

# SAN LUIS VALLEY COMMUNITY FOOD AND AGRICULTURE ACTION PLAN

## 2026

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



Foreword .....	3
Acknowledgements .....	4
What is the food system and why should we plan for food systems? .....	7
How was this plan created? .....	10
How to read this plan .....	17
Priority 1: Education & Engagement .....	18
Priority 2: Producers & Food Business Opportunities .....	24
Priority 3: Food Access .....	30
Priority 4: Environment.....	37
Glossary .....	46
At-a-Glance Goals, Objectives & Actions .....	47
Appendix .....	51



# FOREWORD

The San Luis Valley has a long tradition of growing food, raising animals, and caring for the land and water that sustain us. Over the past three years, neighbors, farmers, ranchers, food businesses, and partners across all six counties have come together to share their ideas on how to continue and expand this work. This Action Plan is the result of those conversations.

This plan represents hundreds of hours of community input—from one-on-one conversations to focus groups, surveys, and community sessions. We took notes, combined overlapping ideas, and prioritized objectives that reflect the values of our region: stewardship of land and water, economic opportunity for producers and food businesses, equitable access to healthy food, and easier access to knowledge and resources.

We owe a tremendous thank you to everyone who helped make this plan possible—our Project Stewards steering committee, the Local Foods Coalition staff, and our Community Food & Ag team. We're also immensely grateful to everyone who participated in the Action Planning meetings. Community members stepped up to facilitate in-person sessions, and twelve local businesses catered our events—using local ingredients whenever possible. We appreciate the venues and their staff who generously provided space for us to meet, and the community members who spread the word, brought friends and family along, and supported us throughout this process. One of the most encouraging things we heard after these events was how appreciative people were that this work is happening—and how much they learned about the complexities of the SLV food system and the challenges our producers face. Your voices and energy shaped this plan.

This Action Plan is more than a document to put on a shelf. It is full of ideas and aspirations that we can keep working toward together. What's in these pages is not final—it's just the beginning of the partnerships, infrastructure, and policy recommendations we will pursue as a community.

We invite you to act, collaborate, and step up to help make these ideas a reality for the San Luis Valley. Whether you are a producer, business owner, teacher, policymaker, or community member, you have a role to play in making this vision real.

Thank you for lending your voice, your time, and the expertise that has shaped this work. We look forward to working alongside you as we put these ideas into motion and strengthen the food system that sustains us all.



*“Specific and realistic action items and plan. I love to see it!”*

*—Participant from Alamosa*

# ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This Community Food and Agriculture Action Plan reflects the collective effort, insight, and energy of many people across the San Luis Valley. We are deeply grateful to the individuals and organizations who contributed their time, knowledge, and lived experience to help shape this work.

## SAN LUIS VALLEY LOCAL FOODS COALITION

We thank the staff and Board of Directors of the San Luis Valley Local Foods Coalition for their leadership, commitment, and ongoing support throughout the Action Planning process.



*“I just can’t believe  
anyone is looking out  
for our best interest.”*

—Participant from Center

## PROJECT STEWARDS

We are especially grateful to the members of the CFAAP Project Stewards, who provided guidance, expertise, and accountability throughout the planning process. Their continued direction and support helped ground this plan in community priorities and practical implementation.

- Aaron Atencio, Community Member
- Aaron Miltenberger, Boys and Girls Clubs of the SLV
- Amy Brenneman, La Puente’s VEGI
- Beata Ramza, City of Alamosa
- Dana Maestas, Community Member
- DJ Salazar, SLV Community Solutions
- Jacob Gefell, Tomorrow’s Bread
- Larry Brown, Colorado State University Extension
- LeRoy West, Baca Grande Property Owners Association
- Liza Marron, Saguache County Commissioner
- Lois Harvey, Community Member
- Meghan Stalzer, Producer
- Melinda Myers, Producer
- Paul Formisano, Adams State University’s Salazar Center
- Regan Velasquez, Producer
- Richard Hubler, Alamosa County Land Use
- Sandy Ortega, Producer
- Sherice Shiner, La Puente’s Food Bank Network of the SLV
- Zoila Gomez, Los Promotores del Valle de San Luis

## FOCUS GROUP AND KEY PERSPECTIVE INTERVIEW PARTICIPANTS

We extend our appreciation to the many individuals and organizations who participated in focus groups, interviews, and sector specific conversations. Their perspectives ensured that this plan reflects real conditions, challenges, and opportunities across the Valley. See page 13 for the full list.

## FACILITATORS AND SESSION SUPPORT

We are grateful to our facilitators and support staff who helped make the Action Planning sessions inclusive, productive, and welcoming spaces for dialogue. In February 2025, the LFC hosted a Simplifying Language and Facilitation Training with Lee Shanis to build community capacity for clear communication, inclusive facilitation, and shared leadership. This training directly strengthened community engagement efforts, with ten of the fifty attendees going on to help facilitate the in-person Action Planning sessions.

- Aliya Evans
- Amanda Alanis
- Anita Rodriguez
- Ari Devora
- DJ Salazar
- Goldie Mariola
- Iava Williams
- Jae Sanders
- Joseph Jaime
- Lisa Bodey
- Lois Harvey
- Max Gibson
- Melinda Myers
- Sherice Shiner
- Zoila Gomez

## COLLABORATORS

We thank New Venture Advisors for their technical expertise and collaboration. We also thank Los Promotores del Valle de San Luis for translating our slides and worksheets from English to Spanish, recruiting monolingual Spanish-speaking participants, and providing facilitation during Spanish-language events. Finally, we thank the San Luis Valley Language Justice Cooperative for providing interpretation and translation support that helped ensure broad and inclusive participation.

## COMMUNITY PARTICIPANTS

Thank you to everyone who attended one or more of our events and shared your lived experience, knowledge, and unique perspectives. This Action Plan was created to serve you, and it needed your suggestions and priorities to be meaningful and effective. You asked thoughtful questions, offered practical insight, and helped ground this plan in the realities of the San Luis Valley. Thank you for your time, your trust, and your contributions.





## LOCAL FOOD CATERERS

Finally, we thank the caterers who used local ingredients for community meetings and events, helping to model and support the local food economy. These caterers were the Valley Roots Food Hub, Sabor de Vida, Caboose Burgers, the Creede Hotel, and the Acequia Institute's SNAP-Ed youth interns.



*“You all have addressed a lot of issues we face as producers.”*

—Participant from Del Norte

# WHAT IS THE FOOD SYSTEM AND WHY SHOULD WE PLAN FOR FOOD SYSTEMS?

## OUR 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.

A community food and agriculture system doesn’t only represent the transactional steps of food moving 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.

### 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.

### 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.

### 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.

### 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.

### 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.

### 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.

## PLANNING FOR FOOD SYSTEMS

A food system plan is a strategic framework that outlines a community’s vision for its food system while mapping out the stakeholders and actions needed to achieve that vision. Food system plans often focus on local agriculture and food security, but may also include strategies to support issues ranging from hunting to composting to fair labor practices in the food service industry. Just as many city and county governments create 10- or 15-year plans for land use, transportation, and economic development, we can create food system plans that take a long-term view of community needs. This strengthens our ability to coordinate efforts that support them.

Food system planning has not always received the attention it deserves, in part because there is no dedicated state or federal “Department of Food” to lead these efforts across all the government agencies and sectors that impact the food system. Yet, food is deeply connected to many critical aspects of community well-being. If we do not intentionally plan for food systems, we are likely to miss opportunities to support local people, economies, and ecosystems, and may even perpetuate practices that harm them. By recognizing this, more local governments and community-led groups like the San Luis Valley Local Foods Coalition can begin to integrate food system planning into their broader strategic efforts—focussing on developing sustainable and resilient food systems.

## WHY DOES THE SAN LUIS VALLEY NEED A PLAN?

In recognition of the region’s shared history and natural resources, this plan aims to support the entire San Luis Valley and the six counties it includes: Alamosa, Conejos, Costilla, Mineral, Rio Grande, and Saguache. The Valley supports a large proportion of the state’s food production and includes the important Rio Grande watershed. While the Valley is vast—over 8,000 square miles—and sparsely populated by modern standards, the region shares many values and aspects of rural identity,



including resilience. Its economies also share a common dependence on agriculture and tourism. The Valley’s food system is part of a much larger system that is influenced by global food production and trade, federal and state policies, and other forces. For the purposes of this plan,

we are focused on the parts of the food system that we can influence within the Valley.

Recent years have brought significant economic and environmental challenges to the Valley and its food system, highlighting the need for coordinated action that stretches across sectors and counties. In particular, the COVID-19 pandemic exacerbated issues related to food access, agricultural viability, and local supply chains. Local residents, producers, and community organizations have mobilized to address these challenges and create a more resilient, just, and localized food system. More work is needed to build on their efforts.

This action plan aims to address key challenges and leverage opportunities related to topics across the Valley’s food system, including:

- **Food & Farm Economy:** Food and farm businesses often face rising costs and supply chain issues, which can narrow profit margins and complicate efforts to get their products to consumers. Small businesses may experience several barriers to entry, including accessing land and capital. Many business owners note the cost and availability of labor, transportation, and key infrastructure like processing make it challenging to sustain and scale their operations.

- Food Security:** Geographic isolation, limited food retail options, and low incomes can make accessing food—much less healthy, local, and culturally relevant food—a challenge for many in the Valley. Experiencing food insecurity is associated with poorer physical and mental health outcomes. Estimates of food insecurity in our six counties range from 13.4% in Mineral County to 19.4% in Costilla County, much higher than the Colorado average of 12.7%.<sup>1</sup> Food insecurity among children is even greater—more than 19% in each county and reaching 25.9% in Costilla County.<sup>2</sup>
- Cultural Foodways:** Recognizing and celebrating the Valley’s diverse food cultures and traditional foodways can strengthen community identity and connection to place, but efforts are needed to ensure knowledge around growing, gathering, and preparing traditional foods is passed down.
- Water Stewardship:** The Valley only receives 7-10 inches of rain per year and is growing increasingly dry, requiring all residents and businesses to make do with less water. State law now requires the Valley to restore the unconfined aquifer of the San Luis Valley Aquifer System to its previous levels, which will require substantial reductions in water use and transitions to more drought-resistant crops and growing practices, and retiring some agricultural wells and water rights.
- Climate & Growing Season:** The Valley’s dry climate and extreme temperatures, coupled with our short growing season of approximately 90-130 days, have implications for our local food supply and the viability of food and farm businesses. Farmers and ranchers must also cope with the effects of climate change, including more frequent droughts and extreme weather events that impact crop growth and animal welfare.
- Public Health:** Nutritious food is vital for good health, but many Valley residents consume excessive sodium, saturated fats, and processed carbohydrates and insufficient fresh fruits and vegetables. Across Colorado, 38% of adults report eating less than one serving of fruit per day and 18.6% report eating vegetables less than once per day,<sup>3</sup> while more than half of high school students report eating fruits and vegetables less than once per day.<sup>4</sup>

For more information and detailed community input on these topics, check out the [San Luis Valley Community Food & Agricultural Assessment](#).



<sup>1</sup>Feeding America, Map the Meal Gap. Hunger & Poverty in Colorado - Overall

<sup>2</sup>Feeding America, Map the Meal Gap. Hunger and Poverty in Colorado - Children

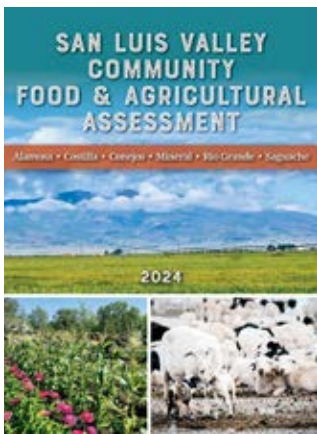
<sup>3</sup>Colorado Department of Public Health and Environment. (2023). Behavioral Risk Factor Surveillance System. Accessed from: [teeo-cdphe.shinyapps.io/CDPHE\\_VISION/](https://teeo-cdphe.shinyapps.io/CDPHE_VISION/)

<sup>4</sup>Colorado Department of Public Health and Environment. (2023). Healthy Kids Colorado Survey. Accessed from: [cdphe.colorado.gov/healthy-kids-colorado-survey-dashboard](https://cdphe.colorado.gov/healthy-kids-colorado-survey-dashboard)

# HOW WAS THIS PLAN CREATED?

## PLANNING PROCESS

This action plan is the result of a deeply collaborative, hands-on effort that involved more than 1,750 people, including farmers, ranchers, emergency food providers, soil health experts, grocery store owners, other food system experts and community members. These individuals shared their input through community gatherings, surveys, focus groups, interviews, and other formats from 2022 to 2025.



