NORTHWEST COLORADO

MEAT SECTOR FEASIBILITY STUDY

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community agriculture alliance

JUST TRANSITION FUND

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NW Colorado Meat Sector Feasibility Study

Fall 2023

Executive Summary

This report has been developed with support from the Just Transition Fund to identify opportunities and needs in Northwest Colorado's food system.

There are ongoing concerns about livestock processing and storage capacity in Northwest Colorado. This report is intended to help support efforts to develop and expand value-added agricultural enterprises and to increase consumption of regionally raised livestock. Specifically, the goal of this study is to determine the following: a) is there sufficient demand for the establishment or expansion of a federally inspected slaughter and/or secondary storage and processing facility within the region, b) is there sufficient demand for regionally raised livestock, and c) what additional solutions to perceived limitations in processing might exist.

Challenges associated with access to USDA inspected slaughter and cut and wrap facilities are well documented across the United States. Northwestern Colorado has a higher density of USDA and custom exempt slaughter facilities, as compared to many parts of the Rocky Mountain region. The high density of slaughter facilities is in part attributable to the important role of hunting. Unfortunately, hunting season coincides with the preferred time for cattle processing, the most common domestic species raised in the region. As a result, two of the USDA certified and custom exempt facilities in the area shut down their operation for domestic animals from September to the end of November.

Our study found that there is sufficient demand for expansion of existing federally inspected slaughter facilities. Cold storage can help alleviate issues associated with processing times and seasonal demand for products. Consumers, both visitors and locals, are increasingly demanding meat products raised and processed in Northwest Colorado. The geographic designate serves as a proxy for many of the attributes consumers are seeking in their food including freshness, supports the local economy, maintains local ranches, and the animals are treated humanely.

In response to these challenges, this feasibility study was prepared. The study includes data from primary and secondary data sources including from a survey of 100 consumers in NW Colorado, interviews of ranchers and processors conducted in 2023, and information from the USDA.

This report is the result of a collaborative effort between Colorado State University Extension, Northwest Colorado Development Council, and the Community Agriculture Alliance.

SCOPE OF STUDY

What this study is:
This study is a general assessment of supply and demand for additional meat processing and processed meat products in Northwestern Colorado and beyond.

What this study is not:
This is not a comprehensive feasibility study of a particular meat processing facility. It does not look at the specific cost and potential revenues associated with building and operating a processing plant.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This study is conducted with support from the Just Transition Fund. A special thank you to the Value-Added Agriculture Working Group with the NWCDC who reviewed the interview protocol and made introductions for the interview team, to Michele Meyer and Christine Rambo who provide ongoing guidance and leadership to this project, Jeannie Jo Logan, Carrie Olsen, and Courtney Zimmerman who conducted the interviewers and shared their local expertise, and to Jess Diehl who conducted the consumer surveys and provided administrative support. Finally thank you to all of the ranchers who took the time to speak with our interviewers.

This report was prepared by Dr. Libby Christensen with Colorado State University Office of Engagement and Extension. Questions and inquiries can be directed to libby.christensen@colostate.edu.

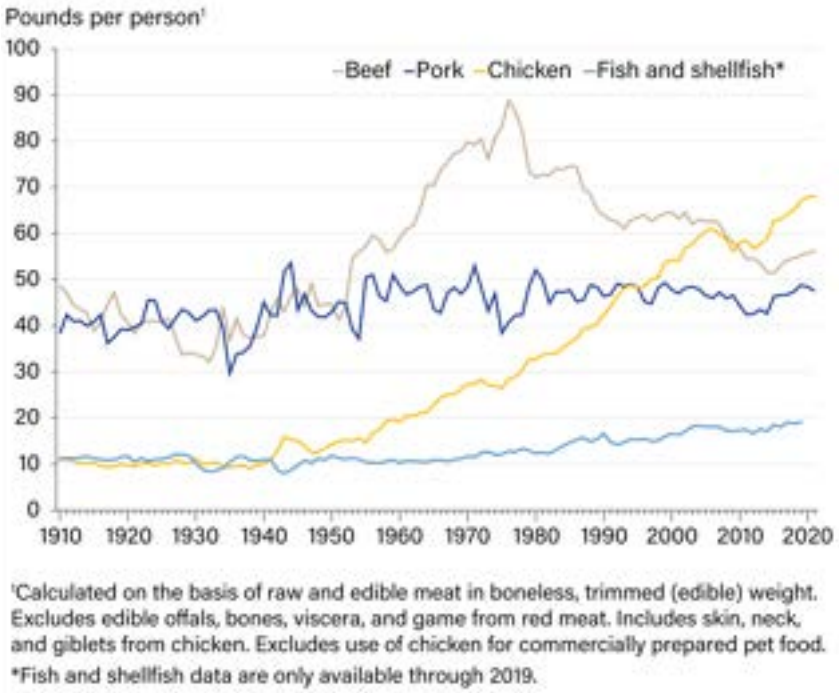
NW Colorado Meat Sector Feasibility Study **1**
Executive Summary 1
National and State Historical and Geographic Context 4
Northwest Colorado Context 6
Processing infrastructure 10
Feasibility study 14
Supply 14
Demand for NW Colorado Meat Products 16
Processing needs assessment 17
Efforts to expand processing 21
Efforts to expand sales 22
Opportunities for non-processor supported initiatives 22
Appendix 1. NW Colorado Livestock Producer Interview Protocol 25
Appendix 2. USDA Pertinent Grant and Loan Programs: At a Glance 28

National and State Historical and Geographic Context

Livestock production is one of the most important industries in Colorado. Meat animals accounted for 53 percent of Colorado cash receipts in 2021, with cattle and calves accounting for 96 percent of that value in the state[1]. In 2022, Colorado ranked 17th in the United States in total beef inventory[1]. In 2021, Colorado had 12,407 beef cattle operations with 659,000 beef cows and heifers, 235,000 market lambs and sheep, 475,000 market hogs, 24,000 meat goats, and 1.347M pullets[1].

Per capita beef consumption in the US has been on a steady decline since the 1970s (Figure 1). In the past, beef was a dominant protein source in the American diet, but changing consumer preferences, health concerns, and the rise of alternative protein sources have contributed to this decline.

Figure 1. U.S. per capita availability of beef, pork, chicken, and fish/shellfish, 1910-2021[2].



[1] United States Department of Agriculture, National Agricultural Statistics Service, Mountain Region, Colorado Field Office. 2022. Colorado Agricultural Statistics.Sourced from https://www.nass.usda.gov/Statistics_by_State/Colorado/Publications/Annual_Statistical_Bulletin/Bulletin2022.pdf
[2] USDA, Economic Research Service. 2022. Food Availability Data. Sourced from https://www.ers.usda.gov/data-products/chart-gallery/gallery/chart-detail/?chartId=105929

While more difficult to measure, market demand for locally and regionally sourced meat products has been steadily increasing in recent years. Consumers have shown a growing interest in knowing where their food comes from and how it is produced. There are several reasons why this trend has emerged:

Sustainability: Consumers are increasingly concerned about the environmental impact of food production and transportation. Locally sourced meat tends to have a lower carbon footprint since it doesn't require long-distance transportation.

Quality and freshness: Local meats are often perceived as fresher and of higher quality since they typically undergo shorter transportation and storage times.

Supporting local economy: Buying locally sourced meat supports local farmers and businesses, which can boost the regional economy.

Traceability and transparency: Consumers want to know more about the origins of their food and how the animals were raised, which is often more accessible with local sourcing.

Health and safety: Some consumers believe that locally sourced meats are healthier and safer because they can have more control over the production process.

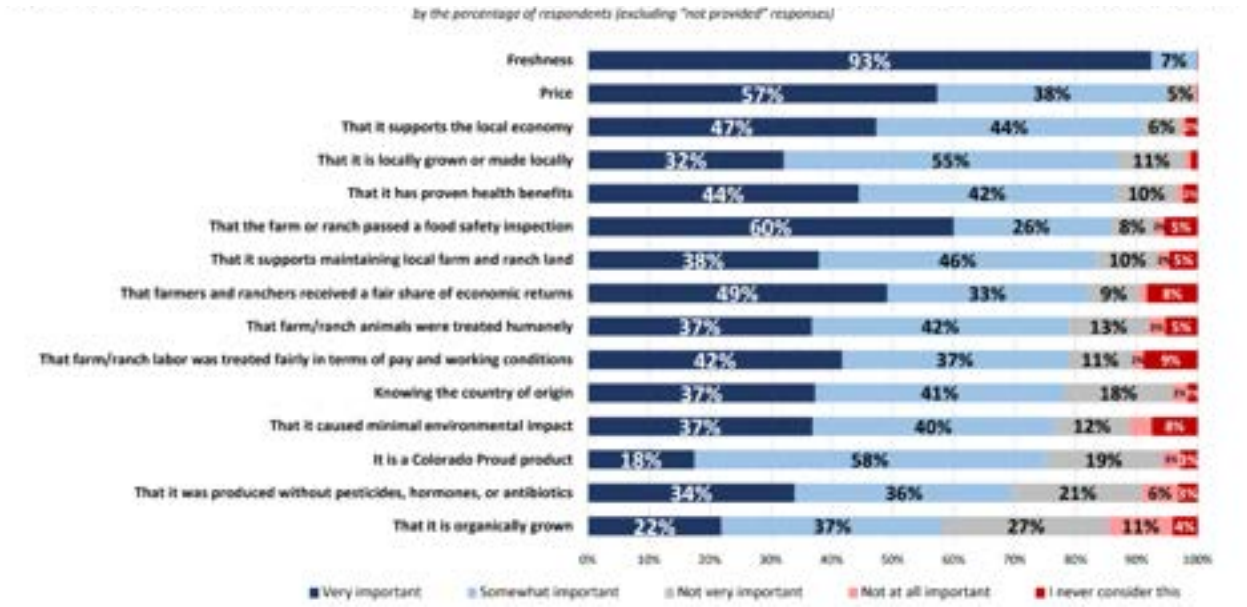
Animal welfare: People concerned about animal welfare may prefer to buy meat from local farms that prioritize ethical and humane treatment of animals.

