

Impact

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

Community development through local food

Emphasis on local food production and food access has created a broad community development platform that is generating both economic and social benefits.

Issue

La Plata County citizens are committed to increasing the health, wellness, and prosperity of the region's people and communities. Educational programs and events that develop new opportunities for learning about active lifestyles, local foods, and regional food security have proved successful in achieving these goals.

Extension's Response

For nearly a decade, Colorado State University Extension in La Plata County has promoted community development by increasing awareness of and access to local foods. Darrin Parmenter, La Plata County Extension director and horticulture agent, Wendy Rice, family and consumer science agent, and Greg Felsen, 4-H youth development agent, have all created programs that support this goal.

La Plata County Extension has partnered extensively with *Healthy Lifestyle La Plata*, *Growing Partners of Southwest Colorado* and *The Garden Project of Southwest Colorado* to address issues of food security and promote local foods and healthy lifestyles (see page 2). Recent La Plata County Extension programs—some affiliated with one or more of the organizations mentioned above—include:

- Annual 'agritainment' events: *Tour de Farms*, a daylong bike tour of local farms and gardens; *Iron Horse Chef*, a cook-off series featuring local chefs and Farmers' Market produce; and *Homegrown Apple Days Festival*, a fall harvest and cider-making celebration.
- Produce Bounty: A new initiative that provides federal food assistance participants (SNAP-ED) with fresh, donated garden produce and cooking demonstrations.
- Backyard Food Production: An annual series of CSU Extension classes on growing and preserving food.
- Colorado Building Farmers: A bi-annual farmer education program that teaches the business side of successful farm operations.
- Neighborhood Days: Annual 4-H-sponsored community gatherings that feature local foods.
- Increased use of local meat and produce at the 4-H BBQ fundraiser, an annual county fair event.
- Colorado Master Gardener (CMG) help develop and maintain school and neighborhood gardens, and develop garden-related K-12 curriculum.



The Bottom Line

- La Plata County has become a statewide leader in promoting healthy lifestyles, local foods, and regional food security. The United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) defines food security as the ability by all people at all times to have access to enough food for an active, healthy life.
- CSU Extension and its partners have created a broad community development platform that is generating social and economic benefits.

By the Numbers

- La Plata County population: 51,655
- Percent of Durango School District K-12 schools with salad bars that offer local produce: 100
- Calculation of annual revenue that would be generated locally if every county household spent \$10/week on local foods: \$7.5 million

Impact

La Plata County has become a statewide leader in promoting healthy lifestyles, local foods, and regional food security. Educational programs and events developed by La Plata County Extension and more than 20 partner organizations have led to this leadership role. Together, they have created a broad community development platform that is generating social and economic benefits:

Increased self-sufficiency

- Extension-led programs in backyard food production and food preservation—along with Colorado Master Gardener volunteer efforts to establish community and school gardens—provide county residents with the knowledge and skills to have more control over what they eat and when they eat it.
- Extension partners with *Cooking Matters*, a nonprofit organization teaching families how to make healthy and affordable meals.
- 4-H youth programs develop agricultural and business literacy. Members interested in livestock and food production learn the economics behind selling, marketing, and distributing to local buyers.

Improved access to healthy and local foods

- *Produce Bounty*, which launched in fall 2011, expanded community efforts to increase healthy, local food access to low-income individuals and families.
- *Backyard Food Production*, *Iron Horse Chef*, *Homegrown Apple Days Festival*, *Tour de Farms*, and *Cooking Matters* combine to raise community awareness about the social and economic benefits of growing and purchasing healthy and local foods.
 - Since 2007, more than 4,000 people have participated in these programs and events.
 - 77 percent of respondents to a 2011 *Iron Horse Chef* survey said they were more likely to try a recipe that included healthy local foods as a result of the event; 90 percent said they were more likely to go to a restaurant that highlighted healthy local foods.

A robust local food system that is contributing to regional economic development

- La Plata County Extension developed '*Local Food Connection*' in partnership with *Growing Partners of Southwest Colorado*. The meet-and-greet event helps farmers, ranchers, and commercial food buyers form potential business relationships.
 - As a result of this event, Durango School District 9-R now buys 100% of their ground beef from a local, organic producer which means that local money stays local. The school district has become a state leader in the farm-to-school movement.
- *Colorado Building Farmers* teaches beginning, direct market farmers how to identify appropriate markets, evaluate financial needs of production plans and address risks; this know-how helps growers increase sales, expand operations, and succeed.
- 4-H projects help youth contribute to the local economy by increasing their business and agricultural production skills, and developing an entrepreneurial spirit.

Colorado State University Extension, U.S. Department of Agriculture and Colorado counties cooperating. Extension programs are available to all without discrimination. July 2012. Written by Carol Busch.

“It has been important for La Plata County Extension 4-H to be a part of the promotion of local foods and healthy lifestyles. Our youth are seeing how gaining skills in agricultural, business and other 4-H projects fosters an entrepreneurial spirit and can build our local economy.”

– Greg Felsen, La Plata County Extension
4-H youth development agent

Partners in Community Development

La Plata County Extension has partnered with organizations and coalitions to address food security and promote local foods and healthy lifestyles. Here's a small sample of the partners who have made a difference:

- *Healthy Lifestyle La Plata*—This *LiveWell Colorado*-funded coalition of nonprofit organizations and agencies has advanced local foods, active lifestyles, and worksite wellness. Extension has been a partner from the beginning. The program sunsets in 2013.
- *Growing Partners of Southwest Colorado*—A group of nonprofits and service agencies dedicated to sustainable local food programs. www.growingpartners.org
- *The Garden Project of Southwest Colorado*—A nonprofit that promotes community and youth development through gardening. www.thegardenprojectswcolorado.org

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