This process began in 2022 with a robust food system assessment, which engaged more than 1,300 community members via surveys and listening summits. The assessment helped to surface key opportunities to build on as well as barriers to address when strengthening the Valley's food system. More

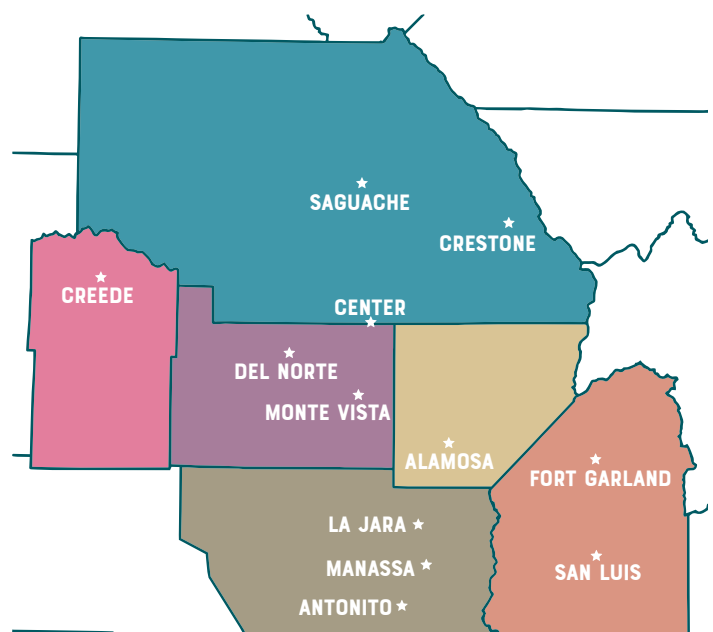
information about the assessment process and findings can be found in the [San Luis Valley Community Food & Agricultural Assessment \(CFAA\)](#).

The top priorities identified in the CFAA were used to develop draft action plan goals and action-oriented questions for focus groups, interviews, and larger community events. Feedback from those sessions was used to develop the objectives and actions, which were then refined and prioritized through community action planning sessions, project stewards working sessions, and reviews of effective policies and programs from other communities in the Mountain West. More than 420 people participated in these sessions, which were held both virtually and in-person across the Valley.

## PROJECT STEWARDS

To ensure broad community representation in spaces where project decisions were being made, SLVLFC invited a wide range of community members to help guide the process. They formed the Project Stewards, who functioned as a steering committee. Project Stewards met with SLVLFC and consultants every month to check in on project progress and weigh in on key steps, such as developing the action plan goals, designing community engagement materials, and strengthening outreach strategies. They also participated in working sessions where they helped analyze community engagement data, refine potential actions for the plan, and review the final draft of the action plan.

The Project Stewards met from May 2024 through October 2025 to guide the planning process. Many of the Project Stewards also supported the Community Food and Agriculture Assessment in 2022 and 2023 and were able to build on what they learned during that process. See the *Acknowledgments* section of this plan for a full list of the Project Stewards and the organizations they represent.



As part of the Community Food & Agriculture Assessment, three surveys were conducted across different sectors. The graphic below highlights shared priorities that emerged from those survey results. Full survey results are available in the Survey Results document at [sylvlocalfoods.org/cfaa](http://sylvlocalfoods.org/cfaa).

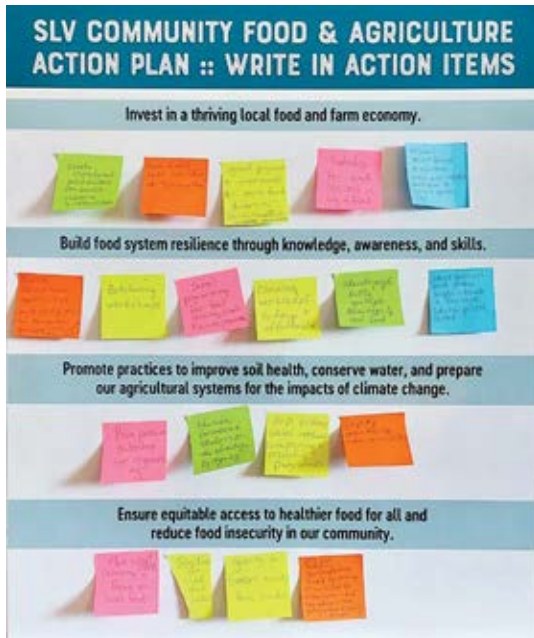
COMMON GOALS IN ORDER OF PRIORITY		
In all three surveys, respondents were presented with a list of 15 possible food system goals and asked to prioritize those of most importance to the San Luis Valley.		
COMMUNITY SURVEY (1,011 responses)	FARMER/RANCHER SURVEY (84 responses)	FOOD BUSINESS SURVEY (58 responses)
1) <u>Invest in a thriving local food and farm economy.</u>	1) Promote conservation practices to improve soil health.	1) <u>Invest in a thriving local food and farm economy.</u>
2) Increase the production, sales, and consumption of locally grown foods.	2) <u>Encourage and support youth farming and ranching programs.</u>	2) Increase the production, sales, and consumption of locally grown foods.
3) <u>Encourage and support youth farming and ranching programs.</u>	3) Promote and build upon programs to conserve water.	3) <u>Encourage and support youth farming and ranching programs.</u>
4) Ensure access to healthier food for all and reduce food insecurity in our community.	4) <u>Invest in a thriving local food and farm economy.</u>	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.

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



## METHODOLOGY: FOCUS GROUPS & KEY PERSPECTIVE INTERVIEWS

To ensure that the plan is grounded in the experiences and expertise of those most directly involved in the food system, LFC conducted a series of focus groups, key perspective interviews, and community engagement events from 2024-2025.

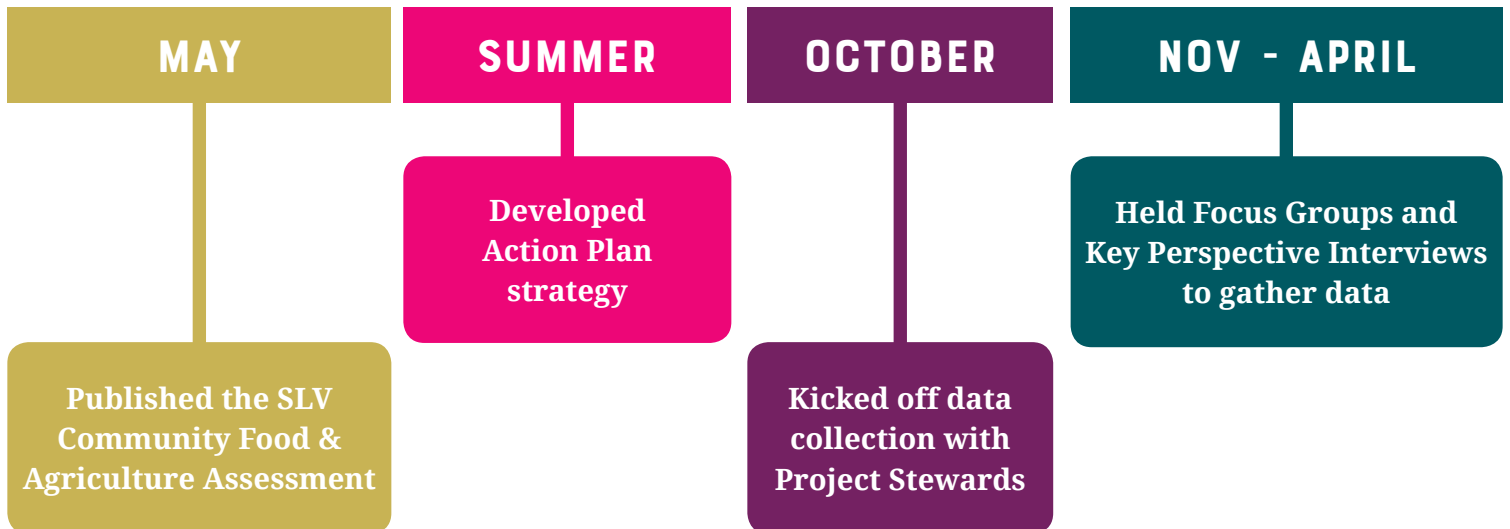


## Engagement Approach

This engagement process was designed to be participatory, sector-specific, and solutions-oriented. The goal was not just to gather community input, but to build relationships, elevate subject matter expertise, and generate actionable recommendations across the food system. Sessions were held both virtually and in person—structured to elicit input on core programmatic and policy areas related to the Valley’s food system such as: land and water stewardship; food access; workforce; infrastructure; and agriculture. Participants were asked about barriers and opportunities, and invited to share ideas for potential policies, programs, partnerships, infrastructure and funding priorities.

Engagement focused on diverse stakeholder groups representing a broad spectrum of the Valley’s food system.

2024



MAY

SUMMER

OCTOBER

NOV - APRIL

Published the SLV Community Food & Agriculture Assessment

Developed Action Plan strategy

Kicked off data collection with Project Stewards

Held Focus Groups and Key Perspective Interviews to gather data

**Focus Groups covered these sectors:**

- Cattle Ranchers
- School Nutrition Directors
- Food Pantry staff and volunteers
- Rio Grande Farm Park Co-op farmers
- Community Gardens
- Meat Processors
- Mosca-Hooper Conservation District
- Adams State Students - Natural Resource & Water Law Class
- Farm Tour Attendees
- Project Stewards
- Local Foods Coalition staff

**Key Perspective Interviews:**

- Owners of the now-closed Old Fort Market
- Executive Director of SLV Ecosystem Council
- Farmer, Rancher, RMFU chapter president
- Farmer, Rancher, public health advocate
- Agronomist at Soil Health Services
- CEO of Farm Fresh Direct
- Owner of San Juan Ranch
- New General Manager of Valley Roots Food Hub
- Markets Manager of Valley Roots Food Hub
- Previous General Manager of Valley Roots Food Hub
- Food Bank Network Director at La Puente

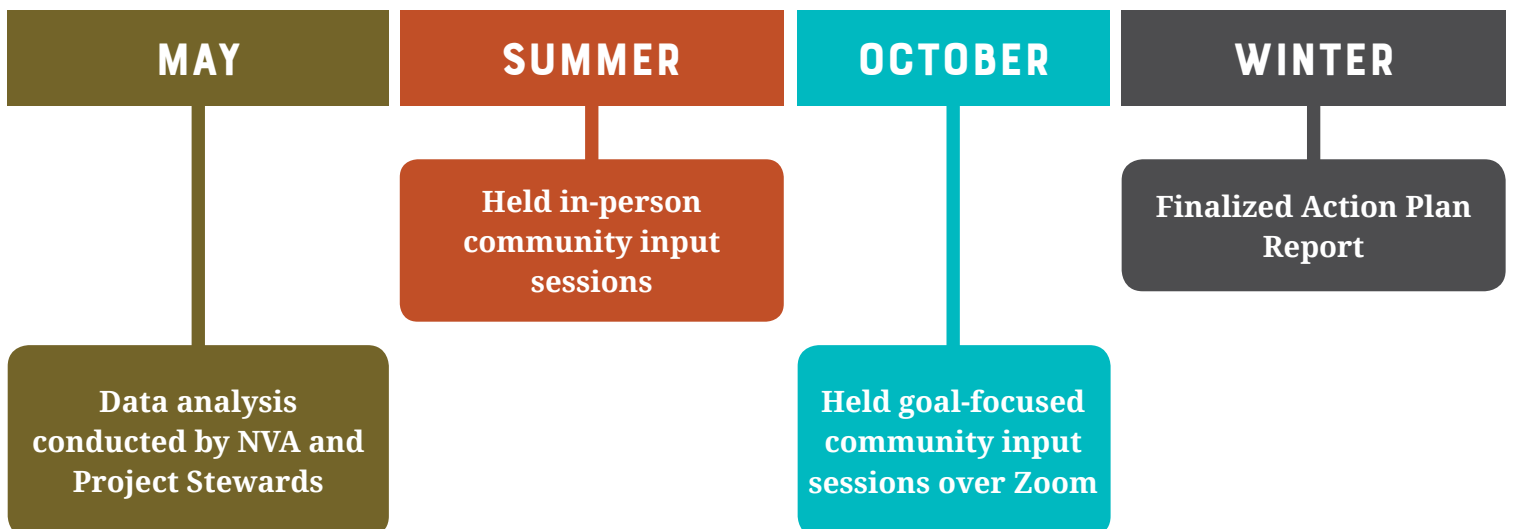
Over the course of the engagement period, LFC participated in or hosted more than 75 engagement events, meetings, and interviews across the Valley.