In Colorado, we can dig into changes in consumer preferences a little deeper using the Colorado Department of Agriculture and Colorado State University's Colorado Consumer Preference Survey[3]. The purpose of the 2022 survey was to gauge public perception about various agricultural topics and issues including land and water use, agricultural practices, food security, agricultural labor, and climate change. Information compiled from this survey provides important insights, helping to prioritize what is important to rural, suburban, and urban Colorado residents, farmers, and ranchers.

Colorado consumers share their national counterparts' motivations to purchase local and regional food products (Figure 2). One-hundred percent of consumers felt freshness was very or somewhat important when deciding what food products to purchase, 91% wanted to support the local economy, 86% of consumers felt proven health benefits were very or somewhat important, 77% of consumers felt minimizing environmental impacts was very or somewhat important, 79% indicated animals were treated humanely was very or somewhat important.

[3] Colorado Department of Agriculture and Colorado State University. 2022. 2022 Public Perceptions and Attitudes About Colorado Agriculture Survey Findings Report. Available from https://drive.google.com/file/d/1F2A3baEZhJBMZMRqVo1MzB7shDN2XKjs/view

Figure 2. Colorado consumers' degree of importance for various factors when making decisions to purchase food products.[3]



As a result of these ongoing trends, consumer purchases of meat, and beef in particular, have become less sensitive to changes in price yet more sensitive to consumer incomes[4]. Further, relative pricing of one species on purchases of another species is limited. Consumers are not substituting one meat for another based on price, they are making decisions before they get to the retail outlet.

Northwest Colorado Context

While the trends presented above provide a general outlook for meat supply and demand at the national and state level, the remainder of this study looks at Northwest Colorado. Northwest Colorado is a vibrant region on the Western Slope of Colorado, known for its rich natural resources and western heritage. The region encompasses Garfield, Mesa, Moffat, Rio Blanco, and Routt counties. Because of their geographic proximity and economic linkages, this study focused only on Moffat, Rio Blanco, and Routt counties.

While the region shares a strong history, recent demographic changes have impacted the individual counties differently. Steamboat Springs is the county seat for Routt County. Ski Town USA, Steamboat Springs, is home to Steamboat Springs Ski Resort. More than 750,000 people

[4] Tonsor, G. T., J. L. Lusk, and T.C. Schroeder. 2018. Assessing Beef Demand Determinants. Sourced from https://www.beefboard.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/06/Assessing-Beef-Demand-Determinants_ExecutiveSummary.pdf

visit the area each year, primarily for winter activities[5,6,7]. The Colorado Tourism Office shows that for Routt County, visitor spending was $613 million in 2021. Routt County has nearly double the population of Moffat and over three times the population of Rio Blanco (Table 1)[8]. In addition to having more people, Routt County is generally more affluent with median home values and household incomes higher than the state average.

Table 1. Demographics for Colorado, Moffat, Rio Blanco, and Routt counties from the US Census Bureau.

	Colorado	Moffat	Rio Blanco	Routt
Population estimates (July 2022)	5,839,926	13,177	6,569	25,007
Population, percent change 2020-2022	1.1%	-0.9%	0.6%	0.7%
Median value of owner-occupied units, 2017-2021	$397,500	$201,700	$220,100	$570,600
Total retail sales per capita, 2017 ($1,000)	$15,119	$15,121	$8,588	$16,536
Median household income (in 2021 dollars), 2017-2021	$80,184	$58,583	$58,239	$83,725

The region's economy is diverse and robust, with several key industry clusters.[9] Based on employment the top ten industry sectors include:

1. Accommodations and Food Services
2. Health Care and Wellness

[5] RRC Associates, Inc. 2019. Steamboat Springs Chamber: 2019 Economic Impact of Summer Tourism. Sourced from ATTACH_3_RRC SSC ECONOMIC IMPACT OF SUMMER TOURISM REPORT 2019.FINAL.PDF.pdf (steamboatsprings.net)

[6] Steamboat Springs Chamber. 2022. Steamboat Springs visitation statistics.

[7] Steamboat Pilot and Today Staff. 2023. Capacity is set to jump by 30,000 arriving seats for Steamboat Air Program. 25 August. Sourced from https://www.steamboatpilot.com/news/capacity-is-set-to-jump-by-30000-arriving-seats-for-steamboat-air-program/

[8] U.S Census Bureau. 2022. QuickFacts for Moffat, Rio Blanco, and Routt counties. Sourced from https://www.census.gov/quickfacts/fact/table/moffatcountycolorado,rioblancocountycolorado,routtcountycolorado,CO/PST045222.

[9] Economic & Planning Systems, Inc. (2022) Northwest Colorado Resiliency and Recovery Roadmap

3. Retail Trade
4. Constrction
5. Public Administration
6. Arts and Recreation
7. Educational Services
8. Administrative and Waste Services
9. Mining
10. Real Estate

The industry clusters of energy/natural resources and infrastructure are in a period of transition[9]. Two coal-fired power plants in Moffat and Routt counties will undergo transition in the next seven years. The move to renewable and clean energy will led to the closure of five coal mines in the three counties that supply the power plants[10]. The sunsetting of the coal industry in northwestern Colorado represents a loss of more than 2,800 jobs and nearly 22% of the regional gross domestic product.

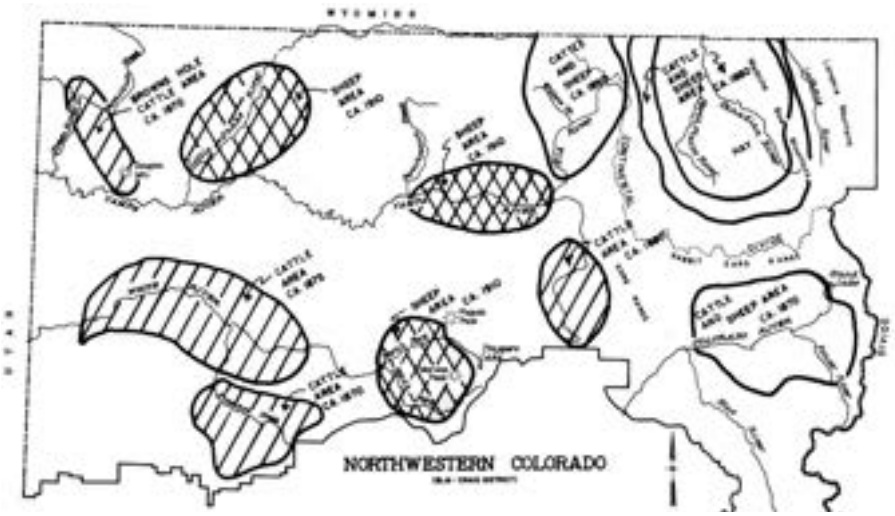
The coal industry and agriculture historically coexisted and in many ways thrived in Northwest Colorado. Many employees of the mines and plants also participated in livestock production. The transition away from coal presents a new opportunity to explore the feasibility of expanding and capturing more value from livestock production in the region.

Northwest Colorado plays an important role in Colorado's beef supply chain starting with the introduction of cattle to the region in 1877[11]. Starting in 1880, raising cattle was one of the top economic drivers in the region. Early settlers built large expansive ranches with large herds. The cattle population of Moffat and Routt counties increased from 5,000 in 1880 to twenty times that number by 1910. By 1909, Steamboat Springs was the biggest cattle shipping point in the United States. The 1910s was the high point for cattle production in the region and has been steadily decreasing with periodic upticks in production.

[9] Jaffe, M., and M. Booth. 2023. How is Colorado doing in shutting down coal power plants? *Colorado Sun*. Sourced from https://coloradosun.com/2023/05/15/colorado-coal-shut-down-new-epa-rules/
[10] Perry, N. 2018. Economic transition in Northwest Colorado: The economic contribution of coal power and coal mining, and the economic impact of solar power and natural gas power. Sourced from https://www.coloradomesa.edu/energy/documents/economic-impact-of-coal-solar-gas-nw-co.pdf
[11] Athearn, F. 1976. An isolated empire: A history of Northwest Colorado. Cultural Resource Series No.2 for the Bureau of Land Management Colorado. Source from https://www.nps.gov/parkhistory/online_books/blm/cultresser/co/2/contents.htm

In addition to cattle, the region has a long history of sheep production both for wool and meat (Figure 3).

Figure 3. Concentration of sheep and cattle ranges, circa 1870-1920[11].



