

Denver Metro Producers' Summit

December 3, 2018

SUMMARY REPORT

Executive Summary

Small-scale urban farmers in the Denver Metro Area are continually facing increased challenges to their livelihoods: development pressures and rising land values resulting from a rapidly growing population; short-term land leases and uncertain land-tenure, resulting in higher risk of losses in capital investments made to the land; inability to participate in regional food distribution systems due to smaller yields and lack of centralized collection/distribution systems; diminishing institutional farming knowledge as older farmers retire; the overall lack of basic skills necessary to run a successful farm with no full-service farmer education programs available to fill the gap; and, the absence of a cohesive voice for producers in the political and economic arenas of Denver.

To form a collective of local producers that could begin to address these challenges, a group of over 60 Denver Metro Area farmers gathered together, created a unified voice and vision, and began to chart a viable path toward success for small-scale producers in Denver. The conversation focused on brainstorming a desirable future for urban agriculture and identified six near-term priorities to be addressed through Action Committees, as identified below:

- Food Justice/Food Access for All: Ensuring equitable access to healthy, locally produced food for all communities.
- Producer Co-op/Food Hub: Building a small-scale farmer distribution network.
- Producer-Only Farmers Markets: Advocating for farmers markets that prioritize local farmers and local food.
- Farmer-to-Farmer Education: Developing peer-to-peer education and collaboration networks.
- Strategic Partnerships: Developing partnerships to support marketing, sales, and other collective needs.
- Land Access: Identifying and securing land in perpetuity for agricultural production within the Denver Metro Area.

Going forward, the working groups will meet regularly with the intent of strategizing solutions to the specific challenges facing farmers in metro Denver. The near-term goal for all working groups will be to realize the respective desired future for urban agriculture within five years.

For more information regarding the Summit or the report, please email denverproducerssummit@gmail.com.

Overview

The Denver Metro Producers Summit (Summit) brought together approximately 60 producers from around the Denver Metro Area to discuss shared needs and challenges as urban/peri-urban farmers and to explore collaborative, inclusive, and just structures to meet those needs. The Producers' Summit was organized by a Steering Committee of metro area farmers and farmer-supporters that began collaborating in the fall of 2018 to develop and organize the event.

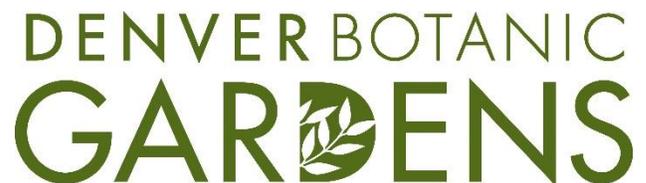
The “Denver Metro Area” was loosely defined as the areas from Brighton to Larkspur, and Jefferson County to Bennett, although producers could self-select whether they consider themselves part of the Denver Metro Area food system.



The Summit Steering Committee limited attendance to producers only, with the intent of placing producers at the center of conversations focused on building the local food system while offering an opportunity for producers to focus specifically on farmers' needs and challenges. This initial gathering of producers expressed an intent to expand collaboration to the many organizations and individuals working on local food systems, and to convene a Producers' Summit annually in December.

Support

The Producers and Summit Steering Committee would like to thank the RMFU Cooperative Development Center, CSU Extension, and Denver Botanic Gardens for providing breakfast, lunch and snacks (all of which were purchased or donated locally!); thank you to the Jefferson County Public Health Department for providing funding for Spanish interpretation by the Community Language Co-op; and, a special thanks to Denver Botanic Gardens for providing the space for the event.



Event Structure

The Summit was facilitated by Elaine Granata of Granata Farms, who is both a long-time Denver-area farmer and a professional facilitator. Search Conference, the facilitation model used, is designed as a highly participatory and grassroots process. Participants are first asked to identify the trends, events, and forces affecting them. They are then asked to envision a probable future given those trends, events, and forces, and finally to envision a desired future based upon all the collective needs being met. Following is a summary of that process as it occurred during the 2018 Producers' Summit.

Trends, events and forces

The gathered farmers brainstormed together several dozen trends, events, and forces shaping agriculture in the Denver Metro Area. Please refer to Appendix A for a full list, as the discussion below only refers to those carried forward for the five-year desired future.

