SAN LUIS VALLEY COMMUNITY FOOD & AGRICULTURAL ASSESSMENT

Farmer/Rancher Survey Report

Surveys were made available between October 2022 and March 2023 online via the SLVLFC website, multiple listservs related to food system efforts in the region, distribution by project stewards, promotion on social media, and outreach at food system events. To encourage participation, survey respondents were offered the chance to win a $100 gift card.

In addition to online surveys, paper surveys were made available to residents without access to smart phones or computers. Also, the Promotores del Valle de San Luis provided survey support and interpretation services to reach out to Spanish and Q'anjob'al (a Mayan language)-speaking community members.

The farmer/rancher survey was targeted to agricultural producers who farm or ranch in the San Luis Valley. It included questions about their farming experiences, their production practices, their goals for their farm/ranch in the future, the challenges they face when farming/ranching in the Valley, their vision for the future of agriculture in the San Luis Valley, and their values when it comes to food production.

Note: Q1 responses are not shown in this report. The questions was designed to make sure that individuals were taking the appropriate survey. The question was:
"Do you currently farm or ranch in the San Luis Valley of Colorado?"

SLVLOCALFOODS.ORG/CFAA

Q2

Q2. How many years have you farmed as an adult?	Count	%
0-10	46	55%
11-30	17	20%
31+	21	25%
Total Respondents	**84**	

Q3

Q3. Are you a multi generational farmer	Count	%
Yes.	64	76%
No, I'm a first generation farmer.	20	24%
Total Respondents	**84**	

Q4

Q4. USDA defines beginning farmers and ranchers as those who have operated a farm or ranch for 10 years or less. Do you fit the USDA definition of a "beginning farmer or rancher?"	Count	%
Yes	45	54%
No	39	46%
Total Respondents	**84**	

Q5

Q5. How much land do you currently operate as part of a farm or ranch?	0 acres	<10 acres	10-100 acres	101-1000 acres	>1000 acres	Total Acres
Owned Acres	2	7	28	31	9	32,568.25
Leased/rented Acres	13	11	12	19	4	14,529.75
Acres Leased to Others	19	9	12	2	0	711
Total Acres Operated	0	11	16	30	13	43,419
Total Respondents	**84**					

Q6

Q6. Which category best describes your farm production in 2022?	Count	%
Vegetables (incl. potatoes)	36	43%
Hay or forage crops	35	42%
Cattle and calves	33	39%
Field crops such as quinoa, grain, canola, corn, or wheat	33	39%
Sheep or goats	20	24%
Poultry	15	18%
Fruit, nuts, or berries	14	17%
Nursery, greenhouse, floriculture, sod, mushrooms, vegetable seeds or propagative materials	11	13%
Colonies of honey bees	10	12%
Aquaculture	7	8%
Agritourism	6	7%
Horses, ponies, mules, burros, or donkeys	6	7%
Cultivated Christmas trees, short rotation woody crops or maple syrup	5	6%
Other (please specify)	5	6%
Hogs and pigs	4	5%
Hemp	3	4%
Biomass for fuel production	2	2%
Total Respondents	**84**	
Other:		
Cover crops/green manure		
Cover/soil health		
Dairy, milk, kefir, cheese		
Homestead farm		
Pollinator gardens		

Q7

Q7. Do you utilize any of the following practices?	Count	%
Irrigate with well water	44	52%
Irrigate with surface water	43	51%
No-till/low-till practices on significant portion of farm (i.e. more than ¼ of operation)	42	50%
Use manure as source of fertilizer	42	50%
Use water conservation or water savings technology (i.e. drip irrigation)	38	45%
Participate in a water management sub district	37	44%
Cover Cropping	36	43%
Free-range (i.e. animals have freedom of movement)	33	39%
Use soil tests to determine organic matter	33	39%
Use intensive rotational grazing	32	38%
Create or maintain habitat for pollinators	32	38%
Use soil tests to determine fertilizer rates	31	37%
Grass-fed (i.e. animals only ate grasses and forages for length of its life)	25	30%
Value-added processing of farm products	22	26%
Season-extension (e.g. hoop houses and greenhouses)	21	25%
Use extended crop rotations (e.g. grow 3 or more different crops over a 3-5 year rotation)	19	23%
Utilize soil inoculants	19	23%
Mulching	18	21%
Use vegetative buffers in fields or field edges (e.g. grassed waterways, filters strips, wetlands)	17	20%
Use subsurface placement of fertilizer (via banding, 2/2, or in-furrow with seed)	16	19%
USDA Certified Organic	13	15%
Use variable rate fertilizer applications	12	14%
Participate in local acequia	10	12%
Hydroponics	6	7%
Other (please specify)	1	1%
Total Respondents	**84**	
Other:		
Participate in an Augmentation Plan to abandon subdistrict #1		