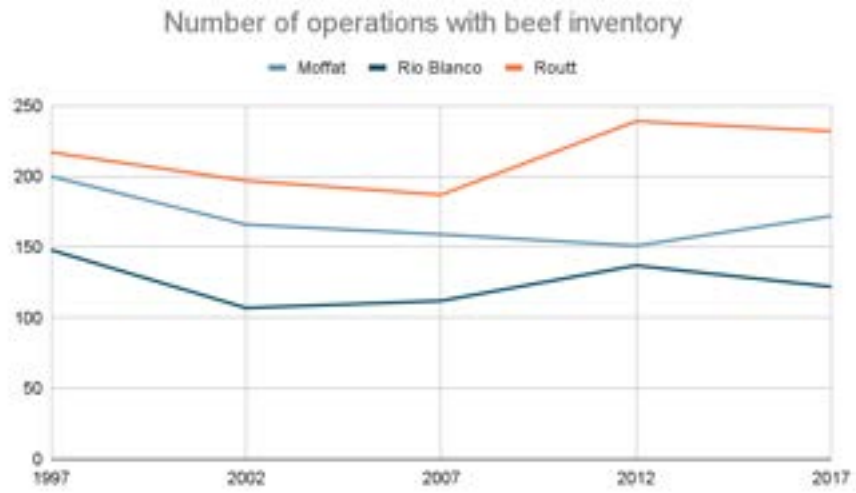
According to the 2017 USDA Census of Agriculture there are 759 livestock producers with inventory in Northwest Colorado (Table 2)[12]. The number of operations with inventory has stayed relatively constant from 1997-2017 (Figure 4).

Table 2. Number of operations with inventory by county and species.

	Beef		Sheep		Hog		Poultry	
County	Operations	Inventory	Operations	Inventory	Operations	Inventory	Operations	Inventory
Moffat	172	23,172	31	54,647	35	507	16	144
Rio Blanco	122	16,792	25	7,859	1	15	4	6
Routt	232	15,831	30	12,518	10	24	23	489
TOTAL	526	55,795	86	75,025	46	546	43	639

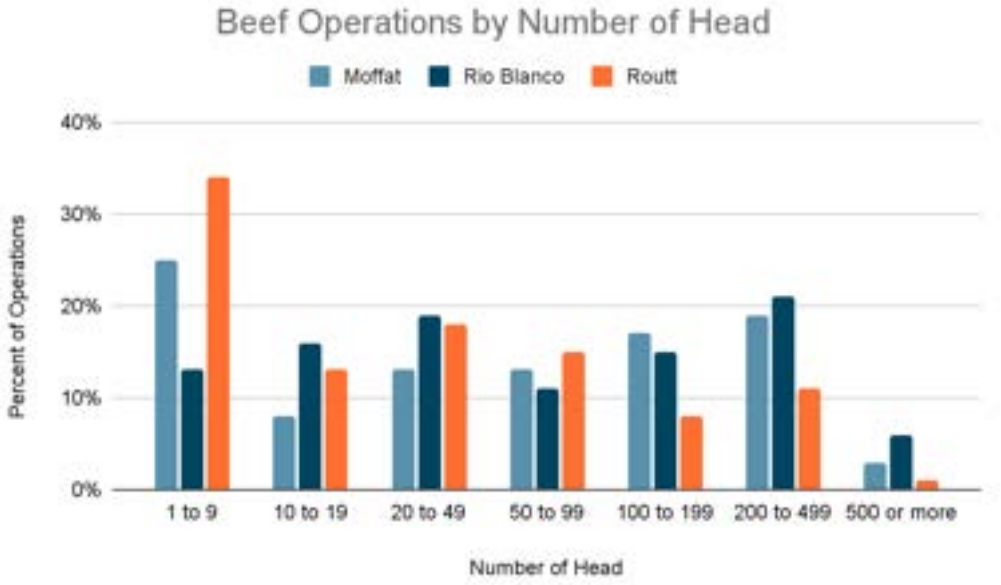
[12] USDA National Agricultural Statistics Service. 2017. Census of Agriculture. Sourced from https://quickstats.nass.usda.gov/

Figure 4. Number of operations with beef inventory, 1997-2017[12].



According to the USDA operations with 40 or fewer head are largely part of multi-enterprises, or are supplemental to off-farm employment[13]. In 2017, operations with less than 50 head made up 47 percent of cattle operations in Moffat County, 48 percent in Rio Blanco County, and 65 percent in Routt County (Figure 5).

Figure 5. Beef operations by the number of head, 2017.



[13] USDA Economic Research Service. 2022. Sector at a glance: Cattle and beef. Sourced from https://www.ers.usda.gov/topics/animal-products/cattle-beef/sector-at-a-glance/

Processing infrastructure

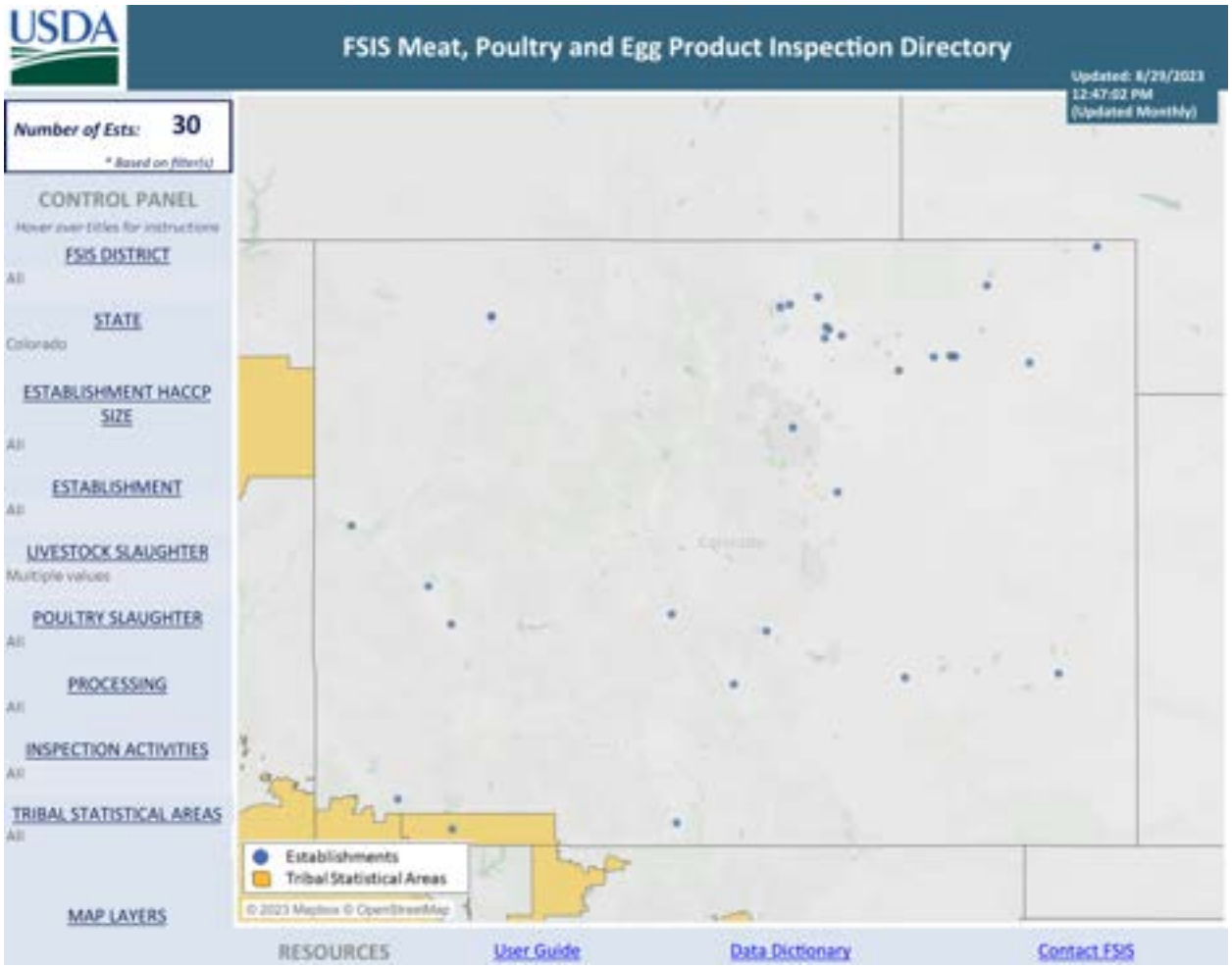
Despite the continued large number of livestock in Northwest Colorado and across the state, the number of meat processors has decreased. Challenges associated with access to USDA inspected slaughter and cut and wrap facilities are increasingly well documented across the United States[14]. Since the 1970s, large corporations have consolidated operations, replacing smaller plants with larger facilities with the ability to process far larger quantities of meat per day.

Limitations in the capacity of processors are particularly acute for producers of cattle, hogs, sheep, goats and other large livestock. Allowances for on-farm and custom-exempt slaughter are not an option if the product is to be resold. These challenges have received increased attention of late, in the context of rapidly growing demand for locally and regionally produced meat products and were only further exacerbated by supply chain shortages resulting from the public health response to the COVID-19 pandemic.

There are 30 USDA inspected large species slaughter facilities and one USDA inspected poultry processor in the state (Figure 6). Federally inspected facilities are under continuous inspection from the time the animal is delivered to the facility to the final processing. Federally inspected facilities incur additional costs for USDA inspection including dedicated office space. USDA regulates the inspected meat through delivery to the customer. USDA inspected meat can be sold to individuals, retail establishments, and wholesale channels. Of the 30 facilities, two are large (defined as having 500 or more employees), 7 are small (defined as having 10 or more employees but fewer than 500 employees), and the remaining 21 are considered very small (defined as having fewer than 10 employees or annual sales of less than $2.5 million). The two large plants process around 4,000 head of cattle per day. There are two USDA inspected slaughter facilities in Northwestern Colorado, because they are so close to one another they appear as a single dot on the map.

[14]Gwin, L, A. Thiboumery, and R. Stillman. 2013.The Importance of Business Commitments for Long-Term Viability, ERR-150, U.S. Department of Agriculture, Economic Research Service.