Probable Future

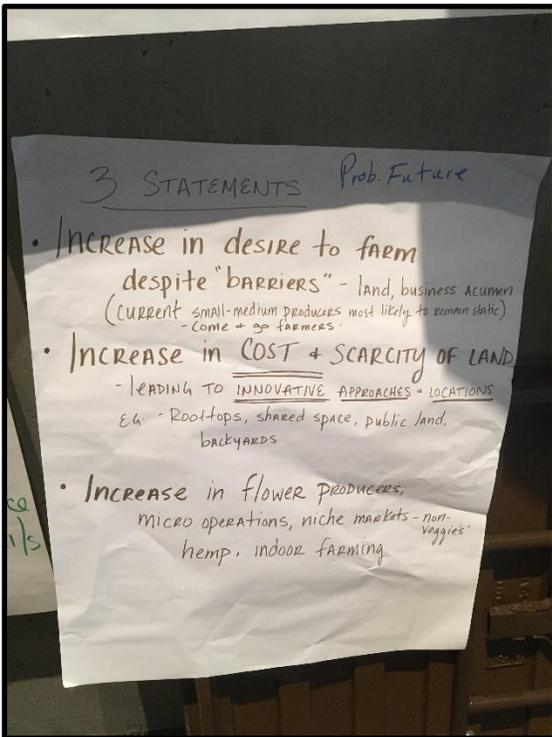
The following points communicate the concerns for small-scale farmers moving forward with the status-quo (i.e. no collective voice or function) that arose during discussions regarding the probable future of agriculture in Denver.

- Witness a “revolving door” of farmers due to **lack of training, understanding, and long-term local support**
 - **Farmers' markets consist primarily of craft shows**, with the relevance of farmers markets already in question.
 - There are some Farm-to-table commitments among restaurants, but **use of convenient distribution systems prevail** instead; the majority of purchasing for local restaurants

“Is it really a “farmers market” if no local producers are present? Why have a farmers market if the market doesn’t support local farmers?”

is from larger regional and national distributors, not from local producers.

- Conventional distribution models **erase the connection between producer and consumer.**
- Increased **scarcity of agricultural land** and water rights.
- **Increase in cost** and scarcity of land, leading to innovative approaches and locations such as rooftops, shared space, public land, and back yards.



- **Increase in corporate farms** and the fiber industry backed by out of state investment with potential negative impacts to the environment and food quality.

- **Non-profit and/or non-traditional programming will continue**, offering education, urban solutions and food access work

- No growth in for-profit farms
- Increase in subsidized, large-scale agriculture
- Majority of future urban farms will appear as small, isolated “passion projects” (both for-profit and non-profit)
- Increase in flower producers, micro operations, niche markets such as non-veggies, hemp, indoor farming, and controlled-environment agriculture

- **Lack of cultural diversity** and cohesiveness between cultural farming groups.

- External, non-farmer organization efforts that **may exclude small local farms** (i.e. National Western Center)

“Will farming be a long-term career choice for future generations?”

Desired Future

The following seven points outline the desired future of agriculture in Denver by 2023. Participants selected these seven from a longer list of brainstormed ideas. See Appendix B for full list.

1. Land Access

- Farmers easily own their own land.
- Affordable and abundant land and water access for specialty crop production and livestock.
- Local municipalities and land trusts support purchasing and preservation of agricultural land for environmentally-sound farming.
- We have a Colorado land trust for agriculture.
- Incentives for retiring farmers and assistance for new farmers.
- Viable LandLink-type program to connect farmers with money and resources currently available.

2. Culture and Economy of Local Food

We would like to see an increase in local food purchasing by 20% by 2023 driven by:

- Restaurants commit to 20% locally sourced ingredients
- Consumers demand increases in local food offerings
- Policies that require and/or encourage institutional procurement to commit to local food sourcing
- Government-provided incentives for local food purchasing.
- Programs that communicate a product is local (i.e. stickers, certification).

3. Coordinated Public Agency Support for Urban Agriculture

- Marketing support from and the development of an urban agriculture department within Colorado Department of Agriculture (CDA).
- Urban agriculture included in disaster relief plans from the Colorado Department of Public Health & Environment.
- Urban agriculture support from local public health departments.
- Local zoning to support urban agriculture including larger high tunnels, growing on rights-of-way, beekeeping, rooftop production and small animal husbandry.

- Urban agriculture coordination provided by the City of Denver including guidance, resources, referrals, incentives and a dedicated staff coordinator.

