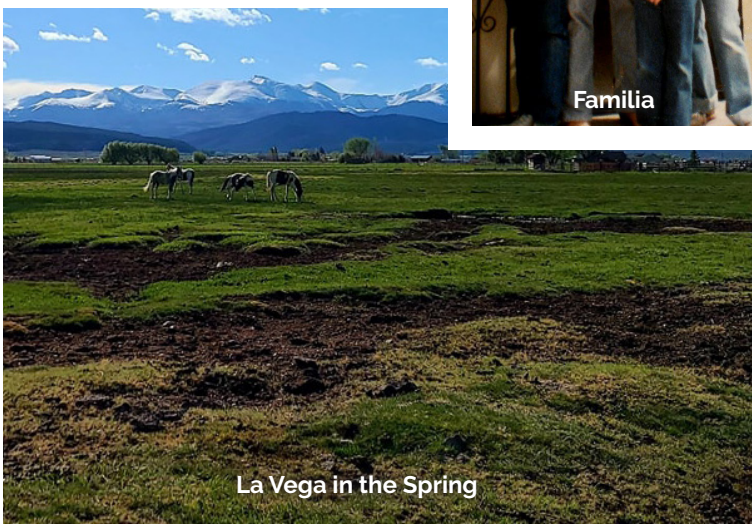
According to the Rio Grande Water Conservation District, the Valley's aquifer can only support irrigation of 400,000 acres, requiring a permanent 20 percent reduction in irrigation to restore the aquifer to its prior levels.

The state of Colorado has enacted legislation requiring the Valley to restore the aquifer to prior levels. Policies to cut off wells for irrigation and the expected accompanying drastic reduction in farmland would require lower crop production or transition to more drought-resistant crops, refined cropping and range rotations, and more conscientious methods of water use, all of which could impact the viability of regional farmers.[2] In addition, water compact demands on the Rio Grande and the Conejos require water to be sent down the river to satisfy the needs of New Mexico, Texas, and Mexico.

2 *Haley Ruffner, "Water Usage in the San Luis Valley," Aden Brook, December 13, 2022, https://adenbrook.com/water-usage-in-the-san-luis-valley//.*


Grandparents - Jose Nicanor Quintana and Maria Natividad Ortega


Familia


La Vega in the Spring

Photos courtesy of Jason Medina

ROOTS OF RESILIENCE: SAN LUIS' RICH HISTORY IN AGRICULTURE

JASON MEDINA

- COMMUNITY FOUNDATION OF THE SAN LUIS VALLEY

I'm Jason Medina from San Luis, Colorado, the state's oldest town, established in 1851. It was part of the Sangre de Cristo Land Grant, originally given to Narcisso Beaubien in 1848. After Narcisso's death in the Taos Revolt, his father Carlos inherited the grant, leading to the distribution of land parcels known as VARA strips to many Hispanos, who started their own farms. Additional properties included La Sierra, 80,000 acres on the Western Slope of the Sangre de Cristo Mountains, and La Vega, 900 acres along Culebra Creek. The People's Ditch, Colorado's first agricultural ditch, was dug in 1852, sustaining our community's farming heritage.

I grew up on the People's Ditch, and my family's roots in San Luis trace back to the 1880s as merchants. While agriculture has shaped our community for 170 years and people used to rely 100% on their own food production, food insecurity is widespread in our community now. To access fresh produce and meat, residents must make a 90-mile round trip. Around 60% of our school children lack daily access to fresh food when not in session, and this issue disproportionately affects our elderly population. Many older farms have 'dried up' due to overgrazing, lack of water and lack of farming.

Fortunately, there's hope on the horizon. The San Luis People's Market, Move Mountains Youth Project, and the Acequia Institute are educating our youth in farming techniques and offering discounted produce during store renovations. Groups like SLV Local Foods are promoting locally grown produce, fostering community gardens and milpas, and encouraging self-sufficiency. While we have a long way to go, our nonprofits are tirelessly combating food insecurity in our valley. We're grateful for their efforts, ensuring that fresh, healthy foods are accessible to all. If you wake up to the sound of cattle or roosters, you should also have access to fresh foods.

San Luis Peoples Ditch by Kent Kanouse

DEMOGRAPHICS

The Valley covers an area of 8,193 square miles, which is nearly the size of the state of New Jersey, but with a total population of only 46,424, or 5.6 persons per square mile.[1] The population is projected to decrease slightly to 45,772 by 2040. [2]

RACE OF THE SLV[2]

AMOUNT	RACE
76.3 %	White
12.4%	Two or more races
6.5%	Other
2.8%	American Indian & Alaska Native
1.1 %	African American
0.8%	Asian

46.1 % identify as Hispanic / Latino.[2]

We recognize that adequately illustrating our region's people by race, and ethnicity is nuanced and complex. Relaying this data to everyone's liking is a difficult and evolving process. For this report, we have utilized US Census data categories as this is the most widely used form for this type of data.

AGE[2]

AGE	IN SAN LUIS VALLEY
0 - 24	30%
25 - 44	22%
45 - 64	24%
65 +	25%

INCOME & POVERTY[2]

	SAN LUIS VALLEY	STATE OF COLORADO
Median Household Income	$45,644	$80,184
Persons living in Poverty	16.0%	9.6%

As the table shows, average household incomes in the Valley lag behind those of Colorado, and accordingly, the share of households in poverty is higher than state averages.

UNEMPLOYMENT[2]

YEAR	AVERAGE ANNUAL UNEMPLOYED PERSONS	UNEMPLOYMENT RATE
2021	1,370	5.7%
2020	1,548	6.5%
2019	921	3.5%

FOOD BANK USE IN ALAMOSA

5346 unique individuals received food from the Alamosa Food Bank between 1/1/21 and 12/31/22.[3]

HOUSING STATUS OF ALAMOSA FOOD BANK CUSTOMERS[3]

AMOUNT	HOUSING STATUS
42.30%	Rent
23.42%	Experiencing Homelessness
23.19%	Own a Home
10.37%	Unknown

1 *Haley Ruffner, "Water Usage in the San Luis Valley," Aden Brook, December 13, 2022, https://adenbrook.com/water-usage-in-the-san-luis-valley//.*

2 *San Luis Valley Development Resources Group and Council of Governments, "2023 San Luis Valley Statistical Profile," March 2023, www.slvdrg.org/.*

3 *La Puente Records*

REGIONAL FOOD SYSTEM SUMMARY

Statewide, 98 percent of Colorado residents consider the food and agriculture industry to be important to the state's future economic resiliency and believe that the presence of ranches, farms, and agriculture is important to quality of life.

Over 96 percent think it is important to maintain land and water for agricultural purposes such as food security, open space and wildlife habitat, agricultural jobs and businesses, and food, fiber, and fuel production in Colorado.[1]

This level of public support is especially important in a region where agriculture is the primary economic driver that accounts for nearly a third of the region's economic activity. [2]

TOP CROPS GROWN IN THE SLV

TOP CROPS	ACRES OF PRODUCTION
Pastureland	521,865
Forage Crops (harvested for hay, alfalfa, silage)	171,149
Wheat	93,545
Vegetables (includes potatoes)	57,099
Barley	37,606

Top crops produced in the San Luis Valley region by acreage.

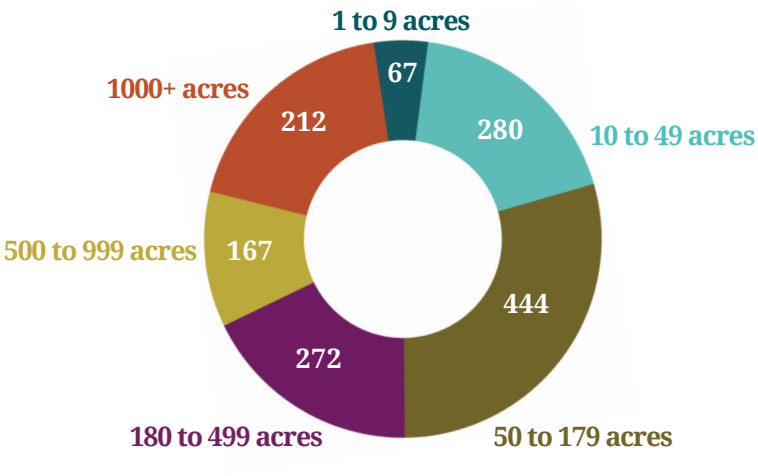
In 2022, the total market value of all agricultural products sold across the Valley, was $495,162,000. The agriculture industry in the San Luis Valley is shifting over time. As of 2022, there were 1,489 total farms and ranches, down 10 percent since 2017[3]. Those farms average 788 acres, which is about the same average size as in 2017. There were 1,169,385 acres in farms and ranches in 2022, a decrease of 11 percent since 2017. This suggests that farms continue to consolidate, and that land is being removed from production.

1 Colorado Department of Agriculture, "2022 Public Perceptions and Attitudes about Colorado Agriculture Survey - Findings Report," October 2022, https://ag.colorado.gov/markets/publications/public-attitudes-survey-2022#.

2 Colorado Blueprint of Food and Agriculture, "Regional Opportunity Report: South Central," May 2017, https://foodsystems.colostate.edu/wp-content/uploads/2017/04/South-Central-Regional-Opportunity-Report.pdf.

3 U.S. Department of Agriculture, National Agricultural Statistics Service, Census of Agriculture, 2022 State and County Profiles - Colorado, https://www.nass.usda.gov/Publications/AgCensus/2022/Full_Report/Volume_1,_Chapter_2_County_Level/Colorado/.

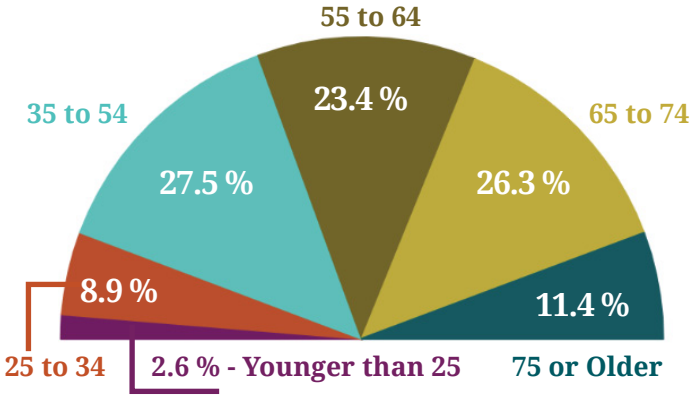
NUMBER OF FARMS BY FARM SIZE



Number of farms in the San Luis Valley by farm size (in acres).

AGE OF FARMERS

Among all farmers, 28.23 percent identified as "new or beginning" farmers, or farmers with less than ten years of experience.[1] The average age of a San Luis Valley farmer is 56.9 years old.[2]



1 U.S. Department of Agriculture, National Agricultural Statistics Service, Census of Agriculture, 2022 State and County Profiles - Colorado, https://www.nass.usda.gov/Publications/AgCensus/2022/Full_Report/Volume_1,_Chapter_2_County_Level/Colorado/st08_2_045_045.pdf.

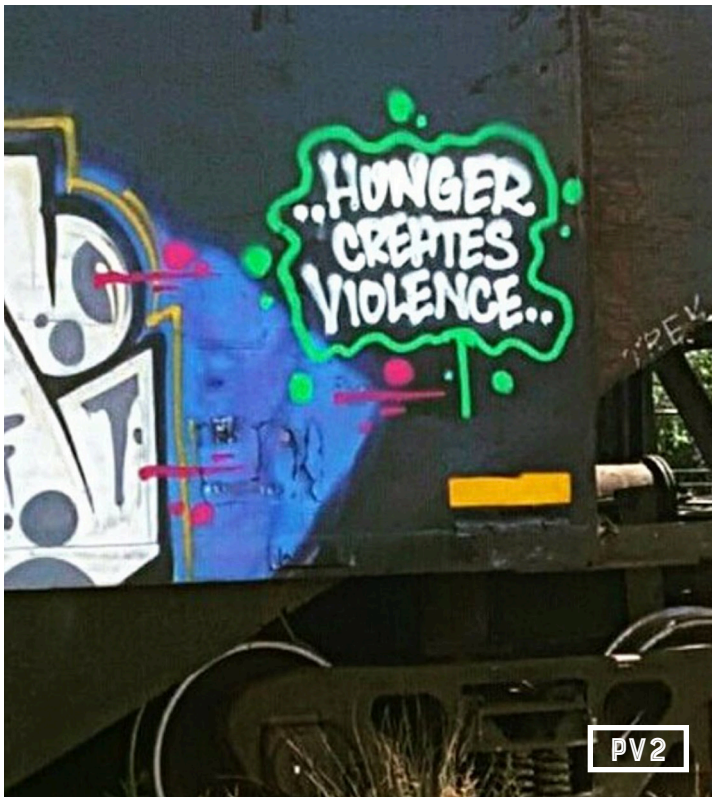
2 U.S. Department of Agriculture, National Agricultural Statistics Service, Census of Agriculture, https://www.nass.usda.gov/Quick_Stats/CDQT/chapter/2/table/45/state/CO/year/2017.

RACE OF PRODUCERS

Farm owners in the Valley are predominantly White, and **24.51 percent identify as of Hispanic, Latino, or Spanish origin.**[2]

RACE OF AGRICULTURAL PRODUCERS	% OF TOTAL
American Indian / Alaska Native	0.95 %
Asian	0.78 %
Black or African American	0.03 %
Native Hawaiian / Pacific Islander	0.00 %
White	96.45 %
More than one race	1.77 %

Race of agricultural producers in the San Luis Valley.



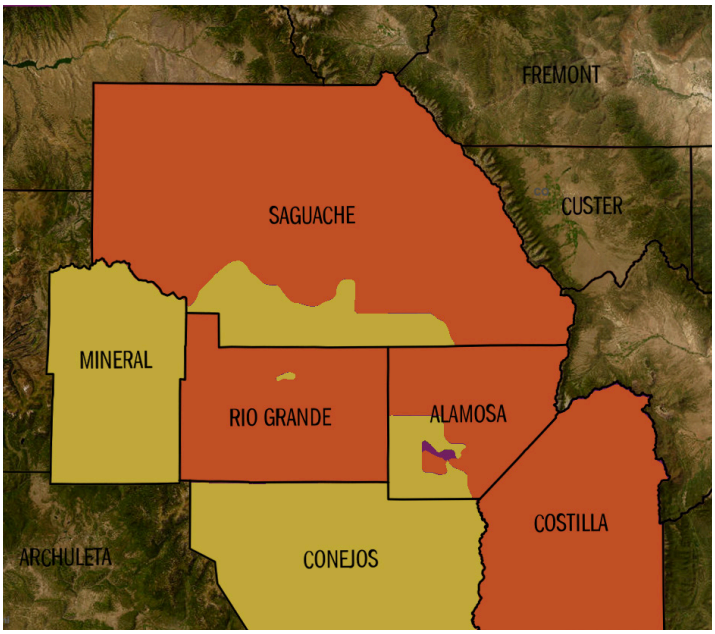
Given the region's rich agricultural production, these measures of low and inconsistent food access indicate a critical gap between San Luis Valley residents and the food grown all around them.

The SLV serves as one of Colorado's key agricultural regions, being rich in natural resources. However, the SLV is impacted by poverty, geographic isolation, food insecurity, limited market access, chronic disease, limited employment opportunities, and a limited number of housing options. Many Coloradans face food insecurity, and this problem is acute in the rural San Luis Valley.

The county level food insecurity rates ranged from 10.5 percent in Mineral County to 15.2 percent in Costilla County in 2021, compared to 8.3% for the state of Colorado.[1] Child food insecurity rates varied even more widely, from 8.8 percent in Mineral County to 21.2 percent in Costilla.[2]

1 https://map.feedingamerica.org/county/2020/overall/colorado.

2 *Feeding America, Map the Meal Gap,* https://map.feedingamerica.org/.



Map of USDA designated Low-Income/Low-Access census tracts in the San Luis Valley.

LOW INCOME

LOW ACCESS TO SUPERMARKETS - AT 1/2 MILE IN URBAN AREAS & 10 MILES IN RURAL AREAS

LOW INCOME & LOW ACCESS

In 2021, an average of 60 percent of students qualified for free and reduced price lunch compared to the state average of 37.2 percent.[3] The Food Bank Network of the San Luis Valley reports that 17 percent of the Valley's families access food banks each year.

Healthy School Meals for All was recently passed in Colorado, which requires public School Food Authorities (SFAs) participating in the National School Lunch and School Breakfast Programs to provide free meals to all students beginning School Year 2023-24. Additional components of the program available in School Year 2024-25 include funding to increase wages or provide stipends for front line kitchen staff and incentives to purchase local food.

Beyond traditional production models and markets, there are diversifying agricultural market opportunities across the SLV for small and mid-sized producers, including the following:[4]

- 1 food hub with sales of $1,621,340 in 2022
- 7 farmers markets (Mercado del Norte, Mercadillo at the Rio Grande Farm Park, Alamosa, Monte Vista, Crestone Saturday Market, Creede, and Blanca)
- 46 agritourism operations with a total value of $1,702,000 (an increase of 70% from 27 operations in 2007)

Together, these sales of local food direct-to-consumer, to retail markets, or to institutions generated $43,894,000 in sales in 2017.

Agritourism is proving a to be viable opportunity to farms and ranches wanting to diversify their income and operations.


PV3


PV4

3 *Colorado Department of Education, 2021–2022 Free and Reduced Lunch Eligibility by District, https://www.cde.state.co.us/cdereval/2021-2022districtmembershipk-12frl.*

4 *U.S. Department of Agriculture, Local Food Directories, https://www.usdalocalfoodportal.com/#directories.*

PROJECT SUMMARY

PREVIOUS EFFORTS

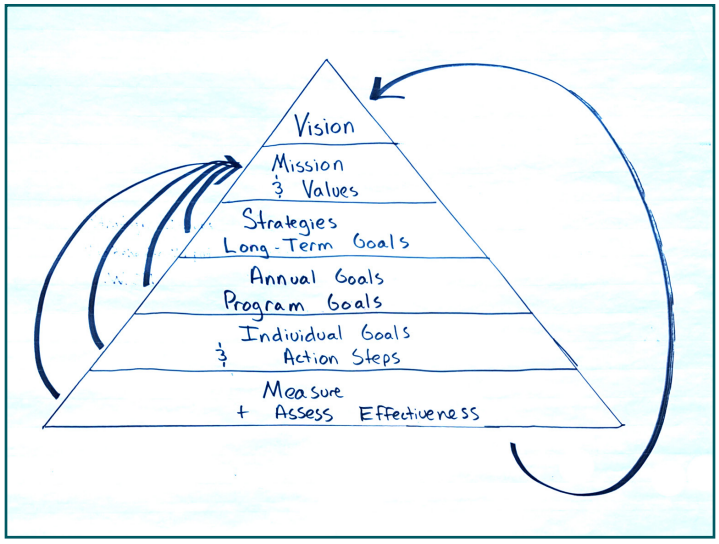
In 2016, the SLVLFC team applied to the Local Foods, Local Places program to develop an action plan for promoting local food systems and a healthy, walkable, economically vibrant community in Alamosa.

The Local Foods, Local Places program was supported by the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA), the U.S. Department of Transportation (DOT), the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), the Appalachian Regional Commission (ARC), and the Delta Regional Authority (DRA). Alamosa was one of 23 communities across the United States selected to participate in the program in 2017.

The Alamosa Local Foods, Local Places process included community tours and workshops to identify challenges and opportunities for building a healthier community. The resulting Action Plan identified four goals and corresponding actions to advance this vision:

1) Integrate local foods, art, music, and outdoor recreation as a community development strategy.
2) Prioritize economic development opportunities, agritourism, and revitalization efforts in downtown Alamosa.
3) Increase and strengthen food access, learning programs, and infrastructure that celebrates Alamosa's agricultural heritage.
4) Place youth and historically underrepresented members of the community in growing the Local Foods, Local Places initiatives.

This planning effort was so instrumental to building partnerships and discovering opportunities in Alamosa's food system that the SLVLFC decided to update and expand this assessment and planning process across the six-county San Luis Valley. The unmet goals of the Alamosa Action Plan will be merged into the Community Food and Agriculture Action Plan.



ASSESSMENT PROCESS

To advance this vision of a six-county food system action plan, the SLVLFC partnered with New Venture Advisors (NVA), Colorado State University (CSU), and CSU Extension in 2022. Together, they created a community food and agriculture assessment process driven by the following values:

- **Honoring the work of local food system partners and all scales of production**
- **Looking at what is working well and those exemplary players in the current food system**
- **Valuing all voices and perspectives in the process**
- **Creating multiple, innovative engagement opportunities to hear from a diverse audience of stakeholders**
- **Balancing engagement to hear from all communities in the six-county region**
- **Providing access to all through translation and interpretation for languages spoken in the region**
- **Exploring ways to increase resiliency in the face of all kinds of shocks to the food system**

PROJECT STEWARDS

To ensure that as much of the community as possible was able to participate, multiple methods were employed such as a Word Cloud activity, physical and digital surveys, in-person listening summits, and a PhotoVoice project. To ensure the process was community-led, the SLVLFC invited a wide range of project stewards to help guide the process. The project stewards' attended monthly project update meetings with the SLVLFC and consultants; advised on survey and listening summit methodology, connected community partners with the engagement opportunities; confirmed key themes that emerged in the assessment process; and reviewed the final draft of the assessment. In meetings, interpretation was provided by the San Luis Valley Language Justice Cooperative to ensure that both English and Spanish speakers could participate.

The project stewards met monthly from May 2022 through 2023 to guide the assessment process through all phases. See the *Acknowledging the People* section of this report for a full list of the project stewards.

AREAS OF FOCUS

This assessment includes seven areas of focus, each of which plays a crucial role in fostering a holistic and inclusive approach to food and agriculture planning. Healthy Food Access, Producer Opportunities, Diversity Equity and Inclusion, and Environment were selected as focus areas by the San Luis Valley Local Foods Local Places (LFLP) stakeholders as they expanded and updated the 2017 LFLP plan and are retained in this assessment.

The first focus area originating from the LFLP stakeholders is **Healthy Food Access** for Valley families. By assessing healthy food access, Valley stakeholders will have data to ensure that everyone has access to nutritious and culturally appropriate food options.

Just as important is **Producer Opportunity** and the viability of producers in the face of water shortages, high land prices and other challenges. Understanding this will help safeguard the livelihoods of local farmers and ranchers, and contribute to the resilience of the agricultural sector.