Figure 6. USDA Certified meat slaughter facilities.

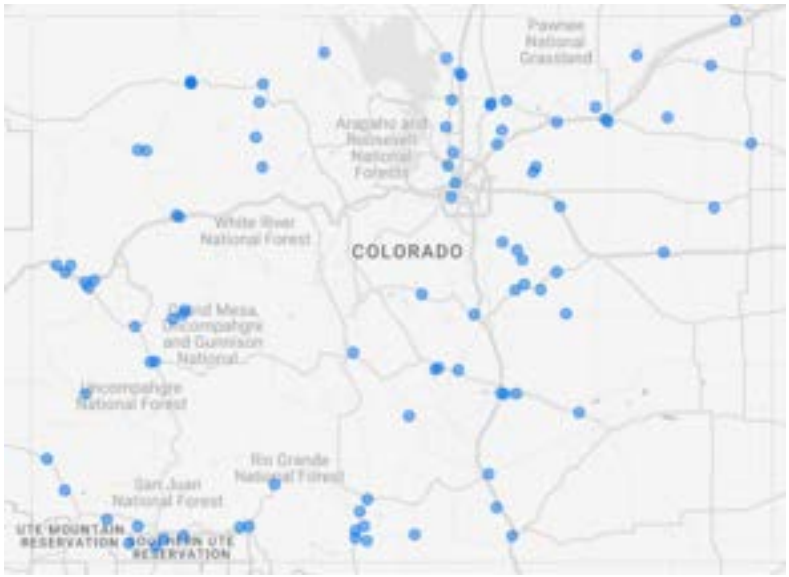


In addition to federally inspected facilities, there are four additional options for processing meat and poultry in Colorado.

1. Custom exempt slaughter and processing: Custom exempt operators provide a slaughter and processing service to animal owners. In many instances, these facilities also process wild game. These operators are not USDA inspected but are licensed and inspected by the Colorado Department of Agriculture to monitor compliance with state and federal requirements. Custom exempt operators must return meat products to the original owners or denature or otherwise identify or destroy the products. Products must be marked NOT FOR SALE and are intended to be consumed by the owner, family member, and non-paying guests. There are 92 facilities in the state offering custom processing (Figure 7).
2. Personal exemption: Personal exemption allows for an individual to process their own animals. The meat is intended to be consumed by the animal owner, family, or non-paying guest. Personal exemption meat may not be sold to other consumers or retail establishments. There may be additional regulations and oversight from local and county jurisdictions.

3. In early 2016, Senate Bill 16-058 established a new state licensing program that allows small and mid-sized poultry producers (defined as producers that process less than 20,000 birds) to be exempt from federal inspections to sell processed poultry directly to individuals at venues such as farmers' markets. Through this legislation, the Colorado Department of Agriculture (CDA) provides regulatory oversight to allow local producers to sell their poultry to individuals. Producers can process the birds themselves or through a custom exempt facility. There are 12 poultry exempt facilities registered with the state.
4. During the 2021 Legislative Session,the Ranch to Plate Act passed, SB21-079, and was signed into law. This act promotes increased access for consumers to directly purchase meat and meat products from local ranchers through the use of live animal-share agreements. Primarily, this act clarifies that the sale of animals, animal shares, or meat is exempt from state licensure and inspection by a public health agency, provided proper requirements are met. The Ranch to Plate Act does not allow a rancher or other animal owner to slaughter and self-process an animal under an animal share agreement and distribute the meat to multiple owners. Such action could be considered a violation of the personal use exemption found in the FMIA and may be subject to regulatory action by the USDA.

Figure 7. Custom slaughter facilities[15]



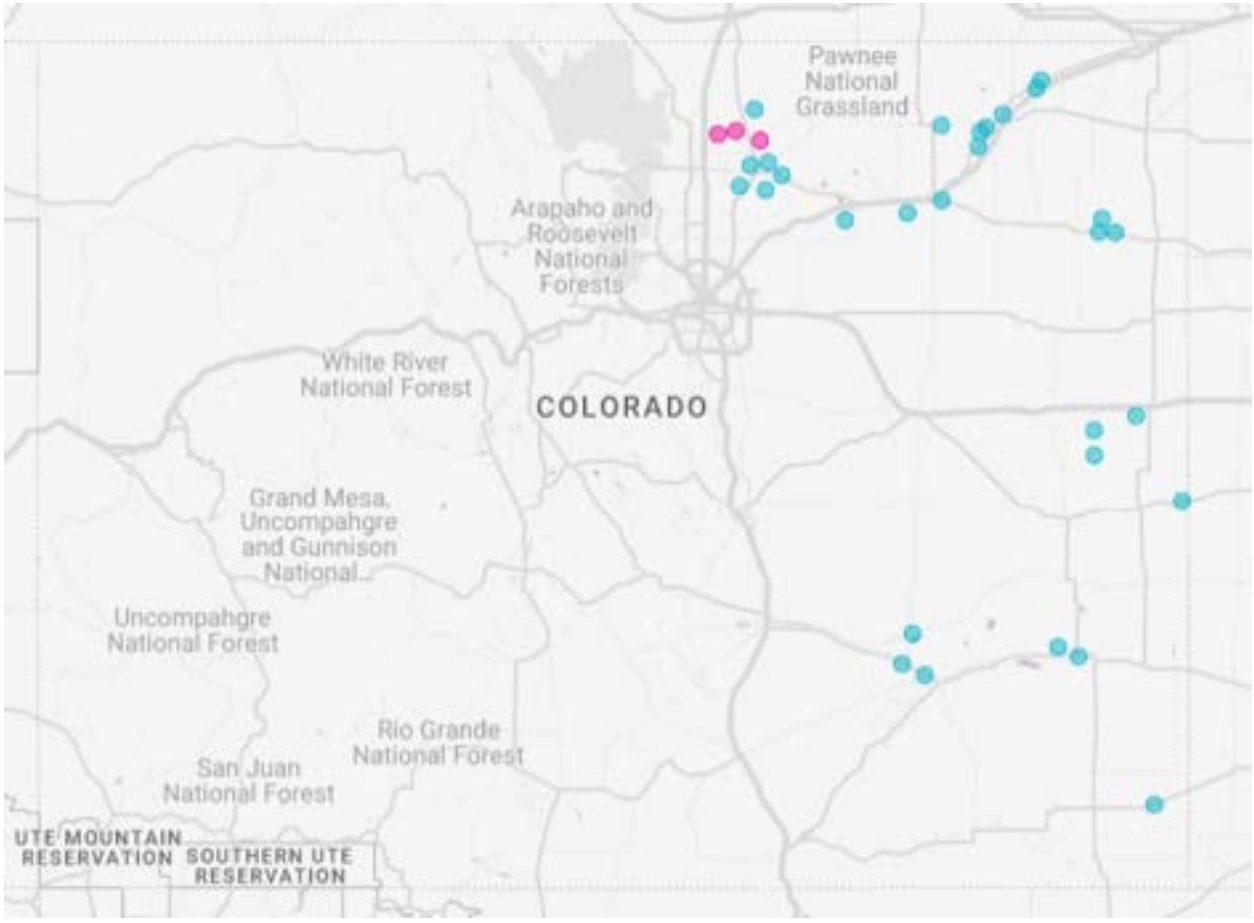
FINISHING

In addition to processing, finishing animals is an important component of the beef supply chain. Most cattle in the United States spend some time "on grain". This has several benefits - faster weight gain, improved marbling and tenderness, consistent flavor, balanced nutrition, and consumer preferences. Time on grain for cattle typically ranges from 80 to 300 days. Ranchers in Northwestern Colorado often choose to ship their cattle to feedlots because of the short

[15] Colorado Department of Agriculture. 2023. 2023 Actively Licensed Custom Meat and Poultry Processors. Sourced from https://drive.google.com/file/d/1lKtHcUCTozWeLrQDB05UbKp9zH9GYa4r/view

growing season, harsh winters, and high cost of feed. The Colorado Department of Agriculture import approved feedlots are concentrated in the Front Range and along the Eastern Plains (Figure 8). These feedlots are registered with the Colorado State Board of Stock Inspection Commissioners and can receive animals from surrounding states. These feedlots have the capacity to test animals, and to segregate potentially diseased animals. The list does not include smaller feedlots. During interviews with producers, feedlots often were the biggest sticking point to finishing their own animals. It was not economically feasible to bring feed to animals in Northwestern Colorado.

Figure 8. Colorado Department of Agriculture Import Approved Feedlots.[16]



*pink dots indicate lamb feedlots and blue dots represent cattle feedlots.

Feasibility Study

During the winter of 2022/2023, the Northwest Colorado Development Council (NWCDC) conducted a series of focus groups with producers in the three counties (defined here as Moffat,

[16] Colorado Department of Agriculture. 2023. Colorado Approved Feedlots. Sourced from https://ag.colorado.gov/colorado-approved-feedlots

Rio Blanco, and Routt counties). Producers identified regulatory and infrastructure barriers to expanding value added livestock opportunities in the region. To assess these barriers and to identify potential solutions the Community Agriculture Alliance, in partnership with the NWCDC applied and was awarded a grant from the National Just Transition Fund.

Supply

In light of anecdotal feedback from producers about limitations to slaughter and processing we developed a list of all of the producers in NW Colorado currently selling meat products through local and regional supply chains including direct-to-consumer (e.g., online, word-of-mouth, farmers markets, etc.) or through an intermediated market (e.g., direct to institution, restaurant sales, Community Ag Alliance Market, etc.). We started with a list from the CAA Market, which currently carries 12 livestock producers. We added to the list through snowball sampling and additional online research. In total we found 62 producers selling meat through local and regional supply chains.