4. Living Wage

- All farmers earn a living wage with long-term financial well-being.
- Urban farming is a sustainable option.

Farmers are celebrated and thriving as professionals and supported as such through access to loan forgiveness, affordable health care, capital investment, living wages, and childcare.

5. Regenerative Agriculture

- Urban farmers and government officials commit to ecological restoration by reducing smog and carbon output through increasing green spaces and rooftop gardening
- Reduce the use of pesticides and support native pollinator populations.
- Support renewable energy and other climate change mitigation strategies such as participation in a blue carbon market and further research into farming under solar panels
- Greater education and incorporation of regenerative agricultural practices such as no-till agriculture and cover cropping

6. Collaboration

- More cohesive farmers co-ops and networks.
- Partnerships between farmers, for-profit businesses, and governmental organizations.
- Build large scale “year-round” production through increased workforce

7. Education for farmers

- Stewardship programs for producers provided by Extension services, land grant opportunities and the Small Business Administration.
- Extend resources currently offered in-state.
- Support also from out-of-state universities for agricultural education
- Creation of an organization that offers training for new farmers and coordination of successive training programs for experienced farmers.
- Develop functioning farmer incubator farms (i.e. training farms)

Priority Action Committees

Arising from the visioning of a desired future, and through continued process and discussion, six near-term priorities were identified with action committees assigned to each.

Food Justice/Food Access for All*

Ensuring equitable access to healthy, locally produced food for all communities.

lead convener: Nick Gruber, Produce Denver

Producer Co-op/Food Hub

Building a small-scale farmer distribution network of producers, centered around a centralized food hub for aggregating and distributing produce in the Denver Metro Area and along the Front Range from both urban and rural producers.

lead convener: Roberto Meza, Emerald Gardens

Producer-Only Farmers Markets

Advocating for farmers markets that are producer-only, recognizing that many farmers markets in Colorado and the Denver Metro Area are not farmer- and local-food-focused.

lead convener: Katie Huszcza, Sprout City Farms

Farmer to Farmer Education

Developing peer-to-peer education and collaboration, with the potential to combine with the Mile-High Farmers education committee.

lead convener: Tammy Brislin, Under the M Farm

Strategic Partnerships

Developing and improving partnerships in support of marketing, sales, land, and other needs.

lead convener: Josie Hart, Denver Botanic Gardens Chatfield Farms

Land Access

To find suitable land for agriculture that is available in perpetuity and can be purchased or leased at a reasonable price.

lead convener: Elaine Granata, Granata Farms

**committee is not currently active.*

Each action committee began to plan next steps at the summit and look forward to collaboration and participation from many partners involved in supporting farmers and in food systems work.



Conclusion

For more information on the work of the action committees, or any other questions about this and future Producers' Summits in the Denver Metro Area, please send an email to denverproducerssummit@gmail.com

Steering Committee Members

Meg Caley (Sprout City Farms), Brien Darby (Denver Botanic Gardens), Dave Demerling (Emerald Gardens), Elaine Granata (Granata Farms), Rosalind May, Roberto Meza (Emerald Gardens), Jon Rodrigues (UpDig), and Lisa Warren.

Appendix A: Trends, events and forces currently shaping agriculture in the Denver metro area

- Production—
 - Increase in greenhouse production, farm stands, incubator farms, mail order food
 - Not enough Denver metro farmers to meet demand
 - Decrease in family farm/multi-generational farm
 - Scarcity of land and water, both ag and municipal
 - Opportunity for farmers to sequester carbon in the soil
 - Climate change resulting in increased heat, hail and extreme weather
 - Food being grown in non-traditional places such as parking lots, school grounds and rooftops
 - Partnerships in food production and distribution with non-profit hospitals obligated to provide community health benefit
 - LAND
 - WATER
 - Overall decline in pollinator population

- Distribution—
 - Need a collaborative food hub in a central location
 - Some producers can't find access to markets
 - Consumers need consistent income to buy product
 - Amazon Fresh, and other grocery delivery services, pose competition
 - Farm stands and CSAs offer opportunities to make connections and build community
 - Explore niche markets such as corrections, assisted living, pre-schools, new schools for farm-to-school
 - Increase in accessibility to SNAP and Double-Up Food Bucks at markets, farm stands and CSAs
 - Farmers markets – people want in every neighborhood
 - Definition of local and farmers market needs to be evaluated

