

Colorado Food and Farm Systems Response Team

RESPOND & REBUILD FUND GRANTEE VOICES REPORT

May 2021



Photo: Green Junction Farmstead

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01

Fund Background



Photo: New Roots Farm

Fund Background

The COVID-19 crisis disrupted food systems in Colorado and upended the livelihoods of many farmers, ranchers, and other actors in the Colorado food system.

Several food and agriculture organizations in Colorado partnered to create the Colorado Food & Farm Systems Response Team (CFFSRT) to provide essential financial support to farmers, ranchers, and intermediaries that allowed organizations to adapt to the rapidly changing food system. The fund was called the Respond & Rebuild Fund (RRF).

Recognizing that critical resources would be less likely to reach historically under-resourced organizations, the fund focused on the specific needs of small- and mid-size growers, beginning farmers and ranchers, veteran farmers, black, indigenous and producers of color (BIPOC), LGBTQ+ farmers and female farmers. The fund also ensured strong representation from these groups in decision making.

The CFFSRT secured grant funding and awarded \$1,995,512 across 280 grants to organizations throughout Colorado.

Fund Background

The RRF provided three rounds of awards, focusing on producers and intermediaries in the first two rounds and extending funding to processors in the third round.

A [March report](#) describes the characteristics of those who applied for and received awards.

Producer



Meat, produce, dairy, eggs, grains and commodities, agriculture inputs and feed, mushrooms, honey, and others

Produces raw goods

Processor



Meat packing; meat, produce, grain, dairy, animal feed, and consumer good processing; and canning and preserving

Prepares raw goods for consumption

Intermediary



Producer collectives, farmers markets, food hubs, associations, kitchens, distributors, and others

Moves goods to consumers

02

Evaluation Background



Photo: Boulder County Farmers Markets

Evaluation Background

At the end of the Round 3 funding cycle, the RRF contracted with [ResultsLab](#) to evaluate the grantee experience. This evaluation focused on RRF grantees' outcomes, successes and improvement opportunities for the funding process, and grantees' ideas for how funders can support food system actors' efforts to build sustainable, resilient Colorado food systems.

The evaluation included these three components:

Grantee Focus Groups

The ResultsLab team conducted three virtual focus groups with grantees across Colorado in late-March.



Grantee Report Review

The ResultsLab team reviewed 50 randomly selected grantee reports in April.



Analysis and Synthesis

The ResultsLab team conducted a thematic analysis of all qualitative data, and this report describes the findings from that analysis.

Evaluation Background

This report summarizes insights gathered from over one fifth of grantees. The table below describes participation and sampling methods for each data source:

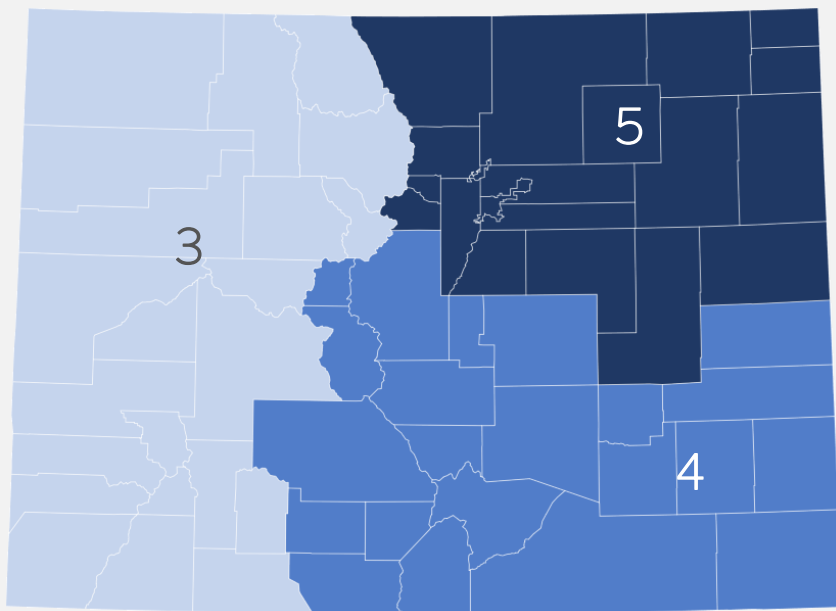
Data source	Participant count	Percent of all grantees represented	Sampling method
Grantee Focus Groups	12	4%	All grantees were invited to participate, and we spoke with everyone who signed up.
Grantee Reports	50	18%	126 reports were submitted across three rounds, and we randomly selected approximately 39% of reports submitted in each round to review: <ul style="list-style-type: none">– Round 1: 8 reviewed (20 submitted)– Round 2: 10 reviewed (24 submitted)– Round 3: 32 reviewed (82 submitted)

Evaluation Background

Focus group sample demographics

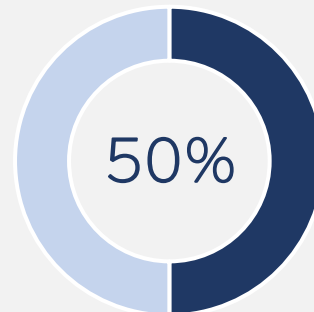
We spoke with 12 grantees in late-March 2021, and the charts below show some characteristics of focus group participants.