Another important focus area is **Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion**, creating a Valley where everyone has equitable access to leadership roles, land and resources. Stakeholders felt this was crucial for creating a fair and just food system.

The **Environment** is another essential focus area. In the face of climate change it was considered important to address soil, water, and air conservation in an effort to move towards more sustainable practices and long-term resilience.

The Valley Roots Food Hub staff added a focus on **Emergency Food Planning** after experiencing the effects of the supply chain disruptions that occurred during Covid-19. Emergency food planning is a critical element allowing the community to respond effectively to unexpected disruptions.

Finally, the SLVLFC added **Values** and **Gratitude** as additional focus areas. The SLVLFC felt that including the values of food system stakeholders, along with understanding what players and attributes of the current food system people are grateful for, would add a richness to the study.

VALUES

What are the values held by the people who make up the food system?

PRODUCER OPPORTUNITY

What do farmers, ranchers, and food entrepreneurs need to ensure the long term sustainability of their operations or to grow their businesses? What infrastructure or policy changes are needed to create a food system that serves them well?

DIVERSITY, EQUITY & INCLUSION

What inequities exist in the current San Luis Valley food system? What do people most affected believe would increase equity in the SLV food system?

ENVIRONMENT

What are the experiences of farmers/ranchers in the face of a changing climate and reduced availability of water? What do food system stakeholders think will prepare the region for these coming changes?

HEALTHY FOOD ACCESS

Does everyone in the San Luis Valley have access to affordable, healthy, culturally-appropriate foods? If not, where are the gaps? What do participants envision for a food system that restores health and nourishes the people, the community, the economy, and the ecosystem?

EMERGENCY FOOD PLANNING

What were residents' experiences when the food chain or access has been interrupted in the San Luis Valley (i.e. by the COVID-19 pandemic, loss of work, snowstorms, high gas prices, recessions, etc.)? What was in place to support people in these times? What were the gaps? What can we build here to create a resilient food system in the face of these potential breakdowns?

GRATITUDE

What do food system stakeholders appreciate in the current food system? What organizations, businesses, institutions, and individuals are showing the way to a brighter future for food and agriculture?

METHODOLOGY: COMMUNITY SURVEYS

Surveys were made available between October 2022 and March 2023 online via the SLVLFC website, multiple listservs related to food system efforts in the region, distribution by project stewards, promotion on social media, and outreach at food system events. To encourage participation, survey respondents were offered the chance to win a $100 gift card.

In addition to online surveys, paper surveys were made available to residents without access to smart phones or computers. Also, the Promotores del Valle de San Luis provided survey support and interpretation services to reach out to the Spanish and Q'anjob'al (Mayan language) - speaking community members.

SURVEY TYPE	SPANISH	ENGLISH
Community	179	832
Farmer / Rancher	0	84
Food Business	9	49

COMMUNITY SURVEY

This survey was widely marketed to be taken by anyone that "eats or buys food in the San Luis Valley." It included questions about community members' ability to access healthy food, their values when it comes to the food they want to eat, perceptions of the healthfulness of their food options, interest in learning more about gardening or cooking, their food waste practices, and their trusted sources of information when it comes to food.

FARMER/RANCHER SURVEY

This survey was targeted to agricultural producers who farm or ranch in the San Luis Valley. It included questions about their farming experiences, their production practices, their goals for their farm/ranch in the future, the challenges they face when farming/ranching in the Valley, their vision for the future of agriculture in the San Luis Valley, and their values when it comes to food production.

FOOD BUSINESS SURVEY

This survey was targeted to business owners and operators of food-related businesses in the San Luis Valley. This survey was distributed to chefs, restaurant workers, food truck operators, grocers, market managers, and other small food businesses in the region. It included questions about their current food business, future business goals, the challenges they face when operating a food business in the region, and their interest/challenges when it comes to sourcing product locally from farmers in the Valley.

For a full copy of survey questions and results, see appendix at https://slvlocalfoods.org/cfaa

METHODOLOGY: COUNTY FOOD SYSTEM SUMMITS

This agenda poster was on display at each community listening summit, in English and in Spanish.

SLVLFC staff and partners hosted six food system summits in each county. Participants at each listening summits shared their feedback and experiences in two rounds of small-group breakouts. Each breakout group spent approximately 45 minutes discussing three questions regarding their experiences within the food system in the San Luis Valley: "What is working well?" "What is not working?" and "What is your vision for the future?" Breakout groups were each assigned a facilitator and a notetaker.

The first round of breakouts divided participants into groups based primarily on the ***sector*** of the food system that they most identified with (i.e., farmer/rancher, community member, institution, etc). The second round of breakouts divided participants into groups based primarily on the ***area of focus*** (see page 24) that they were most interested in discussing.

PROJECT

2022

MAY

- Community food and agriculture assessment project launched

JUNE

- Project Stewards convened

SUMMER

- Community engagement planned with Project Stewards

OCTOBER

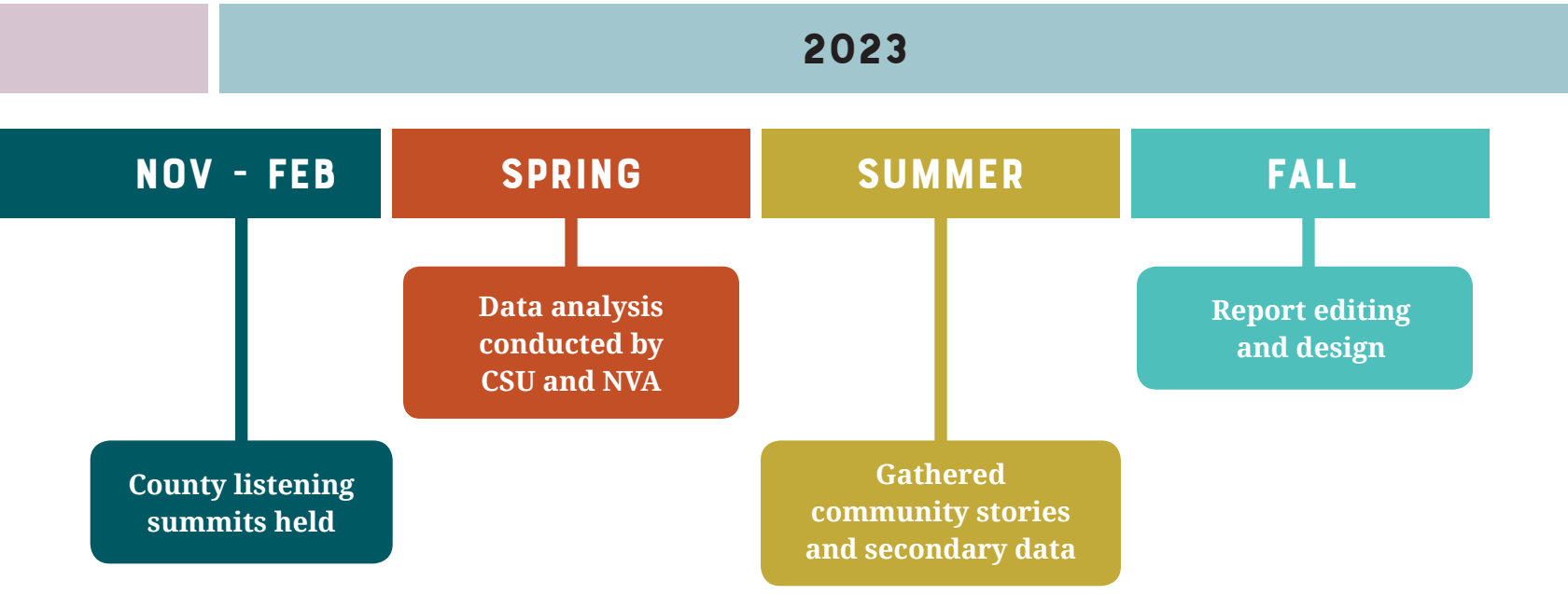
- Surveys launched in English and Spanish

COUNTY SUMMIT ATTENDANCE

COUNTY	DATE	LOCATION	NUMBER OF ATTENDEES
Alamosa	2/18/23	Adams State University - Alamosa	65
Conejos	11/12/22	Chavez Southwest Market - Antonito	22
Costilla	1/14/23	Centennial School - San Luis	22
Mineral	2/4/23	Underground Mining Museum - Creede	17
Rio Grande	12/10/22	Ski-Hi Complex - Monte Vista	32
Saguache	11/19/22	United Methodist Church - Center	27

These county-level food system summits were open to all residents in the county where they were held. English-Spanish interpretation was available. Breakfast or lunch was catered by a local business from each county, and when possible, the ingredients were sourced from the San Luis Valley. Participants included individuals and families, farmers/ranchers, food business owners, representatives of food banks, homesteaders, gardeners, government officials, and institutions. In total, 185 residents of the San Luis Valley shared their time and insights with us through participating in the summits.

TIMELINE



DATA ANALYSIS PROCESS

This community food and agriculture assessment yielded three key sets of data:

1) Secondary, quantitative data about the food system in the region (see Regional Food System Summary section and County Level Snapshots)

2) Mixed method surveys (Community, Farmer/Rancher, and Food Business) with both quantitative and qualitative components

3) County-level summit discussions that yielded qualitative data and allowed themes to emerge

SECONDARY DATA

The team conducted secondary research using publicly available data on the food landscape. Data was collected at the county level (or in the case of climate data, at the regional scale). The six-county averages or totals, when appropriate, were calculated and aggregated for the San Luis Valley region.

MIXED METHOD SURVEY DATA

Survey responses were collected in March of 2023 for analysis. Unfortunately, the Community Survey and the Farmer/Rancher Survey became targets for survey bots.[1] To clean the surveys, the NVA, CSU, and SLVLFC teams reviewed survey responses and eliminated any with the characteristics of bot responses - taken at unusual times of the night, taken quickly (i.e., taking 3 minutes to take a survey that was taking most 15 minutes to complete), and answers that were nonsensical or conflicting. Therefore, we have increased confidence in the validity of the remaining data but recognize we may have missed some responses with the use of filters.

Several survey questions asked participants to select their top three responses. The survey instrument didn't limit participants to only three responses, and many participants provided more (or fewer) than three responses. On these questions, the results include data from participants who selected two, three, or four responses.

NOTE: Producers and food businesses who participated in the surveys and summits were often already connected to the SLV Local Foods Coalition, and therefore responses may be more aligned with 'local food' values than is representative of all producers in the Valley.

1 A survey bot is a type of form bot that is specifically designed to fill out a survey. "Bots" are automated programs designed to carry out tasks on behalf of a human user. While some bot programs can be benign, survey bots are malicious - designed with the express purpose of answering survey questions to gain access to offered incentives - and therefore leading to invalid survey responses.

SUMMIT DATA

Data from the summits were generated through facilitated group discussions for each of the areas of focus. In these, participants recorded their answers to each question on sticky notes, which were arranged and summarized by a facilitator based on the group's discussion. Additional findings from the conversation were recorded by notetakers. These were analyzed by the research team from CSU and additionally informed by observations they made through attendance at the summits.

The CSU research team then conducted an iterative qualitative theme analysis of the data. This involved going through the data multiple times and identifying common themes or patterns of responses. In general, if a pattern of responses appeared across breakout groups in three or more counties, it was included in the findings. However, some sectors only had breakout discussion groups in two or three counties. For those sectors, the threshold for inclusion was relaxed to responses that appeared across breakout groups in at least two counties. To capture some of the diversity of responses and potentially unique challenges across counties, several themes that came up in discussions in only one county were included as well. As a final step to the analysis, themes from each sector were merged into the most relevant focus area(s).

PHOTOVOICE

An additional source of data was provided through a PhotoVoice component inviting Valley residents to take pictures that reflect "*What does food and agriculture look like in the San Luis Valley?*" Participants were encouraged to take photos that illustrated one or more of the project's focus areas - Public Health & Food Access, Environmental Health, Opportunities, Inclusion or Inequity, and Emergency Food Planning. The SLVLFC received 23 photos with captions, and included some as an enhancement to this assessment report.

INSPIRED BY COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

IAVA WILLIAMS – SUMMIT FACILITATOR

It stood out to me how passionate people became after they heard either other peoples' struggles/concerns, or a question/statement was mentioned that seemed to trigger a deeper desire to see and create change. There would be individuals in the breakout groups who wouldn't participate in the discussion, seeming almost like they weren't sure what to say or how the questions we were asking pertained to them. Once someone else, or the facilitator themself, mentioned certain issues or concepts in relation to the focus group criteria, they would start to converse more and add more opinions. It was like watching someone come out of their shell once they realized that the notions being talked about were because they were going to be taken seriously, and could have a real impact on not only themselves, but the other people in their community.

REGIONAL FINDINGS

The secondary data, survey responses, and county-level summits all yielded rich data for our teams to consider. The findings were sorted into the project's areas of focus to answer the key questions which a broad range of food system stakeholders were interested in exploring. The data presented here has been aggregated across all six counties to tell the story of the San Luis Valley's regional food system.

VALUES

~ What are the values held by the people who make up the food system?

SURVEY FINDINGS

In the community survey, respondents were asked about the importance of different food system characteristics when choosing foods to eat. Food affordability, treatment of food system workers, their purchases' impact on the local economy, food safety, and local sourcing were categories that were most important to respondents. Of lesser importance were the organic certification of the food, the variety of food purchasing options, and the cultural appropriateness of the food.

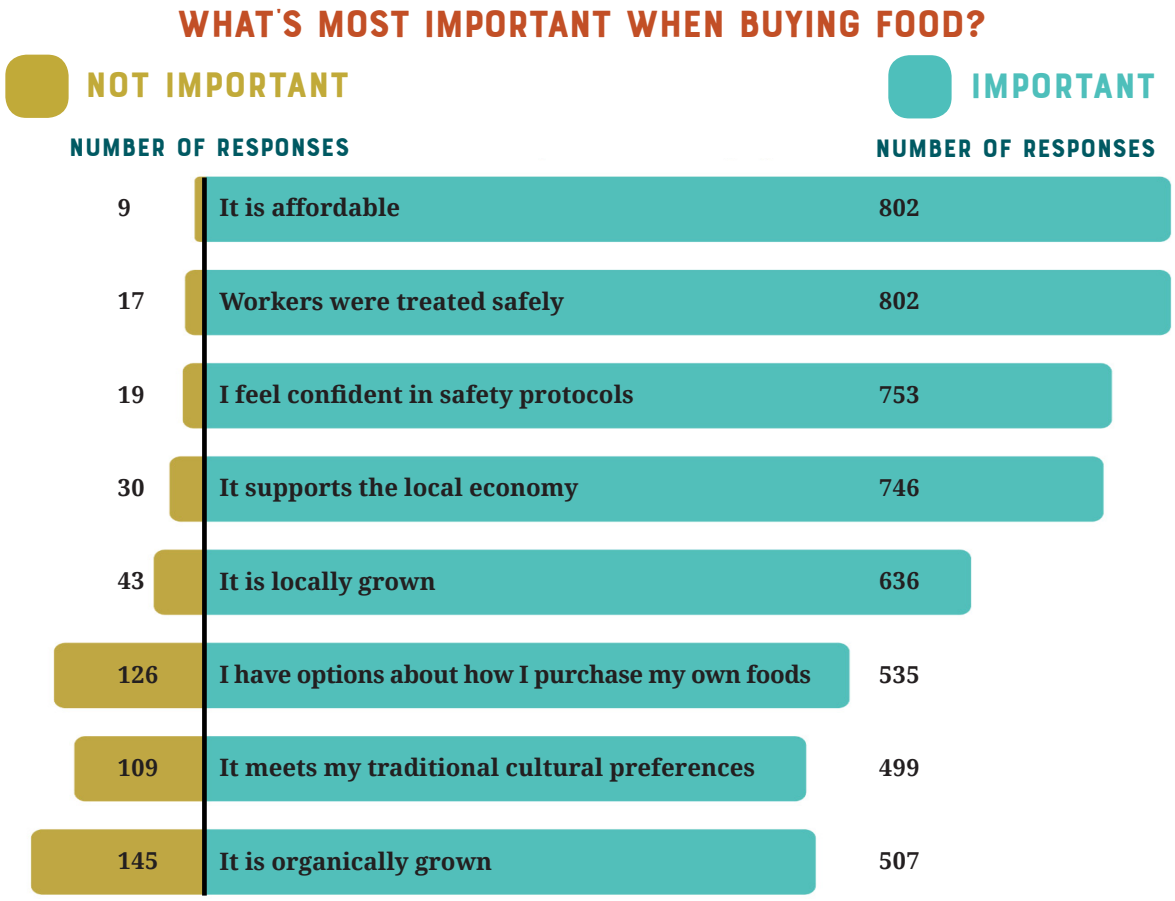


Figure 4. Response to Community Survey question: "Suppose you are shopping for food, and are deciding what to buy. Please indicate how important the following factors are in your decision (check one for each). Knowing that...."

COMMON GOALS IN ORDER OF PRIORITY

In all three surveys, respondents were presented with a list of 15 possible food system goals and asked to prioritize those of most importance to the San Luis Valley.

COMMUNITY SURVEY (1,011 responses)	FARMER/RANCHER SURVEY (84 responses)	FOOD BUSINESS SURVEY (58 responses)
1) Invest in a thriving local food and farm economy.	1) Promote conservation practices to improve soil health.	1) Invest in a thriving local food and farm economy.
2) Increase the production, sales, and consumption of locally grown foods.	2) Encourage and support youth farming and ranching programs.	2) Increase the production, sales, and consumption of locally grown foods.
3) Encourage and support youth farming and ranching programs.	3) Promote and build upon programs to conserve water.	3) Encourage and support youth farming and ranching programs.
4) Ensure access to healthier food for all and reduce food insecurity in our community.	4) Invest in a thriving local food and farm economy.	4) Find ways to add value to our agricultural products through farm, ranch, and food entrepreneurs.
5) Promote and build upon programs to conserve water.	5) Find ways to add value to our agricultural products through farm, ranch, and food entrepreneurs.	5) Prepare our food and agriculture systems for the impacts of climate change.

Figure 5. Response to survey question: Which food and agriculture system goals are most important to the San Luis Valley community? Please select your TOP 3. Underline indicates the statement was ranked in the top 4 values in all 3 surveys. Matching color indicates the statement ranked in the top 5 values across at least 2 surveys.

- KEY TAKEAWAYS -

SHARED FOOD SYSTEM VALUES

- The community found it important to prioritize affordability and worker safety when shopping for food.
- Farmers/ranchers, food businesses, and the community at large all prioritize the same food system goals:
  - Invest in a thriving local food and farm economy.
  - Encourage and support youth farming and ranching programs.

PRODUCER OPPORTUNITY

~What do farmers, ranchers, and food entrepreneurs need to ensure the long-term sustainability of their operations or to grow their businesses, especially in the face of increasing water shortages?

~What infrastructure or policy changes are needed to create a food system that serves them well?

SURVEY FINDINGS - FARMER & RANCHER

EXPANDING SALES

Producers were interested in scaling up sales within their farm/ranch operation. They prioritized on-farm sales/retail, sales to restaurants or food trucks, wholesale institutional/food hub sales, and farmers' markets as top areas for growth.

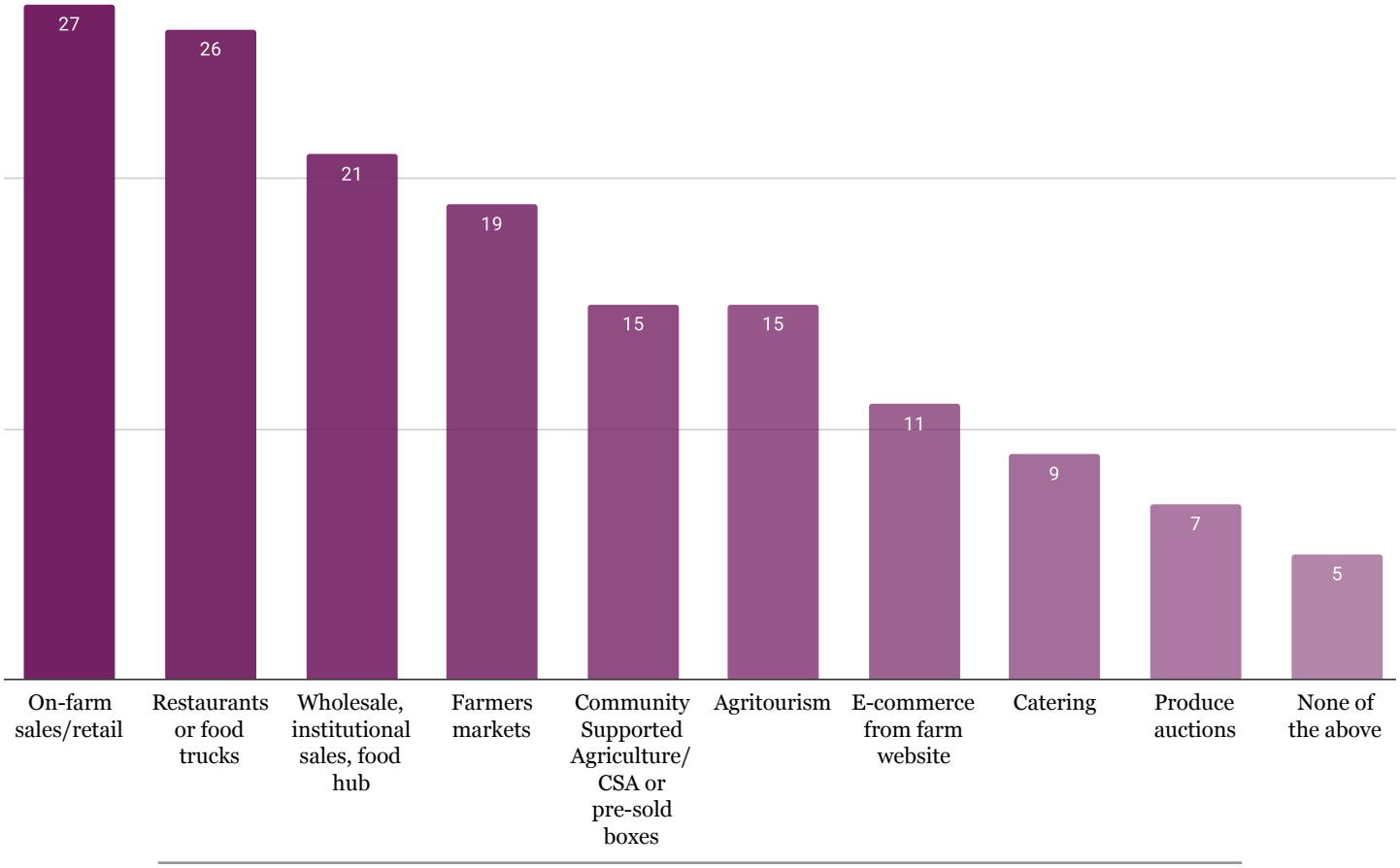


Figure 6. Farmer/Rancher survey responses to the question: "In which of the following channels, if any, would you like to expand your sales? (select all that apply)" (84 producers responded)

CULTIVATING INNOVATION IN THE SAN LUIS VALLEY

SHELDON ROCKEY - ROCKEY FARMS & WHITE ROCK SPECIALTIES

In the San Luis Valley, Verlin Rockey, a visionary farmer, ignited a potato revolution in the 1990's by bringing the first fingerling potatoes to the United States. Encouraged by his friend and fellow farmer, Ernie New, Who happened to have a couple of fingerling potatoes in his hands that he obtained by smuggling them in from Canada. Verlin embarked on cultivating this unique variety and the Rockeys began searching for tissue cultures. In 1994, these cultures arrived in test tubes from Europe, undergoing months of quarantine at Cornell University to ensure their safety for U.S. soils.

