



La Plata Food Equity Coalition Food Business Workgroup

About Us

The La Plata Food Equity Coalition (LPFEC) started in 2020 when we asked rural, BIPOC, and senior members of the community *What would it take to have access to nourishing food?* The answers went far beyond the need for food assistance programs, and pointed more to the upstream causes of food insecurity: financial opportunity, agency, sense of belonging, knowledge & resources, representation, and language access.

Our workgroup started out focusing on food access, working with the farmer's market to make it more welcoming to BIPOC, rural, and senior shoppers. When we asked people who don't usually shop at the farmer's market how it could be made more welcoming, responses revealed a growing interest in becoming *vendors* at the market, not just shoppers. Food entrepreneurship is a common way for immigrant community members to provide financial security for their families. The Food Access workgroup became the Food Business workgroup, and **we work to support economic opportunity and financial security in La Plata County by building and sustaining a food business ecosystem that is welcoming and inclusive of rural and minority-owned businesses.**

We define the food business ecosystem as the collection of all the entities that interact with a food business: business owners and employees, regulatory agencies, service organizations, suppliers, customers, etc.

We know that our small town has a ton of resources available to small business owners, and we know that those resources are not equitably accessible. With the goal of gathering representatives from all the regulatory agencies and entrepreneur support organizations that a small business could to interact with, we convened the following entities as members:

- [City of Durango](#)
- [La Plata County Public Health Department](#)
- [Southwest Colorado Small Business Development Center \(SBDC\)](#)
- [Southwest Colorado Accelerator Program for Entrepreneurs \(SCAPE\)](#)
- [Local First](#)

- [First Southwest Community Fund](#)
- [Rocky Mountain Microfinance Institute \(RMMFI\)](#)
- [CSU Extension](#)

Since 2022, we have:

- Conducted a [Food Business Assessment](#) with 60 food entrepreneurs across the county.
- Developed La Plata County's first [Food Business Resource Directory](#), an online [Commissary Kitchen Database](#), and [food business funding resource packet](#).
- Hosted educational events for both food entrepreneurs and entrepreneur support organizations.
- Were [West Slope Startup Week](#)'s Inclusivity Sponsor, providing language access coordination to better reach immigrant businesses.
- Been in [City Inclusive Entrepreneurship](#) program partnership with the City of Durango for 2 years running.
- Developed and piloted the Manna Shared Kitchen program, in partnership with Manna, to incubate new minority-owned businesses.
- Began a Bilingual Food Business Navigator pilot, providing outreach and warm hand-offs, with emphasis on Spanish-speaking food entrepreneurs.

Here's what we're working on in 2024:

- Facilitating bilingual tax education for small food businesses.
- Continuing the Manna Shared Kitchen Program pilot, helping startup businesses access commercial kitchen space and business mentorship.
- Continuing our Bilingual Food Business Navigator pilot, helping immigrant business owners access resources, and recommending system changes to regulatory agencies to help streamline processes.
- Facilitating and informing policy conversations in the city and county that support minority-owned and rural food businesses.
- Supporting healthy food access by reducing barriers for small food businesses to procure and serve nourishing foods, through local procurement education and support.