

Impact

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

Building Farmers: Helping new farmers manage risk and succeed

CSU Extension expanded its successful new farmer training program from Boulder County to the state's remote southwestern corner in 2009 to help farmers more effectively manage their business and production risks.

Issue

Durango and the surrounding La Plata County area has one of the strongest local food movements in the state, generating an estimated \$130 million in sales of locally grown food. A new generation of farmers, many with little to no agricultural background, have stepped in to meet this demand for locally grown food at farmers' markets and in schools, restaurants, and grocery stores. These newcomers often start farming without an awareness of the business risks unique to their enterprise.

Extension's Response

To help farms better manage their risks and succeed, CSU Extension created a business training program that debuted in Boulder County in 2007 as *Building Farmers*. In 2008, the program expanded to La Plata County as *Colorado Building Farmers*. Through a series of eight evening classes, farmers learned to 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 2008: 29
- Percent of farmers who would recommend class to others: 100%
- Cost to participate: \$180

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The first year survey results of *Building Farmers* in La Plata County show the course is providing inexperienced, direct market farmers with the skills, resources and confidence they need to succeed. One hundred percent of survey respondents indicated the class had encouraged them to implement more detailed record keeping, create or edit a business plan, and continue farming. 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 and produce stands, in restaurants and schools, and through farm member shares and other venues.

Building Farmers has also created farmer-to-farmer networks that extend learning into the field where participants share expertise and resources. Collaborative networks play an important role in educating farmers and ranchers because the region's environmental extremes contribute to a short, variable, and inconsistent growing season.

In 2009, *Colorado Building Farmers* expanded to three other Colorado counties through funding from the Western Center for Risk Management Education. 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.

"This is the best thing that could have happened to us. The people we met and the information we learned are going to guide us throughout this experience for many years to come."

– Paul and Krii Black
2009 Building Farmers participants

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