With a family legacy of farming and potato production dating back to Floyd Rockey in the 1940s, and their status as certified potato seed producers since 1980, complete with a tissue culture lab and greenhouse, transitioning to fingerling production was a natural step.

It took four years of dedicated work to amass enough seed stock to begin growing certified fingerling seed for themselves and other local farmers.

Assisted by Culinary Specialty Produce, fingerlings made their debut in East Coast restaurants, primarily in New York, sparking a thriving market within the restaurant industry. As interest grew from distributors and retailers, Rockey Farms began shipping SLV fingerling harvests to be packaged for retail sales.

Today, fingerlings comprise 2% of all U.S. potatoes, with five San Luis Valley producers and ten more nationwide. Verlin Rockey's journey, from smuggling a spud to pioneering an entirely new potato market, showcases the innovative spirit and untapped opportunities of the San Luis Valley.

SCALING UP

Producers who indicated an interest in scaling up prioritized "water and water conservation infrastructure improvements" as the top food system component they need to scale. Other priorities were to explore more market channels to sell local foods, more proximate access to large animal processing capacity, value-added processing and product innovation for potatoes, integration of solar equipment, and agritourism.

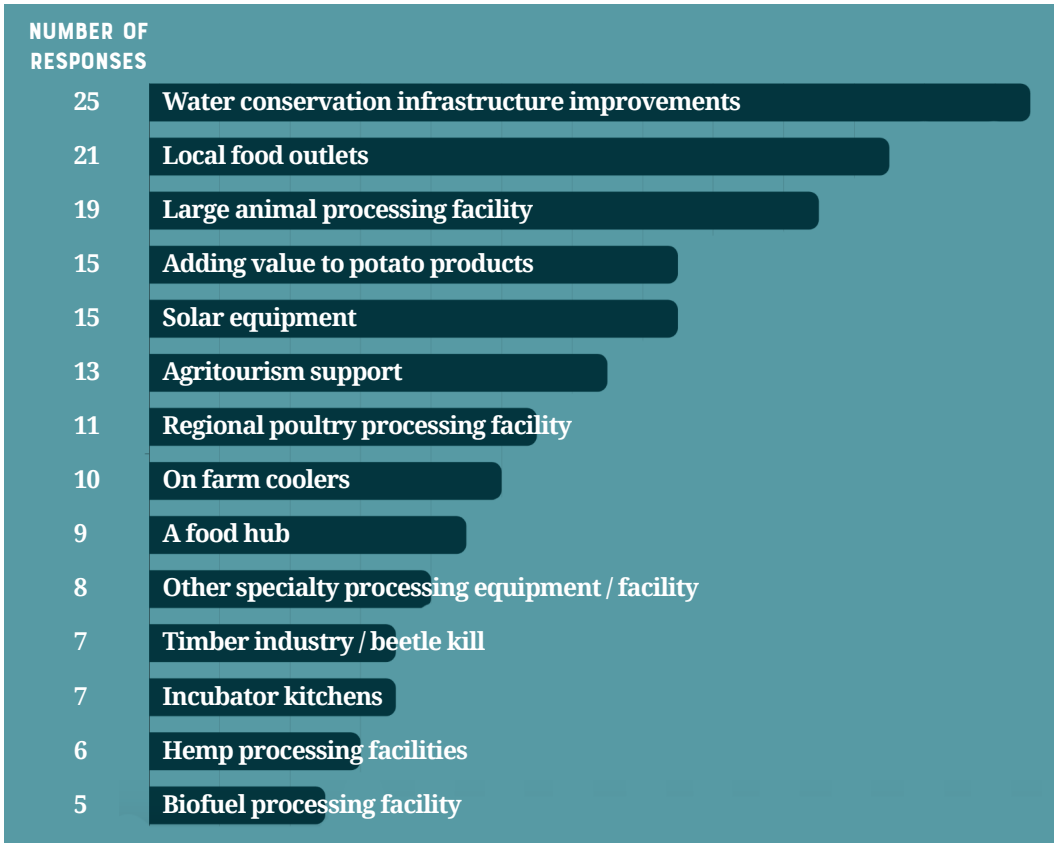


Figure 7. Farmer/Rancher survey responses to the question: "Which of the following food system infrastructure components would you need to scale up? (check all that apply)" (84 producers responded)

MARKET FOR LOCAL FOODS (PRODUCER RESPONSES)

Farmers/ranchers shared their perception of the market for locally-grown foods. Respondents agreed most strongly with these statements:

1) Shoppers and diners who reside in the SLV need education on the value of buying locally-produced food
2) Tourists are seeking a "taste of place" experience*
3) Farmers have the opportunity to grow and sell a diverse set of products
4) The demand for local products is weak considering the abundant SLV supply

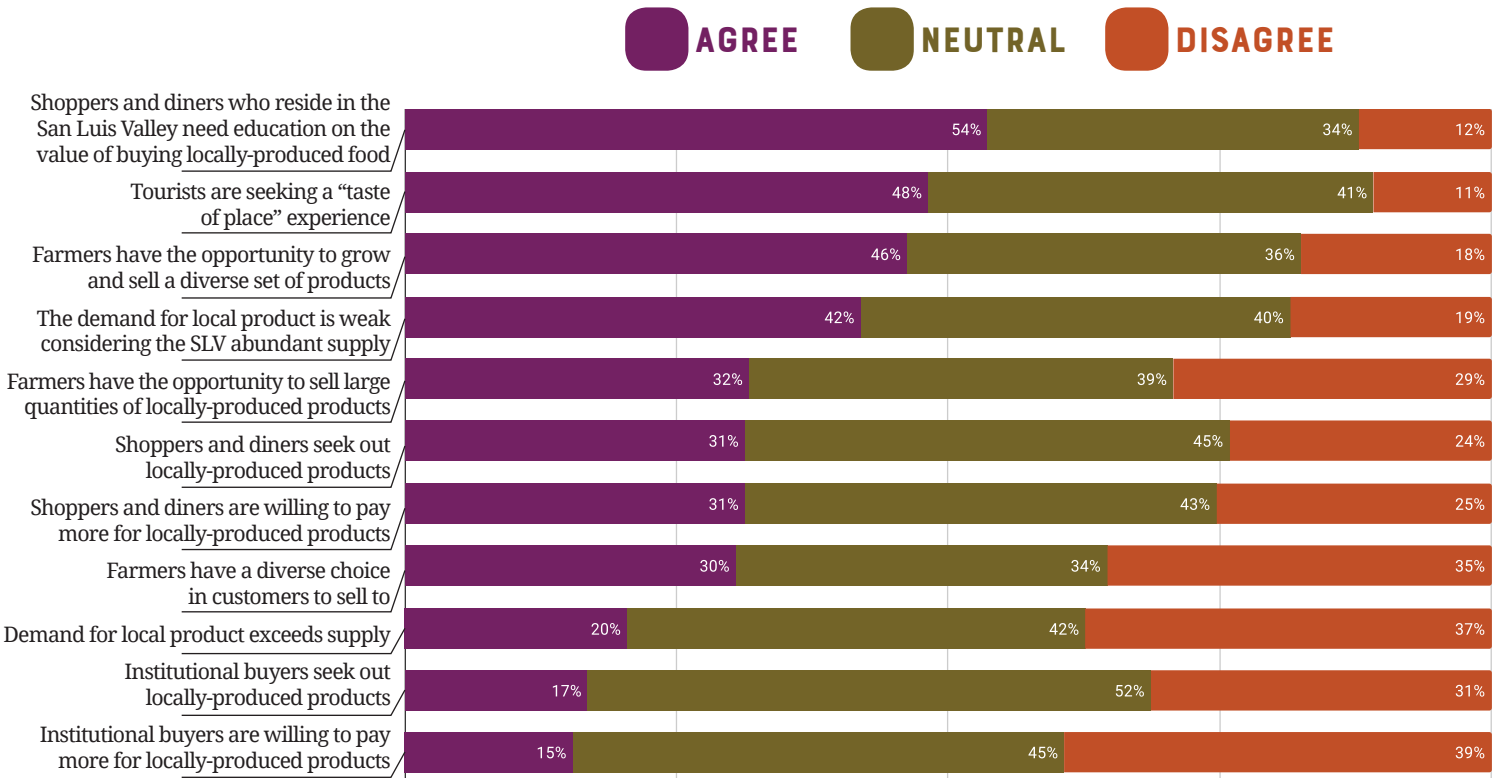


Figure 8. Farmer/Rancher survey responses to the question: "How would you describe the market for locally grown and raised products? Please rate the following statements from agree to disagree." (84 producers responded)

***A *Taste of Place* was a goal of the 2017 Local Foods Local Places Alamosa Action Plan and involves highlighting local cultural foods of the SLV.**

BARRIERS

The top barriers for farmers/ranchers included (84 producers responded):

1) Access to water
2) Water curtailment during drought
3) Cost of suitable land
4) Availability of labor
5) Cost of water

SURVEY FINDINGS - FOOD BUSINESS

CHALLENGES TO GROWING YOUR BUSINESS

The biggest challenges food businesses face is limited outlets for selling locally-produced foods, permitting challenges, recruiting/retaining employees, and sourcing quality or local ingredients. "Other" responses included below, suggest technical assistance to support the food production, business skills, and consumer awareness of local foods would benefit the region.

- Challenges with rising food ingredient prices
- Competition
- Customers' lack of willingness to pay higher prices for local foods
- Seasonality of the customer base

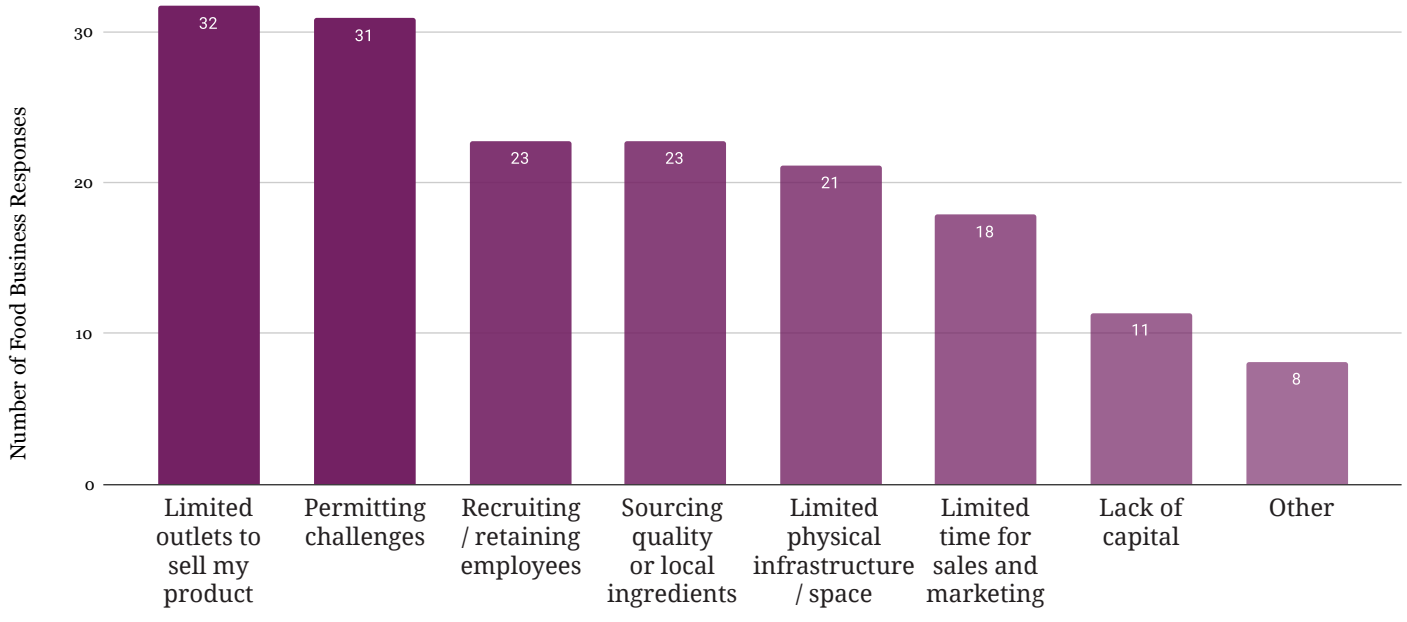


Figure 9: Food Business survey responses to the question: "What are the main challenges you face in growing your business? Choose your top three." (58 food businesses responded)

CHALLENGES OF SOURCING LOCAL INGREDIENTS

Some food businesses also face problems with local sourcing. Out of 47 total weighted responses, the top challenges identified were:

- **No challenges purchasing locally** (32 respondents)
- **Professional skills of suppliers** – unprofessional or poor communication (30 respondents)
- **Quality** – product does not meet grading standards (27 respondents)
- **Effort** – too much effort required on my part to find and source local (26 respondents)
- **Timing** – seasonality of produce does not align with consumer demand (24 respondents)
- **Volume** – unable to fill the quantity needed (24 respondents)
- **Diversity of product** – not enough selection (23 respondents)

GOALS FOR GROWTH

Food business owners shared that their top growth goals were: turning a profit, sourcing more ingredients or items locally, and offering better opportunities to employees (benefits, wages, etc).

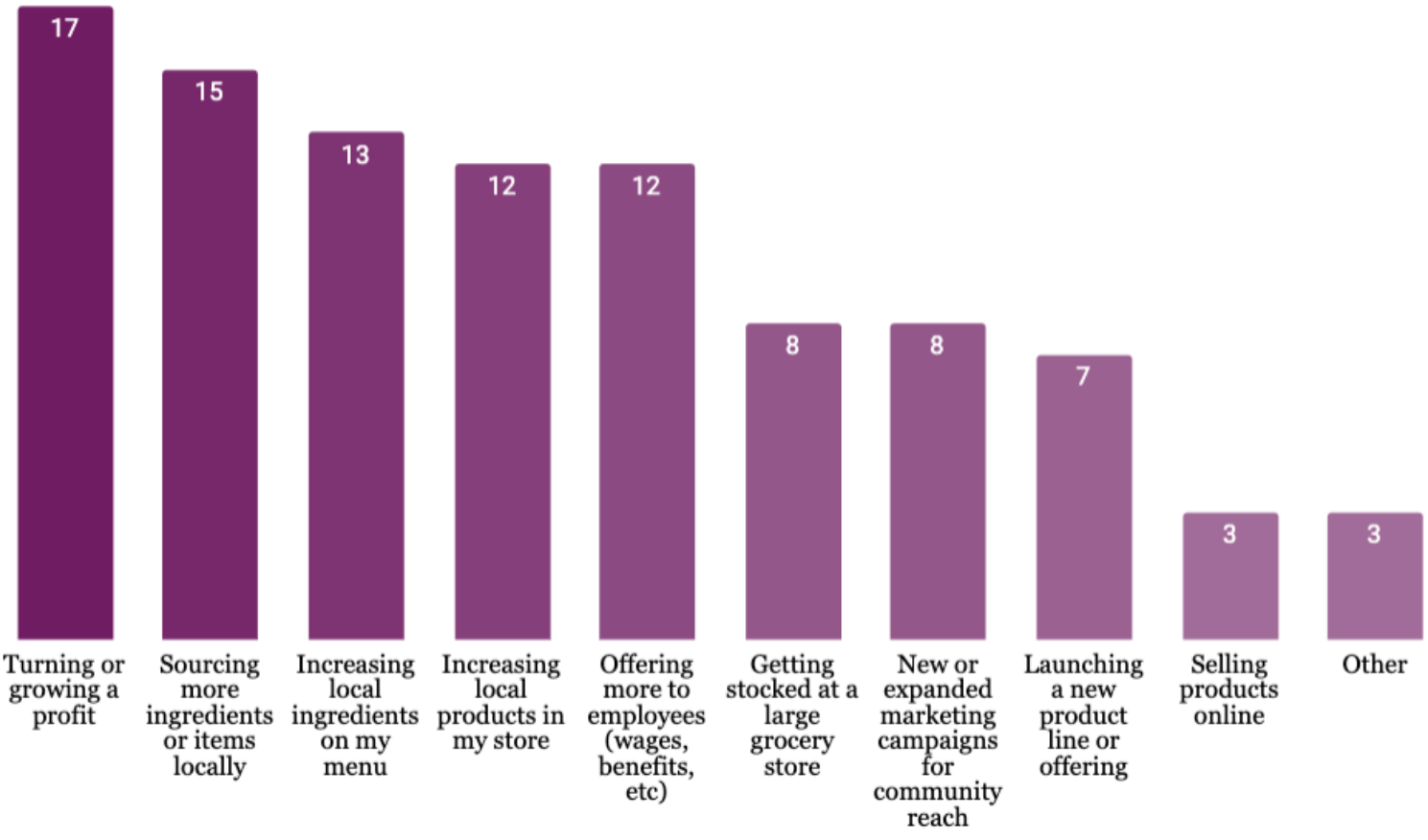


Figure 10: Food Business survey responses to the question: "What are your top growth goals for your business? Choose your top three." (58 food businesses responded)

BUSINESS SUPPORT SERVICES DESIRED

Food business owners would use support services for the following:

1) Financing / funding opportunities
2) Accounting or business development training
3) Networking with other local food businesses and local producers

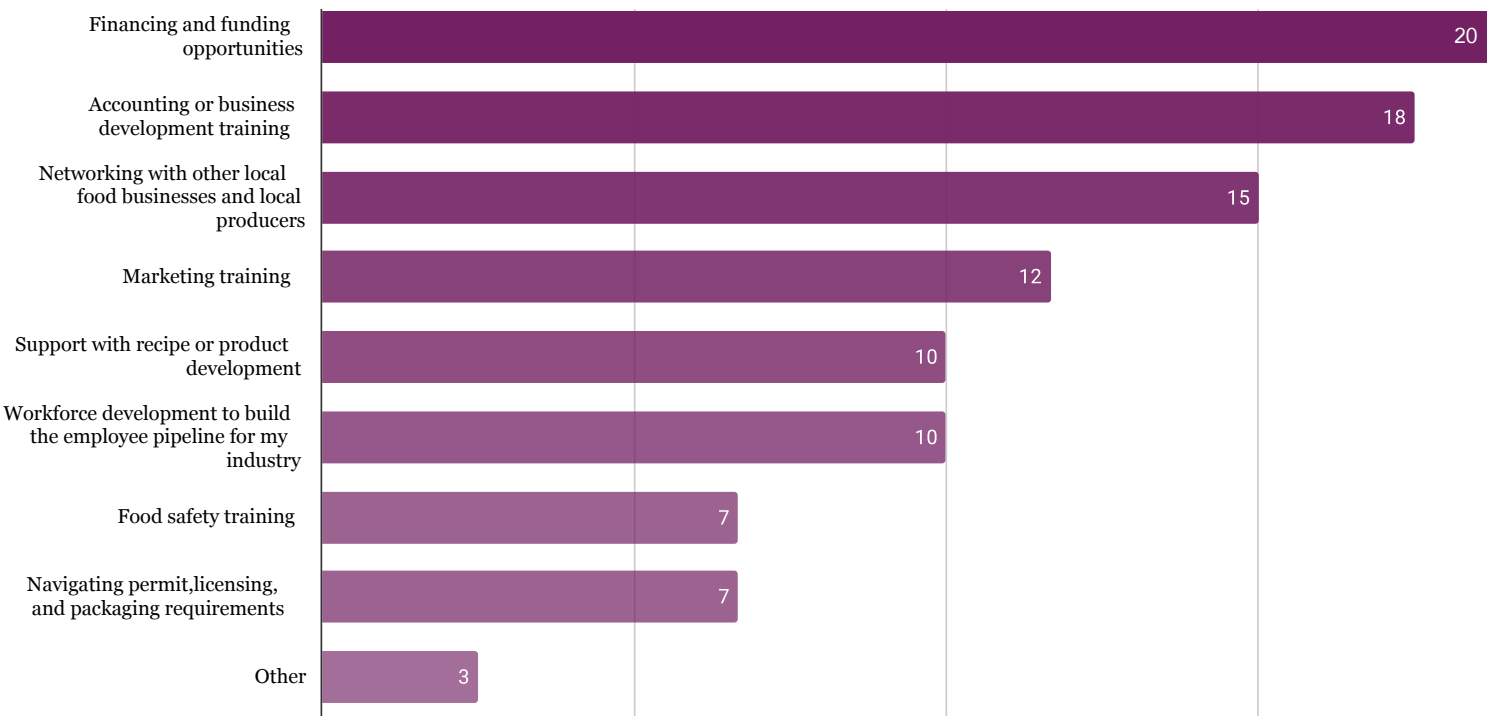


Figure 11: Food Business survey responses to the question: "What types of business support services would help you reach your business goals? Choose your top three." (58 food businesses responded)

INFRASTRUCTURE NEEDED TO ACHIEVE BUSINESS GOALS

The top food system infrastructure which food businesses need to help them reach their goals are more suppliers selling local foods.