Q8

Q8. During the past year, did your operation produce and sell any crops, livestock, poultry, or agricultural products DIRECTLY to – (Check all that apply)	Count	%
Consumers (individuals who purchased your products from farmers markets, on-farm stores or farm stands, roadside stands or stores, CSAs [Community Supported Agriculture], online marketplace, etc)?	37	44%
No, my farm did not sell direct to any of these outlets.	27	32%
Retail markets (supermarkets, supercenters, restaurants, caterers, independently owned grocery stores, food cooperatives, etc)?	25	30%
Intermediate markets (businesses or organizations in the middle of the supply chain marketing locally – and/or regionally-branded products, such as distributors, food hubs, brokers, auction houses, wholesale and terminal markets, food processors, etc)?	24	29%
Institutions (K-12 schools, colleges or universities, hospitals, workplace cafeterias, prisons, foodbanks, etc)?	12	14%
Total Respondents	**84**	

Q9

Q9. Please indicate which, if any, of the following are barriers preventing you from reaching your farm production and business goals. (Check all that apply)	Count	%
Access to water	32	38%
Water curtailment due to drought	31	37%
Cost of suitable land	29	35%
Availability of labor	27	32%
Cost of water	24	29%
Concerns about fair pricing	19	23%
Weather (extreme events, ie flood, drought, tornados)	19	23%
Lack of adequate slaughter and meat processing facilities	18	21%
Availability of suitable land	17	20%
Lack of processing capacity	17	20%
Government regulations that restrict your production or sales	17	20%
Soil challenges	16	19%
Access to capital	16	19%
Lack of knowledge of government grants and programs	13	15%
Weather (seasonal changes)	13	15%
Risk of not selling what you grow	12	14%
Difficulties finding and/or negotiating with buyers	12	14%
Lack of business development knowledge for evaluating new on-farm enterprises	11	13%
Lack of knowledge about post harvest handling (grading, cooling, washing, packing)	11	13%
Delivery cost/limitations in current delivery range	11	13%
Production equipment (tilling, planting, weeding, harvesting)	10	12%
Equipment for post harvest handling (grading, cooling, washing, packing)	10	12%
Cost, time and/or labor to get GAP certified and to implement/follow GAP protocols	9	11%

Concerns about food safety requirements including FSMA regulations	7	8%
Management skills to run a larger operation	7	8%
Other (please specify)	7	8%
Financial management and record keeping	6	7%
Total Repsondents	**84**	
Other:		
Bio security/Animal Health issues		
Government regs that are not written for rural ag. Cost of fuel and not being able to use green energy		
Just getting started		
Lack of value-added processing facilities to sell products to		
None		
We are in the seedstock business. Doesn't fit with direct marketing of beef.		

Q10

Q10. How would you describe the market for locally grown and raised products? Please rate the following statements from agree to disagree.	Agree	%	Neutral	%	Disagree	%
Shoppers and diners seek out locally-produced products	26	31%	37	44%	20	24%
Tourists are seeking a "taste of place" experience.	40	48%	34	40%	9	11%
Shoppers and diners are willing to pay more for locally-produced products	26	31%	36	43%	21	25%
Shoppers and diners who reside in the San Luis Valley need education on the value of buying locally-produced food	44	52%	28	33%	10	12%
Institutional buyers seek out locally-produced products	14	17%	43	51%	26	31%
Institutional buyers are willing to pay more for locally-produced products	13	15%	38	45%	33	39%
Farmers have the opportunity to sell large quantities of locally-produced products	26	31%	32	38%	24	29%
Farmers have the opportunity to grow and sell a diverse set of products	37	44%	29	35%	14	17%
Farmers have a diverse choice in customers to sell to	25	30%	28	33%	29	35%
The demand for local product exceeds supply	17	20%	35	42%	31	37%
The demand for local product is weak considering the SLV abundant supply.	34	40%	32	38%	15	18%
Total Respondents	**84**					