**Data Analysis**

All engagement sessions were documented through detailed notes, and/or audio recordings when consent was provided. Data from these sessions were analyzed using a qualitative coding process to identify recurring themes, emerging needs, and high-potential ideas.

Thematic analysis of the qualitative data focused on shared challenges (e.g., water scarcity, lack of processing capacity, workforce shortages), actionable opportunities (e.g., expanding value-added infrastructure, investing in soil health), and sector-specific priorities (e.g., needs of school food programs vs. needs of ranchers).

Input was cross-referenced with other regional assessments and public plans as well as institutional data to ensure alignment and validate findings. The resulting insights directly informed the plan.

**2025**

## METHODOLOGY: COMMUNITY ACTION PLANNING SESSIONS

To ground the Action Plan in broad community priorities and lived experience, LFC hosted a series of in-person and virtual Community Action Planning Sessions across the San Luis Valley. These sessions were designed to gather structured input on proposed goals, objectives, and action items, while also building shared understanding of the planning process and encouraging community ownership of the plan.

### Engagement Approach

To encourage participation, LFC used a combination of outreach strategies. Staff designed and posted fliers throughout the region, shared email invitations through organizational mailing lists, and worked with community partners to invite their constituents. Facebook events were created and promoted, and the Action Planning sessions were regularly mentioned during monthly appearances on KRZA radio.

Fifteen in-person Action Planning sessions were held across the region. Each session began with an overview of the full project, including the Community Food and Agriculture Assessment (CFAA), followed by an explanation of the Action Planning process. Participants were then divided into evenly sized groups and rotated through tables, each focused on one of the goals of the Action Plan. Each table was supported by a trained facilitator and equipped with posters, worksheets, sticky notes, and pens.

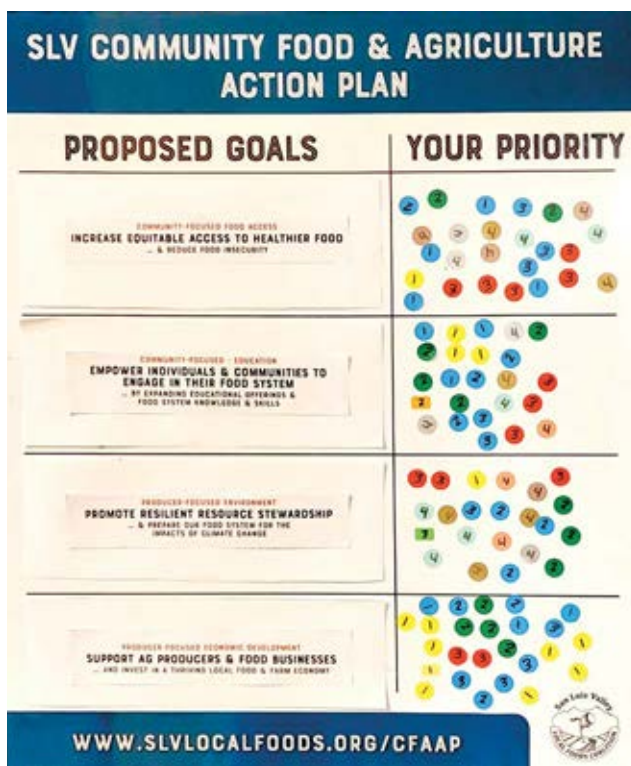


At each table, facilitators reviewed one goal along with its associated objectives and action items. Participants worked together to rank the objectives in order of importance and were then asked to individually identify their highest priority action items under each objective. Each group spent approximately 30 minutes on each goal. In-person sessions typically lasted about four hours in total. A full meal and snacks were provided, sourced locally whenever possible, and participants received a \$50 stipend in recognition of their time and contributions.

The final four Action Planning sessions were held virtually, with each session focused on one of the four Action Plan goals. These sessions were open to anyone in the San Luis Valley with an interest in a specific goal area, such as Food Access or Environment. During these sessions, staff reviewed the full goal, objectives, and action items and facilitated discussion focused on implementation. Participants were asked whether they were aware of existing efforts related to the proposed actions and to identify individuals or organizations that could potentially lead or support this work. Participants in virtual sessions received \$25 stipends for their time.

## Data Analysis

Following each session, staff compiled objective rankings and individual action item selections into a master spreadsheet. Objective rankings from all sessions were aggregated to establish the priority order reflected in this plan. Votes for action items were tallied across all sessions to identify areas of strong community support.



Information gathered during the virtual sessions, including names of existing initiatives, organizations, and potential action leads, was documented and incorporated into a living master document. Together, these quantitative rankings and qualitative inputs provided a clear picture of community priorities and informed both the structure and content of the final Action Plan.



*“Thanks so much for doing these events!”*

—Participant from Monte Vista

## Agenda

- 

1. Grab Food, Review Posters, Mingle
- 

5. Explain Breakout Session
- 

2. Introductions
- 

6. Regroup - Share what you're excited about
- 

3. Assessment & Action Plan Overview
- 

7. What Comes Next
- 

4. Breakout into Groups
- 

8. Complete Survey & Receive Stipend

### COMMUNITY ACTION PLANNING SESSIONS 275 PEOPLE ATTENDED

DATE	REGION	LOCATION	ATTENDEES
4/26/2025	Alamosa (pilot)	Division of Fire Prevention and Control	9
5/17/2025	Ft. Garland / Blanca	Ft. Garland Museum	8
5/31/2025	Crestone / Moffat	Crestone Charter School	28
6/10/2025	Del Norte / South Fork	Rio Grand Wellness Center	26
6/17/2025	Center	Center High School	23
6/28/2025	Monte Vista	Ski Hi	14
7/1/2025	Creede	Underground Mining Museum	6
7/8/2025	Saguache	Road & Bridge	38
7/15/25	Center - Spanish	Center Viking Club	18
7/19/25	La Jara / Capulin	Wagon Wheel	6
7/26/25	Antonito	Old Fire Department	4
7/29/25	Alamosa - Spanish	DFPC	36
8/2/25	San Luis & Villages	S.L. Peoples Market Annex	13
8/5/25	Manassa	Catholic Church	18
8/9/25	Alamosa	Adams State - Ballroom	28
10/6/25	GOAL: Education & Engagement	ZOOM	11
10/8/25	GOAL: Producer & Food Business Opportunities	ZOOM	13
10/15/25	GOAL: Food Access	ZOOM	10
10/17/25	GOAL: Environment	ZOOM	8

# HOW TO READ THIS PLAN

## FOUR HIGH-LEVEL PRIORITIES AND ACCOMPANYING GOALS



### EDUCATION & ENGAGEMENT

Engage individuals and communities in the food system, expanding knowledge and skills.



### PRODUCER & FOOD BUSINESS OPPORTUNITIES

Support agricultural producers and food businesses, and grow a thriving local food and farm economy.



### FOOD ACCESS

Increase equitable access to healthy food and reduce food insecurity.



### ENVIRONMENT

Promote resilient resource stewardship and prepare for the impacts of climate change.

Each goal is broken down into specific objectives, and each objective is supported by concrete actions. These actions include policies, programs, and investments that work together to move the plan's vision forward. Within each goal, the objectives are listed in order of priority as determined through multiple rounds of voting at the community action planning sessions. Under each objective, you'll find numbered action items in **bold**, followed by bulleted lists of what those action items could look like in practice. The bolded action represents the core focus. The bulleted items

are suggestions—not requirements—for how that action might be implemented based on highly specific community suggestions shared during the planning process. Nearly 300 such ideas were collected and grouped under broader action items to preserve community input while maintaining the plan's readability and feasibility.

The following icons are used to identify whether an action relates to policy, programs, partnerships, or infrastructure.

*“It’s refreshing to see that you acknowledge the needs. I see real opportunities to build this. I’m glad I came.”*

—Participant from Del Norte



# PRIORITY 1: EDUCATION & ENGAGEMENT

**Goal: Engage individuals and communities in the food system and expand knowledge and skills.**



Public engagement is a powerful driver of a resilient and equitable food system. Across the San Luis Valley, community members expressed a deep appreciation for local culture, food traditions, and agricultural heritage. However, they also named barriers that limit their ability to participate more fully in the Valley's food system. These include a lack of awareness of where and how to buy local products and limited opportunities to build careers within the food system. Consumers and food producers alike noted the need for more education about the value of local food, along with better outreach strategies that reflect the Valley's linguistic, cultural, and generational diversity.

This goal focuses on lifting up community knowledge, building stronger connections to local food, and fostering inclusive participation in the regional food system. Strategies include expanding community events that celebrate food and culture, improving marketing and public awareness, offering hands-on workshops and garden classes, and integrating food

education into youth programming. Supporting food-related career pathways for youth and adults is also central to this work, helping to ensure that local food is not only valued but also grown, prepared, and shared by people who reflect the Valley's full diversity. These efforts are grounded in partnerships across sectors, from schools and libraries to healthcare providers and workforce centers.

Ultimately, this goal is about creating shared ownership of the Valley's food future. By investing in public education, workforce development, and culturally rooted engagement, the San Luis Valley can increase demand for local food in ways that improve health, economic opportunity, and community pride. Through coordinated outreach and inclusive design, residents from all backgrounds—especially those from historically underserved and underrepresented groups—can see themselves as active participants in building a stronger, more connected food system.

## OBJECTIVES AT A GLANCE

- 1.1 Increase public engagement in the food system and demand for local food through education, partnerships, and marketing.**
- 1.2 Support workforce development and career opportunities in the food system for youth and adults.**
- 1.3 Support youth gardening and nutrition education.**
- 1.4 Provide education and resources for home food production, food preparation, and disaster preparedness.**
- 1.5 Strengthen community capacity to advance food and agriculture policy, systems, and environmental change.**

### ACTION LENS

Education and engagement efforts should be inclusive, culturally relevant, and accessible to all community members.

# Increase public engagement in the food system and demand for local food through education, partnerships, and marketing.



### WHY IS THIS IMPORTANT?

Public engagement builds pride in local food, strengthens markets for producers, and keeps money in the community. Education, storytelling, and thoughtful marketing help residents understand the value of buying local and make healthy food more visible and accessible. By using existing community assets and creating new ways to connect people to their food, we reinforce culture, identity, and economic resilience.