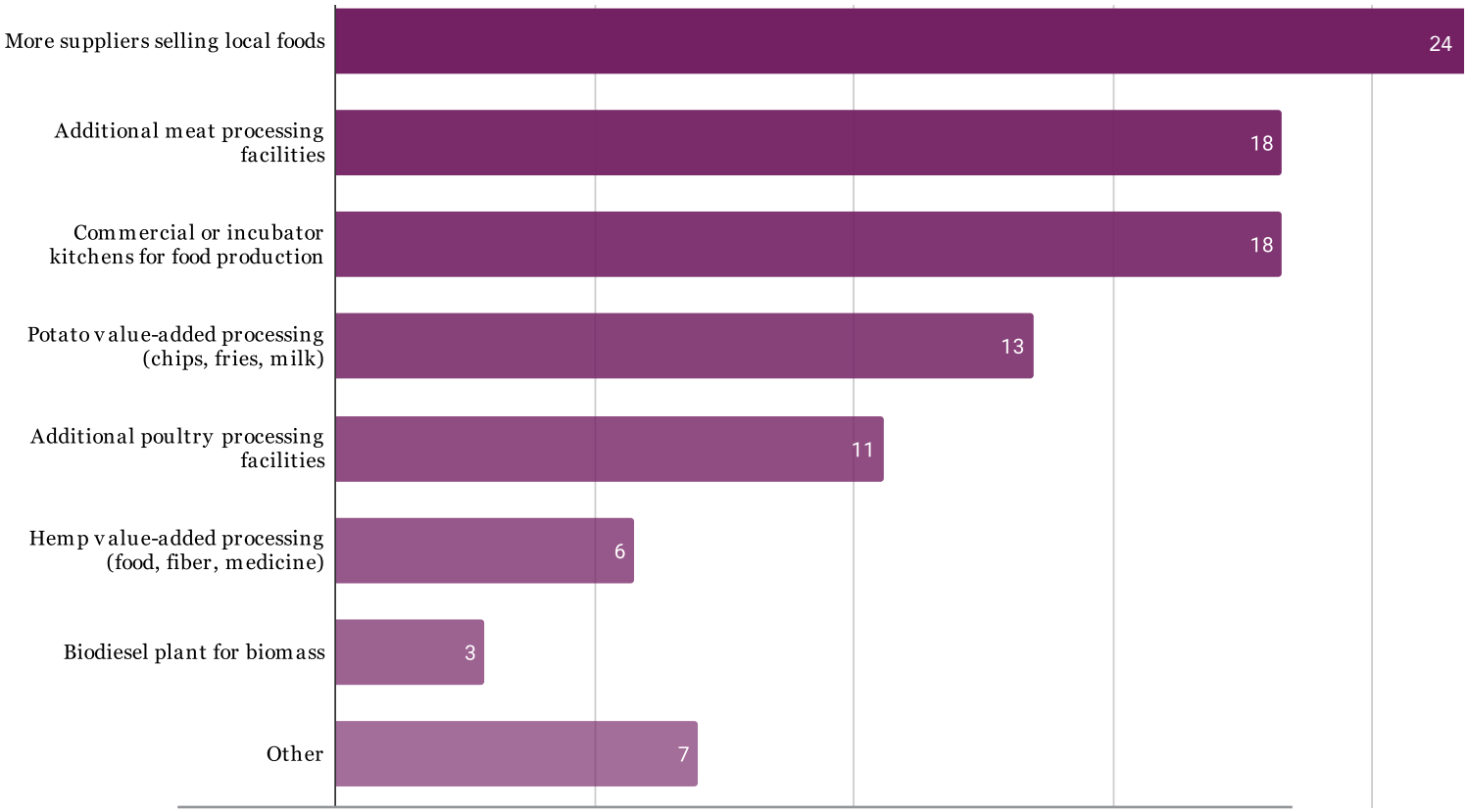


Figure 12: Food Business survey responses to the question: "What types of infrastructure would help you reach your business goals? Choose your top three." (58 food businesses responded)

MARKET FOR LOCAL FOODS (FOOD BUSINESS RESPONSES)

Food Businesses also shared their perception of the market for locally-grown foods. They were asked whether they agreed, disagreed, or were neutral on the following statements. The same question was asked of Producers and they gave the same top two responses.

1) Tourists are seeking a "taste of place" experience

2) Shoppers and diners who reside in the SLV need education on the value of buying locally-produced food

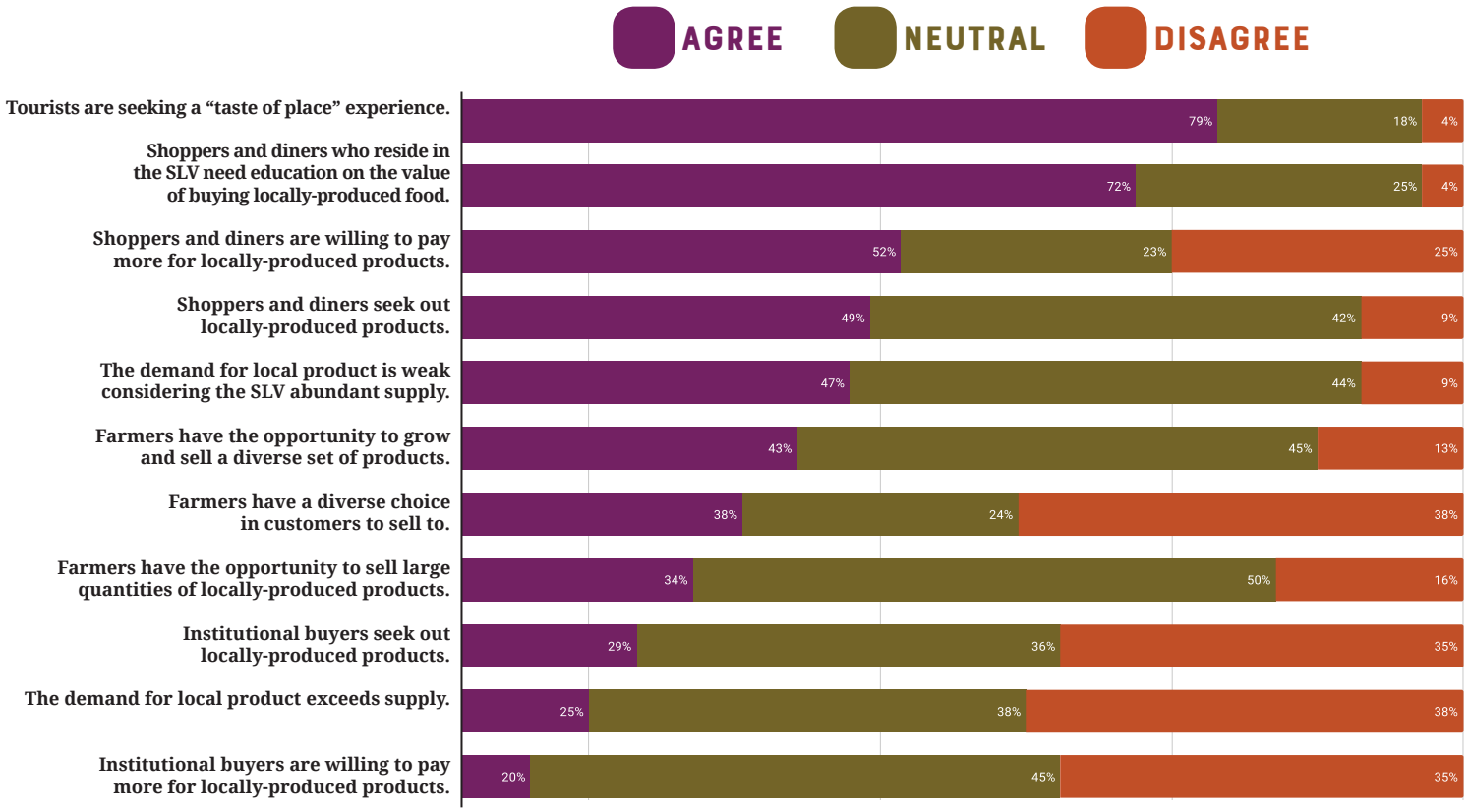


Figure 13: Food Business survey responses to the question: "How would you describe the market for locally grown and raised products? Please rate the following statements from agree, neutral, disagree." (58 food businesses responded)

SUMMIT FINDINGS

If responses appeared in three or more counties, it is included here.

WHAT'S WORKING

- Selling at farmers markets.
- Valley Roots Food Hub offers a valuable marketing opportunity.
- Organic food demand is growing.
- Shifting towards regenerative farming.
- There is a sense of community support.
- Agricultural grants and programs.

WHAT'S NOT WORKING

- Rising input costs strain finances.
- High food business costs.
- Financial entry barrier for new farmers.
- Succession of operations.
- Limited land access.
- Short shelf life due to logistics.
- Unsustainable supply chain.
- Labor shortage and regulations.
- Complex regulations and funding.
- Lack of USDA meat processing.
- Drought reduces production.
- Water access and rights issues.
- Aging water infrastructure.

VISION FOR THE FUTURE

- Informed consumers, food education.
- Farmer cooperation and resource-sharing.
- Agricultural lands in production.
- Community collaboration.
- Support for young farmers & ranchers.
- Simplified funding access.
- Fair prices for producers.
- Equitable food programs.
- Local markets and cooperatives.

PRODUCER OPPORTUNITY

- KEY TAKEAWAYS -

DIVERSE MARKET OPPORTUNITIES

- There are agricultural market opportunities across the SLV for small and mid-sized producers, including; the Valley Roots Food Hub, 7 farmers markets, and 46 agritourism operations. Together, these sales of local food direct-to-consumer, to retail markets, or to institutions generated $43,894,000 in sales in 2017.

WATER CHALLENGES ARE CRITICAL

- The biggest challenges facing farmers/ranchers in the San Luis Valley are related to water. Producers are concerned about the lack of water, facing curtailment, and the increasing cost of water access. This is exacerbated by the threat of water exports out of the Valley.

INTEREST IN BUSINESS GROWTH & PRIORITY ON INFRASTRUCTURE IMPROVEMENTS

- 74% of farmers/ranchers were interested in growing their businesses. To support this they were most interested in water conservation, additional outlets to sell local foods, large animal processing facilities, and value-added processes facilities for animals, potatoes, and hemp.

FOOD BUSINESSES SEEK LOCAL SOURCING

- Food businesses operating in the San Luis Valley are most challenged by limited outlets for selling locally produced foods, permitting challenges, and recruiting/retaining employees.
- Food businesses are interested in growth and their top goals include: turning a profit, sourcing more ingredients or items locally, and offering more to employees.

TOURISTS MAY PRIORITIZE LOCAL FOOD WHILE RESIDENTS NEED EDUCATION ON VALUE OF IT

- Food businesses and producers believe that tourists are seeking a “taste of place” experience, but that SLV residents need education on the value of buying locally-produced food.

HEALTHY FOOD ACCESS

Does everyone in the San Luis Valley have access to affordable, healthy, culturally appropriate foods? If not, where are the gaps?

What do participants envision for a food system that restores health and nourishes the people, the community, the economy, and the ecosystem?

SURVEY FINDINGS

EATING BALANCED MEALS*

Over half of the SLV community can't afford to eat balanced meals, at least some of the time. Those identifying as Hispanic or Latino reported significantly higher challenges affording balanced meals, with 75.1 percent of Hispanic respondents answering "often true" and "sometimes true" compared to 35.5 percent of non-Hispanic respondents. *'Balanced Meal' was not defined in the survey. Each survey taker was free to use their own definition.

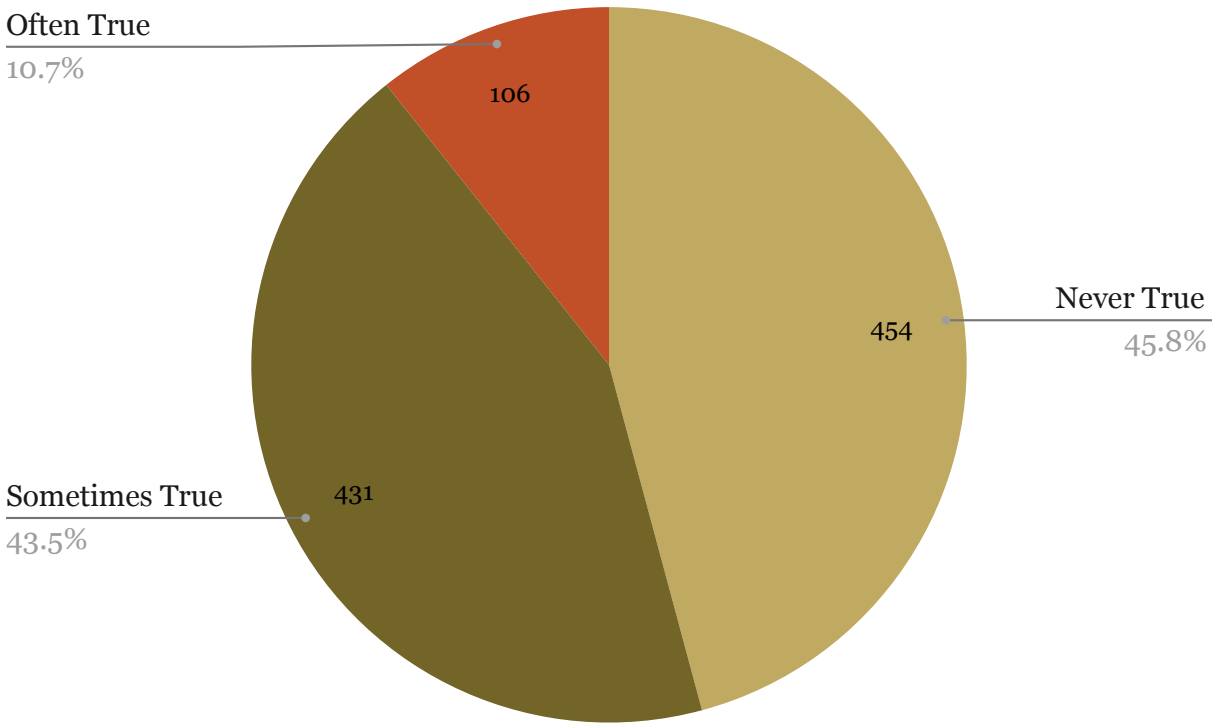


Figure 14: Community Survey responses to ""We couldn't afford to eat balanced meals." Was that often, sometimes, or never true for your household in the last 12 months? (1011 individuals responded)

SKIPPING MEALS

Another indicator of food insecurity is whether adults in the family skip meals because there isn't enough money for food: 26.6 percent of survey respondents reported that they, or other adults in the family, skip meals to stretch their food budgets. When this question was analyzed by county, Mineral County residents reported significantly higher rates of food insecurity, with 51.6 percent of respondents reporting that they skipped meals due to lack of money for food.

COMMUNITY & KIDS BENEFIT FROM LOCAL FOOD

MALCOLM SNEAD

- FOOD SERVICE DIRECTOR FOR CREEDE SCHOOL DISTRICT

We are fortunate to live in an agricultural area where we can purchase local foods in season from the Valley Roots Food Hub. Students benefit from fresh and local items in our meal program that include: potatoes, beets, carrots, onions, mushrooms, cheese, spinach, arugula, cherries, peaches, watermelon, honey dew, radishes, zucchini, and green chilis. Local foods not only taste better, but our kids like them too. Purchasing local is an investment in our farmers and our community.

WHY WE DON'T HAVE FOOD WE WANT TO EAT

The reasons that Valley residents don't always have access to the food they want to eat vary. Respondents cited a lack of variety of foods available, a lack of money for food purchases, and a lack of time for shopping and cooking as the top three reasons.

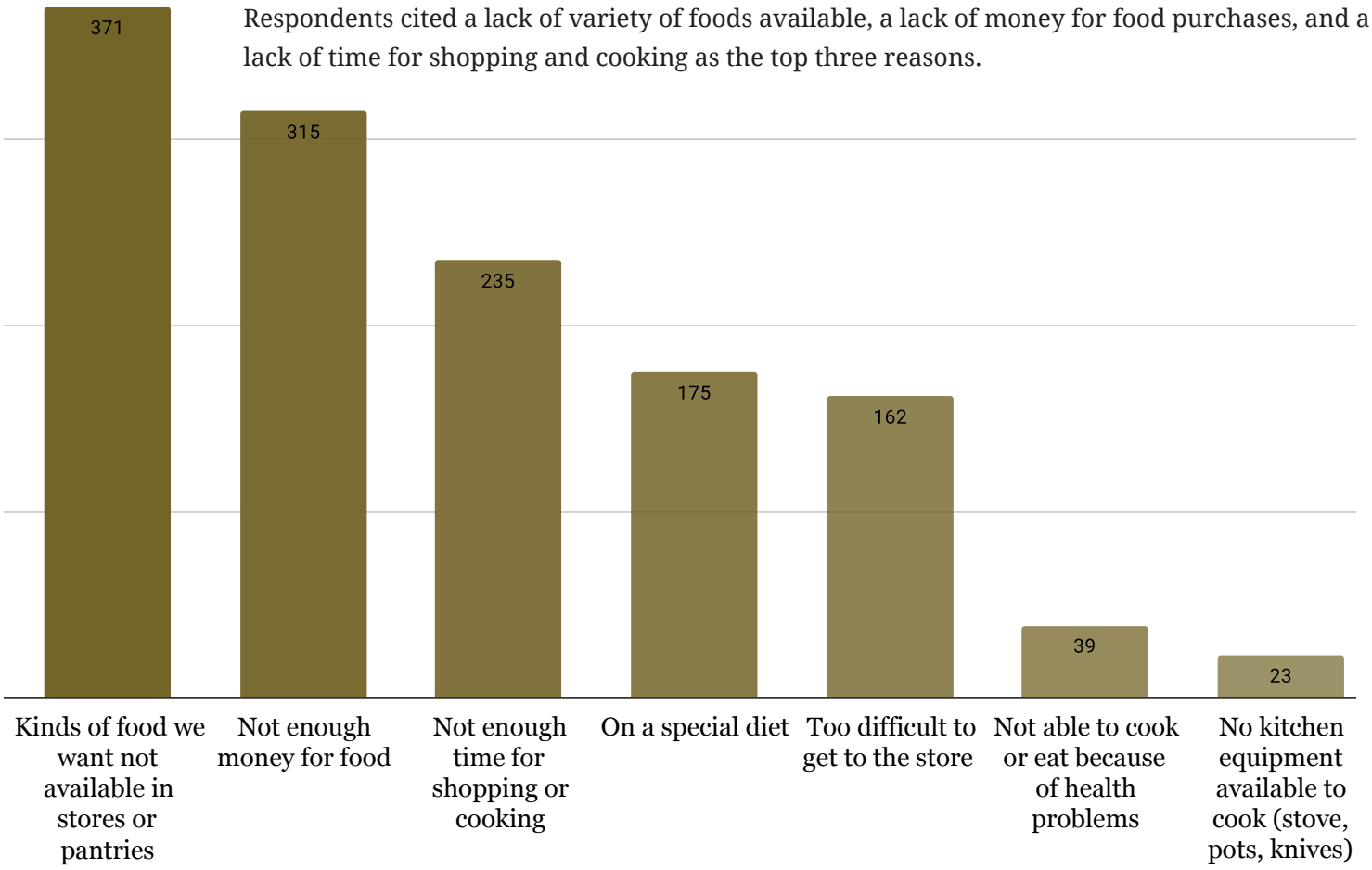


Figure 15. Community survey responses to the question: Please select the reason(s) that best describe why you or your household doesn't always have the kinds of food you want to eat. Check all that apply. (1011 individuals responded)

A full 64.4 percent of survey respondents had provided groceries for others in the community in the past 12 months. This high level of mutual support may also indicate the strength of community social networks in the Valley.

RESOURCES TO GET SUPPLEMENTAL FOOD

A variety of programs and services are available in the San Luis Valley for individuals and families struggling with food insecurity. Residents most often utilized food pantries/food banks, SNAP (Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program funds, formerly known as food stamps), and free communal meals to meet their needs.

