

Impact

Colorado State University
Extension

Sharing the difference CSU Extension makes in people's lives and their communities.

Business training prepares beginning farmers for direct market success

Not all beginning farmers understand the financial and production risks of growing and selling food locally. To help new farmers in Boulder County succeed, CSU Extension has created a successful business training program that has expanded around the state and the West.

Issue

Boulder County supports one of the strongest local food movements in the state with sales from farmers' markets alone generating almost \$4 million in 2009. Demand for locally grown food both at home and in restaurants has inspired a new generation of 'market farmers'—many with no agricultural background—who grow and sell vegetables, fruit, eggs, meat, dairy and other products directly to consumers and chefs. Often, these newcomers start farming without an awareness of the financial risks unique to their business.

Extension's Response

In 2007, Boulder County conceived and debuted a new business training program to help new farmers better manage their risks and succeed. Through a series of eight evening classes, *Building Farmers—Market Farm Track* helps farmers develop and refine their business management and marketing skills while also building community. Dinners featuring locally grown food were served before class to help farmers develop a strong camaraderie so they could learn from each other in a supportive environment. At the end of the course farmers presented business plans and then received feedback from peers and teachers on the feasibility, shortfalls, and strengths of each plan.



The Bottom Line

- CSU Extension is helping a new generation of market farmers acquire the business skills and financial risk management strategies they need to succeed.
- As a result of participating in *Building Farmers*, new farmers are strengthening local food systems.
- Building Farmers is growing a new and vital generation of farmers at a time when fewer individuals are choosing farming as an occupation.

By the Numbers

- Total farmers trained since 2007: 84
- Percent of farmers who would recommend class to others: 100%
- Percent encouraged to follow their farming dreams: 95%
- Cost to participate: \$80 - \$200

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Survey results from three years of *Building Farmers* in Boulder County show the course is providing inexperienced, direct market farmers with the skills, resources and confidence they need to financially succeed. As a result, farmers are expanding their production and management know-how, developing new markets, and making more food available for direct sale at farmer's markets, produce stands, restaurants, and through farm member shares and other venues.

Building Farmers has also created farmer networks that extend learning into the field where participants share expertise and resources. In fact, *Building Farmers* now includes a companion learning track, *Market Farm Mentorship*, which pairs new farmers with experienced ones who have similar scale operations to accelerate learning and foster community.

In 2009, *Building Farmers* expanded to four other Colorado counties through funding from the Western Center for Risk Management Education. Statewide, the program is now called *Colorado Building Farmers*, which offers both a Market Farm Track and a Mentorship Track. Lastly, the program's overall success has captured national attention by receiving a three-year, \$748,000 grant from the USDA Beginning Farmer and Rancher Development Program to create *Building Farmers In The West*. The six-state *Building Farmers* program will train producers in Colorado, Idaho, Oregon, New Mexico, Nevada and Washington to successfully enter and compete in emerging markets through classroom and experiential learning.

“Now doing this seems possible, if difficult and chancy. I feel I have a much better grasp of what will make my future operation successful. This has included a great deal of the skills I've been looking to learn and probably wouldn't find anywhere else.”

– 2009 *Building Farmers*
Participant

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