POLICY 	PROGRAM 	PARTNERSHIP 	INFRASTRUCTURE 	
	✓	✓		<p><b>ACTION 1.1.1</b></p> <p><b>Offer more community events that connect people to the Valley’s food system and celebrate its cultural food traditions.</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Host events that bring people together around food, such as documentary nights, “Taste of Place” farm-to-table dinners, open mics, storytelling nights, or even fun activities like speed dating.</li> <li>• Organize events that spark interest in growing and making food, like vegetable-growing contests, bake-offs, cook-offs, or hot chili pepper challenges.</li> <li>• Support businesses and institutions in showcasing local sourcing by creating materials and resources for hosting farm-to-table events and promoting local cuisine.</li> <li>• Encourage communities, organizations, or individuals to host regular local-food cooking classes with follow-up potlucks.</li> </ul>
	✓	✓		<p><b>ACTION 1.1.2</b></p> <p><b>Develop marketing campaigns and partnerships that highlight community food assets such as farmers markets, food hubs, CSAs, farm parks, commercial kitchens, and community gardens, using multilingual and culturally relevant materials to reach diverse communities.</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Expand the SLV Local Foods Coalition’s social media presence and increase tabling at community events.</li> <li>• Maintain the Local Roots Guide and develop regional “where to find food” maps.</li> <li>• Create a walking/running trail around the Rio Grande Farm Park.</li> <li>• Co-locate food assets like community gardens and CSA pick-ups with other community attractions, like playgrounds, music venues, schools, and libraries.</li> <li>• Expand regional CSA programs.</li> <li>• Increase opportunities for communities to share feedback and stories about local food, such as by deploying a simple “What did you eat today?” QR code survey at farmers markets and community events, which can help collect anecdotes and tailor public outreach.</li> </ul>
		✓		<p><b>ACTION 1.1.3</b></p> <p><b>Expand public education on the benefits of buying local foods for individuals, communities, and the Valley as a whole.</b></p>

OBJECTIVE 1.2

Support workforce development and career opportunities in the food system for youth and adults.



**WHY IS THIS IMPORTANT?**

Expanding local training and career pathways helps address “brain drain” and prepares residents for regional jobs essential to food and agriculture. Strengthening these opportunities gives young people reasons to stay in the Valley, supports succession needs, and builds a skilled workforce able to sustain and grow the region’s food economy.

POLICY 	PROGRAM 	PARTNERSHIP 	INFRASTRUCTURE 	
	✓	✓		<p><b>ACTION 1.2.1</b></p> <p><b>Collaborate with regional and county economic development offices to align food system career pathways with workforce needs, and support job fairs, job boards, and training programs.</b></p>
✓	✓	✓		<p><b>ACTION 1.2.2</b></p> <p><b>Support extracurricular youth programs or internships that provide education and career pathways in the food system.</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Connect youth to programs like 4-H, FFA, and Boys and Girls Club, and create pathways for homeschooled students to access these opportunities.</li> <li>• Encourage FFA or 4-H to create an SLV food documentary to be shown in area grocery stores, farmers markets, or relevant events.</li> <li>• Help youth connect with food system jobs that use a variety of skillsets and on-site job training. For example, partnering with high school classes to develop websites, short films, marketing campaigns, or social media content for the SLV food system or local producers.</li> <li>• Collaborate with Adams State University and Trinidad State Junior College to ensure courses meet regional workforce needs (e.g., consider adding a culinary arts track) and are accessible to high school students and nontraditional learners</li> </ul>
	✓	✓		<p><b>ACTION 1.2.3</b></p> <p><b>Promote school-based opportunities to learn about small business operations within the food system.</b></p>





**WHY IS THIS IMPORTANT?**

Young people are increasingly disconnected from healthy food and the systems that produce it. Gardening and nutrition programs help them understand where food comes from, build healthier habits, and strengthen their connection to land and community. These experiences spark curiosity, encourage better nutrition, and nurture the next generation of informed and engaged food system stewards.

POLICY 	PROGRAM 	PARTNERSHIP 	INFRASTRUCTURE 
	✓	✓	
<b>ACTION 1.3.1</b>			
<b>Conduct an asset map or assessment of school and youth organization infrastructure (e.g., grow domes, greenhouses, gardens, programs, hornos) to integrate into curricula.</b>			
	✓		
<b>ACTION 1.3.2</b>			
<b>Increase opportunities for kids and teens to experience local food system values and fall in love with agriculture, farms, ranches, and the outdoors through field trips and farm tours.</b>			
	✓		
<b>ACTION 1.3.3</b>			
<b>Develop and implement culturally relevant cooking, nutrition, and food system curriculum for all grade levels.</b>			
	✓		
<b>ACTION 1.3.4</b>			
<b>Develop extracurricular cooking, gardening, and nutrition programs aligned with school schedules (e.g., after school, weekends).</b>			



## OBJECTIVE 1.4

## Provide education and resources for home food production, food preparation, and disaster preparedness.



## WHY IS THIS IMPORTANT?

Community members told us that they want to grow and prepare more of their own food but need guidance and resources. Teaching gardening, preservation, cooking, and disaster preparedness strengthens household food security, reduces waste, and supports resilience during disruptions. Connecting residents with existing classes and resources helps keep traditional skills alive and empowers families to care for themselves in uncertain times.

POLICY 	PROGRAM 	PARTNERSHIP 	INFRASTRUCTURE 	
	✓			<b>ACTION 1.4.1</b> <b>Offer in-person and virtual workshops, tours, and camps that teach essential food cultivation and preservation skills.</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Create an online forum for SLV gardening and growing.</li> </ul>
✓	✓	✓		<b>ACTION 1.4.2</b> <b>Convene a seasonal “Garden Guild” of volunteers, AmeriCorps and Extension interns, and site coordinators to collaborate on garden efforts.</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Encourage greater involvement in community gardens.</li> <li>• Host regular meetings to swap seeds, share best practices, coordinate mentorship, and plan volunteer days.</li> <li>• Promote policies in HOAs and municipalities that support personal and community (non-commercial) food production, such as gardens and backyard chickens.</li> <li>• Convene ongoing meetings to connect and support community gardens across the SLV.</li> </ul>
✓		✓		<b>ACTION 1.4.3</b> <b>Work with county and regional emergency managers to strengthen disaster preparedness for food and water distribution, including coordinated storage, refrigeration, electricity backup, and communication systems.</b>
✓	✓			<b>ACTION 1.4.4</b> <b>Expand public education on household emergency preparedness, like having three days of food and water on hand.</b>
	✓			<b>ACTION 1.4.5</b> <b>Develop and promote a planting guide for what grows well and when in the SLV.</b>
		✓		<b>ACTION 1.4.6</b> <b>Expand public education on hunting, foraging, and fishing.</b>
	✓		✓	<b>ACTION 1.4.7</b> <b>Create a lending library for tools and seeds.</b>

**Strengthen community capacity to advance food and agriculture policy, systems, and environmental change.**



**WHY IS THIS IMPORTANT?**

Many residents care about food, water, and land but feel unsure how or lack resources to influence decisions that affect them. Building skills in leadership, advocacy, and civic engagement helps communities participate in shaping policies that support producers, protect resources, and improve access to healthy food. Stronger community capacity creates more equitable, informed, and durable systems change.

POLICY 	PROGRAM 	PARTNERSHIP 	INFRASTRUCTURE 	
✓				<p><b>ACTION 1.5.1</b></p> <p><b>Conduct a policy scan of existing food and agriculture policies to identify opportunities and gaps relevant to the SLV.</b></p>
✓				<p><b>ACTION 1.5.2</b></p> <p><b>Explore creating a regional Food Policy Council to coordinate advocacy, align priorities, and elevate community voices.</b></p>
	✓			<p><b>ACTION 1.5.3</b></p> <p><b>Provide civic engagement training to help residents participate effectively in local decision-making processes, and develop a community engagement toolkit (e.g., plain-language briefs, visual explainers) to make policy and systems issues more accessible.</b></p>
	✓	✓		<p><b>ACTION 1.5.4</b></p> <p><b>Build partnerships with local governments and institutions and encourage collaborative advocacy campaigns that unite producers, food businesses, nonprofits, and residents around shared food system policy goals.</b></p>



# PRIORITY 2: PRODUCERS & FOOD BUSINESS OPPORTUNITIES



**Goal: Support agricultural producers and food businesses to grow a thriving local food and farm economy.**

A strong, resilient food system depends on the success of its producers and food businesses. Across the San Luis Valley, farmers, ranchers, and local food entrepreneurs are eager to bolster our local food supply but face persistent challenges related to water scarcity, labor, housing, and limited infrastructure. Producers cited a need for more outlets to sell their goods, support for value-added processing, and access to reliable labor and affordable land. Food businesses emphasized the difficulty of turning a profit while offering fair wages, securing ingredients locally, and navigating complex permitting processes. Despite these challenges, both producers and entrepreneurs see opportunities for expansion, especially when community support, technical assistance, and infrastructure investments are aligned.

This goal focuses on creating the conditions that allow local producers and food businesses to thrive. Strategies include building out essential infrastructure—from poultry and meat processing to commissary kitchens

and food hubs—while providing robust technical support, peer-to-peer learning, and access to capital. Workforce development and housing support are also key, especially as labor shortages remain one of the biggest barriers to growth. In addition, this goal emphasizes the need to expand markets, support succession planning, and ensure that new and diverse producers, including women, BIPOC, LGBTQIA+ individuals, and young farmers, can access land, resources, and opportunities.

By investing in the full agricultural value chain, the Valley can create a thriving local food economy that supports producers of all scales. This work builds on the region's strong agricultural heritage and community values of peer learning, mutual aid, and cooperation. With the right partnerships and policies in place, the San Luis Valley can become a model for how rural communities grow food businesses rooted in sustainability, equity, and local identity.

## OBJECTIVES AT A GLANCE

- 2.1 Strengthen regional food system infrastructure and distribution networks.**
- 2.2 Expand funding opportunities, business support services, and technical assistance for producers and food businesses.**
- 2.3 Increase access to affordable agricultural land and support succession planning for producers and food businesses.**
- 2.4 Support a thriving, sustainable ranching economy.**

### ACTION LENS

All infrastructure and facility investments to support producers and food businesses should encourage resilient systems, encouraging the integration of renewable energy, energy efficiency, and waste reduction wherever possible.



# OBJECTIVE 2.1





## Strengthen regional food system infrastructure and distribution networks.

### WHY IS THIS IMPORTANT?

Efficient processing, storage, and distribution are essential for moving local food from farm to market. Improving these systems reduces bottlenecks, cuts waste, and keeps food dollars circulating locally. Stronger infrastructure helps producers reach customers more reliably and builds a more resilient regional food economy.

POLICY	PROGRAM	PARTNERSHIP	INFRASTRUCTURE	
		✓	✓	<p><b>ACTION 2.1.1</b></p> <p><b>Support regional processing capacity by investing in new or expanded facilities, while encouraging the integration of renewable energy, energy efficiency, and waste reduction where possible.</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Develop a value-added potato processing facility focused on chips, #2s, dog food, and other product lines.</li> <li>• Establish a grain and bean processing and hulling facility.</li> <li>• Create a poultry processing facility to serve regional producers.</li> <li>• Build a hemp processing facility for uses such as hempcrete, animal feed or fiber-based animal bedding.</li> <li>• Expand USDA-certified meat processing by either establishing a regional facility or supporting existing processors through funding for USDA inspectors and mobile units.</li> <li>• Develop an industrial-scale co-packing and private-labeling facility for larger producers to package chilled and canned goods.</li> <li>• Support the development of a regional wool pellet manufacturing facility to create value-added products from local or regional fiber.</li> <li>• Develop a beef by-product rendering facility to process hides into collagen and fats into tallow and other marketable products.</li> </ul>
	✓	✓	✓	<p><b>ACTION 2.1.2</b></p> <p><b>Help small producers and food businesses scale up value-added products and find new markets.</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Develop commissary kitchens in key locations with shared dry and cold storage and value-added processing space, paired with support programs that help producers and food businesses store, process, and scale their products.</li> <li>• Communicate the benefits of selling through a food hub to producers.</li> <li>• Develop small community farmers and/or vendor markets in strategic locations.</li> <li>• Provide outreach and technical assistance to small producers and food businesses on funding opportunities and business support resources.</li> </ul>



POLICY 	PROGRAM 	PARTNERSHIP 	INFRASTRUCTURE 
✓			

**ACTION 2.1.3****Advocate for incentives that encourage institutions, restaurants, and food businesses to purchase local and regional foods.**

- Simplify regulations to make it easier to develop on-farm structures such as season-extension equipment.
- Support policies that expand options for temporary and permanent housing.
- Encourage counties, municipalities, schools and public institutions to adopt purchasing policies that prioritize locally produced food.
- Support counties and municipalities in creating incentives and simplifying regulations to expand access to fresh foods, from pop-ups, farmers markets, and farm stands to brick-and-mortar stores, especially in underserved areas.