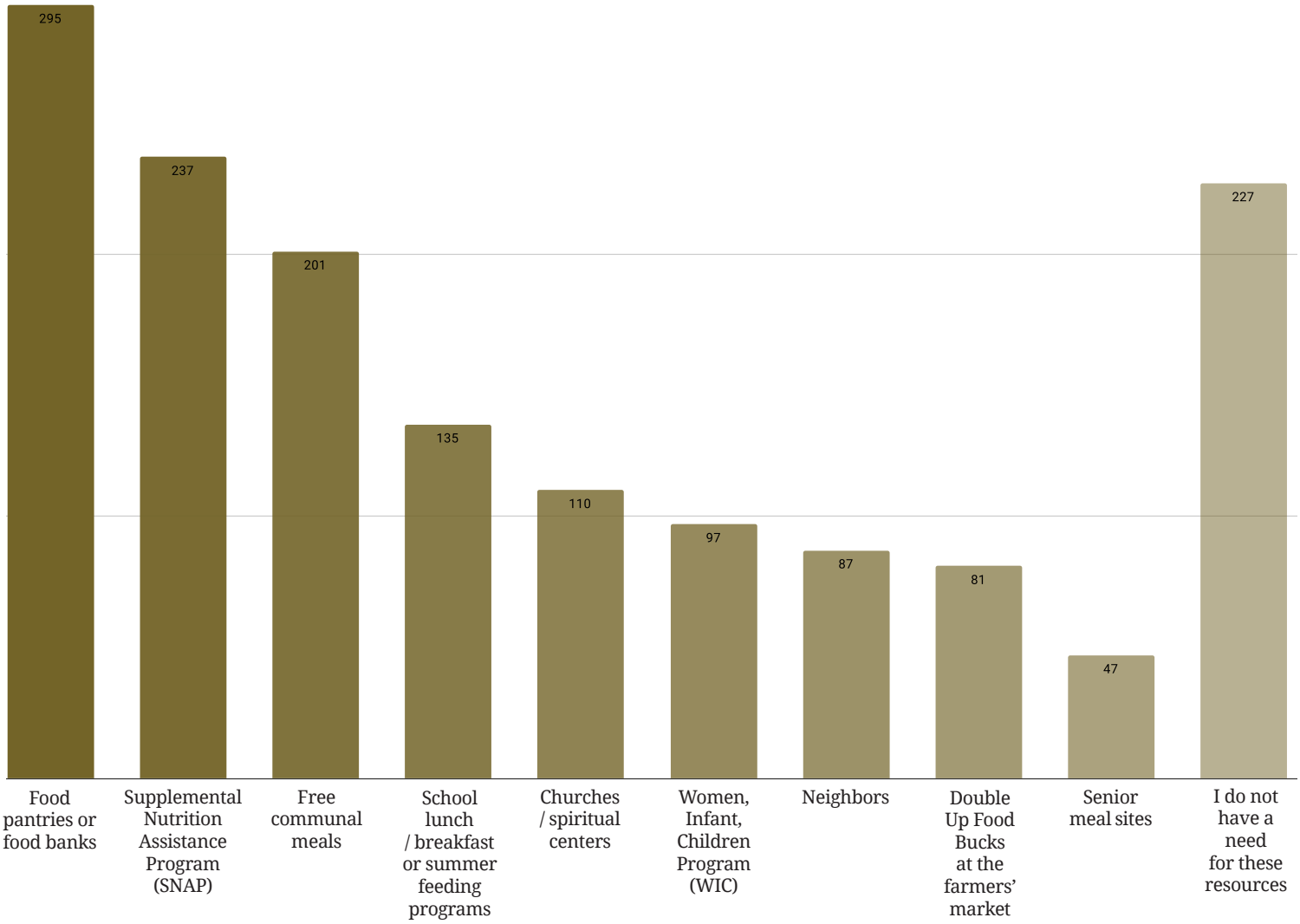


Figure 16. Community survey responses to the question: In the past 12 months what resources have you accessed to get free or reduced cost foods? Check all that apply. (1011 individuals responded)

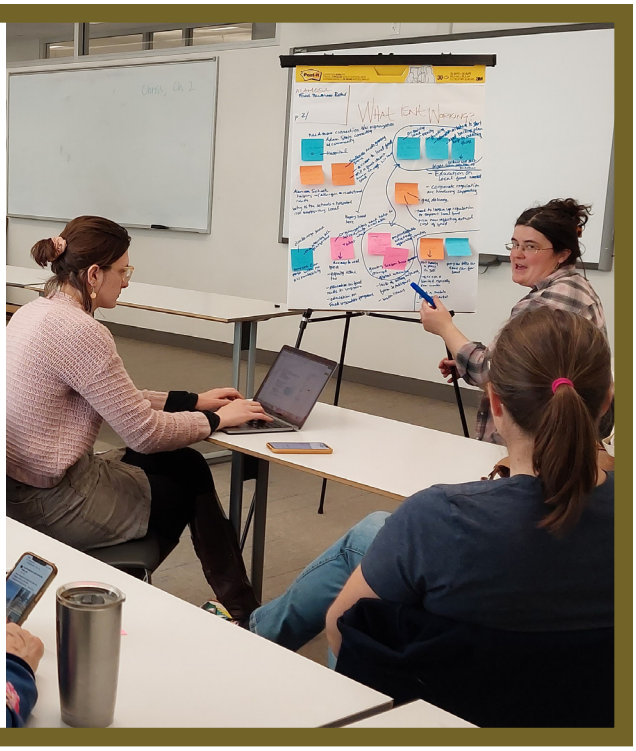
POINTS HEARD DURING LISTENING SUMMITS

ALICE PUGH - CIVIC CANOPY & CFAA FACILITATOR

"People don't have transportation to get to food banks or stores. School buses go throughout the Valley. What would it look like to have local food boxes in the school buses?"

"Glycoalkaloids occur naturally in potatoes and are toxic to humans at high levels. Some specialty potatoes grown in SLV don't have this toxicity. If we could create a common seal indicating Glycoalkaloid free, we could expand to wider markets and encourage other local farmers to grow these potatoes at a premium price."

"Can we get local convenience stores in outlying towns to carry local produce?"



WHAT WOULD HELP FOOD ACCESS

Community members were most interested in learning about how to grow, prepare and/or preserve their own food and in increasing the number of farmer's markets and CSA programs in the region. There was also strong interest in participating in community gardens.

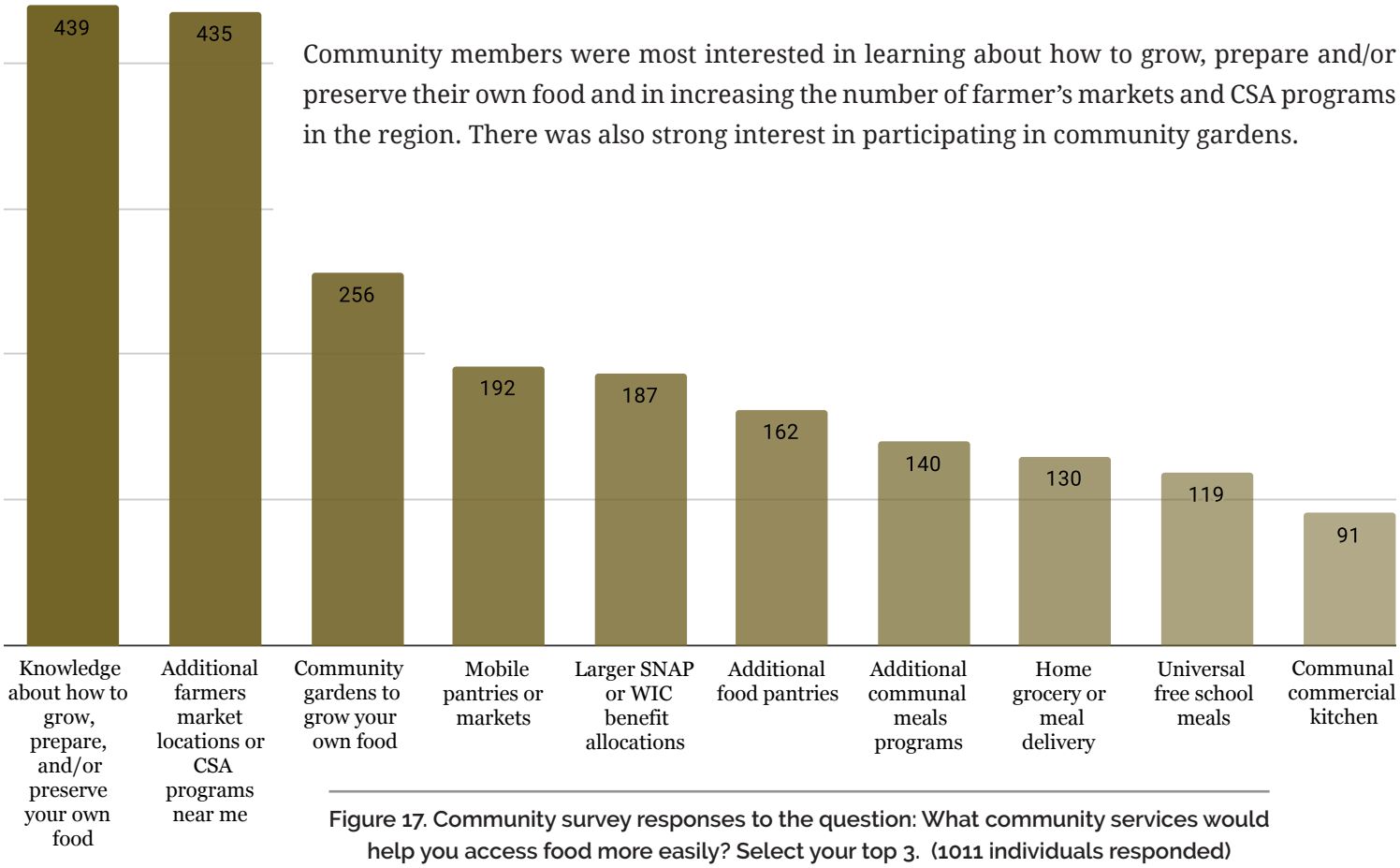


Figure 17. Community survey responses to the question: What community services would help you access food more easily? Select your top 3. (1011 individuals responded)

SUMMIT FINDINGS

If responses appeared in three or more counties, it is included here.

WHAT'S WORKING

- Farmers markets and food banks are offering healthier options.
- Food programs like school lunches, senior meals, and SNAP provide healthier options.
- Rising interest in healthy, local food.
- Community values local networks and its rich heritage and traditions.
- Charitable organizations aid food access.
- More funding for healthy food access.

WHAT'S NOT WORKING

- Scarcity of fresh food in winter.
- Distant grocery stores and limited transportation.
- Healthy food is costly and hard to find.
- Healthy foods require more time and knowledge to prepare.
- Convenience foods are preferred.
- Need for more food education.
- Limited access to community gardens and food infrastructure such as commercial kitchens and food storage.
- Assistance programs don't offer as much fresh, healthy food as they do processed and convenience foods.
- Social stigma in seeking food aid.
- Limited food delivery, especially for seniors and the disabled.
- Short shelf life due to being so rural.
- Counties need community collaboration.

VISION FOR THE FUTURE

- Local governments enhance food access.
- Education on nutrition, preservation, composting.
- More school-based food education.
- Locals appreciate traditional Valley foods.
- People recognize the true cost and value of local food.
- Community is involved in food system.
- Local food is more affordable.
- Efficient Valley-wide food distribution.
- Awareness of food resources.
- Investment in local markets for easier food access.
- Fresh food in stores year-round.
- More food coops serve the region.
- Sharing resources for home-based food production.

BUILDING RESILIENCE THROUGH COMMUNITY NARRATIVES

SHERICE SHINER - LA PUENTE'S HEALTH FOOD ACCESS COORDINATOR

My goal for the Food Bank Network of the San Luis Valley is to enhance system resilience. When pantry leaders change, the pantry can become vulnerable, losing institutional knowledge, key contacts, and vital relationships. Pantries are also at risk of losing their spaces (which are often donated) for various reasons. And, even if a community is aware of a pantry closure, coordinating an effective response can be challenging. Food pantries often lack a budget and rely on donated resources primarily for food, overlooking essential expenses like utilities, rent, cleaning supplies, and wages or stipends for staff and volunteers.

One way to address these issues is for pantries to take control of their narratives by understanding their demographics and tailoring their offerings to suit their unique communities. For instance, a pantry serving seniors may require more ready-made meals, while one in an off-grid community may need more non-perishable items. These insights are crucial when engaging with local councils, commissioners, and governing bodies. As grant funders and organizations are beginning to prioritize "aging in place," and towns are increasingly pursuing the need to consolidate emergency resources, such as having fire equipment and ambulances nearby, they should strongly consider including food access into the model.

Understanding our stories empowers us to identify what the community truly needs, ensuring that resources are allocated to genuine priorities. Towns can prioritize pantry spaces as part of emergency services, guaranteeing food resources are accessible – demonstrating a commitment to the community's well-being.

HEALTHY FOOD ACCESS
- KEY TAKEAWAYS -

FOOD ACCESS IS AN ISSUE

- Food insecurity rates - both from national data sets and self-reported from residents - are high in the SLV.
- Food insecurity is higher among Hispanic/Latino communities than among the non-Hispanic/Latino population.
- Food assistance programs are highly utilized.
- Food access is difficult due to lack of outlets and long distances to travel.
- Short growing season makes local produce limited.
- Cost of food is challenging, especially considering the transportation costs.

FOOD SOVEREIGNTY & EDUCATION ARE DESIRED

- Education is needed and desired to grow and cook healthy foods.
- SLV residents desire to be more food sovereign and to have access to food system infrastructure such as compost facilities, community gardens and greenhouses, commercial kitchens, and storage facilities for perishable products.

DIVERSITY, EQUITY & INCLUSION

~ What inequities exist in the current San Luis Valley food system?

~ What do people most affected believe would increase equity in the SLV food system?

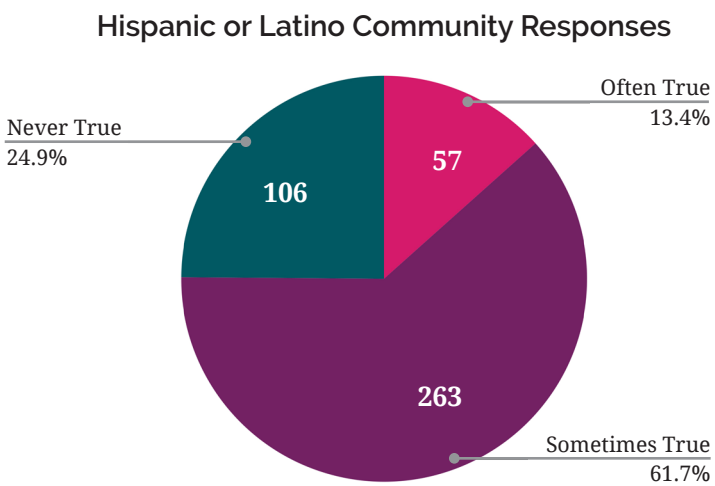
SURVEY FINDINGS

The Community Survey was the only survey with a large enough number of responses to show responses by certain demographic groups. The following survey findings reflect the questions in which there was a significant difference in how Hispanic and non-Hispanic groups experience the food system in the region. Unfortunately, the surveys were not able to track findings for other demographic groups in the SLV.

We acknowledge that many people in the SLV refer to themselves with a variety of terms, such as Hispano and Chicano. Hispanic and Latino are used here, in line with US Census Bureau statistics, but there is no intention to exclude or mislabel any people.

COULDN'T AFFORD TO EAT BALANCED MEALS*

Community survey respondents were asked about their ability to afford to eat balanced meals. Responses differed based upon ethnicity, with 13.4 percent of Hispanic or Latino respondents stating that this was "often true" - which was higher than the Non-Hispanic or Latino respondents at 7.4 percent. Hispanic or Latino respondents also reported that it was "sometimes true" at a higher rate – 61.7 percent compared to just 28.1 percent for Non-Hispanic or Latino respondents. *'Balanced Meal' was not defined in the survey. Each survey taker was free to use their own definition.



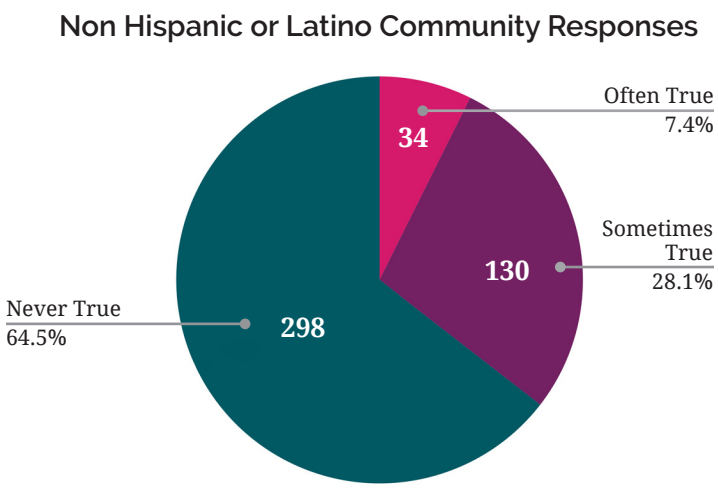


Figure 18 : Community Survey responses to "We couldn't afford to eat balanced meals."
Was that often, sometimes, or never true for your household in the last 12 months? (1011 individuals responded)

FROM LAND GRANT TO LAND GRAB: A COMMUNITY'S QUEST FOR JUSTICE

SHIRLEY ROMERO-OTERO - MOVE MOUNTAINS YOUTH PROJECT DIRECTOR

In the rugged terrain of southern Colorado's Sangre de Cristo Mountains, Shirley Romero, a dedicated land rights activist from San Luis, tells the story of the tireless struggle for justice.

The story begins in the early 1840s with the gifting of a vast Land Grant to the Mexican people spanning 1.2 million acres, intended to support the entire community's way of life. In what is now Southern Costilla County it centered on "La Sierra" a peak rich in resources – wood, timber, firewood, grazing lands, and more and for generations the people there were able to obtain their livelihood from the land.

Then, history took an unfortunate turn. The U.S. government had already displaced the Indigenous inhabitants, then Colorado Territory became a state and the Mexican descendants became US Citizens by default. After this "La Sierra" illegally fell into private ownership, and the new owners barred the land from the people. The land grants were never meant to be sold, protected under the Treaty de Guadalupe Hidalgo.

A long and arduous legal battle followed. In 1992, there was a glimmer of hope when due process rights were affirmed, but many challenges remained.

Recently a formidable 10-foot fence was erected, so tight not even a coyote could pass through, now dividing the land, and blocking hard won traditional activities like grazing rights and firewood gathering from the people.

Despite these trials, Shirley Romero's community, a community of color with a history of struggle, remains resilient. They pin their hopes on the next generation, determined to preserve their culture, language, and way of life. It's a story of courage, resistance, and a deep connection to the land, echoing across generations.

COVID-19 IMPACT ON BUYING FOOD

Impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic also varied by ethnicity. 58.9 percent of Hispanic or Latino respondents responded that the "pandemic made it more difficult to buy food" while only 43.1 percent of Not Hispanic or Latino respondents replied the same.

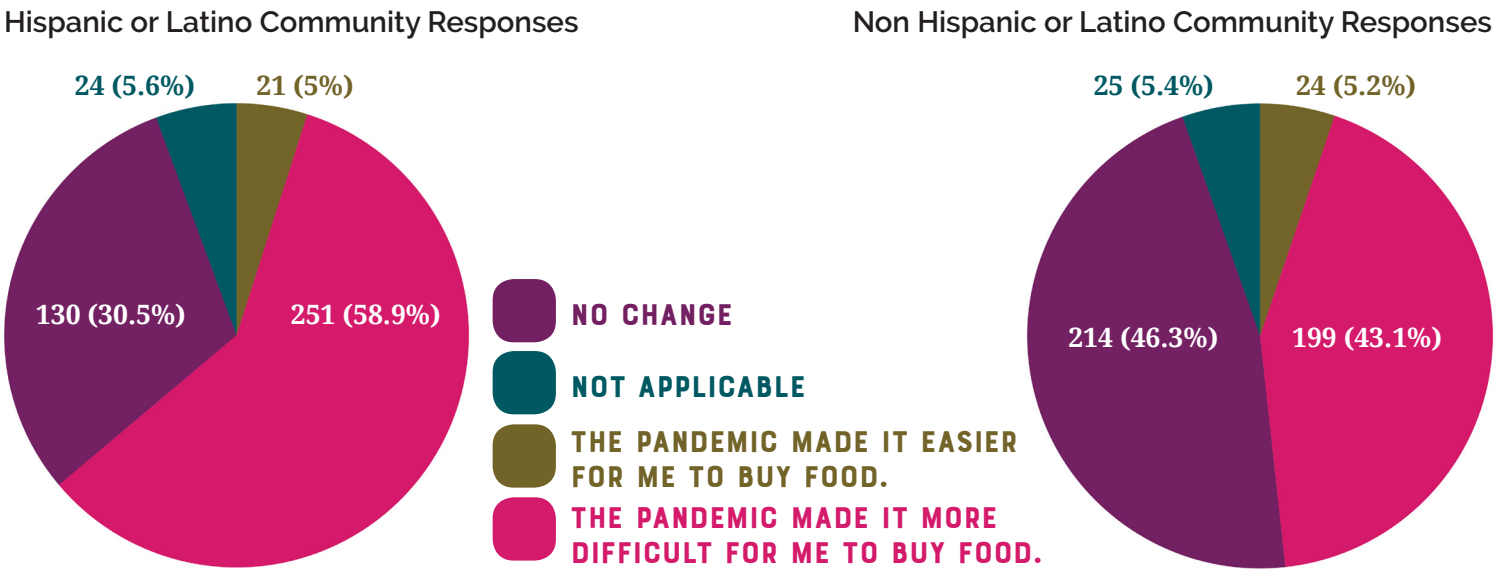


Figure 19 : Community Survey responses to "How did the COVID-19 pandemic impact your ability to buy food?" (1011 individuals responded)

WHY WAS PREFERRED FOOD NOT AVAILABLE

When asked about the reasons that their household experiences food insecurity, responses also varied by ethnicity.

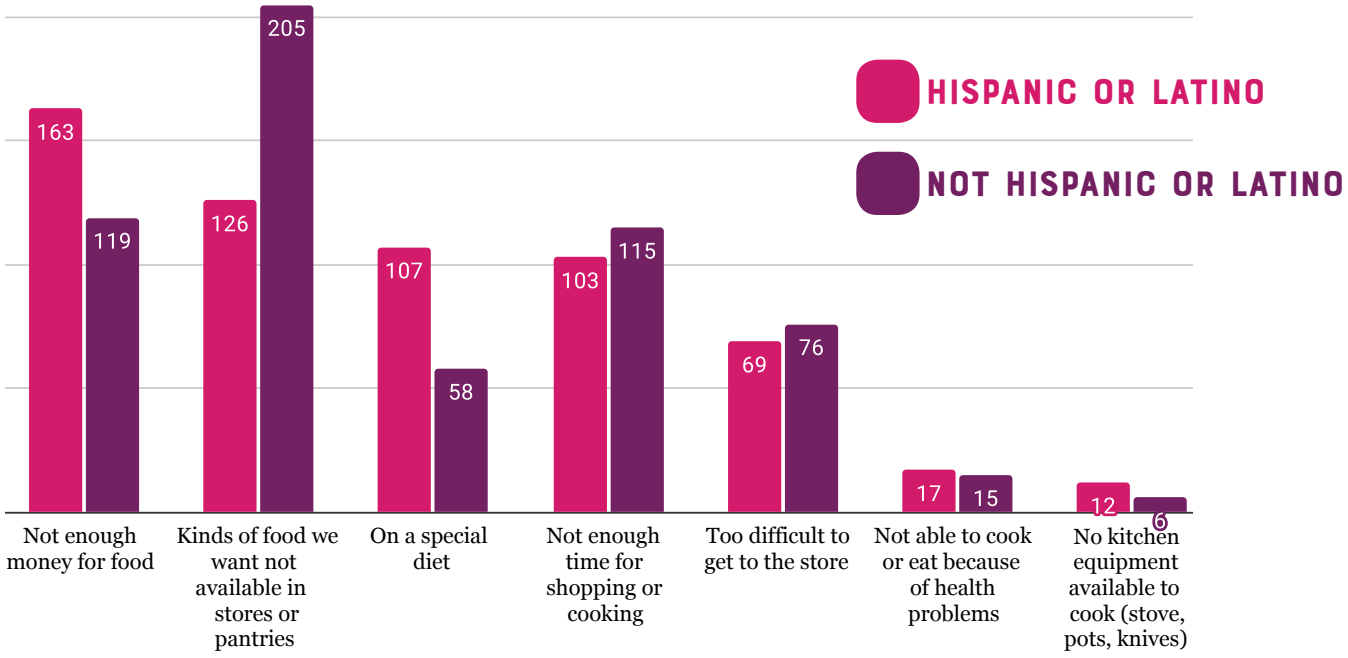


Figure 20: Community Survey responses to: "Please select the reason(s) that best describe why you or your household doesn't always have the kinds of food you want to eat. Check all that apply." (1011 individuals responded)

SUMMIT FINDINGS

Typically, throughout this report, the 'summit findings' show up if the response was appeared in at least 3 counties. However, we want to highlight some specific Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) issues that were mentioned in the county summits, even if they did not show up three times. There is a rich diversity in the Valley that is not reflected in this data, and there are gaps in people and sectors who are represented in this assessment because they did not attend a listening summit.