Q11

Q11. Is there a written business plan for your farm or ranch operation?	Count	%
Yes	35	42%
No	35	42%
Prefer not to say	14	17%
Total Respondents	**84**	

Q12

Q12. Do you have a written food safety plan for your farm? (A food safety plan is a requirement from the FDA under the Food Safety Modernization Act for covered facilities that manufacture, process, pack or hold food)	Count	%
Yes	33	39%
No	28	33%
We fall under minimum requirements for a FSMA plan - less than $5,000 in gross sales/yr	14	17%
Prefer not to say	9	11%
Total Respondents	**84**	

Q13

Q13. Thinking about the next 5 years, how do you feel about the future of your farm business?	Count	%
1 **Not optimistic at all**	4	5%
2	17	20%
3	40	48%
4 **Very optimistic**	23	27%
Total Respondents	**84**	

Q14

Q14. Over the next 5 years, which of the following aspects of your business do you expect to increase, decrease or keep the same?	Increase	%	Keep the same	%	Decrease	%
Farmland/rangeland acres	33	39%	40	48%	8	10%
Investment in farm equipment or buildings	39	46%	31	37%	9	11%
Access to agricultural water	28	33%	38	45%	17	20%
Number of employees	18	21%	59	70%	7	8%
Number of sales outlets for my products	33	39%	42	50%	7	8%
Number of distinct commodities produced	27	32%	50	60%	6	7%
Proportion of household income earned from farming	38	45%	33	39%	10	12%
Products sold to local markets	36	43%	40	48%	5	6%
Agri-tourism	31	37%	41	49%	7	8%
Total Respondents	84					

Q15

Q15. What will most likely happen to this farm when you stop farming?	Count	%
An heir will continue to farm it	37	44%
I (or my children) will sell the land to another farmer	10	12%
Other (please specify)	9	11%
An heir will use the property for other purposes	8	10%
I (or my children) will lease the land to another farmer.	7	8%
I will relinquish my lease when I'm done farming	6	7%
I (or my children) will sell the water rights to a land developer	4	5%
I (or my children) will sell the land to a land developer	3	4%
Total Respondents	**84**	
Other:		
Continued to be managed by nonprofit owner		
I am interested in conservation options		
I hope someone will continue what I've started.		
It will be subdivided and less land will be in agriculture		
May put in easement		
Unknown		
The company will probably lease out		

Q16

Q16. Who do you go to for information about farm and/or ranch business decision-making? (check all the apply)	Count	%
Neighbors and other community members	39	46%
USDA, NRCS	37	44%
Farm Service Agency	32	38%
CSU Extension	30	36%
Farm membership organizations	28	33%
The internet	28	33%
Buyers	14	17%
Local non-profit organizations	11	13%
Farm management companies	11	13%
SBDC (Small Business Development Center)	10	12%
Supply stores	10	12%
Other (please specify)	5	6%
Total Respondents	**84**	
Other:		
Colorado Cattlemans		
Family members		

Multiple Universities extension. Personal knowledge based on my varied experience
None
Self-sufficient information gathering

Q17

Q17. Do you want to scale-up your farm/ranch business?	Count	%
Yes	62	74%
No	22	26%
Total Respondents	**84**	

Q18

Q18. Which of the following food system infrastructure components would you need to scale up? (check all that apply)	Count	%
Water and water conservation infrastructure improvements	25	30%
Local food outlets (i.e. farmers markets, farm to school, etc.)	21	25%
Large animal processing facility	19	23%
Adding value to potato products	15	18%
Solar equipment	15	18%
Agritourism support	13	15%
A regional poultry processing facility	11	13%
On farm coolers	10	12%
A food hub (aggregation/distribution)	9	11%
Other specialty processing equipment / facility	8	10%
Other (please specify)	8	10%
Timber industry/beetle kill	7	8%
Incubator kitchens	7	8%
Hemp processing facilities	6	7%
Biofuel processing facility	5	6%
Total Respondents	**84**	
Other:		
Company support		
Get rid of subdistricts		
Greenhouse		
Land		
More regional education on cattle/potato farm partnerships		
More water and more soil		
None		
Soil improvement technology such as liquid compost.		