## OBJECTIVE 2.2

# Expand funding opportunities, business support services, and technical assistance for producers and food businesses.



### WHY IS THIS IMPORTANT?

Producers excel at growing food but often lack time, resources, or expertise for marketing, finance, and regulatory tasks. Expanding access to funding, training, and business support helps small operations stay profitable and grow. This type of support strengthens the local food economy and keeps more value in the region.

POLICY 	PROGRAM 	PARTNERSHIP 	INFRASTRUCTURE 	
✓	✓			<b>ACTION 2.2.1</b> <b>Expand cost-share programs, incentives, and grants to improve farm viability.</b>
	✓	✓		<b>ACTION 2.2.2</b> <b>Increase awareness of business support resources and funding opportunities by developing centralized information hubs and resource guides that provide multilingual, culturally relevant, and accessible support for producers of all backgrounds.</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Assist with state and federal loan applications.</li> <li>• Create and maintain a list of professional service providers, such as accountants, business planners, web developers, lawyers, and insurers, who specialize in working with farms and food businesses.</li> <li>• Offer business incubation support for commercial farms and homesteaders.</li> <li>• Providing financial education for producers on how to invest money beyond the farm or operation.</li> <li>• Offer support with pricing and accessing new markets.</li> <li>• Expand peer-to-peer learning opportunities for producers and food business owners.</li> <li>• Regularly update and share the SLV Local Foods Coalition’s Bilingual Resource Guide for producers and food businesses.</li> </ul>
		✓		<b>ACTION 2.2.3</b> <b>Strengthen dialogue and coordination among land stewards, producers, and CSU Extension to expand research and technical assistance on relevant issues.</b>
	✓	✓		<b>ACTION 2.2.4</b> <b>Facilitate voluntary USDA Good Agricultural Practices (GAP) compliance and traceability.</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Partner with CSU Extension, Conservation District, and FFA to offer workshops on traceability (i.e. QR codes, harvest sanitation).</li> </ul>
	✓			<b>ACTION 2.2.5</b> <b>Support food businesses in accessing resources through things like co-ops, matchmaking events, and grant program assistance.</b>

OBJECTIVE 2.3

Increase access to affordable agricultural land and support succession planning for producers and food businesses.



**WHY IS THIS IMPORTANT?**

With many producers nearing retirement and few successors lined up, access to land, access to capital, and clear transition pathways are critical. Supporting new farmers and helping established ones plan for succession preserves local food production, protects agricultural heritage, and ensures the region's farms remain active for the next generation.

POLICY	PROGRAM	PARTNERSHIP	INFRASTRUCTURE	
	✓			<p><b>ACTION 2.3.1</b></p> <p><b>Assist producers with generational succession planning resources and services.</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Create a list of experts, including lawyers, who can help with land transfer, ownership, and business continuity planning.</li> </ul>
	✓			<p><b>ACTION 2.3.2</b></p> <p><b>Advocate for turning inactive cannabis greenhouses into year-round vegetable production.</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Work with Colorado Land Link to encourage leasing of these properties.</li> </ul>
	✓			<p><b>ACTION 2.3.3</b></p> <p><b>Continue to offer commercial and family plots to producers via the Rio Grande Farm Park.</b></p>
✓				<p><b>ACTION 2.3.4</b></p> <p><b>Streamline permitting for greenhouses and innovative farming projects.</b></p>





**WHY IS THIS IMPORTANT?**

Ranchers face rising costs, limited processing options, and new pressures affecting their viability. Supporting them helps maintain local meat production, open landscapes, and a traditional part of the region’s identity.

POLICY	PROGRAM	PARTNERSHIP	INFRASTRUCTURE	
✓	✓			<p><b>ACTION 2.4.1</b></p> <p><b>Support ranchers in effectively managing wildlife conflicts.</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Fund on-ranch deterrent training and “non-lethal” control pilots.</li> <li>• Counties limit/control individual carcass-pits.</li> <li>• Implement control of domestic and feral dogs.</li> <li>• Support peer-to-peer learning among ranchers to exchange strategies for wildlife management and rangeland stewardship.</li> </ul>
	✓			<p><b>ACTION 2.4.2</b></p> <p><b>Offer technical assistance and education for ranchers on working with beef processors.</b></p>
	✓	✓		<p><b>ACTION 2.4.3</b></p> <p><b>Support ranchers in developing processing partnerships that help them scale, such as cooperative ownership or “buy-in” agreements at processing facilities.</b></p>



## PRIORITY 3: FOOD ACCESS

**Goal: Increase equitable access to healthier food, and reduce food insecurity.**



Ensuring equitable access to healthy, culturally relevant food is a foundational goal of this plan. Across all six counties, food insecurity rates remain consistently higher than the Colorado average. Some residents, like those who are Hispanic/Latino or Native and those from low-income households face disproportionate challenges. Community feedback highlighted both structural and logistical barriers to accessing nutritious, locally produced food including long travel distances to grocery stores, limited food outlets, high costs, and seasonal availability constraints. At the same time, residents expressed strong interest in learning how to grow, cook, and expand access to key food infrastructure such as community gardens, greenhouses, and commercial kitchens.

Improving food access is not only a health imperative but also a pathway to greater economic and social resilience. During community engagement, residents, producers, and food businesses emphasized shared values around affordability, cultural relevance, youth engagement, and support for a thriving local food

economy. This plan responds with a set of strategies designed to address immediate food access needs while strengthening the regional food system for the long term. These strategies include enhancing food assistance programs, expanding local procurement efforts, improving transportation and distribution, increasing culturally appropriate offerings, and creating innovative partnerships between food, health, and education systems.

Importantly, these recommendations are grounded in a broader vision of equity and community empowerment. They aim to close historical and systemic gaps in access to healthy food, cultural foodways, and nutrition education, particularly for BIPOC, immigrant, and low-income communities. The actions outlined in this section reflect a regional commitment to working across sectors and county lines, building on existing collaborations, and honoring the San Luis Valley's cultural heritage while shaping a more inclusive and just food future.

### OBJECTIVES AT A GLANCE

- 3.1 Expand coordinated regional purchasing of local foods.**
- 3.2 Develop innovative programs that improve community food access, health, and well-being.**
- 3.3 Strengthen & support rural food banks and pantries.**
- 3.4 Support Farm to School initiatives.**
- 3.5 Support and optimize access to and use of food access programs.**

#### ACTION LENS

All food systems and infrastructure should consider incorporating renewable energy, energy efficiency, and waste reduction to ensure long-term community health.



**WHY IS THIS IMPORTANT?**

Coordinated purchasing strengthens producer markets, keeps food dollars local, and improves access to fresh food. When institutions and businesses buy locally, supply chains shorten, communities gain healthier options, and producers gain stability. Even small shifts in purchasing can meaningfully boost the regional food economy and build long-term resilience.

POLICY 	PROGRAM 	PARTNERSHIP 	INFRASTRUCTURE 	
		✓	✓	<p><b>ACTION 3.1.1</b></p> <p><b>Help businesses and institutions with marketing and menu development to showcase local foods, cuisines, and recipes.</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Partner with mainstream grocery outlets to feature local products and develop a regional grocery model focused on local foods.</li> <li>Offer “Ingredients on the Go,” where grocers provide recipe cards next to displays of locally sourced ingredients.</li> <li>Promote businesses that source a set percentage (by volume or price) of food locally</li> </ul>
✓	✓	✓		<p><b>ACTION 3.1.2</b></p> <p><b>Strengthen regional value chain coordination and support institutions and restaurants in sourcing more local food.</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Encourage Adams State University, Trinidad State Junior College, and K-12 districts to adopt preferential procurement policies for local food.</li> <li>Establish a position or team dedicated to helping producers and food hubs with forward contracting to supply restaurants, schools, and other institutions.</li> <li>Create School Food Advisory Groups made up of parents, community members, and school district staff.</li> <li>Strengthen distribution links between food hubs and wholesale clients across the SLV and into neighboring regions, including New Mexico.</li> <li>Support small and beginning producers in meeting requirements (insurance, packaging, delivery) needed to sell into institutional markets.</li> <li>Work with county governments to adopt local food procurement policies in institutions such as jails, senior centers, and county-run facilities.</li> <li>Enhance the Valley Roots Food Hub website to integrate producers, products, recipes, and links to local food resources.</li> </ul>
✓	✓			<p><b>ACTION 3.1.3</b></p> <p><b>Advocate for incentives that encourage institutions, restaurants, and food businesses to purchase local and regional foods.</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Create county-level grants or incentive programs that reward institutions, restaurants, and food businesses when they meet benchmarks for sourcing a percentage of food locally.</li> <li>Work with the Colorado Department of Agriculture to increase incentives for businesses to purchase Colorado-grown foods.</li> </ul>

OBJECTIVE 3.2

Develop innovative programs that improve community food access, health, and well-being.







**WHY IS THIS IMPORTANT?**

Many communities lack grocery stores or reliable access to healthy food. Creative solutions, like mobile markets, buying clubs, and local delivery, make it easier for families to find affordable, nutritious options. Improving access supports health, reduces long travel burdens, and strengthens connections between residents and local businesses.

POLICY 	PROGRAM 	PARTNERSHIP 	INFRASTRUCTURE 	
✓	✓	✓	✓	<p><b>ACTION 3.2.1</b></p> <p><b>Address physical and transportation barriers to accessing and buying local and nourishing food.</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Develop a mobile market that visits communities with no grocery stores on a consistent weekly basis.</li> <li>• Offer free grocery delivery services to seniors, people with disabilities, and low-income households.</li> <li>• Establish more farmstands, food hub satellite sites, and markets in underserved communities.</li> <li>• Partner with regional transit programs to align routes and schedules, adding stops at farm stands and grocery stores and creating delivery routes for homebound seniors and ag-worker camps.</li> <li>• Advocate for policies that encourage neighborhood farms and gardens as part of new development.</li> <li>• Promote transit services, e-bike and bike routes, and scenic driving corridors featuring local farms and ranches to create agritourism loops that connect visitors directly with local agriculture.</li> <li>• Create an online ride-share system to help residents reach local food sites, with QR codes on mailers linking to routes and schedules.</li> </ul>
	✓	✓		<p><b>ACTION 3.2.2</b></p> <p><b>Support buyers, from consumers to small retailers, in increasing their purchasing power.</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Help communities organize buying clubs to place collective orders (e.g., from Valley Roots Food Hub, UNFI, AFI).</li> <li>• Support small retailers in bulk ordering from distributors such as UNFI or AFI.</li> </ul>
	✓			<p><b>ACTION 3.2.3</b></p> <p><b>Establish work-trade and community harvest programs.</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Allow people to earn credits for working at the Rio Grande Farm Park and redeem them for produce at the end of the season.</li> <li>• Organize gleaning days that provide food to pantries while allowing volunteers to take home part of the harvest.</li> </ul>



 <p>POLICY</p>	 <p>PROGRAM</p>	 <p>PARTNERSHIP</p>	 <p>INFRASTRUCTURE</p>
✓	✓	✓	
<p><b>ACTION 3.2.4</b></p> <p><b>Use strategic partnerships, programs, and policy to connect food to health.</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Support Food is Medicine initiatives by partnering with healthcare providers, insurers, and public health agencies to integrate produce prescription programs into healthcare, and include Food is Medicine strategies in county community health improvement plans.</li> <li>• Formalize SLVGO’s Garden RX alongside Ecosystem Council’s Nature RX pilot, combining clinic-prescribed produce shares with outdoor activity “scripts.”</li> <li>• Create community bulletin boards or social tables at food pantries and partner with service providers for drop-in referrals during distribution hours.</li> </ul>			





**WHY IS THIS IMPORTANT?**

Food banks are vital community infrastructure, especially when federal programs fall short or emergencies arise. Supporting them ensures families can reliably access food and helps keep resources local. Stronger coordination, storage, and funding allow pantries to serve more people and partner with local producers to reduce waste and improve access.