ACCESS TO LOCAL FOODS

While there is more availability of local foods in some places, there is sometimes no access to healthy and culturally relevant foods. For many people, food costs and transportation issues are often the primary difficulty.

LANGUAGE SUPPORT AND COMMUNICATION ACCESSIBILITY

While multi-language support is increasingly offered during events and programs, there is still much room for improvement in places like schools, community environments, and across sectors and services. Further progress is needed to ensure equitable delivery of information to everyone, considering varied access capabilities.

SYSTEMIC ISSUES

Equity and fair wage concerns highlight systemic disparities that exist, as well as limited opportunities for women, LGBTQIA+[1], BIPOC[2], and persons with disabilities as farmers/artisans. There is a desire for the establishment of equity councils and advisory groups to address historic and legislative racism and injustice, and to enact policy changes to support farm-to-market and water equity in our region. The need for increased, equitable access to affordable housing and other basic necessities was a repeated theme.

COLLABORATION

While there are many effective and beneficial partnerships and coalitions in the Valley, there is room for improvement among organizations, government, schools, and the community. Our youth are being prioritized in various programs, and events and schools are working on collaborative programs between students and the community.

EDUCATION

There is a desire for more education around consensus decision-making, DEI education for community members and non-profits, and for gardening and nutrition education in schools.

COMMUNITY INCLUSIVITY AND CULTURAL RELEVANCE

Summit attendees noted that they would like to see organizations, councils, and coalitions working beyond their regional barriers, continue uplifting DEI within our community spaces, and fostering inclusive spaces where diverse voices and visions are welcomed, heard, and respected. Attendees noticed progress in that food pantries are carrying culturally relevant food, and that there is wider support for migrant farm workers.

1 LGBTQIA+ stands for Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer, Intersex, and Asexual. The additional "+" stands for all of the other identities not encompassed in the short acronym.

2 BIPOC stands for Black, Indigenous, and people of color. Pronounced "bye-pock."

WE ARE THE LAST & THE LEAST

DEVON PEÑA - THE ACEQUIA INSTITUTE & SAN LUIS PEOPLES MARKET

One of the challenges we have encountered at the San Luis Peoples Market during our transition from the R&R Market is the poor quality of the produce, packaged salads, and deli items we receive from the wholesale supply chain we inherited from the previous owners. Our carrots and other veggies arrive limp. Our cilantro arrives limp and sometimes moldy and has a 2-3 day shelf life. The packaged organic salads arrive with sell-by-dates as short as 5 days instead of the norm of 10 days. We have checked with retail grocers in other communities across the SLV with the same supplier and they do not have these problems of poor quality and short expiration dates. As a delivery location, we are the last and least.

This is a widespread and well-recognized problem for low-income, BIPOC communities in both rural and urban areas. The poor get inferior quality produce and other staple foodstuffs. This problem is a form of institutionalized environmental racism that has led many food justice activists to characterize the system as a form of "food apartheid."

If responses appeared in three or more counties, it is included here.

WHAT'S WORKING

- Nonprofit support for food and other aid.
- Some counties have school food and senior lunch programs that support diverse populations.
- Strong community support and appreciation of Valley culture.
- Available funding for diverse food systems.

WHAT'S NOT WORKING

- Unequal land and water access.
- Housing affordability challenges.
- Limited Spanish language support.
- Racism's impact on food programs.
- Stigma in seeking food assistance.
- Grocery store distance and transportation.
- Erosion of cultural food traditions.
- Lack of nutritional knowledge and a preference for convenience food.

In the spirit of inclusion, we would like to acknowledge that we did not have significant summit participation from typically underrepresented communities such as Indigenous people, the elderly, youth, houseless, people with disabilities, and non-English speakers.

VISION FOR THE FUTURE

- Region embraces diversity and cultures.
- Multicultural events unite through food.
- Inclusivity in social service programs.
- Improving existing support programs.
- More affordable housing.

DIVERSITY, EQUITY & INCLUSION

- KEY TAKEAWAYS -

SLV RESIDENTS STRUGGLE WITH FOOD & HOUSING ACCESS

- Availability of local foods is inconsistent; some areas have more access than others.
- Lack of access to healthy and culturally relevant foods due to food costs and transportation issues.
- All six counties in the San Luis Valley have higher food insecurity rates than the Colorado average, with a higher percentage of residents living below the 200% poverty threshold. [1]

DIVERSITY IS INCREASING

- Colorado's racial diversity nearly doubled between 1980 and 2019. People of color went from 17% to 32% of the population.[2]

NEED FOR LANGUAGE SUPPORT & COMMUNICATION ACCESSIBILITY

- Improved multi-language support during events and programs, but significant room for enhancement in schools, community environments, and across sectors.
- Need for equitable delivery of information considering varied access capabilities.

SYSTEMIC ISSUES MUST BE ADDRESSED

- Equity and fair wage concerns reveal systemic disparities.
- Limited opportunities for women, LGBTQIA+, BIPOC, and persons with disabilities as farmers/artisans.
- Calls for the establishment of equity councils and advisory groups to address historical and legislative racism and injustice.
- Affordable housing and basic necessities are persistent challenges.

EDUCATION IS NEEDED

- Desire for more education on consensus decision-making, DEI education for community members and non-profits.
- Call for gardening and nutrition education in schools.

COMMUNITY INCLUSIVITY & CULTURAL RELEVANCE

- Desire for organizations, councils, and coalitions to work beyond regional barriers.
- Call for continuous upliftment of DEI within community spaces and fostering inclusive environments.
- Positive progress noted, such as food pantries carrying culturally relevant foods and wider support for migrant farm workers.

ETHNIC DISPARITIES EXIST

- Hispanic or Latino residents face greater challenges accessing healthy foods.
- Racial and ethnic disparities exist in access to land, water, affordable housing, and transportation.
- Farm owners in the Valley are predominantly White. 25.44 percent identify as of Hispanic, Latino, or Spanish origin.[3]
- Lack of multi-language translation exacerbates these disparities.

APPRECIATION OF CULTURE & COLLABORATION

- Strong community support and appreciation for local culture, social networks, rich heritage, and traditions.
- Existing partnerships and coalitions are effective, but improvement is needed among organizations, government, schools, and the community.
- Prioritization of youth in programs and collaborative efforts between students and the community.

1 Feeding America, Map the Meal Gap, https://map.feedingamerica.org/

2 National Equity Atlas, accessed at: https://nationalequityatlas.org/research/data_summary#/?geoSectionName=State&geo=02000000000008000

3 U.S. Department of Agriculture, National Agricultural Statistics Service, Census of Agriculture, https://www.nass.usda.gov/Quick_Stats/CDQT/chapter/2/table/45/state/CO/year/2017

ENVIRONMENTAL HEALTH & WATER CHALLENGES

~ What is the condition of the Valley's soil, water, air, and land?

~ What are the experiences of farmers/ranchers in the face of a changing climate and reduced availability of water?

~ What do food system stakeholders think will prepare the region for these coming changes?

~ How can we improve the health of our precious natural resources?

SURVEY FINDINGS

Promoting soil and water conservation practices were values identified as important to all members of the community.

CONCERN ABOUT CLIMATE CHANGE

84.1 percent of respondents were either "very concerned" or "somewhat concerned" about climate change in the region, with just 15.9 percent "not very/not at all concerned."

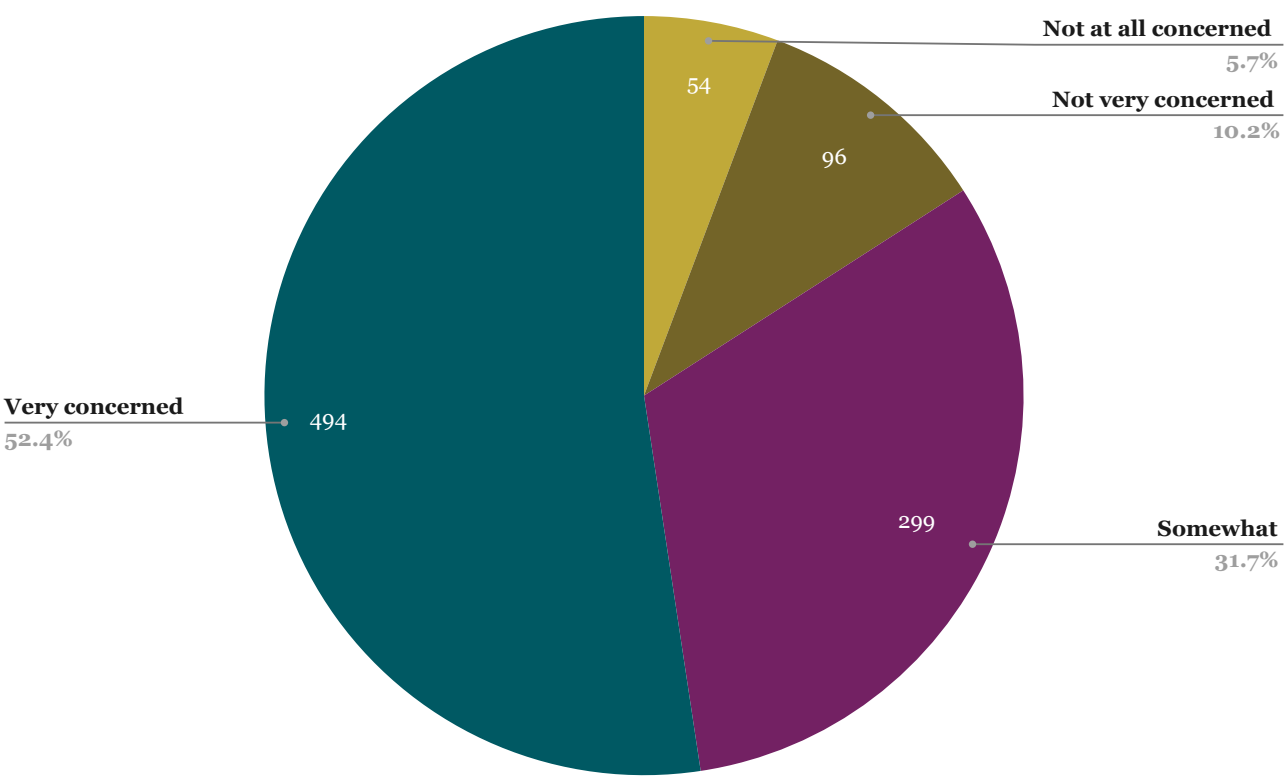


Figure 21: Community survey responses to question: "How concerned are you, if at all, that global climate change will harm your community's food system at some point in your lifetime?" (1011 individuals responded)

CAUSES OF PRODUCER STRESS

Two of the top stressors of farmers/ranchers were related to climate concerns: The top stressor being the **threat of water being sold and transferred outside of the SLV**. Despite falling towards the bottom of this chart, a significant number of producers report that **Livestock or crop problems (disease, weeds, pests)** cause "some stress."

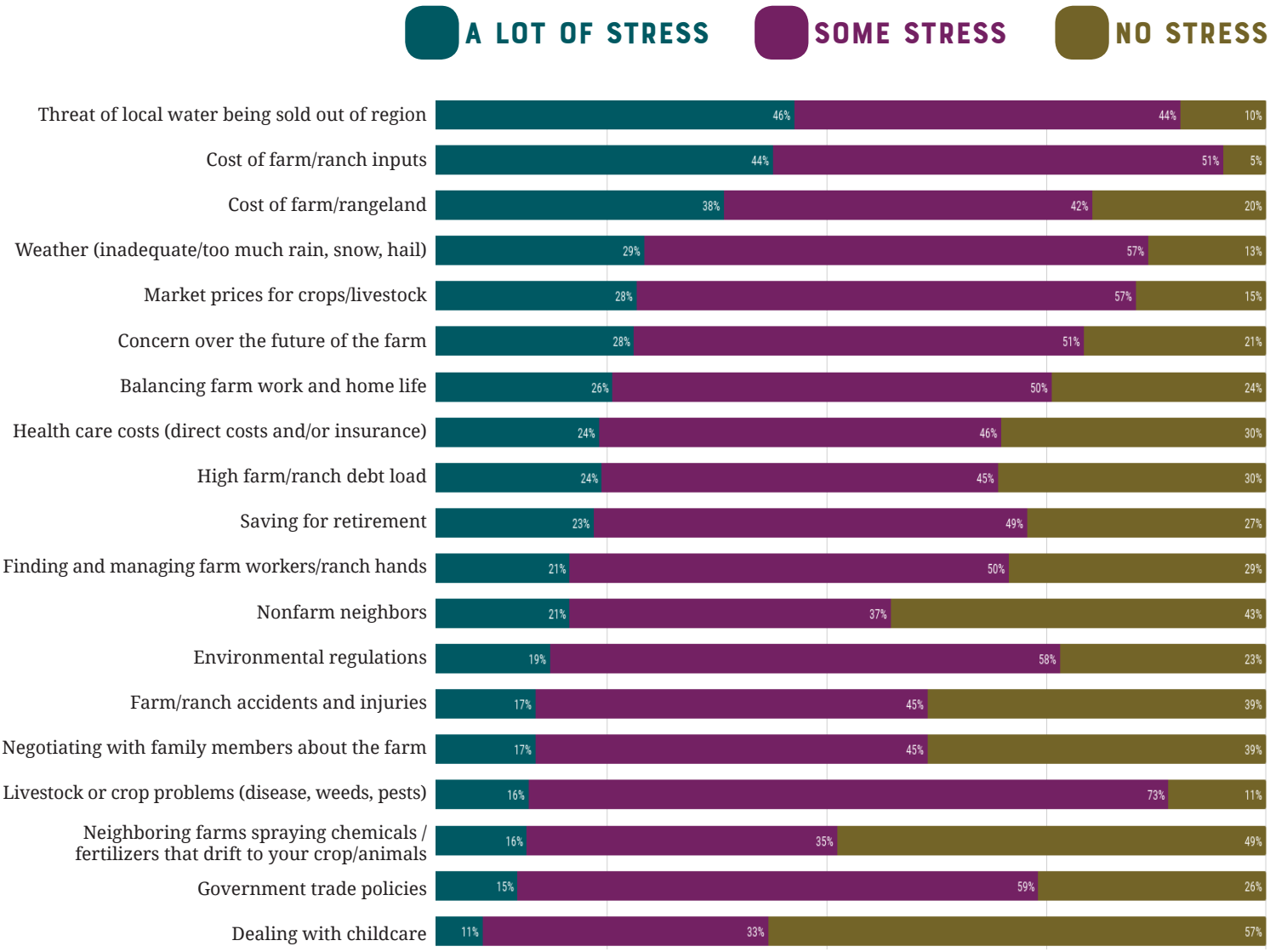


Figure 22: Farmer/rancher survey response to question: "Listed below are some things that can contribute to stress. Please rate each item according to how much stress it caused your farm operation or household in the past year." (84 producers responded)

Farmers/ranchers in the San Luis Valley are using various innovative practices to maintain viable operations in the face of economic and environmental stressors such as water scarcity, loss of biodiversity, soil erosion, and climate change. The survey presented farmers/ranchers with different standard and innovative practices known to be relevant to the Valley and asked which practices they currently employ in their operations.

There were 84 respondents to the question about climate-related production practices. The practices with the highest number of respondents included:

1) Irrigation with well or surface water
2) No-till cropping systems
3) Using manure for fertilizer
4) Using water conservation practices
5) Participating in a water management subdistrict
6) Utilizing cover cropping systems

PRACTICES UTILIZED

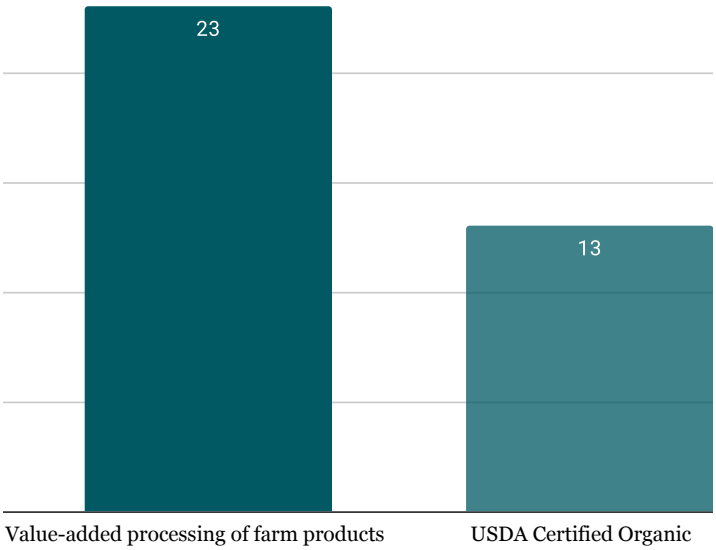


Figure 23: Farmer/rancher survey responses to the question: "Do you utilize any of the following practices? (Check all that apply)"

PRACTICES USED TO INCREASE VALUE

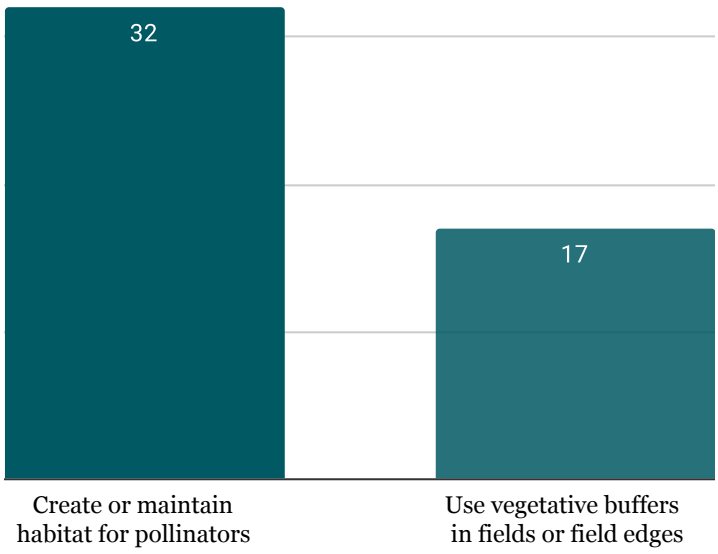


Figure 23a: Producers' use of select practices to capture increased value.

SOIL NUTRIENT MANAGEMENT PRACTICES

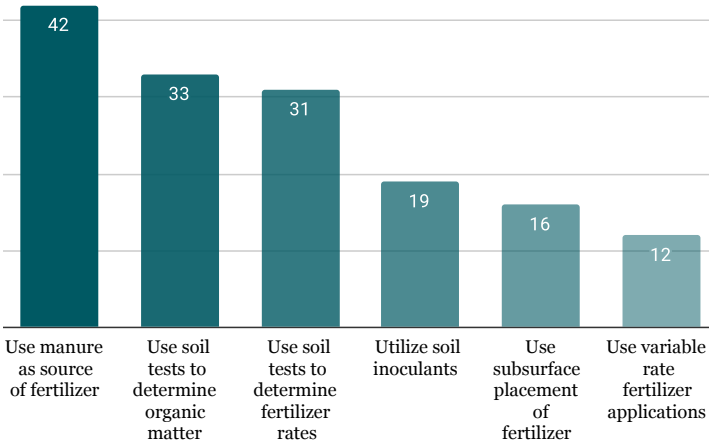


Figure 23f: Producers' use of select soil nutrient management practices. (84 producers responded)

GESTIÓN AMBIENTAL EN PARQUE GRANJA RÍO GRANDE

ENVIRONMENTAL STEWARDSHIP AT THE RIO GRANDE FARM PARK

JESÚS FLORES - RIO GRANDE FARM PARK MANAGER

La agricultura en Rio Grande Farm Park es muy importante por la calidad de la comida que producen, para las familias de agricultores, y para gentes de Guatemala, México y los nativos. La comida orgánica en la mayor cantidad se vende en el mercadillo y en el Farmer Market de Alamosa. Estos productos son comprados por la misma comunidad. En Alamosa siempre tratamos de tener una comunidad limpia, sin problemas de cáncer, diabetes, y creemos mucho en la agricultura regenerativa.

Con la agricultura regenerativa, estamos creando un medio ambiente saludable ya que no utilizamos químicos en nuestros cultivos. En el RGFP utilizamos el sistema de riego por goteo. Con este método, tratamos de economizar la mayor cantidad de agua posible y solamente darles agua a las plantas que se estamos creciendo. Protegemos el agua y la tierra con estas prácticas. para nuestros agricultores, es un lugar de oportunidades porque traen a sus hijos, enseñarles cómo producir vegetales sin químicos.

The agriculture at the Rio Grande Farm Park is very important for the quality of food they produce, for farming families, and for the people from Guatemala, Mexico, and the natives. Most of the organic food is sold at the Mercadillo and the Alamosa Farmers' Market. These products are purchased by the same community. We are always trying to have a clean community in Alamosa, without problems such as cancer, diabetes, and we believe a lot in regenerative agriculture.

With regenerative agriculture, we are creating a healthy environment since we do not use chemicals in our crops. At the RGFP we use the drip irrigation system. With this method, we try to save as much water as possible and only give water to the plants that we are growing. We protect the water and soil through these practices. For our farmers, it is a place of opportunities because they bring their children, and to teach them how to produce vegetables without chemicals.