With feedback from the NWCDC Value Ag Working Group and key stakeholders, we developed a series of questions (Appendix 1). With the support of three interviewers in the field, we conducted 38 interviews in the three-county area between March and July of 2023 (Table 3). Interviews were recorded, transcribed, and coded. With regards to livestock producers engaged in slaughtering or processing their animals for re-sale of meat products, it is estimated that our interviews reached approximately 61% of those within our grant area.

Table 3. Estimate and number of interviewed livestock producers selling through local and regional market channels by county.

County	Estimated number of producers selling locally/regionally	Interviewed	% interviewed
Moffat	15	7	47%
Rio Blanco	21	18	86%
Routt	26	13	50%
TOTAL	62	38	61%

Interviews were conducted with beef (31), lamb (8), swine (4), goat (3), and poultry (2) producers (Table 4). Nine producers raised multiple species. The average number of finished cattle was 22, lamb/goat was 40, swine was 40, and poultry was 1,493.

When asked if they intended to grow their herd, 60% of producers wanted to grow, 31% wanted to maintain, and 9% wanted to shrink their herd.

Table 4. Estimate and number of interviewed livestock producers by species.

Species	Total number of producers selling locally/regionally	Interviewed	% interviewed
Cattle	49	31	63%
Lamb	14	8	57%
Swine	7	4	57%
Goat	3	3	100%
Poultry	3	2	67%

Based on these numbers we can estimate, at current production levels, there is an annual supply of 1,078 beef, 560 lamb, 280 swine, 120 goats, and 4,479 poultry in the three county region.

Carcass weight for the cattle averaged around 720 pounds; average cattle carcass weight in the United States was 888 pounds in 2021[17].

Twelve of the 31 cattle producers finished their animals completely on grain, 6 grass-finished and 7 did some combination of the two. Producers grain finishing fewer animals, were purchasing grain and bringing it to their animals. There were four producers that shipped their cattle off to a feedyard, finished there and processed their animals at local processing plants. These feedlots were located on the Western Slope and were not included in the Colorado Import Approved Feedlot database.

Winter feed logistics with regards to timing and sourcing of feed was identified by seven producers as a major barrier to expansion. As one producer summed it up, “It is just more cost effective to ship our calves out”. Another explained with their experiences direct marketing, “We looked into it but because you have to feed all winter. It doesn't make much sense here and if you go somewhere where they have feed available it's more cost effective. We actually participated in the little farmers market here [Rio Blanco County]. We sold frozen beef there but it was so marginal, it wasn't worth it. By the time an animal is ready it is almost 30 months old. It's just not cost effective. And then on such a small scale, it was hard to get more people to buy it.” These challenges are only compounded by drought and uncertainty about the availability of water.

[17] Peel, D. 2021. Cattle slaughter and carcass weights in 2021. *Beef Magazine*. Sourced from Cattle Slaughter and Carcass Weights in 2021 (beefmagazine.com)

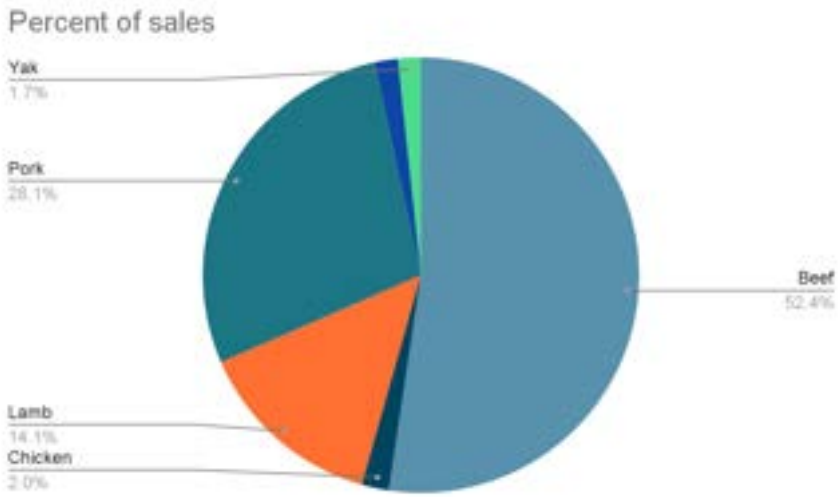
Demand for NW Colorado Meat Products

Thirty-two producers shared information about how they were currently selling their product. Thirteen (41%) of the interviewed operations were selling wholes and halves. These often were sold to family, friends, or to supply meat for their hunting operation. Marketing was done through word-of-mouth or through community connections (e.g. churches, gyms, schools, etc.).

There were 16 producers (53%) who sold custom cuts. Four of those producers sold through the CAA Market and four producers (13%) sold to wholesale buyers either retailers or restaurants.

The Community Ag Alliance has been operating the CAA Market since 2014. The market features local meat, eggs, seasonal produce, cheese, honey and a wide range of value-added products from more than 60 local producers. Producers that sell through the market, price their own product and receive 100% of the retail price. The CAA Market charges a 23% mark up on all purchases to customers with a 10% discount provided to consumer members. Average weekly sales have grown from $500 in 2014 to $7,500 in 2023. Animal proteins continue to be the primary sales category at the store with beef sales being the largest animal protein category (Figure 9). In 2022, there was a total of $138,400 in total meat sales through the CAA Market.

Figure 9. CAA Market sales by species.



In order to gain some public perspective on the meat products purchased within Northwest Colorado, we conducted two public dot surveys: one at the weekly farmer's markets in Steamboat Springs and the second at the Routt County Fair. Each participant was asked to answer five questions. Participants were given five dots to mark their responses. We solicited responses from 64 farmers market shoppers and 34 county fair attendees. The dot survey allows for participant anonymity encouraging truthfulness in their responses.

Realizing the difference in the two locations we asked slightly different questions of the two groups. The Steamboat Farmers Market is located in downtown Steamboat Springs and runs from mid June to the end of September. Approximately 4,500-5,500 people attend the farmers market each week, with half of the attendees identifying as visitors and half identifying as locals. Over 60% of survey participants at the Steamboat Farmers Market were residents of Northwestern Colorado, 14% were from the Front Range, 8% were from another part of the state, and 17% from another state. Nearly 80% of survey participants had purchased meat products from Northwestern Colorado. Sixty-one people out of 63 (97%) indicated that they would like to purchase meat products that have been locally branded. Sixty-six percent of respondents also indicated they would be willing to pay at least a 25% premium on those locally branded products.

The Routt County Fair runs the second to last week of August in Hayden, Colorado. Daytime attendees are almost exclusively made up of families from Routt County, many of whom are actively involved in 4-H. Over 79% of the survey participants at the Routt County Fair were from NW Colorado, 9% were from the Front Range, 12% were from another part of the state. Over 94% of survey participants had purchased meat products from Northwestern Colorado. All of the participants express interest in buying a NW Colorado branded meat product. All of the respondents indicated they would be willing to pay at least a 25% premium on those locally branded products.There is definitely a place for local meat to be profitable and beneficial to producers within the Northwestern Colorado region

Processing needs assessment

Producers were asked which processors they currently use. Eight out of 37 interviewed producers pointed to using multiple processors depending on who was purchasing the animal and species. Identified processors included Fitch's (41% of producers referenced using them), Mountain Meats (27%), Purkey's (14%), H & H (8%), Homestead (5%), 307 (3%) and Superior (3%). Three producers mentioned doing on farm processing.

Interest in increasing sales of meat to local and regional markets was constrained by the perception that finishing, accessing slaughter, and availability of cold storage were prohibitively time consuming and expensive by comparison to conventional markets.

We received open-ended responses from producers about the relationship with their processors. The challenges can be organized into four categories - scheduling, certification, value added processing, packaging/quality control, and pricing. It should be noted that producers did not prioritize building new processing operations, they either focused on improving existing facilities or were looking to process animals on their own operations.

SCHEDULING: The most frequently noted challenge with processing had to do with scheduling; 47% of the identified challenges were with scheduling. Ranchers referenced needing to schedule slaughter well in advance, complaining of lead times between one month and up to

one year. Scheduling a year in advance when feeding animals on grass is difficult. There are a lot of variables that contribute to animal weight gain - primarily length of the winter and grass growth - that are out of the producers control. These variables are often more controlled in a feedlot setting - often in milder climates - where producers can manage rations and feed composition.

Needing to schedule processing a year out can also negatively impact the quality of the final product. Producers feel obligated or stuck bringing animals in when they have an appointment, even if the animal is not ready.

Scheduling constraints were exacerbated in the fall because of processing of 4-H and FFA animals and shutting down of processing lines for wild game processing. As one producer put it, “Fall is just out of the question.” Many ranchers in the area also rely on hunting as another revenue stream from their land - hosting hunters including feeding and guiding them is a very lucrative business. The harsh 22/23 winter, resulted in the reduction in the number of hunting tags available; female mule deer licenses were cut by as much as 94% in some areas[18]. Reduced demand for wild game processing has the potential to increase the slots for domestic animal processing but has had a negative effect on some ranching operations because of fewer hunting reservations.

CERTIFICATION: Nineteen percent of the challenges identified related to certification. Some producers wanted custom exempt processors to pursue USDA certification to reduce reliance on two the USDA-certified processors in the region. They described liking to work with their preferred processors and being frustrated when buyers needed USDA certification, requiring them to work with a non-preferred processor. There was also a belief that if there were more USDA certified processors, no one processor would have a monopoly on the market and some of the challenges including scheduling and cost of processing would be addressed through competition.