POLICY 	PROGRAM 	PARTNERSHIP 	INFRASTRUCTURE 	
✓	✓			<p><b>ACTION 3.3.1</b></p> <p><b>Increase procurement of fresh, local produce to area food banks and pantries.</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Support community gardens in producing more food specifically for donation.</li> <li>• Develop systems that help local farmers and gardeners donate surplus produce to area food banks.</li> </ul>
	✓	✓		<p><b>ACTION 3.3.2</b></p> <p><b>Develop a regional food pantry coalition that hosts regular meetings to coordinate efforts.</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Jointly apply for public and private grants.</li> <li>• Create systems for surplus redistribution, including a shared pool and a first-call protocol for excess items.</li> <li>• Develop advisory committees for each community food pantry to help guide coordinators, volunteers, producers, and partners.</li> <li>• Explore new models such as offering prepared meals, produce boxes, and ready-to-go ingredient boxes for vulnerable clients (e.g., seniors, people with disabilities, the unhoused). Boxes could include pre-chopped vegetables, spice mixes, and shelf-stable proteins.</li> <li>• Advocate for county-level funding to underwrite pantry staff, rent, utilities, equipment, and maintenance.</li> <li>• Develop county-level emergency food distribution plans that connect pantries, growers, and food hubs to ensure food access during disasters.</li> </ul>
	✓	✓		<p><b>ACTION 3.3.3</b></p> <p><b>Increase recruitment and training of food bank and pantry volunteers to better serve client needs.</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Recruit Spanish-speaking volunteers where needed.</li> <li>• Develop a Volunteer Standard Operating Procedures Manual that each pantry can customize.</li> <li>• Host workshops on non-judgmental service and customer support.</li> </ul>



**WHY IS THIS IMPORTANT?**

Farm to School connects students with fresh, local food while giving producers dependable markets. School gardens, tasting programs, and nutrition education help children build healthy habits and understand where food comes from.

POLICY 	PROGRAM 	PARTNERSHIP 	INFRASTRUCTURE 	
✓	✓		✓	<p><b>ACTION 3.4.1</b></p> <p><b>Increase the amount of local food served in K–12 schools through partnerships, school gardens, and supportive policies.</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Install vertical hydroponic systems in schools for year-round microgreens and herbs.</li> <li>• Formalize school garden programs that supply fresh produce to cafeterias.</li> <li>• Advocate for school wellness policies to explicitly include goals for sourcing and serving fresh, local foods.</li> <li>• Work with school districts to adopt local food procurement policies that set purchasing targets for Colorado- and SLV-grown products.</li> <li>• Encourage counties to establish incentives or matching funds that support schools in purchasing local foods.</li> </ul>
	✓		✓	<p><b>ACTION 3.4.2</b></p> <p><b>Improve the nutritiousness of school meals and student engagement with school food.</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Install salad bars in every school cafeteria, stocked with farm-fresh and frozen produce.</li> <li>• Equip central kitchens for scratch cooking to make better use of existing culinary staff.</li> <li>• Add short cafeteria-based lessons tied to menu items to boost student interest and buy-in.</li> <li>• Strengthen school garden programs by involving community members and organizations to help sustain them during the summer and staff turnover.</li> </ul>
	✓	✓		<p><b>ACTION 3.4.3</b></p> <p><b>Partner with Nourish Colorado to co-write grants, share technical assistance, and rotate produce-sampling demos in schools.</b></p>



**WHY IS THIS IMPORTANT?**

Many eligible families are unaware of programs like SNAP, WIC, and summer food programs, as well as where benefits can be used. Increasing outreach and helping more retailers and producers accept SNAP and Double Up Food Bucks expands access to healthy food while supporting local businesses.

POLICY 	PROGRAM 	PARTNERSHIP 	INFRASTRUCTURE 
	✓		
<b>ACTION 3.5.1</b>			
<b>Increase enrollment in SNAP, WIC, summer feeding, and other programs by providing in-language outreach and promoting where benefits can be used, such as farmers markets, farmstands, and food hubs.</b>			
		✓	
<b>ACTION 3.5.2</b>			
<b>Help more local retailers and producers accept SNAP benefits.</b>			
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Assist farmers to take SNAP/EBT, since farmers markets will no longer qualify after 2026 per USDA.</li> <li>• Support Valley Roots Food Hub to accept SNAP and Double Up Food Bucks online.</li> </ul>			
	✓	✓	
<b>ACTION 3.5.3</b>			
<b>Partner with local youth organizations to expand summer food programs and offer more fresh, local foods.</b>			





# PRIORITY 4: ENVIRONMENT

**Goal: Promote resilient resource stewardship and prepare for the impacts of climate change.**

The San Luis Valley has long grappled with growing food and managing resources in a challenging climate, which has prompted profound resilience and adaptation. That legacy continues as more producers adopt healthy soil techniques, experiment with low-water crops, and explore renewable energy solutions on their land. There is strong community interest in becoming better stewards of key resources and some groups are already leading the way with creative, locally rooted responses to environmental changes.

At the same time, the Valley is experiencing new and intensifying environmental challenges. Rising temperatures, drought conditions, and an increasingly arid climate put pressure on the Valley's food system, land, and people. Residents across the region expressed concern about how these issues will affect agriculture, health, and livelihoods within their lifetime.

This goal focuses on building climate resilience and environmental stewardship across the Valley's food system. Strategies include supporting producers in transitioning to regenerative practices through education, peer learning, and access to funding and resources. Community members expressed a clear desire for more water conservation efforts and localized solutions to environmental challenges. The plan supports these priorities and calls for stronger collaboration between producers, governments, researchers, and youth. By weaving resilience into every part of the food system and uplifting traditional stewardship practices, the Valley can safeguard its natural resources while adapting to future climate impacts.

## OBJECTIVES AT A GLANCE

- 4.1 Provide education and resources to support transitions to regenerative and sustainable production methods.**
- 4.2 Support accessible education about water policy and practices.**
- 4.3 Encourage the use and integration of renewable energy within food system operations.**
- 4.4 Invest in localized research and monitoring on sustainability and climate resilience.**
- 4.5 Promote effective waste management and composting.**

### ACTION LENS

All food systems and infrastructure should consider incorporating renewable energy, energy efficiency, and waste reduction to ensure long-term community health.

OBJECTIVE 4.1

Provide education and resources to support transitions to regenerative and sustainable production methods.







**WHY IS THIS IMPORTANT?**

Regenerative practices improve soil health, conserve water, and strengthen resilience to drought and flood, yet few producers use them. Clear communication and locally relevant research help demonstrate economic and ecological benefits, while accessible education and hands-on support widen adoption of these practices and protect long-term farm productivity and viability.

POLICY 	PROGRAM 	PARTNERSHIP 	INFRASTRUCTURE 	
	✓			<p><b>ACTION 4.1.1</b></p> <p><b>Connect producers to grants and resources for healthy soil practices (e.g., compost, cover crop seed, crop rotation, testing services, wool-pellet use) and provide technical assistance to access them. Consider a central resource hub with technical assistance.</b></p>
	✓			<p><b>ACTION 4.1.2</b></p> <p><b>Offer ongoing producer education on soil health and water conservation practices.</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Host regular workshops on soil and water conservation practices (like Holistic Management International) with one-to-one follow-up coaching opportunities.</li> <li>• Develop video libraries showcasing conservation practices proven effective in the SLV.</li> <li>• Support peer-to-peer networks and informal mentorships for producers.</li> <li>• Use Quivira Coalition and Rio Grande Round Table convening power to host biennial field days where peer groups share successes and demonstrate new soil and water tools.</li> </ul>
	✓			<p><b>ACTION 4.1.3</b></p> <p><b>Promote lower-water crops and provide training and resources for growing them (e.g., millet, rye, hemp, indigenous crops), building on programs like the Rye Resurgence Project.</b></p>
	✓			<p><b>ACTION 4.1.4</b></p> <p><b>Establish part-time soil health facilitators to host sessions and lead localized peer-to-peer study groups. Begin with a facilitation guide and train-the-trainer workshops so each SLV county can host sessions and market it widely.</b></p>



POLICY 	PROGRAM 	PARTNERSHIP 	INFRASTRUCTURE 	
✓	✓			<p><b>ACTION 4.1.5</b></p> <p><b>Increase demand and markets for regenerative production by developing campaigns for buyers (institutions, processors, restaurants, consumers) and encouraging incentives for every regenerative practice used.</b></p>
✓	✓			<p><b>ACTION 4.1.6</b></p> <p><b>Promote practices that improve air quality and visibility, such as conscious timing of plowing and tilling.</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Provide dust-suppression workshops for water districts, including strategies such as cover crops and windbreaks.</li> <li>• Encourage counties to explore incentives for producers adopting regenerative practices (e.g., tax rebates or grants).</li> </ul>





**WHY IS THIS IMPORTANT?**

Water rules and rights are complex, and misunderstandings can lead to costly mistakes or inappropriate land use. Clear, accessible education helps residents, landowners, and realtors understand their rights and responsibilities. Improving water literacy supports better stewardship, protects limited resources, and strengthens long-term resilience.

POLICY 	PROGRAM 	PARTNERSHIP 	INFRASTRUCTURE 	
	✓			<p><b>ACTION 4.2.1</b></p> <p><b>Clarify water policy by developing online and print, in-language resources that explain state and conservation district policies for new residents.</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Educate realtors on water rights and their implications for buyers and sellers. Mandatory disclosure when someone buys land.</li> <li>• Host short Water 101 sessions to the public.</li> </ul>
		✓		<p><b>ACTION 4.2.2</b></p> <p><b>Expand groundwater conservation discussions to include more producers partnering with Rio Grande Water Conservation District (RGWCD).</b></p>
	✓			<p><b>ACTION 4.2.3</b></p> <p><b>Promote, encourage, and advertise water conservation practices at every level, from households to center-pivot operations.</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Offer incentives for adopting water-saving methods such as drip irrigation.</li> <li>• Encourage residents to install rain barrels by partnering with local suppliers, providing installation tips, and aligning with Colorado rainwater harvesting requirements.</li> </ul>



Promote responsible renewable energy development that complements agriculture and conserves water.



**WHY IS THIS IMPORTANT?**

Abundant sunlight creates opportunities for renewable energy, but development must consider the long-term ramifications to farmland, soils, and water. Educating landowners, aligning policies, and encouraging agrivoltaic models ensure energy projects support, not replace, agriculture. Thoughtful siting and revegetation can reduce costs for producers while strengthening both energy and food system resilience.