LIVESTOCK MANAGEMENT PRACTICES

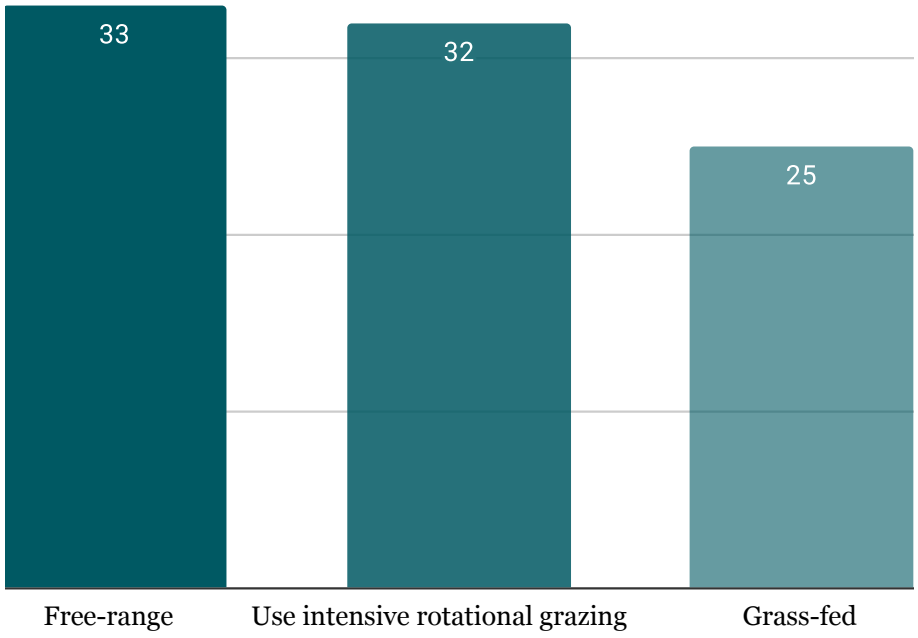


Figure 23c: Producers' use of select livestock management practices.

CROPPING PRACTICES

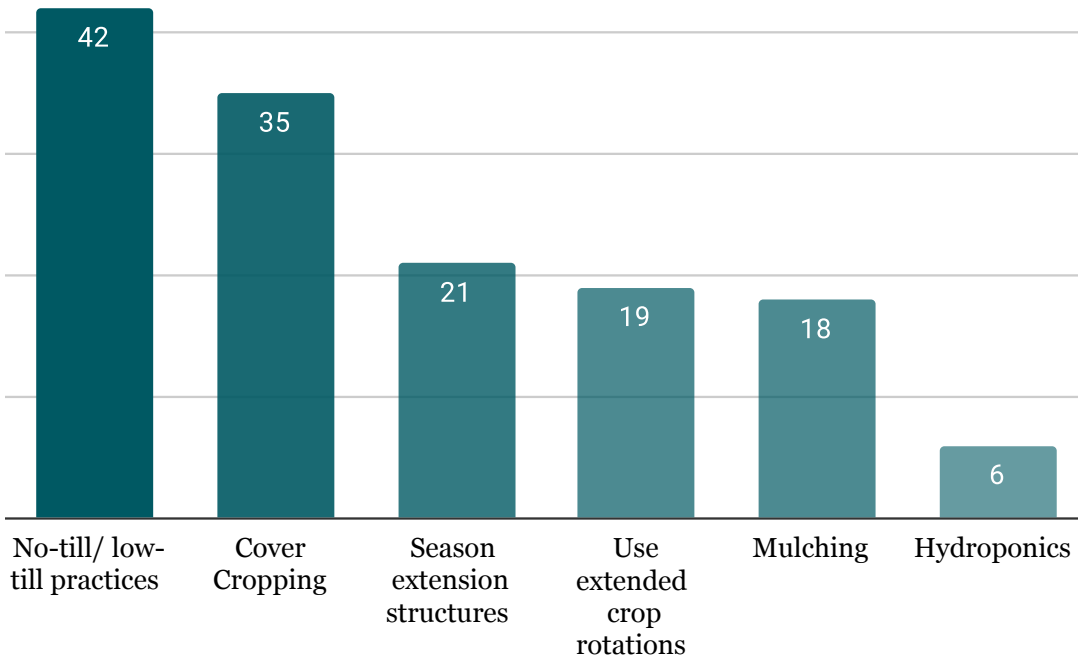


Figure 23d: Producers' use of select cropping practices.

LAND OWNERSHIP BY FOREIGN INVESTORS

As of December 31st, 2021 foreign held agricultural land in Colorado was 1.9 million acres which is 5.2% of all agricultural land in the state. [1]

TYPE OF LAND	OWNERSHIP	ACRES
Agricultural Only	Privately held by US Citizens	36,521,116
Agricultural & Non-Agricultural Landholdings	Canada	725,726
	Netherlands	65,977
	Italy	296,288
	United Kingdom	261,994
	Germany	127,432
	All others	456,214

Acres of land ownership by foreign investors & US citizens.

TYPE OF LAND	ACRES
Cropland	1,106,377
Pasture	696,154
Forest	21,035
Other Ag	92,104
Non-Ag	17,961
Total Acres	1,933,631

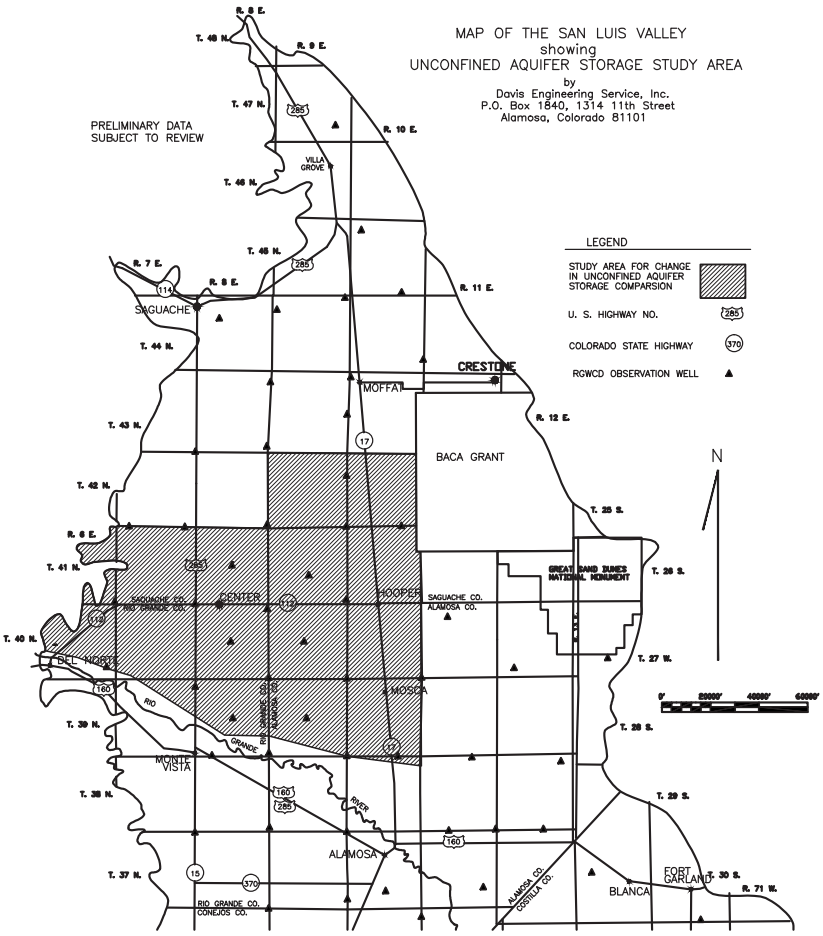
Type and amount of land ownership by foreign investors.

COUNTY	ACRES HELD BY FOREIGN INVESTORS
Alamosa	26,738
Conejos	1,814
Costilla	26,948
Mineral	0
Rio Grande	459
Saguache	18,719

Foreign Investor land ownership by county.

1 *USDA Farm Service Agency - https://www.fsa.usda.gov/Assets/USDA-FSA-Public/usdafiles/EPAS/PDF/2020_afida_annual_report.pdf*

In 2012 the first Plan of Water Management (POWM) for Subdistrict No. 1 set a goal to recover the unconfined aquifer to a level of -200,000 to -400,000 acre-feet below the 1976 level over the next 20 years (by 2032) or the State Engineer could shut off the agricultural wells within the Subdistrict. In the new 4th amended POWM, which has not yet been approved by the Water Court, the timeline to recover the aquifer to these levels was extended. Although the timeline for the recovery goal was shifted, the new Plan will now only allow groundwater use in the amount of water that recharges the aquifer each year to stop a further decline in the aquifer levels. Any excess pumping will incur a fee of $500 an acre-foot and that fee will increase until there is no overpumping. Native flows into the Subdistrict No. 1 boundary will assist in recovering the aquifer to help meet sustainability. Ultimately, the State Engineer has the authority to curtail wells, even under the new plan, if the Subdistrict is not able to achieve and maintain a sustainable water supply in the unconfined aquifer as required by the Groundwater Rules.



WATER MANAGEMENT PRACTICES

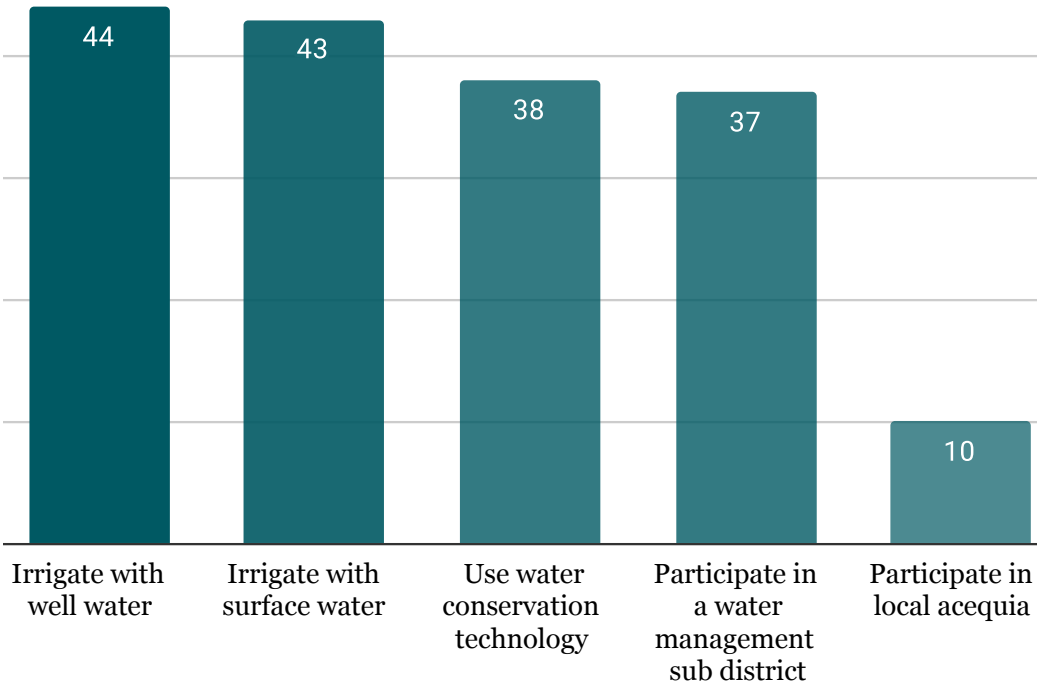


Figure 23e: Producers' use of select water management practices.

HISTORY & NECESSITY OF SLV WATER SUBDISTRICT FORMATION

AMBER PACHECO - RIO GRANDE WATER CONSERVATION DISTRICT

For the Valley, the period 2002-2005 was the driest period on record. In 2002, the Rio Grande, gauged at Del Norte, was just 160,000 acre-foot and its long-term average was closer to 640,000 acre-foot. With significantly reduced stream flow conditions, irrigators in the Valley had to rely heavily on their groundwater wells. These wells were withdrawing large amounts of groundwater from both the confined and the unconfined aquifers without the recharge from snowmelt and surface water diversions. This shift to a reliance on groundwater resulted in a substantial over-draft of both the unconfined and the confined aquifer systems and it highlighted the community's dependence on these aquifer systems. The decline of both surface and groundwater supplies in the Valley, along with the outcomes witnessed on the South Platte in the 1990's, was a motivating factor for the Rio Grande Water Conservation District (RGWCD) and the community to find an innovative and cooperative approach to learning to live with a changing water supply in the Valley.

The precipitous decline of the unconfined aquifer in 2002 and the very real impacts of groundwater use on surface water rights led to Senate Bill 04_2022 being passed in 2004. Simply put, this bill directed the State Engineer to adopt rules and regulations for groundwater withdrawals that: prevent material injury to senior surface water rights; and, create and maintain sustainable aquifers. The RGWCD had the statutory authority to create and operate subdistricts which could assist groundwater well owners in complying with these rules and regulations. In 2006, the first Subdistrict was formed in the area known as the closed basin (Subdistrict No. 1). Six more subdistricts were formed and are now in operation in the San Luis Valley. The objectives of these subdistricts are to remedy any injurious depletions being caused to surface water rights and to create and maintain sustainable aquifers.

Since their creation, subdistricts have been successful in remedying all the depletions caused to surface water rights by continued groundwater withdrawals from Subdistrict Members. They have worked diligently to find sources of replacement that provide long-term guarantees that no injury will go unpaid by the well users. They are also working hard to find solutions to recover aquifers and bring them back to sustainable levels. They have taken many steps to achieve their sustainability goals and tried many different programs to do this but they still find themselves looking for ways to reduce the reliance on groundwater while still keeping the Valley's agricultural community largely intact.

For Subdistrict No. 1, the sustainability challenge has been great. In their original plan, the Subdistrict aquifer recovery goal was to get the levels back to -200,000 to -400,000 acre-feet below the point that was measured in 1976. To reach this goal, Subdistrict No. 1 would need to recover 758,539 acre-feet in approximately 8 years. The Subdistrict, the RGWCD, and the State Engineer have recently approved the Fourth Amended Plan of Water Management for Subdistrict No. 1 in an attempt to allow another option to try to bring the unconfined aquifer back into sustainability. The new plan includes a drastic change in how Subdistrict No. 1 will get to sustainability by only allowing the use of groundwater equal to the surface water they bring in. This is a paradigm shift for this Subdistrict but the members recognized they needed more reductions to bring the aquifer into balance or they would face the threat of a curtailment on all groundwater use in their area. Subdistrict No. 1 is not the only subdistrict with these sustainability challenges but it is the most recognized issue. It is the goal of all subdistricts to reduce their reliance on groundwater through mandatory groundwater allocations, compensated fallow programs, federal programs, and more recently, well buy-out programs. Even with all the challenges they have faced, Subdistricts remain focused on their goals and continue to seek community-driven solutions to sustainability to support the vibrant agricultural community of the Valley!

SUMMIT FINDINGS

If responses appeared in three or more counties, it is included here.

WHAT'S WORKING

- Shifts toward sustainable farming practices.
- Growing awareness of water importance.
- Soil care and pollution reduction.
- Increasing environmental awareness.

WHAT'S NOT WORKING

- Overuse has depleted aquifer.
- Inefficient water regulations and federal control.
- Lack of interest in environmental education.
- Lack of recycling infrastructure for consumers or industry.

VISION FOR THE FUTURE

- Community shapes eco-regulations.
- Counties are engaged in improving soil quality.
- More access to cleaner, renewable energy.
- Reduced plastic usage and all counties have recycling programs.
- Sustainable decisions balance economy and environment.
- Abundant funding for sustainability.
- Climate-friendly practices promoted.
- Widespread use of innovative technologies to tackle environmental challenges.


PV11


PV12

ENVIRONMENT & WATER CHALLENGES
- KEY TAKEAWAYS -

WATER & CLIMATE ARE A CONCERN

- The most significant climate shift in the San Luis Valley has been a trend toward increasing aridification, marked by a 20+ year megadrought, highlighting the effects of climate change.
- Future droughts are expected to increase in frequency, duration, and intensity, requiring all land users (residents and farmers) to make do with less water.
- People are very concerned that climate change will impact the food system in their lifetime.
- Producers are very concerned that water exports will affect their livelihoods and way of life.

COMMUNITY INTEREST IN SOLUTIONS

- There is increasing interest in environmental solutions, such as renewable energy, water-smart practices, and recycling.
- Producers are trending towards soil health and water conservation practices.

EMERGENCY FOOD PLANNING

~ What were residents' experiences when the food chain or access has been interrupted in the San Luis Valley (i.e. by the COVID-19 pandemic, loss of work, snowstorms, high gas prices, recessions, etc.)?

~ What was in place to support people in these times?

~ What were the gaps?

~What can we build here to create a resilient food system in the face of these potential breakdowns?

SURVEY FINDINGS

COVID-19 IMPACT ON BUYING FOOD

The COVID-19 pandemic, which disrupted food supply chains and increased unemployment in the region, also disrupted survey respondents' ability to access healthy foods - with 50.8 percent reporting that the pandemic made it more difficult for them to access food. For 38.7 percent of respondents though, the COVID-19 pandemic caused no change in their ability to buy food. For a small portion of respondents (4.8 percent), the pandemic made it easier for them to access food. This increased access may be due to the Pandemic EBT program, which increased SNAP benefits, and the variety of food access programs that scaled up to meet the increased demand for food resources.

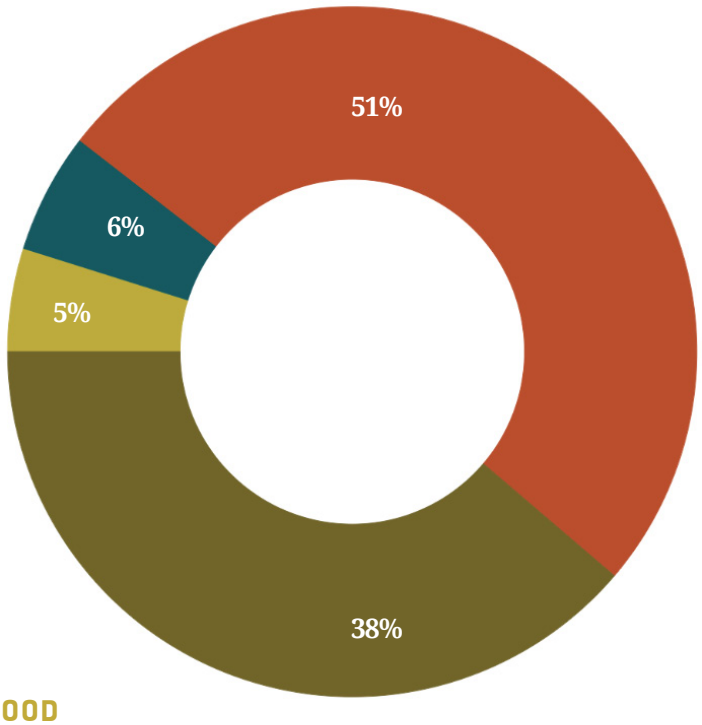


Figure 24: Community survey responses to the question: "How did the COVID-19 pandemic impact your ability to buy food?" (1011 individuals responded)

"Emergencies come in all shapes and sizes. Sometimes simply not having enough food is an emergency."

Heather Comstock ~ Emergency Preparedness and Response Coordinator for Alamosa Public Health

OBSERVATIONS FROM RIO GRANDE COUNTY

LOIS HARVIE - SLV COOKING MATTERS COORDINATOR

I sat in for the Emergency Food plan breakout session and was surprised that those who joined this discussion were mostly local farmers and ranchers who had experienced a wake up during the pandemic in 2020. These gentlemen shared they had begun formulating some ideas around emergency plans for the future from their personal experience, and expressed a desire to create a cross county emergency response team for the San Luis Valley. Discussion around opportunities for local farmers and ranchers to get involved to support their community with local food was top on the list. Two of the farmers mentioned that they had made an effort to donate their food crops (potatoes and carrots) during the pandemic and would readily do it again. This discussion was one that really excited me that day, and is one I believe that our farmers, ranchers, and community want to keep front and center as we prepare for the years ahead.

RESOURCES USED FOR FREE OR REDUCED COST FOODS

To address the challenges residents experienced accessing food, community members relied on food pantries/food banks, the SNAP program, free communal meals. This mix of government and nonprofit programs fill in the gaps for families in the San Luis Valley.

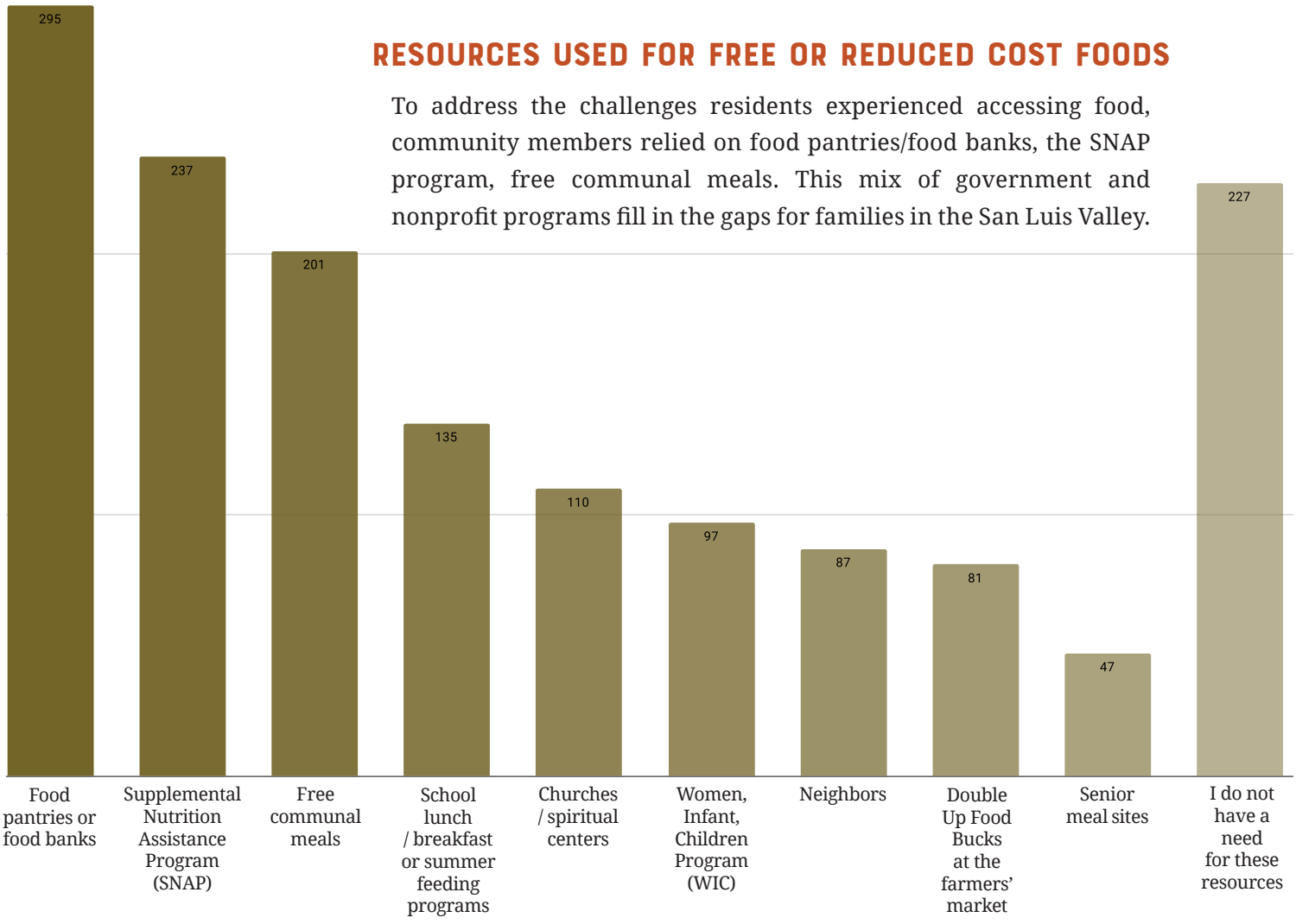


Figure 25: Community survey responses to the question: "In the past 12 months what resources have you accessed to get free or reduced cost foods? Check all that apply." (1011 individuals responded)

VALLEY ROOTS FOOD HUB & THE THREE VOTES A DAY FOR A RESILIENT LOCAL FOOD SYSTEM

NICHOLAS CHAMBERS - VALLEY ROOTS FOOD HUB GENERAL MANAGER

The local food system is a myriad web of perishable details in dynamic relationships across logistical five-ring circuses. That is to say, there are many stakeholders at the table from farmers/ranchers in the fields and packing houses, value-added processors in the kitchens, food hub aggregators in trucks/warehouses/offices, to the hard-working retailers, chefs, and other front line foodies serving the people. In Colorado, we operate in all the primary agricultural regions: from the corn and bean growing Southwest corner, to the abundant fruit of the Western Slope, to the world class melons and chiles of the lower Arkansas River valley, to the diversity of scale and output of the Northwestern plains, and to the world class potatoes, quinoa, carrots, mixed veggies, aquaculture, and meats of the San Luis Valley. Together this is a diet worthy of simple notoriety: diverse, nourishing, and affordable. Diverse because each region has its unique climate and growing conditions for their specific crops; nourishing because we are focusing on regenerative soil farming where feeding the soil feeds the crops which feeds us, and affordable because each regions' growers have scale in their respective crops which enables the price to be competitive.