- Culture—
 - Instantaneous culture presents a challenge; fidelity that ag life demands
 - Cultural and systemic challenges faced by would-be farmers coming out of historically marginalized communities
 - Psychological burden that can go along with urban and rural farming
 - Dynamic between for-profit and non-profit farms; how to better manage competition and cooperation
 - Growing connection between rural producers and urban producers/markets

- Education –
 - Lack of professionalization
 - Increased interest in farming from the younger generation
 - Fewer programs educating in urban ag, fewer people able to make a living farming
 - Encourage Colorado Department of Agriculture to focus on experts and remember that farmers need to feed ourselves

- Consumer Education—
 - Different value system – know how food is being grown; transparency from the farm to eaters
 - Demand for locally sourced food
 - Need a public campaign around farming
 - Need for increased awareness of ag as a solution to climate problem
 - Farmers as part of the solution to obesity, other health issues

- Economics—
 - High cost of living leads to a transient community; farmers should be able to live where they grow
 - Not getting a fair price for product compared to large-scale farms
 - Economic viability of farming, is it a part-time or full-time job?
 - Are small farmers viable?
 - Lack of diversified crop-loss insurance
 - Growth of cannabis industry (both hemp and marijuana) creates new economic engine/cash crop for farmers and technology could be transferred to veggie production
 - Tension from urban ag tourism; more profitable than to sell the products that allow for the tourism
 - How to afford labor while also being able to pay people a livable wage; results in seasonal and part-time help for small producers.
 - Global/National/Local → incoming mega-farms, now on coasts
 - Competition from venture capital-backed hydroponic and/or warehouse farms has an impact on soil farming and small farms

- Policy—
 - Food Safety Modernization Act (FSMA) updates – starting in 2019
 - Municipalities place zoning/water/fire department barriers
 - Cottage food laws make it easier to grow food at home
 - Colorado does not require producer-only markets
 - Political buy-in and opposition from government
 - Denver Food Vision feels like lip-service
 - In Colorado, Diana DeGette received a recent assignment 1 year ago to support urban ag. Michael Bennett is also an ally.

- In Golden, ordinance allowing farm stands on private property; represents baby steps at local level
- National Young Farmers Coalition (NYFC) is working on loan forgiveness through programs that see farming as public service

Appendix B: Desired Future

A. Land Access

- Local municipalities and land trusts support purchasing and preservation of agricultural land for environmentally sound farming.
- Farmers easily own their own land.
- Affordable and abundant land access and water for specialty crop production and livestock.

B. Incentives

We have incentives to grow food on urban land (ie: grants, ag exemption).

C. Colorado communities prioritize locally produced food products through/by supporting diverse, creative, profitable avenues.

- Increase local food by 20% by 2023; restaurants demand local—commit to 20% of what they buy
- Use market forces and regulations
- Schools and jails support local food production

D. We have great, strategic partnerships

Including: chefs, farm to institution, other farmers, Johnson and Wales, food grows in parks/open space.

E. Living Wage

- All Farmers are earning a living wage with long-term financial health making urban a sustainable career
- Farmers are celebrated and thriving as professionals and supported as such through access to loan forgiveness, affordable health care, capital investment, living wages, child care (government central entity)

F. Public agency support – marketing

- CDA Marketing support, Urban Ag department in CDA
- CDPHE—Urban Ag included in disaster relief
- Coordinated city/county support
 - Policy
 - Zoning offices
- Denver Department of Environmental Health

G. Restorative Ag

- Restorative agriculture practices dominate urban agriculture.
- Urban Farmers and governmental officials commit to ecological restoration by:
 - reducing smog through increasing green spaces

- rooftop gardening
- reducing carbon output
- solar panels on farms
- helping pollinators by reducing pesticides

H. There is an incubator to prepare the next generation of urban farmers

We have functioning incubator farms

I. There is accessible, unlimited education for farmers

J. Stewardship program for farms (producers)

- SBA – resources
- Land grant opportunities
- Extension services
- Training for new farmers organization

K. Farm Bill and subsidies

US Farm Bill that supports small/urban agriculture

L. City of Denver Ag Coordination

- Coordinator for Urban Ag
- Zoning regulation changes
 - allowing high tunnels
 - growing on right of ways
 - bees
 - rooftops
 - chickens, duck (livestock)

M. There are more farmer co-ops

N. Building larger scale “year-round” production