POLICY	PROGRAM	PARTNERSHIP	INFRASTRUCTURE	
	✓			<p><b>ACTION 4.3.1</b></p> <p><b>Provide education on renewable energy opportunities, especially on or near agricultural and food-producing land.</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Provide education on using photovoltaics to support community gardens, beekeeping, and homestead agriculture.</li> </ul>
✓	✓			<p><b>ACTION 4.3.2</b></p> <p><b>Incentivize solar farms and other alternative energy solutions to reduce water use.</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Support landowners in meeting Colorado’s 2030 energy goals by integrating livestock grazing and native ground cover beneath solar arrays on retired irrigated lands.</li> </ul>
✓				<p><b>ACTION 4.3.3</b></p> <p><b>Collaborate with local governments on policies supporting agrivoltaics.</b></p>
✓				<p><b>ACTION 4.3.4</b></p> <p><b>Require revegetation for solar installations.</b></p>



# OBJECTIVE 4.4

## Invest in localized research and monitoring on sustainability and climate resilience.



### WHY IS THIS IMPORTANT?

Good decisions depend on good information. Tracking local air, water, and soil conditions helps identify risks early and supports choices that protect people, wildlife, crops, and land. Partnering with schools and research institutions strengthens understanding and supports long-term stewardship and preparedness across the region.

POLICY	PROGRAM	PARTNERSHIP	INFRASTRUCTURE	
	✓			<b>ACTION 4.4.1</b> <b>Identify key climate change impacts on the SLV to inform mitigation and resilience strategies.</b>
		✓	✓	<b>ACTION 4.4.2</b> <b>Use vulnerability analyses to develop proactive monitoring systems and partner with universities and high schools for data collection.</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Encourage a regional data-sharing platform for climate and soil health monitoring, accessible to producers, researchers, and local governments.</li> </ul>
	✓			<b>ACTION 4.4.3</b> <b>Conduct SLV-specific trials on bare-soil impacts and water-retention benefits of key practices like cover cropping to produce credible local data.</b>
✓		✓		<b>ACTION 4.4.4</b> <b>Develop a drought and flood preparedness and management plan.</b>





**WHY IS THIS IMPORTANT?**

Turning organic waste into compost rebuilds soil, reduces landfill use, and cuts pollution. Expanding recycling and composting programs keeps nutrients cycling locally and supports cleaner air and water.

POLICY 	PROGRAM 	PARTNERSHIP 	INFRASTRUCTURE 	
	✓		✓	<b>ACTION 4.5.1</b>
				<b>Develop regional commercial, industrial recycling and composting programs, including a centralized SLV compost facility for farm by-products and compost distribution.</b>
	✓		✓	<b>ACTION 4.5.2</b>
				<b>Develop household recycling and composting programs along with consumer education.</b>
✓	✓	✓		<b>ACTION 4.5.3</b>
				<b>Explore and pilot cross-sector partnerships to divert food and crop waste into beneficial uses such as livestock feed, composting, or soil amendment.</b>
				<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Strengthen partnerships with area food banks to divert sub-#1 potatoes.</li> <li>• Create formal agreements with processors (e.g., Idaho Pacific, McCullough, Golden Grains) and breweries to channel surplus potatoes and spent grain into a silage and brewery-grain feed hub.</li> <li>• Create incentives for redirecting crop waste away from landfills.</li> <li>• Encourage conservation districts to pursue grants for demonstration projects that include soil testing.</li> <li>• Assess the feasibility of processing cannabis leaves into edible or juice products for human consumption.</li> </ul>



# 44 PLAN IMPLEMENTATION AND HOW TO GET INVOLVED

## WHAT'S NEXT

This Action Plan is designed to be a working document. It is not a one-time report, but a shared roadmap that can guide coordinated action, investment, and accountability over the coming years. With the Action Plan complete and priority strategies identified, the next phase focuses on implementation.

## SIGNING UP FOR IMPLEMENTATION

The San Luis Valley Local Foods Coalition (LFC) is already advancing many of the strategies outlined in this plan through its existing programs and partnerships. Based on current capacity and alignment with organizational priorities, LFC has committed to implementing approximately one-quarter of the recommended actions. These include efforts related to local food aggregation and distribution, producer support, community food access, education, and systems-level coordination.

Over the next three to six months, LFC will lead a structured outreach process to identify additional implementing partners for the remaining action items. This process will focus on organizations, agencies,

businesses, producers, and community leaders who are well-positioned to advance specific actions based on their mission, expertise, and geographic reach. Participation is voluntary, and the intent is to match strategies with partners who have genuine interest and capacity to lead or co-lead the work.

Once implementation commitments are confirmed, LFC will play a convening and support role. This includes helping partners interpret the action plan, connecting them to relevant data from the 2024 SLV Community Food and Agricultural Assessment, facilitating coordination across efforts, and tracking progress over time. Progress tracking will be practical and transparent, emphasizing learning and adaptation rather than compliance.

## POLICY, SYSTEMS, AND ENVIRONMENT CHANGE

In addition to direct programmatic work, the Action Plan identifies the need for advancing policy, systems, and environment changes. These approaches aim to create durable conditions that make it easier for local food and agriculture efforts to succeed over time, rather than relying solely on short-term projects.



Potential next steps in this area may include deeper engagement with local and county governments, regional agencies, and institutional partners to address issues such as land access, water use, food procurement, zoning, workforce development, and energy and infrastructure needs. One potential pathway under consideration is the formation of a San Luis Valley Food Policy Council or a similar coordinating body. Such a structure could provide a forum for cross-sector collaboration, policy analysis, and sustained community input, while complementing existing efforts rather than duplicating them.

## USING THE PLAN TO ADVANCE FUNDING AND INVESTMENT

Implementing partners are encouraged to use both this Action Plan and the Assessment as justification and supporting documentation when seeking funding or other resources. Together, these reports demonstrate that proposed projects are grounded in community-identified needs, informed by regional data, and aligned with a shared vision for the San Luis Valley food system.

The plan is intentionally designed to support a wide range of funding approaches, including public, philanthropic, and private investment. While grant funding will continue to play an important role, long-term implementation will require diversified financing strategies that support infrastructure, policy change, and sustainable operations.

To support this work, the Council for Development Finance Agencies (CDFA) developed a [Food Systems Financing Map](#) for the San Luis Valley. This tool identifies a range of potential financing mechanisms that can be used to support food system projects, including loans, tax credits, public financing tools, and blended finance approaches.

The Financing Map is intended to help partners think creatively about how to fund implementation beyond traditional grants. It can be used to explore opportunities for infrastructure investment, business development, land access, and other capital-intensive needs that are critical to strengthening the regional food system.

## HOW COMMUNITY MEMBERS CAN GET INVOLVED

This Action Plan depends on broad participation to be successful. Community members, food producers, businesses, and organizations can engage in several ways:

- Sign on as an implementing or supporting partner for specific strategies that align with your work or interests.
- Use the plan as a reference when developing projects, grant applications, or internal priorities related to food and agriculture.
- Participate in convenings, working groups, or pilot efforts that emerge from implementation activities.
- Share feedback and lessons learned as strategies are tested and refined over time.

The LFC will continue to serve as a point of contact for those interested in engaging with implementation efforts and will provide updates as the work progresses, including opportunities to revisit and refine strategies over time.

**BUSINESS INCUBATION**

Programs or services that help new or early-stage food and farm businesses get started and grow. This can include shared space, training, mentorship, and help with planning, financing, and regulations.

**CLIMATE CHANGE**

Refers to any significant change in measures of climate (such as temperature, precipitation, or wind) lasting for an extended period (decades or longer).

**COORDINATED REGIONAL PURCHASING**

An approach where multiple buyers work together to purchase food, often from local producers. By coordinating orders, buyers can make purchasing more efficient, create more reliable markets for farmers, and keep food dollars in the region.

**CO-PACKING**

An arrangement where a business hires another facility to produce, package, or label its food products. Co-packers allow food businesses to scale production without building their own processing facilities.

**COMMISSARY KITCHEN**

A shared, licensed commercial kitchen that food entrepreneurs can rent to prepare, cook, or process food. Commissary kitchens help reduce startup costs and provide access to equipment that small businesses may not own.

**COMMUNITY GARDEN**

Collaborative projects on shared open spaces where participants share in the maintenance and products of the garden.

**COVER CROPS**

Plants grown primarily to protect and improve soil rather than for harvest. Cover crops help reduce erosion, retain moisture, add nutrients to the soil, and improve long-term soil health.

**CULTURALLY RELEVANT FOOD**

Food that reflects and respects the traditions, identities, and preferences of the people who eat it. It may include regionally specific crops, particular ingredients, growing and harvesting practices, preparation methods, and eating practices that connect to a specific community's culture and history.

**FARM TO INSTITUTION**

Connections between local farms and large organizations such as schools, hospitals, and universities. The goal is to bring fresh, local, healthy food into these settings while supporting local farmers and strengthening the local economy.

**FARM VIABILITY**

A farm's ability to sustain long-term production and undergo succession, including transferring ownership of assets, operations, and management.

**FOOD BUSINESS**

A locally or regionally based enterprise involved in growing, raising, processing, aggregating, packaging, distributing, preparing, or selling food. This includes producers, processors, retailers, restaurants, food hubs, and other value-chain businesses that contribute to the local foodshed and economy.

**FOOD HUB**

A business or organization that aggregates, stores, processes, and distributes food from multiple local producers to buyers such as grocery stores, institutions, restaurants, and food pantries.

**FOOD RETAILER**

A business that sells food directly to consumers for off-site consumption. This includes grocery stores, markets, corner stores, food hubs, food co-ops, and other retail outlets that stock and sell food products.

**FOOD SECURITY**

Having reliable access to enough affordable, nutritious food to support an active and healthy life. Food security means people do not have to worry about running out of food or skipping meals.

**FORWARD CONTRACTING**

An agreement made in advance between a producer and a buyer that sets terms such as price, quantity, and delivery before food is grown or harvested. Forward contracting can reduce risk for farmers and provide buyers with a more predictable supply.

**GLEANING**

The practice of collecting leftover crops from fields, gardens, or markets after harvest, often to donate to food pantries or community organizations. Gleaning helps reduce food waste and increase access to fresh food.

**GOOD AGRICULTURAL PRACTICES (GAP)**

Voluntary food safety standards that help farmers reduce the risk of contamination during growing, harvesting, packing, and storage. GAP certification is often required to sell to schools, institutions, or wholesale buyers.

**GROUNDWATER CONSERVATION**

Efforts to protect and manage underground water supplies so they are not overused or depleted. This can include reducing pumping, improving irrigation efficiency, and restoring aquifer levels.

**PRODUCER**

Farmers, ranchers, and growers who raise crops, livestock for food and fiber. This includes operations of all scales and production types, such as vegetable farms, dairies, beekeepers, grain producers, seed growers, and rangeland operations.

**REGENERATIVE AGRICULTURE**

Farming and ranching practices that focus on restoring soil health, conserving water, supporting ecosystems, and building resilience to climate impacts, while maintaining productive and profitable operations.

**SUPPLEMENTAL NUTRITION ASSISTANCE PROGRAM (SNAP)**

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.

**TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE**

Hands-on support, guidance, or expertise provided to farmers, ranchers, or food businesses to help them solve problems, comply with regulations, access funding, or improve operations.

**VALUE CHAIN**

All the steps involved in getting food from the farm to the consumer, including growing, processing, storage, distribution, marketing, and sales. Each step adds value to the final product.

**WATER CONSERVATION DISTRICT**

A local or regional public entity that helps manage and protect water resources. These districts often provide education, technical support, and programs to support efficient and sustainable water use.

**WOMEN, INFANTS AND CHILDREN (WIC)**

The WIC 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.



# EDUCATION & ENGAGEMENT

## Goal: Engage individuals and communities in the food system, expanding knowledge and skills.

### OBJECTIVE 1.1. Increase public engagement in the food system and demand for local food through education, partnerships, and marketing.

- 1.1.1. Offer more community events that connect people to the Valley's food system and celebrate its cultural food traditions.
- 1.1.2. Develop marketing campaigns and partnerships that highlight community food assets such as farmers markets, food hubs, CSAs, farm parks, commercial kitchens, and community gardens, using multilingual and culturally relevant materials to reach diverse communities.
- 1.1.3. Expand public education on the benefits of buying local foods for individuals, communities, and the Valley as a whole.