Some producers, particularly those raising sheep and goats, expressed a need for halal processing. Halal foods are those that adhere to Islamic law as defined in the Koran. Halal slaughtering requires - 1) at least three out of the four main veins of the throat must be cut, 2) the name of Allah must be mentioned during the slaughter, and 3) the butcher must be a Muslim. Halal certified food is expected to reach nearly $2 trillion in sales by 2024. Colorado is home to around 70,000 Muslims, mostly concentrated along the Front Range. While there are examples of processors slaughtering for the Halal market without a third party certification, because of the distance between Muslim population centers and Northwestern Colorado a third-party certification may be necessary. USDA FSIS also requires third party certification for any meat products with the “Halal and Zabiah Halal” label. In 2023, there was only one third-party certified meat processor in the state located in Denver.

A number of other certifications were discussed during the interviews.

[18] Pace, Eli. 2023. CPW makes big cuts to big game hunting licenses in Northwest Colorado. *Steamboat Pilot*. 18 May.

- Certified Humane - The Certified Humane label is a certification placed on meat, poultry, egg, dairy products, or pet food that indicates that the farm animals were raised on farms that met the farm animal welfare standards of Humane Farm Animal Care. To obtain the label, products must pass through a qualification process that ensures that the animals were treated in a humane fashion from birth until slaughter.
- Regenerative Agriculture - Regenerative Agriculture is a land management practice that seeks to close the carbon cycle, and build soil health, crop resilience and nutrient density through plant and soil management.
- IMI Global - IMI Global is a way for producers and consumers alike to confirm the breed of their beef cows and ultimately, their beef product. With this program, there is a sourcing a traceability standard that utilizes electronic ID systems to ensure value-added programs are being used correctly. IMI Global believes that value-added programs begin with the certification and assurance that traceability can offer. This is all done through Program Compliant Tags and EIDs that track the source and age of the beef cattle.
- Audubon Society- Audubon Society provides a seal on agricultural products that encourages and certifies that the commodity is sustainably sourced. The seal is a way for consumers to directly contribute to grassland conservation efforts. Audubon Society was started in the hopes of conserving some of the natural lands of grassland birds, as their numbers continue to decline. This certification embodies conservation ranching and symbolizes it to the consumer.

VALUE ADDED PROCESSING: Five producers referred to a need for more processing options including meat sticks and jerky. These services are offered by some processors in the region. Further this type of additional processing can be expensive depending on the capacity of the processors. Jerky processing can result in a 50 to 70% loss in weight and cost between $12 to $10 per pound to process. Meat sticks cost between $4 and $10 per pound to process. Another value add that one producer mentioned was being able to add their own label to the processed product.

According to the 2022 Power of Meat report[19], the value added category saw a 4.7% increase in dollar sales growth to represent more than $5 billion in 2021. Two-thirds of meat shoppers surveyed said that they “frequently” or “sometimes” purchased value added products, compared to 37% in 2016. When asked their reason for purchasing value added meat products, the top replies from shoppers were time savings (28%), better taste or flavor (22%) and simply for something different (20%).

PACKAGING AND QUALITY CONTROL: Three producers referenced changes to packaging including casing options and vacuum sealed packaging. Many processors across the state offer a cheaper paper wrap or more expensive vacuum seal option. While paper wrap is fine for bulk meat sales - wholes, halves, and quarters - clients that are purchasing individual cuts of meats like to be able to see the product. There is a chance of the vacuum seal failing, this is often

[19] FMI and Foundation for Meat and Poultry Education and Research. 2022. The Power of Meat: An in-depth look at meat through the shopper’s eyes.

more common with bonier cuts like soup bones and ribs because of the increased chance of bag puncture.

COLD STORAGE: Two producers noted cold storage and safe transport of product as a significant barrier to the expansion of their local and regional sales.

In 2021, Leadership Steamboat, a program of the Steamboat Springs Chamber of Commerce, partnered with CAA to develop plans, fundraise, and purchase a 40-foot commercial freestanding freezer that provided 2,280 cubic feet of storage space. The unit is located at Yampa Valley Electric Association in Steamboat Springs. YVEA does not charge CAA for storing the container but CAA charges producers a small monthly fee to cover utilities and related expenses. The facility is currently full. In addition to the additional storage space, the Community Ag Alliance purchased a mobile freezer trailer that is available for member producers to borrow to transport meat. As one producer explained, “I delivered over 2,000 lbs of beef to customers using the refrigerated trailer that the Ag Alliance purchased to support local agriculture. Because of the trailer and its refrigeration ability, I was able to pick up the meat at Mountain Meats in the middle of the summer, deliver whole and half steers to customers at their house, and then bring the rest of the meat back to the ranch for future sales at the CAA market. Not only did it make it easier and safer (no thawing) but it also looked very professional to deliver meat to customers in a refrigerated trailer.”

One of the producers expressed a need and interest in replicating the dispersed cold storage model. Cold storage locations could be established in Rio Blanco and Moffat counties. After processing, frozen products could be stored in these facilities for distribution to individual consumers, institutional, and retail buyers.

COSTS: The cost of processing was only specifically brought up by one producer but came up during the focus groups hosted by NWCDC.

As a part of the study, we reviewed processing fees for 19 processors in Colorado. Lamb and goats were often processed for a whole animal fee ranging between $95 to $200 with an average of $130.63/animal. Larger species cattle and hogs have a slaughter fee and a per pound processing fee (Table 5). Most slaughter facilities offered a premium and basic processing fee. Premium included vacuum pack and basic used butcher paper. Additional fees were associated with grinding, smoking, curing, flavoring, and drying. The average slaughter fee for cattle is $99.82 with a range of $60-$150/head and premium processing is $1.09/lbs and basic processing is $0.90/lbs. Only one facility posted their processing fees for chickens at $7/bird.

Table 5. Average, max and minimum prices for processing for Colorado meat processors

	Slaughter	Premium processing fee ($/lbs)	Basic processing fee ($/lbs)
Beef	$99.82 ($60-150)	$1.09 ($0.70-1.50)	$0.90 ($0.65-1.15)
Hogs	$70.83 ($35-1200	$1.12 ($1.00-1.35)	$0.88 ($0.60-1.00)

Efforts to expand processing

The last five years have seen several significant changes to the meat processing industry in NW Colorado. The COVID-19 pandemic caused unprecedented demand for local processing. Processors in the area were able to purchase animals from closed plants in the Midwest for pennies on the dollar. The Community Ag Alliance saw purchases from their market quadruple during the first month of the pandemic.

Elk River Custom Meats, a custom processing facility in Steamboat Springs, was purchased by AGP, a custom processor based out of Craig. In addition to the processing service, Elk River Custom Meats will also add a retail store front with beef from local ranches. They are excited about expanding their operation including updating equipment and increasing cold storage.

One of the two USDA certified facilities, Brother's was purchased by a ranching family from Grand County in 2022. The new owners are expanding the facility, now Fitch Ranch Artisan Meat Co.. Over the last year, the owners have expanded capacity by hiring additional staff and doubling the cold storage. They have updated aging equipment, improved the quality of the labels and packaging, and shifted more of the priority toward domestic animal processing. Fitch also now offers graded certified Angus beef processing. Yet, processing slots are still booked nine months out at a minimum. They are looking to double the cold storage space again, hire an additional 20 to 30 staff, and increase production space.

Conversations with local processors indicated that capacity is increasing but stressed the challenges associated with regulations, labor (recruitment, retention, and salary), and seasonal variability in demand create a precarious business model that stands to be adversely impacted by the addition of a competing facility within the region. Within the region, finishing periods for livestock coincide with hunting season demands, forcing shut downs in their domestic processing lines at the peak time for grass finished cattle to be finished. Understanding that

keeping livestock over the winter months increases cost of production, this can pose challenges when attempting to keep processing local, especially catering to hunters and ranchers alike.

Efforts to expand sales

In July of 2023, the CAA purchased a building in downtown Steamboat Springs. The new space will double the retail space. Interviews with the market manager indicate major opportunities to increase total meat sales which will require sourcing more product from surrounding communities. Demand is seasonal with ground beef and steaks in high demand during the summer months, and increase in roasts and large cuts during the winter. The market manager also noted supply can not keep up with demand for pork and chicken products.

In addition to the opportunity presented by the expansion of the CAA Market, the passage of the Healthy School Meals for All program presents new opportunities for institutional procurement. The program will provide $0.25 per school meal served during the previous year to be used to purchase food and agricultural products from Colorado sources. Based on school lunch participation during the 2022 school year, the six districts in the three-county area will have an additional $99,000 to purchase Colorado products each year. South Routt and Hayden school districts participated in the Colorado Department of Education Local Food Pilot Program sourcing Colorado meat directly from a processor.

Opportunities for non-processor supported initiatives

In addition to the needs identified by producers that can be addressed by processors, there are a number of opportunities that may best be fulfilled by non-processor entities.

COLLECTIVE MARKETING/AG AMBASSADOR. Four producers expressed a need for marketing support. Each step in breaking down the animal, while potentially more profitable, demands more time. Selling wholes and halves of animals requires one to two sales transactions. Breaking down an animal into individual cuts, while potentially more lucrative, requires more time to find customers and to complete those individual transactions. Many of the producers we spoke with, do not have the time or the inclination to complete multiple transactions.