Q19

Q19. In which of the following channels, if any, would you like to expand your sales? (select all that apply)	Count	%
On-farm sales/retail	27	44%
Restaurants or food trucks	26	42%
Wholesale, institutional sales, food hub	21	34%
Farmers markets	19	31%
Community Supported Agriculture/CSA or pre-sold boxes	15	24%
Agritourism	15	24%
E-commerce from farm website	11	18%
Catering	9	15%
Produce auctions	7	11%
None of the above	5	8%
Other (please specify)	2	3%
Total Respondents	**62**	
Other:		
Genetically improved breeding stock to other ranchers.		
Internet marketing		

Q20

Q20. Listed below are some things that can contribute to stress. Please rate each item according to how much stress it caused your farm operation or household in the past year.	No stress	%	Some stress	%	A lot of stress	%
Weather (inadequate/too much rain, snow, hail)	11	13%	47	56%	24	29%
Threat of local water being sold out of region	8	10%	36	43%	38	45%
Livestock or crop problems (disease, weeds, pests)	9	11%	59	70%	13	15%
Market prices for crops/livestock	12	14%	46	55%	23	27%
Cost of farm/ranch inputs	4	5%	42	50%	36	43%
Cost of farm/rangeland	16	19%	34	40%	31	37%
Health care costs (direct costs and/or insurance)	25	30%	38	45%	20	24%
High farm/ranch debt load	25	30%	37	44%	20	24%
Finding and managing farm workers/ranch hands	24	29%	41	49%	17	20%
Farm/ranch accidents and injuries	32	38%	37	44%	14	17%
Government trade policies	21	25%	48	57%	12	14%
Environmental regulations	19	23%	47	56%	15	18%
Concern over the future of the farm	17	20%	42	50%	23	27%
Nonfarm neighbors	35	42%	30	36%	17	20%
Negotiating with family members about the farm	32	38%	37	44%	14	17%
Balancing farm work and home life	20	24%	41	49%	21	25%
Dealing with childcare	47	56%	27	32%	9	11%

Saving for retirement	22	26%	40	48%	19	23%
Neighboring farms spraying chemicals /fertilizers that drift to your crop/animals	40	48%	29	35%	13	15%
Other (please specify)			1	1%		
Total Respondents	**84**					
Other:						
Water						

Q21

Q21. Are you a member of a group or association that represents agricultural producers?	Count	%
Yes	57	68%
No	27	32%
Total Respondents	**84**	

Q22

Q22. If yes, which types? (check all that apply)	Count	%
General farm organization (ex. Farm Bureau, Farmers Union, or Grange)	29	53%
Commodity organization (ex. Corn Growers, Beef Council, Fruit & Vegetable Growers)	24	44%
Farm or Ranch Cooperative	23	42%
Organic or sustainable growers' association	12	22%
Beginning farmer group	12	22%
Other (please specify)	3	5%
Total Respondents	**55**	
Other:		
Breed associations, cattlemen's, sub district board of managers, basin round table		
Breed registry		
Quivera, Women in Ranching		

Q23

Q23. If no, why not? (check all that apply)	Count	%
Not applicable	23	43%
No groups represent my interests as a producer	13	24%
No time to participate	13	24%
Not interested	9	17%
Other (please specify)	5	9%
Total Respondents	**54**	
Other:		
Anxiety		
Just have not done so yet		
Not sure where to start		