### OBJECTIVE 1.2. Support workforce development and career opportunities in the food system for youth and adults.

- 1.2.1. Collaborate with regional and county economic development offices to align food system career pathways with workforce needs, and support job fairs, job boards, and training programs.
- 1.2.2. Support extracurricular youth programs or internships that provide education and career pathways in the food system.
- 1.2.3. Promote school-based opportunities to learn about small business operations within the food system.

### OBJECTIVE 1.3. Support youth gardening and nutrition education.

- 1.3.1. Conduct an asset map or assessment of school and youth organization infrastructure (e.g., grow domes, greenhouses, gardens, programs, hornos) to integrate into curricula.
- 1.3.2. Increase opportunities for kids and teens to experience local food system values and fall in love with agriculture, farms, ranches, and the outdoors through field trips and farm tours.
- 1.3.3. Develop and implement culturally relevant cooking, nutrition, and food system curriculum for all grade levels.
- 1.3.4. Develop extracurricular cooking, gardening, and nutrition programs aligned with school schedules (e.g., after school, weekends).

### OBJECTIVE 1.4. Provide education and resources for home food production, food preparation, and disaster preparedness.

- 1.4.1. Offer in-person and virtual workshops, tours, and camps that teach essential food cultivation and preservation skills.
- 1.4.2. Convene a seasonal "Garden Guild" of volunteers, AmeriCorps and Extension interns, and site coordinators to collaborate on garden efforts.
- 1.4.3. Work with county and regional emergency managers to strengthen disaster preparedness for food and water distribution, including coordinated storage, refrigeration, electricity backup, and communication systems.
- 1.4.4. Expand public education on household emergency preparedness, like having three days of food and water on hand.
- 1.4.5. Develop and promote a planting guide for what grows well and when in the SLV.
- 1.4.6. Expand public education on hunting, foraging, and fishing.
- 1.4.7. Create a lending library for tools and seeds.

### OBJECTIVE 1.5. Strengthen community capacity to advance food and agriculture policy, systems, and environmental change.

- 1.5.1. Conduct a policy scan of existing food and agriculture policies to identify opportunities and gaps relevant to the SLV.
- 1.5.2. Explore creating a regional Food Policy Council to coordinate advocacy, align priorities, and elevate community voices.
- 1.5.3. Provide civic engagement training to help residents participate effectively in local decision-making processes, and develop a community engagement toolkit (e.g., plain-language briefs, visual explainers) to make policy and systems issues more accessible.
- 1.5.4. Build partnerships with local governments and institutions and encourage collaborative advocacy campaigns that unite producers, food businesses, nonprofits, and residents around shared food system policy goals.

# PRODUCER & FOOD BUSINESS OPPORTUNITIES



**Goal: Support agricultural producers and food businesses, and grow a thriving local food and farm economy.**

## **OBJECTIVE 2.1. Strengthen regional food system infrastructure and distribution networks.**

- 2.1.1.** Support regional processing capacity by investing in new or expanded facilities, while encouraging the integration of renewable energy, energy efficiency, and waste reduction where possible.
- 2.1.2.** Help small producers and food businesses scale up value-added products and find new markets.
- 2.1.3.** Partner with local governments to support producers and food businesses through policy and land-use code updates.

## **OBJECTIVE 2.2. Expand funding opportunities, business support services, and technical assistance for producers and food businesses.**

- 2.2.1.** Expand cost-share programs, incentives, and grants to improve farm viability (e.g., Soil Health Program).
- 2.2.2.** Increase awareness of business support resources and funding opportunities by developing centralized information hubs and resource guides that provide multilingual, culturally relevant, and accessible support for producers of all backgrounds.
- 2.2.3.** Strengthen dialogue and coordination among land stewards, producers, and CSU Extension to expand research and technical assistance on relevant issues.
- 2.2.4.** Facilitate voluntary USDA Good Agricultural Practices (GAP) compliance and traceability.
- 2.2.5.** Support food businesses in accessing resources through things like co-ops, matchmaking events, and grant program assistance.

## **OBJECTIVE 2.3. Increase access to affordable agricultural land and support succession planning for producers and food businesses.**

- 2.3.1.** Assist producers with generational succession planning resources and services.
- 2.3.2.** Advocate for turning inactive cannabis greenhouses into year-round vegetable production.
- 2.3.3.** Rio Grande Farm Park continues to offer commercial and family plots to farmers.
- 2.3.4.** Streamline permitting for greenhouses and innovative farming projects.

## **OBJECTIVE 2.4. Support a thriving, sustainable ranching economy.**

- 2.4.1.** Support ranchers in effectively managing wildlife conflicts.
- 2.4.2.** Offer technical assistance and education for ranchers on working with beef processors.
- 2.4.3.** Support ranchers in developing processing partnerships that help them scale, such as cooperative ownership or “buy-in” agreements at processing facilities.



### **OBJECTIVE 3.1. Expand coordinated regional purchasing of local foods.**

- 3.1.1.** Help businesses and institutions with marketing and menu development to showcase local foods, cuisines, and recipes.
- 3.1.2.** Strengthen regional value chain coordination and support institutions and restaurants in sourcing more local food.
- 3.1.3.** Advocate for incentives that encourage institutions, restaurants, and food businesses to purchase local and regional foods.

### **OBJECTIVE 3.2. Develop innovative programs that improve community food access, health, and well-being.**

- 3.2.1.** Address physical and transportation barriers to accessing local and nourishing food.
- 3.2.2.** Support buyers – from consumers to small retailers – in increasing their purchasing power.
- 3.2.3.** Establish work-trade and community harvest programs.
- 3.2.4.** Use strategic partnerships, programs, and policy to connect food to health.

### **OBJECTIVE 3.3. Strengthen and support SLV food banks and pantries.**

- 3.3.1.** Increase procurement of fresh, local produce to area food banks and pantries.
- 3.3.2.** Develop a regional food pantry coalition that hosts regular meetings to coordinate efforts.
- 3.3.3.** Increase recruitment and training of food bank and pantry volunteers to better serve client needs.

### **OBJECTIVE 3.4. Support Farm to School initiatives.**

- 3.4.1.** Increase the amount of local food served in K–12 schools through partnerships, school gardens, and supportive policies.
- 3.4.2.** Improve the nutritiousness of school meals and student engagement with school food.
- 3.4.3.** Partner with Nourish Colorado to co-write grants, share technical assistance, and rotate produce-sampling demos in schools.

### **OBJECTIVE 3.5. Improve awareness of and access to food assistance programs.**

- 3.5.1.** Increase enrollment in SNAP, WIC, summer feeding, and other programs by providing in-language outreach and promoting where benefits can be used, such as farmers markets, farmstands, and food hubs.
- 3.5.2.** Help more local retailers and producers accept SNAP benefits.
- 3.5.3.** Partner with local youth organizations (e.g., Boys & Girls Club, Monte Vista Kid Connection) to expand summer food programs and offer more fresh, local foods.



## Promote resilient resource stewardship and prepare for the impacts of climate change.

### OBJECTIVE 4.1. Provide education and resources to support transitions to regenerative and sustainable production methods.

- 4.1.1. Connect producers to grants and resources for healthy soil practices (e.g., compost, cover crop seed, crop rotation, testing services, wool-pellet use) and provide technical assistance to access them. Consider a central resource hub with technical assistance.
- 4.1.2. Offer ongoing producer education on soil health and water conservation practices.
- 4.1.3. Promote lower-water crops and provide training and resources for growing them (e.g., millet, rye, hemp, indigenous crops), building on programs like the Rye Resurgence Project.
- 4.1.4. Establish part-time soil health facilitators to host sessions and lead localized peer-to-peer study groups. Begin with a facilitation guide and “train-the-trainer” workshops so each SLV county can host sessions and market it widely.
- 4.1.5. Increase demand and markets for regenerative production by developing campaigns for buyers (institutions, processors, restaurants, consumers) and encouraging incentives for every regenerative practice used.
- 4.1.6. Promote practices that improve air quality and visibility, such as conscious timing of plowing and tilling.

### OBJECTIVE 4.2. Support accessible education about water policy and practices.

- 4.2.1. Clarify water policy by developing online and print, in-language resources that explain state and conservation district policies for new residents.
- 4.2.2. Expand groundwater conservation discussions to include more producers partnering with RGWCD.
- 4.2.3. Promote, encourage and advertise water conservation practices at every level, from households to center-pivot operations.

### OBJECTIVE 4.3. Promote responsible renewable energy development that complements agriculture and conserves water.

- 4.3.1. Provide education on renewable energy opportunities, especially on or near agricultural and food-producing land.
- 4.3.2. Incentivize solar farms and other alternative energy solutions to reduce water use.
- 4.3.3. Collaborate with local governments on policies supporting agrivoltaics.
- 4.3.4. Require revegetation for solar installations.

### OBJECTIVE 4.4. Invest in localized research and monitoring on sustainability and climate resilience.

- 4.4.1. Identify key climate change impacts on the SLV to inform mitigation and resilience strategies.
- 4.4.2. Use vulnerability analyses to develop proactive monitoring systems and partner with universities and high schools for data collection.
- 4.4.3. Conduct SLV-specific trials on bare-soil impacts and water-retention benefits of key practices like cover cropping to produce credible local data.
- 4.4.4. Develop a drought and flood preparedness and management plan.

### OBJECTIVE 4.5. Promote effective waste management and composting.

- 4.5.1. Develop regional commercial, industrial recycling and composting programs, including a centralized SLV compost facility for farm by-products and compost distribution.
- 4.5.2. Develop household recycling and composting programs along with consumer education (e.g., virtual resources, in-language materials, starter kits).
- 4.5.3. Explore and pilot cross-sector partnerships to divert food and crop waste into beneficial uses such as livestock feed, composting, or soil amendment.

## State and Federal Program and Policy Recommendations

### PRODUCER & FOOD BUSINESS OPPORTUNITIES

- Advocate for Mandatory Country of Origin Labeling (MCOOL) which requires all meat labels to clearly state where the animal was born, raised, and slaughtered.
- Prioritize mountain pass and regional road maintenance along key agricultural distribution routes, including those used by potato trucks and farm equipment.
- Encourage governments and foundations to offer funding opportunities such as grants, tax credits, and low-interest loans with broad eligibility for diverse food businesses, including dairies, bakeries, greenhouses, canneries, and seed farms.
- Simplify wolf depredation reporting and compensation processes, provide additional assistance to ranchers, and allow ranchers to manage wolves in ways comparable to coyote management.
- Consider waiving or subsidizing GAP audits for ranchers integrating field-to-fork traceability.
- Advocate for tighter rules to ensure Colorado Proud labeling accurately reflects products that are grown versus just processed in Colorado.

### FOOD ACCESS

- Advocate for funding for food banks and pantries, along with supportive policies at the state and federal levels.
- Pilot a universal basic income program.
- Increase state minimum wage to at least \$18 per hour
- Advocate for cities and counties to adopt higher local minimum wages, as permitted since 2020.
- Amend Colorado Department of Education rules to allow non-BOCES districts to allocate more than 20% of their budgets to local foods.
- Work with the Colorado Department of Education and Nourish Colorado to define “local” as statewide Colorado, ensuring consistent eligibility across school districts.

### ENVIRONMENT

- Encourage the state to offer subsidies for regenerative crops and practices.
- Compensate producers for ecosystem services (e.g., vehicle loan credits).
- Legalize water catchment for community gardens, farms, and ranches.
- Reconsider the state’s “use it or lose it” water policy.
- Encourage the use of water-free toilets.
- Advocate for the continuation of Colorado’s Soil Health Program (via Colorado Department of Agriculture) and Climate Smart Commodities grants, and establish a standing budget line for key elements such as peer-to-peer facilitation.
- Provide technical support for the conversion of conventional farmland to organic or regenerative systems.
- Create a state-level regenerative agriculture certification and traceability program.
- Fully fund and staff the Circular Colorado recycling model under RCRA (Resource Conservation and Recovery Act) to expand materials recovery facilities, drop sites, and curbside pickup across all San Luis Valley counties.

### PHOTO CREDITS

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