The CAA Market has a dedicated staff to facilitating these transactions. Many of the producers in Moffat and Rio Blanco counties were unaware of the CAA Market Program. With additional capacity and staffing, CAA could better engage producers in the counties surrounding Routt. Some producers also expressed skepticism and hesitation about bringing product into Routt County. Additional materials and resources could be prepared to address these concerns. This could include facilitating transportation, pricing, inventory management and possible cold storage.

One specific tool that was requested by producers was a cut sheet calculator that would help a producer to determine the most profitable way to have an animal butchered, taking into account typical sales prices, processing fees, and loss. This support and resources could be shared by an agri-ambassador or a value chain coordinator. Value chain coordination can include market matchmaking, providing technical assistance, organizing conveying events and stakeholder meetings and catalyzing new ideas and projects[20]. There are a number of federal grant opportunities that could go towards covering the salary of this individual (Appendix 2). An individual that lives in one of the surrounding counties could provide some of this technical assistance and outreach.

An example of a potential value chain coordination project resulted in the collective purchasing and processing of culled cows. In 2021, the Rocky Mountain Farmers Union (RMFU) purchased 86 head of cattle from livestock producers. RMFU covered the processing cost for culled cows. Food Bank of the Rockies paid $2.80/lb for the finished product. This was made possible by Colorado Department of Agriculture, Agricultural Drought Resiliency Fund Stimulus Grant. A similar effort could be made to purchase cattle to supply the school districts. One interviewed producer was already providing a service to his neighbor by rounding up the culled cows and shipping them off, because few of the neighbors had enough animals to fill a trailer.

There are also opportunities to do collective marketing to increase the visibility of animal proteins from Northwestern Colorado. The USDA Rural Development developed a generic business plan for a producer-owned meat marketing company[21]. There are also examples of regions coming together to invest in this type of market. The Community Ag Alliance has invested in the development of the Yampavore brand to identify products raised and grown in the Yampa Valley. Some of the member producers include the logo on their meat products. Further Northwest Colorado resonated with customers. Nearly all of the surveyed individuals, both at the farmers market and at the fair, expressed interest in purchasing branded products, and many of those surveyed did not prioritize purchasing from a single producer over a group of producers. Consumers appear to make values-based assumptions about livestock production practices of producers in Northwestern Colorado that align with their own values.

One project that is referenced frequently in Routt County when talking about a Northwestern Colorado brand is Yampa Valley Beef[22]. YVB was a Limited Liability Corporation started in 1998 with funds from The Nature Conservancy and the Routt County Economic Development Council. The group focused on supplying ground beef to the ski resort in an effort to support agriculture and maintain the agricultural identity of the region. There was a focus on land

[20] Wallace Center at Winrock International. 2020. Value chain coordination quicksheet: Roles of value chain coordination. Sourced from https://wallacecenter.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/07/Quicksheet_RolesofValueChainCoordination.pdf
[21] USDA Rural Development. 2011. Generic business plan for producer-owned meat marketing company. Sourced from https://www.nichemeatprocessing.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/07/Generic-marketing-company-business-plan.pdf
[22] University of California Ag and Natural Resources. 2002. Yampa Valley Beef. Sourced from https://ucanr.edu/sites/placernevadasmallfarms/files/79067.pdf

conservation with an expectation that at least 25% of the cattle sold through the program would graze on conservation easements. In 1998, Yampa Valley Beef marketed 10 steers and by 2000 they were selling about 30,000 pounds of ground beef which equated to about 80 cows per year. The 22 producers that sold through the label paid a $100 membership fee. Yampa Valley Beef was selling the ground beef at a 78% premium, the market price for ground beef at the time was $1.29 and they sold Yampa Valley Beef for $2.29. After 18 months in business, they had a positive cash flow. Ranchers were paid on a boneless basis with a premium for each head. The program was implemented at a time when cattle prices were low. On reflection, twenty years later, the involved parties said they needed to sell at least 100 head and to do a better job with consistency, which required improvements to the relationship with the processor, inventory management, and in transportation. Other suggestions included a higher annual membership fee, and better payment of staffing. The project fizzled in October of 2002 due to increased distribution costs and tension with the processor.

DIVERSIFICATION OF LIVESTOCK MIX. Another option, external to processors, is better utilization of existing processing capacity through livestock diversification. A number of interviewed producers were raising non-cattle species, swine, goats, lambs, and poultry. These species often have a wider finishing window, even on grass. Pork can be finished year round, but require supplemental feed and are unable to survive the winter without appropriate shelter. Lambs and goats can be finished between mid-August and the beginning of October. Poultry can be raised and processed between April and November.

Appendix 1. NW Colorado Livestock Producer Interview Protocol

The Community Agriculture Alliance and Colorado State University is conducting interviews of livestock producers in Northwest Colorado to better understand processing, storage, distribution, and marketing needs to identify opportunities for our community to come together to overcome some of these challenges.

This project is a collaborative effort between the Community Ag Alliance, Colorado State University, Northwest Colorado Development Council and Colorado Northwestern Community College. The effort has been informed by ranchers and other key stakeholders in the community through a series of NW Colorado listening sessions hosted by NWCDC. We have all heard stories and anecdotes about the challenges facing livestock producers in our area, but to be able to make regulatory or structural changes we need to do a systematic study to capture these experiences and see beyond the individual. The intent of this project is to report what we hear to business owners and policy makers to enact change. Ranchers will have access to the study to help them apply for grants and loans.

We are required by CSU to explain the potential risk and benefits you will face as a result of your participation in this study. Please bear with us.

The interview should take about an hour to complete. If you decide to participate in the interview you may withdraw your consent and stop participation at any time without penalty. We will not collect your name or personal identifiers. When we report and share our findings with others, we will combine the responses from all participants.

While there are no direct benefits to you, we hope to gain more knowledge on opportunities to support livestock operations and businesses across the state. There are no known risks associated with participation in this interview. I also want to ask you for your permission to record our conversation in a quiet location.

If you have any questions about the research, please contact Libby Christensen at libby.christensen@colsotate.edu. If you have any questions about your rights as a volunteer in this research, contact the CSU IRB at RICRO_IRB@mail.colostate.edu or 970-491-1553.

1. We are trying to get a sense of the different types of livestock operations in Northwest Colorado. Can you please talk me through your operation with regards to the type of species you raise during a year? The approximate quantity of each species you raise?

Species	Number raised	Percent of animal type retained on site for finishing
Cattle		
Cow/calf pair		
Replacement heifers		
Weaned cattle		
Stockers		
Feeders		
Hogs		
Sows		
Weaners		
Feeders		
Yak or Bison		
Lamb or Goat		
Poultry		
Other		

2. Do you retain any animals on site for finishing? What percent/number of each animal type do you currently finish? Are any of the animals you finish associated with a 4-H or FFA project?

3. If you finish animals, when do you typically finish your animals? When would you like to finish your animals? What is the live weight you typically finish with your animals?

4. For the next five years, do you plan to increase, maintain or decrease the number of animals you retain for finishing?

5. If you retain some of your livestock, what is the name of the primary meat processor that you used in 2022?

6. For your primary processor, which services does the processor offer (Processing completed as agreed, USDA inspection, slaughter, cut and wrap of primals, portion cutting, grinding, casing, smoking, drying, new product development, etc.)?

7. Can you describe your experiences working with your current processor with regards to scheduling, packaging, cutting instructions, consistency, etc.? How long have you been working with your current processor? If you recently changed, can you explain why the change? Is there anything else you would like us to know about working with your current or previous processors?

8. Are there additional types of value-added processing that you currently offer (slaughter only, primal cuts, retail cuts, value-added (jerky, smoking, aging), halal, kosher, USDA organic)? If so, do you select your processor because of these offerings? Does this require driving/shipping further distances?

9. Are there additional types of processing would you like to have available for your livestock (slaughter only, primal cuts, retail cuts, value-added (jerky, smoking, aging), halal, kosher, USDA organic)?

10. Where do you currently store your finished product? Approximately how much freezer spaces do you need? How much freezer space would you like to have? Can you describe what your ideal access to freezer space would look like (time of day, frequency of access)?

11. How do you sell your finished product?

12. Are there any characteristics/certifications you use to help market your product (local, organic, natural, grass finished, etc.)?

13. Would you be willing to finish more livestock if a regional brand or entity that would market your culled animals influence your decision to finish livestock?

14. If you wanted to expand your livestock production for meat sales, which factors would likely pose a significant barrier?

15. Are there additional resources and/or information that would help you better understand the potential for selling your product(s) into new markets?

16. Are there other producers you think we should speak with?

Appendix 2. USDA Pertinent Grant and Loan Programs: At a Glance

The list below includes USDA grant and loan programs that can be accessed to support the development or expansion of meat and poultry processing and marketing. This is not a complete list, and we will update it as able. Official FAQ sheets are not published for all programs.

OPEN GRANT PROGRAMS	
Reduce Overtime and Holiday Inspection Costs for Small and Very Small Processing [FSIS]	
Description	FSIS is providing $100 million in grants to reduce the costs of overtime and holiday inspection for small and very small official meat and poultry establishments and egg products plants. FSIS is implementing this provision by reducing overtime and holiday inspection fees for small establishments by 30 percent and very small establishments by 75 percent.
Due Date	Ongoing
Program Explanation	Reduction in Overtime and Holiday Inspection Fees for Small and Very Small Establishments | Food Safety and Inspection Service (usda.gov)
How to Apply	FSIS 5200-16Overtime Holiday Rate Reduction Form (usda.gov)

Meat and Poultry Expansion Program – Round II (RD)	
Description	*Not yet announced*
Due Date	
Fact Sheet	
FAQ's	
Questions	mppep@usda.gov
Rural Energy for America Program Renewable Energy Systems & Energy Efficiency Improvement Guaranteed Loans & Grants	
Description	Provides guaranteed loan financing and grant funding to agricultural producers and rural small businesses for renewable energy systems or to make energy efficiency improvements. Agricultural producers may also apply for new energy-efficient equipment and new system loans for agricultural production and processing.