The thing that is underestimated is how resilient this system can be. As our experience with the recent pandemic proved, we have the logistics and supply to feed our people within the State and definitely within the San Luis Valley. We had little shortages or supply chain disruptions unlike what the commodity market grocery world experienced. Our supply chains are shorter and thus more robust from the farm/ranch/kitchen to the regional food hub, to the end customer. And when the restaurant customer demand dried up, our online presence with our own software enabled us to be in every person's home who wanted source-identified local food within a couple days and twice per week thereafter. Our local producers were only more happy to receive the increased sales volume. And because we are working with professionals, their scale was already there or could easily ramp up with more sales volume, all the while plowing and multiplying dollars into our local economy.

Prior to this scenario, local dollars were just accustomed to leaving our communities with a one way ticket out and away. The only place where we saw shortages or significant price increases was in USDA approved butchers, some animal production that relied on sophisticated feed imports, and packaging like glass jars, containers, and cardboard. The meat and potatoes however never skipped a beat. The global pandemic made local endemic. But like a water right, use it or lose it.

SUMMIT FINDINGS

If responses appeared in three or more counties, it is included here.

WHAT'S WORKING

- Local food access is increasing.
- Growing interest in gardening and food preservation education.
- People in the Valley value the strength of local social networks, rich heritage, and traditions.

WHAT'S NOT WORKING

- Limited awareness of food resources during an emergency.
- Ineffective communication about emergency resources.
- Lack of community involvement in food resiliency.
- Need for wider community collaboration with county government.
- Food system infrastructure is lacking, especially during emergencies.
- Social and economic infrastructure gaps.
- Not enough food production or storage spaces available.
- Distant grocery stores and transportation challenges.

VISION FOR THE FUTURE

- Improved emergency communication.
- Shared community infrastructure fosters trust.
- Enhanced collaboration for resilience.
- Shorter supply chains and more local food options.
- Nutrition, preservation, and composting education.
- More school food education.
- Increased food system awareness and participation.

EMERGENCY FOOD PLANNING

- KEY TAKEAWAYS -

NEED BETTER EMERGENCY PLANNING & COORDINATION

- The San Luis Valley experienced significant food system disruptions during the COVID-19 pandemic.
- More than 50 percent of community survey respondents shared that the pandemic's disruptions made accessing or purchasing food more difficult.
- A mix of federal and state programs along with the charitable sector and local producers supported families to fill in their food access gaps.
- There is a lack of communication with residents about what programs exist in the San Luis Valley to support them during a food system emergency.
- The lack of food system infrastructure and long supply chains in the San Luis Valley complicate food access efforts during emergencies.

HYPER-LOCAL FOOD INFRASTRUCTURE FOR RESILIENCE

- To build a more resilient food system in the face of shocks, residents were interested in improved local food infrastructure (commercial kitchens, grocery stores), and opportunities and education for self-provisioning (gardening, food preservation).
- Having a proactive plan and Valley-wide coordination will reduce the negative impact of future emergencies.

GRATITUDE & RELATIONSHIPS

~ What do food system stakeholders appreciate in the current food system?

~ What organizations, businesses, institutions, and individuals are showing the way to a brighter future for food and agriculture?

SURVEY FINDINGS

If an entity was mentioned more than once, they are included here in order number of times mentioned.

WHO IS SHOWING THE WAY TO A BRIGHTER FUTURE FOR FOOD AND AGRICULTURE?

ORGANIZATIONS	
SLV Local Foods Coalition	San Luis Valley Water Conservancy District (SLVWCD)
Farmers Markets & Farmers	Rio Grande Water Conservation District (RGWCD)
Rio Grande Farm Park	Crestone Energy Fair
Cooking Matters	Move Mountains Youth Project
Valley Roots Food Hub	SOIL Sangre de Cristo
La Puente	Tomorrow's Bread
Los Promotores	Rio Grande Headwaters Restoration Project (RGHWRP)
Food Pantries	Acequia Institute
Community Gardens & Greenhouses	Churches
Alamosa Farmer's Market	Colorado Farm Bureau
San Luis Peoples Market	Little Shepherd Church
Valley Educational Gardens Initiative (VEGI)	Nourish Colorado
Future Farmers of America (FFA)	Weston A Price Foundation
Saguache Works	Integrated Nutrition Education Program
MoKi Food Truck / Local Foods Local Places (LFLP)	
SLV Seed Exchange	
4H Programs	
Quivira Coalition	
Rocky Mountain Farmers Union	
Crestone Community Garden	
Care & Share Food Bank	

BUSINESSES
Simple Foods
City Market
Sol Mountain Farms
Elephant Cloud Market
SLV Apothecary
Tumbleweed Bread
Blue Range Ranch / San Juan Ranch
Breads & Botanicals (now Alpine Valley Mushrooms)
Crestone Mercantile
Jones Farms Organics
Cactus Hill Farm
Coyote Mountain Farm
Hotels that offer fruit

RECOGNITION & RECIPROCITY

LIZA MARRON - SLVLFC & SAGUACHE COUNTY COMMISSIONER

Gratitude is at the center of this delicate ecosystem's health and well being. The hands that sow the seeds, nurture the crops, and tend to the animals deserve recognition; as does the soil that cradles the roots and the water that quenches the thirst of the land. If we show love to our animals, they reciprocate that love, underscoring the intricate balance of respect within the food chain.

Yet, amid the abundance, it's easy to take the bounties of our food system for granted. It is a privilege to know where our food comes from and to witness the journey from soil to table. This awareness fosters a profound appreciation for the labor embedded in each morsel, encouraging us to savor not just the flavors but the stories and dedication behind our meals.

INSTITUTIONS
Colorado State University Extension
Schools
Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP)
Women Infants Children (WIC)
Adams State University
Agricultural classes

GRATITUDE
- KEY TAKEAWAYS -

- There were 964 entities named in response to this community survey question.
- Respondents named several individuals, but the most number of mentions was for "local farmers."
- In particular, respondents were grateful for the role that businesses such as markets and farms play in developing the local food system.
- Respondents were grateful for organizations such as the San Luis Valley Local Foods Coalition and their programs, along with La Puente, area farmers markets, and the Promotores del Valle de San Luis.

ACTION PLANNING

The San Luis Valley Local Foods Coalition will utilize the data from this assessment to launch the next project phase: Community Food and Agriculture Action Planning. This will engage community members in crafting a set of specific, actionable priorities and recommendations for the SLV's food system.

Through another round of community engagement, the Action Plan will identify county-level policy solutions, regional initiatives, and programmatic opportunities for the SLVLFC and other partners to pursue.

The action planning process will engage community members through county-specific community summits, SLV-wide workshops, and another PhotoVoice project to ensure that producers, food businesses, and consumers continue to lead the project.

This Community Food and Agricultural Action Plan will create a roadmap for how the San Luis Valley can improve healthy food access, support producer viability into the future, mitigate climate change, increase DEI, increase market access for producers and buyers, and create a sustainable emergency food plan into the future.

LOCAL FOODS LOCAL PLACES MERGE WITH CFAAP

The Local Foods Local Places (LFLP) Action Plan was published in 2017. Since then, many of the goals were accomplished and are visible throughout Alamosa. As the SLVLFC began to discuss a new Action Planning process and steering committee, it seemed like a natural next step to merge the CFAAP with the Alamosa LFLP Action Plan. The goals from the LFLP plan fit nicely with the results from the CFA Assessment, and will be rolled into the CFA Action Plan, with a larger reach encompassing the entire San Luis Valley.

GLOSSARY OF TERMS

AGRITOURISM is a form of commercial enterprise that links agricultural production and/or processing with tourism to attract visitors to a farm, ranch, or other agricultural business for the purposes of entertaining or educating the visitors while generating income for the farm, ranch, or business owner.

BIOFUEL / BIODIESEL is a liquid biofuel produced from renewable sources, such as new and used vegetable oils and animal fats, and is a cleaner-burning replacement for petroleum-based diesel fuel. Biofuels are also made from almost any type of biomass which can be grown in a regenerative manner.

COMMUNITY GARDENS are collaborative projects on shared open spaces where participants share in the maintenance and products of the garden, including healthful and affordable fresh fruits and vegetables.

COMMUNITY SUPPORTED AGRICULTURE (CSA) involves consumers who support a farmer financially by paying for a share of the farm's production prior to each growing season. The arrangement allows farmers to buy the seeds, transplants, and other inputs they need for the growing season and pay their farm labor without waiting until harvest to generate revenue. The customers will share in the successes or failures of the farmer.

COOPERATIVE GROCERY STORE A consumer-owned cooperative grocery business managed and controlled by the people who use it. Unlike a business owned by an individual, family, or corporation, profits from the store return to the co-op members and are used to serve the collective needs of the members community.

COUNTY HEALTH RANKINGS Annual County Health Rankings measure vital health factors, such as high school graduation rates, obesity, smoking, unemployment, access to healthy foods, the quality of air and water, income inequality, and teen births in nearly every county in America. The annual rankings reveal how the built environment and socioeconomic factors influence health.

DOUBLE UP FOOD BUCKS is a program that doubles the value of federal SNAP benefits spent at participating markets and food retail stores, helping people bring home more healthy fruits and vegetables while supporting local farmers. Double Up Food Bucks is a program of the national nonprofit Fair Food Network, in Colorado, this program is administered in partnership with Nourish Colorado.

EQUITY is the absence of unfair, avoidable, or remediable differences among groups of people, whether those groups are defined socially, economically, demographically, geographically, or by other dimensions of inequality (e.g. sex, gender, ethnicity, disability, or sexual orientation).

The Colorado Office of Health Equity defines Equity as "when everyone, regardless of who they are or where they come from has the opportunity to thrive. This requires eliminating barriers like poverty and repairing injustices in systems such as education, health, criminal justice, and transportation."

FREE AND REDUCED PRICE MEAL PROGRAM The School Breakfast Program (SBP) and National School Lunch Program (NSLO) are federally assisted meal programs that provide nutritious, low-cost, or free breakfasts to students daily. These programs are administered by the Colorado Department of Education (CDE) School Nutrition Unit, and reimbursement is provided by the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA). Qualification depends on school enrollment and annual household income.

FOOD APARTHEID is a system of segregation that divides those with access to an abundance of nutritious food and those who have been denied that access due to systemic injustice.[1]

FOOD DESERTS are geographic areas where residents' access to affordable, healthy food options (especially fresh fruits and vegetables) is restricted or nonexistent due to the absence of grocery stores within convenient traveling distance.[2]

1 https://regeneration.org/nexus/food-apartheid

2 https://foodispower.org/access-health/food-deserts/

FOOD HUB is a business or organization that actively manages the aggregation, distribution, and marketing of source-identified food products, primarily from local and regional producers, to strengthen their ability to satisfy wholesale, retail, and institutional demand.

FOOD INSECURITY is the limited or uncertain availability of nutritionally adequate and safe foods, or limited or uncertain ability to acquire acceptable foods in socially acceptable ways. Food insecure households lack enough food for an active, healthy life.

FOOD JUSTICE ensures that the benefits and risks of where, what, and how food is grown, produced, transported, distributed, accessed, and eaten are shared fairly. Food Justice is seen in communities exercising their right to grow, sell, and eat healthy food. Healthy food is fresh, nutritious, affordable, culturally-appropriate, and grown locally with care for the well-being of the land, workers, and animals. People practicing food justice leads to a strong local food system, self-reliant communities, and a healthy environment.

FOOD PRESCRIPTION PROGRAM or "nutrition prescriptions" are one way for physicians and other health care providers to outline a healthy, balanced eating plan for patients. Based on U.S. Dietary Guidelines for adults, children, and adolescents, nutrition prescriptions establish achievable goals for patients and their families.

FOOD SECURITY is when all people, at all times, have physical and economic access to sufficient safe and nutritious food that meets their dietary needs and food preferences for an active and healthy life.[3]

FOOD SOVEREIGNTY is the right of peoples to healthy and culturally appropriate food produced through ecologically sound and sustainable methods, and their right to define their own food and agriculture systems. It puts the aspirations and needs of those who produce, distribute and consume food at the heart of food systems and policies rather than the demands of markets and corporations.[4]

HEMP is an herb that comes from a variant of the Cannabis sativa plant and contains fiber, seeds, and oil used to make many different industrial and consumer products. These include textiles, building materials, paper, fabrics, soap, food, dietary supplements, and cosmetics.

HOLISTIC GRAZING is a regenerative agriculture practice which involves timing grazing so the livestock's effect on the land builds fertility and resilience. It consists of plotting grazing moves on a chart, so the livestock are in the right place at the right time for the right reasons.

INCUBATOR KITCHEN is a fully equipped commercial food processing facility designed to allow multiple entrepreneurs or food processing operators to grow their businesses by providing a licensed or certified kitchen space with food and packaging equipment.

NO-TILL is an agricultural technique for growing crops or pasture without disturbing the soil through tillage. Benefits include less erosion, an increase in the amount of water that infiltrates into the soil, soil retention of organic matter, and nutrient cycling, which can increase the amount and variety of life in and on the soil.

ORGANIC USDA-certified organic foods are grown and processed according to federal guidelines addressing, among many factors, soil quality, animal raising practices, pest and weed control, and use of additives. Organic producers rely on natural substances and physical, mechanical, or biologically based farming methods to the fullest extent possible. Produce can be called organic if it's certified to have grown on soil with no prohibited substances applied for three years before harvest. However, many crops are organically grown but do not carry the USDA certified organic label because the certification process can be expensive for small farms.

3 https://www.worldbank.org/en/topic/agriculture/brief/food-security-update/what-is-food-security

4 https://usfoodsovereigntyalliance.org/what-is-food-sovereignty/

REGENERATIVE AGRICULTURE is a philosophy and approach to land management that examines how all aspects of agriculture are connected through a web instead of a linear supply chain. It's also a farming and ranching style that nourishes people and the earth, with specific practices varying from grower to grower and from region to region. The holistic principles behind the dynamic system of regenerative agriculture are meant to restore soil and ecosystem health, address inequity, and leave our land, waters, and climate in better shape for future generations.

SUPPLEMENTAL NUTRITION ASSISTANCE PROGRAM (SNAP) is the largest federal nutrition assistance program, SNAP provides benefits to eligible low-income individuals and families via an electronic benefits transfer (EBT) card. This card is used like a debit card to purchase eligible food in authorized retail food stores.

SAVING TOMORROW'S AGRICULTURAL RESOURCES PROGRAM (STAR) is a free and voluntary tool to inspire producers and structure conversations around soil health. STAR is a practice-based rating system that assigns points for the following soil health practices: cropping, tillage, nutrient application, and other best management practices. As a result, the farmer or rancher receives a STAR rating from 1-5 stars that help them understand how well they are promoting soil health.

USDA LOW INCOME, LOW ACCESS The United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) identifies areas of low food access based on certain low-income and low-access criteria. Low-income (LI) is defined as a census tract with a poverty rate of 20 percent or greater, or median family income at or below 80 percent of the statewide or metropolitan area median family income. Low-access (LA) is defined as a low-income census tract with at least 500 people or 33 percent of the tract's population living more than one mile (urban areas) or more than ten miles (rural areas) from the nearest supermarket or grocery store.

VALUE-ADDED PROCESSING is a means to utilize produce not used for fresh market sales and the surplus of product during the growing season. Adding value can be something as simple as sorting fruits and vegetables by size and selling through unique packaging to the complexity of processing salsa, jams, jellies, chutney, and meat animals.

WATER CURTAILMENT is an approved tariff that allows a utility company to request that customers reduce water consumption when the demand exceeds availability.

WATER CONSERVATION DISTRICTS were established by the Colorado State Legislature for conservation, use, and development of Colorado's water resources. There are 74 water conservation districts in Colorado, covering every county in the state. The districts are grouped into ten geographical regions, known as watersheds. The mission of Colorado's conservation districts is to provide leadership for the conservation of natural resources to their stakeholders and their communities to ensure the health, safety, and general welfare of the citizens of the state through a responsible conservation ethic.

WIC (SPECIAL SUPPLEMENTAL NUTRITION PROGRAM FOR WOMEN, INFANTS, AND CHILDREN) is a program provides federal grants to states for supplemental foods, health care referrals, and nutrition education for low-income pregnant, breastfeeding, and non-breastfeeding postpartum women, and to infants and children up to age five who are found to be at nutritional risk.

PHOTO CREDITS

FRONT COVER TOP - DWIGHT CATALAN
Making every foot produce under Greenie.

FRONT COVER BOTTOM LEFT - CAROLINE IRWIN
Flowers and Food - the good life homegrown!

FRONT COVER BOTTOM RIGHT - STEPHANIE BUECHLER
A mother ewe cleans up her newly born lambs while the other sheep watch. Taken south of Monte Vista.

PV1 - CARONLINE IRWIN
Cherry Pie anyone? Then let's get picking...

PV2 - SHERICE SHINER
Taken behind the food pantry in Antonito.

PV3 - MEGHAN STALZER
Shearing sheep at El Sagrado Farm in La Jara

PV4 - MEGHAN STALZER
Camels Grazing at Mudita Camel Farm

PV5 - HUNTER VELASQUEZ
Live life like someone left the gate open.

PV6 - CORVEAUX MILLIONS
Springs Gone Past

PV7 - EMILY BROWN
Looking forward to spring pasture, but valuing the ability to feed hay back on the field where it was grown.

PV8 - JARED ANDERSON
Tarps for days. Alfalfa hay.

PV9 - EMILY BROWN
It is pretty amazing to be able to order a great variety of local food products through Valley Roots Food Hub and get to pick it all up at the local grocery.

PV10 - NANCY CAREY
My food plan. An organic garden in the backyard.

PV11 - JARED ANDERSON
Alfalfa hay. Pivot Irrigation.

PV12 - CARONLINE IRWIN
Grow dang it... need my Beefsteak tomatoes sandwiches.

PV13 - MELINDA MYERS
Ever vigilant. Cowboy - guardian of the goat herd. Sundance Farm, Moffat.

BACK COVER LEFT - CALLIE ADAMS
How do you get access to local food? Grow it in your own kitchen of course! Margherita our lime tree. I anthropomorphize my plants.

BACK COVER RIGHT - MELINDA MYERS
The Chicks are in the mail! Sundance Farm in Moffat have received new baby chicks via US Mail. Chicks can survive for 3 days without food or water after hatching, which makes them ideal for mail shipment. Rural post offices are important.

ALL OTHER PHOTOS in the report were provided by the SLV Local Foods Coalition staff, or they have a caption.

"**PV**" means the photo came from the SLV Food Project PhotoVoice. All submissions can be seen at https://slvlocalfoods.org/photovoice/

GRAPHIC DESIGN BY JAE SANDERS

This report can be found online at https://slvlocalfoods.org/cfaa/

OTHER ASSESSMENTS

If you would like a more comprehensive view of the needs and assets of the San Luis Valley, please check out the work of other area organizations. While the SLV Local Foods Coalition did not conduct or participate in the creation of the below reports, we do refer to them for a more in-depth review.

Semillas of Change - Soul Players of the Valley & partners

Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy - SLV Development Resources Group

Housing Needs Assessment - San Luis Valley Housing Coalition & partners

SLV Community Needs Assessment - San Luis Valley Community Action Agency

2022 Community Health Needs Assessment - San Luis Valley Health

Sustainable Agriculture Action Plan - Mosca-Hooper Conservation District

GET INVOLVED

PARTICIPATE

Come to Action Planning summits and submit entries to the SLV Food PhotoVoice Project.

Join the San Luis Valley Equity Coalition.

VOLUNTEER IN THE COMMUNITY

The Rio Grande Farm Park has monthly volunteer days.

ADVOCATE FOR FARMERS & LOCAL FOOD

Ask grocers and restaurants to carry local goods.

SUPPORT OUR WORK

Make a donation at Colorado Gives.

https://www.coloradogives.org/donate/SLVLFC

San Luis Valley Local Foods Coalition

https://slvlocalfoods.org

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You vote 3 times per day for the food system you want!