Q24

Q24. Which food and agriculture system goals are most important to the San Luis Valley community? Please select your TOP 3.	Count	%
Promote conservation practices to improve soil health.	31	47%
Encourage and support youth farming and ranching programs.	27	41%
Promote & build upon programs to conserve water.	23	35%
Invest in a thriving local food and farm economy.	21	32%
Find ways to add value to our agricultural products through farm, ranch and food entrepreneurs.	17	26%
Increase local food outlets and commercial kitchens for food entrepreneurs.	13	20%
Increase the production, sales, and consumption of locally-grown foods.	12	18%
Prepare our food and agriculture systems for the impacts of climate change.	10	15%
Ensure access to healthier food for all and reduce food insecurity in our community.	8	12%
Support community health and wellness.	8	12%
Increase opportunities for food and agricultural education (soil health, cooking, gardening, food safety, food preservation).	8	12%
Build a resilient emergency food system that can respond to challenges (i.e. pandemics, fires, floods).	8	12%
Reduce food waste and related solid wastes.	6	9%
Recognize and celebrate our community's diverse food cultures	4	6%
Address the lack of racial equity in our current food system.	2	3%
Total Respondents	**66**	

Demographics

Gender Identification	Count	%
Male	38	48%
Female	36	45%
Other/self-identified	3	4%
Prefer not to answer	3	4%
Total Respondents	**80**	

Age	Count	%
18-24 years	1	1%
25 to 29 years	5	6%
30 to 34 years	12	15%
35 to 39 years	9	11%
40 to 44 years	10	13%
45 to 49 years	10	13%
50 to 54 years	6	8%
55 to 59 years	4	5%
60 to 64 years	4	5%
65 to 69 years	11	14%
70 to 74 years	5	6%
75 to 79 years	2	3%
80 to 84 years	1	1%
Total Respondents	**80**	

Education Level	Count	%
Less than 9th grade	2	3%
9th to 12th grade, no diploma	2	3%
High school graduate (includes equivalency)	15	19%
Associate’s degree or completed a technical school program	15	19%
Bachelor’s degree	29	36%
Graduate or professional degree	17	21%
Total Respondents	**80**	

Race, Ethnicity	Count	%
White, non-Hispanic/Latino	49	64%
White, Hispanic/Latino	18	23%
American Indian or Alaska Native	5	6%
Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander	2	3%
Other (please specify)	2	3%
Prefer not to say	2	3%
Asian or Asian American	1	1%
Black or African American	1	1%
Total Respondents	**77**	
Other:		
Genizara, chicane, meztisa		
Mixed pup		

Total gross farm sales for all goods and services produced by this farm business in 2021?	Count	%
Less than $1,000	6	8%
$1,000 to $9,999	9	11%
$10,000 to $24,999	9	11%
$25,000 to $49,999	9	11%
$50,000 to $99,999	8	10%
$100,000 to $249,999	14	18%
$250,000 to $499,999	7	9%
$500,000 and above	8	10%
Prefer not to answer	10	13%
Total Respondents	**80**	

Total household income in the last 12 months?	Count	%
Under $15,000	8	10%
$15,000 - $24,999	10	13%
$25,000 - $34,999	2	3%
$35,000 - $49,999	6	8%
$50,000 - $74,999	19	24%
$75,000 - $99,999	7	9%
$100,000 - $149,999	7	9%
$150,000 - $199,999	1	1%
Over $200,000	5	6%
Prefer not to answer	15	19%
Total Respondents	**80**	

What proportion of your total household income comes from the farm business?	Count	%
0-10%	19	24%
11-25%	8	10%
26-50%	14	18%
51-75%	17	21%
76-100%	17	21%
Prefer not to answer	5	6%
Total Respondents	**80**	

What county do you live in?	Count	%
Alamosa	22	27%
Rio Grande	20	25%
Saguache	16	20%
Conejos	10	12%
Costilla	8	10%
Mineral	4	5%
None of the above	1	1%
Total Respondents	**81**	

What county is your farm or ranch operation located in?	Count	%
Alamosa	26	32%
Saguache	15	19%
Rio Grande	15	19%
Conejos	9	11%
Costilla	8	10%
Mineral	8	10%
Total Respondents	**81**	