Due Date	March 31, 2023
Fact Sheet	Rural Energy for America Program Renewable Energy & Energy Efficiency Factsheet (usda.gov)
Questions	Use this link to locate your state energy coordinator for USDA Rural Development: Simple Masthead Template (usda.gov)
Rural Business Development Grants (RD)	
Description	Supports technical assistance, training, and other activities leading to the development or expansion of small and emerging private businesses in rural areas.
Eligible Applicants	Towns, communities, state agencies, authorities, nonprofit corporations, institutions of higher education, Federally-recognized Tribes, rural cooperatives
Dates	Applications are due at 4:30 p.m. local time, April 19, 2023
Fact Sheet	https://www.rd.usda.gov/sites/default/files/fact-sheet/508_RD_FS_RBS_RBDG.pdf
FAQs	Contact your local or state Rural Development Office with questions. Here is a link to a directory of state offices: State Offices | Rural Development (usda.gov)
Farmers' Market Promotion Program (AMS)	

Description	There are three types of grants available: · Capacity Building – grants of between $50,000 - $250,000. This includes items such as market analysis and strategic planning, farmers' market and agritourism business development, and product marketing · Community Development – grants of between $100,000 - $500,000. This grant requires a broad range of stakeholder input and participation. · Turnkey Projects – Grants of between $50,000 - $100,000. This grant must be used to support at least three of the following activities: • Identify and analyze new/improved market opportunities. • Develop/revise a marketing plan. • Design/purchase marketing and promotion media. • Implement a marketing plan. • Evaluate marketing and promotion activities All grants require a 25% match (including in-kind) All projects must be focused on direct farm-to-consumer marketing
Eligible Applicants	Agricultural businesses, agricultural cooperatives, producer networks or associations, CSA networks or associations, food councils, local governments, nonprofit corporations, public benefit corporations, economic development corporations, regional farmers' market authorities, and Tribal governments.
Dates	Applications are due by 11:59 p.m. Eastern time, May 2nd, 2023
Fact Sheet	2023 FMPP Fact Sheet (usda.gov)
FAQs	Farmers Market and Local Food Promotion Program FAQs (usda.gov)

Local Food Promotion Program (AMS)	
Description	There are four types of grants available: · Planning – grants of between $25,000 - $250,000. These grants are to be used in the planning stages of developing, coordinating, or expanding a food business that supports locally and regionally produced agricultural products and food system infrastructure. · Implementation – grants of between $100,000 - $750,000. These grants are to establish a new food enterprise or market channel or to improve or expand an existing food enterprise or market channel that supports locally and regionally produced agricultural products and food system infrastructure. · Farm to Institution – grants of between $100,000 - $750,000. These grants support the development, coordination, and expansion of institutional markets or institutional food service operations. They may plan and facilitate supply chains and develop relationships between local and regional producers, processors, intermediaries, and institutional markets or institutional food services operations, · Turnkey Marketing and Promotion – grants of between $50,000 - $100,000. These grants are to be used to support at least three of the following activities: • Identify and analyze new/improved market opportunities. • Develop/revise a marketing plan. • Design/purchase marketing and promotion media. • Implement a marketing plan. • Evaluate marketing and promotion activities All grants must include at least a 25% match (including in-kind)

Eligible Applicants	Agricultural businesses, agricultural cooperatives, producer networks or associations, CSA networks or associations, food councils, local governments, nonprofit corporations, public benefit corporations, economic development corporations, regional farmers' market authorities, and Tribal governments.
Dates	Applications are due by 11:59 p.m. Eastern time, May 2nd, 2023
Fact Sheet	LFPP Fact Sheet 2023 (usda.gov)
FAQs	Farmers Market and Local Food Promotion Program FAQs (usda.gov)
Regional Food Systems Partnership (AMS)	
	There are three types of grants available to support the development, coordination, and expansion of direct producer-to-consumer marketing, local and regional food markets and enterprises, and value-added agricultural products: Planning grants of $100,000 - $250,000, Implementation grants of $250,000 - $1 million Farm to Institution grants of $250,000 - $ 1 million. to support partnerships that connect public and private resources to plan and develop local or regional food systems. This program requires that all applications include a partnership between the applicant and at least one elibgieligibleble partner.

	A 25% cash match is required.
Eligible Applicants	Must be a partnership. Eligible entities include producers, farmer- or rancher-cooperatives, producer networks or associations, majority-controlled producer-based businesses, Community Supported Agriculture networks, food councils, local governments, nonprofit and public benefit corporations, and economic development corporations, regional farmers market authorities, and tribal governments. Eligible partners include state agencies or regional authorities, philanthropic corporations, private corporations, institutions of higher education, and commercial, federal, or Farm Credit System Lending institutions.
Dates	Applications are due by 11:59 p.m. Eastern time, May 2nd, 2023
Fact Sheet	RFSP Fact Sheet 2023 (usda.gov)
FAQs	Regional Food System Partnerships (RFSP) Frequently Asked Questions (usda.gov)
LOAN AND LOAN GUARANTEE PROGRAMS	
Food Supply Chain Guaranteed Loan Program (RD)	
Description	Provides financial support to qualified lenders whose loan applicants want to start or expand the middle of the food supply chain activities.

Eligible Applicants	For-profit or nonprofit businesses, co-ops, Federally-recognized Tribes, Public bodies, food-supply chain entrepreneurs
Dates	Ongoing
Fact Sheet	https://www.rd.usda.gov/sites/default/files/508_rcbs_foodsupplychainloanguarantee.pdf
FAQs	https://www.rd.usda.gov/food-supply-chain-guaranteed-loans/frequently-asked-questions
Information or Questions	rdfoodsupplychainloans@usda.gov
Farm Storage Facility Loan Program (FSA)	
Description	Provides low-interest loans for producers to store, handle, and/or transport eligible commodities (including meat and poultry)
Eligible Applicants	Landlords, landowners, leaseholders, tenants, and sharecroppers
Dates	ongoing
Fact Sheet	farm_storage_facility_loan_programs_fact_sheet_july_2022.pdf (usda.gov)
FAQs	

Business & Industry Loan Guarantee Program (RD)	
Description	Offers loan guarantees to lenders for their loans to rural businesses
Eligible Applicants	Lenders include federal and state-chartered banks, Farm Credit Banks with Direct lending authority, credit unions, and some non-regulated lending institutions. Entities eligible for the loans are for-profit and nonprofit businesses, Cooperatives, Federally-recognized Tribes, public bodies, and individuals engaged or proposed to be engaged in a rural business.
Dates	Ongoing
Fact Sheet	https://www.rd.usda.gov/programs-services/business-programs/business-industry-loan-guarantees
FAQs	https://www.rd.usda.gov/files/BCP_BI_LEAP_LEAPfaqs.pdf
Rural Economic Development Loan & Grant Program (RD)	
Description	Provides funding for rural projects through local utility organizations. USDA provides zero-interest loans to local utilities, which they, in turn, pass through to local businesses.
Dates	Ongoing – applications are accepted every quarter.
Fact Sheet	https://www.rd.usda.gov/sites/default/files/rd_fs_rbs_redl.pdf
FAQs	

ARCHIVED GRANT PROGRAMS (NOT CURRENTLY OPEN)	
Note, that USDA is not currently accepting applications for the following grant programs. However, these programs are generally open once each year, so it is helpful to familiarize yourself with them so that you can be prepared when a Request for Applications is issued	
Value Added Producer Grants (RD)	
Description	Provides Planning Grants of up to $75,000 and Working Capital Grants of up to $250,000 (matching funds required) to help agricultural producers enter into value-added activities related to the processing and marketing of new products.
Eligible Applicants	Independent producers, agricultural producer groups, farmer- or rancher-cooperatives, and majority-controlled producer-based businesses.
Fact Sheet	https://www.rd.usda.gov/sites/default/files/value-added-fact-sheet-fy-2022.pdf
FAQs	There's no official USDA FAQ sheet for the VAPG program, but there are several online that have been compiled by outside institutions.
Rural Innovation Stronger Economy (RISE) [RD]	
Description	Grants between $500,000 and $2 million to create new business incubators
Due Date	
Fact Sheet	Rural Innovation Stronger Economy (RISE) Grant (usda.gov)

FAQs	https://www.rd.usda.gov/sites/default/files/risefrequentlyaskedquestions.pdf
Application Template	https://www.grants.gov/web/grants/search-grants.html?keywords=USDA%20RISE
Meat Processing Inspection Readiness Grant MPIRG) [RD]	
Description	Grants of up to $200,000 to assist operational meat and poultry processing facilities obtain a grant of federal inspection, or to operate as a state-inspected facility under the Cooperative Interstate Shipment Program.
Eligible Applicants	Operating mat poultry processing facilities that are not currently operating under USDA inspection or State Inspection under a Cooperative Inspection Shipment program. Click here to determine eligibility: https://www.ams.usda.gov/sites/default/files/media/MPIRGFlowChart.pdf
Due Date	
Webinar on MPIRG	https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VXNXgLfB-D8
FAQs	https://www.ams.usda.gov/services/grants/mpirg/faq
RFA	https://www.ams.usda.gov/sites/default/files/media/2022_MPIRG_RFA.pdf