Participants by region

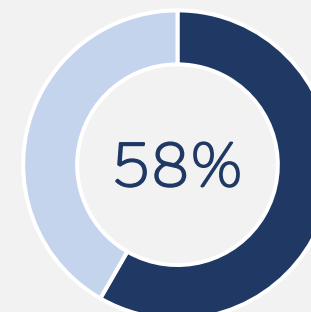


\$7,150 average
award amount
(range: \$2.5k – \$15.4k)

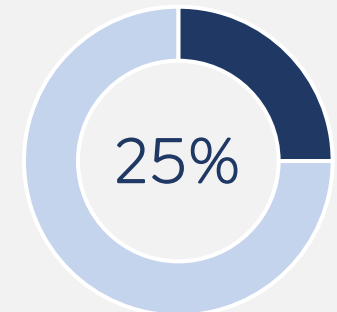
Woman-identifying
businesses



BIPOC-identifying
businesses



Received multiple rounds
of funding

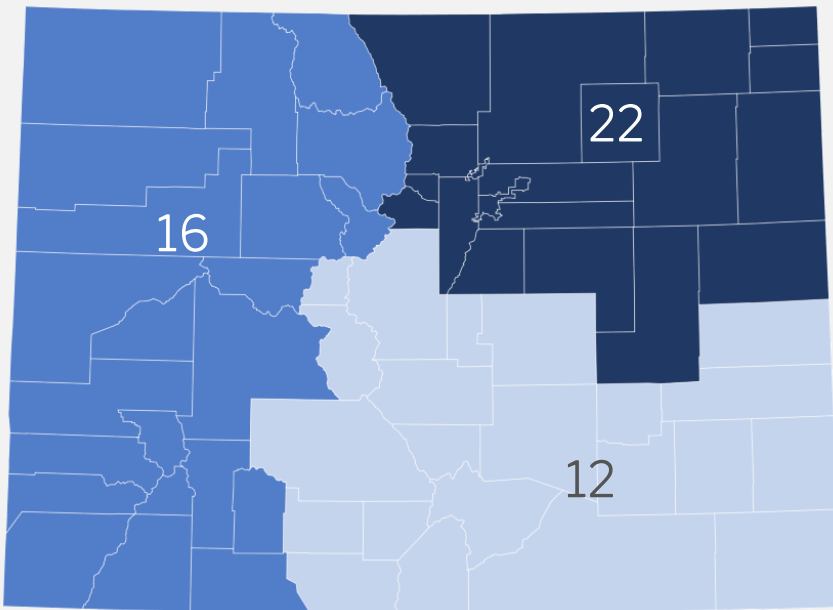


Evaluation Background

Report sample demographics

We reviewed 50 randomly selected grantee reports in April 2021, and the charts below show some characteristics of the organizations included in that sample.

Reports reviewed by region



Producer

68%

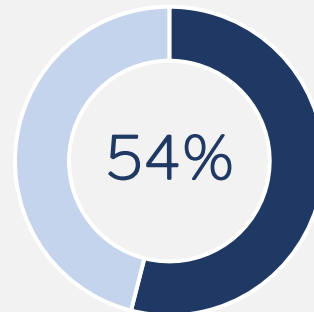
Processor Intermediary

8%

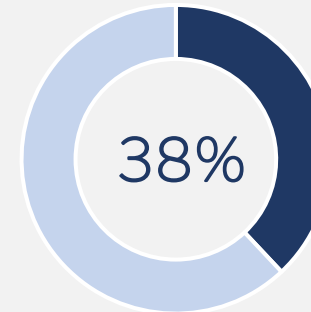
24%

\$6,258 average
award amount
(range: \$1k-\$18k)

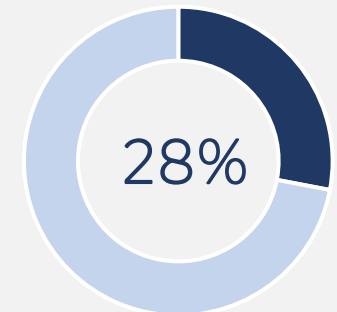
Woman-identifying
businesses



BIPOC-identifying
businesses



Received multiple rounds
of funding



Evaluation Background

How to use this report

Findings combine insights from all data sources across all regions. When relevant, grantee-type distinctions are color-coded as shown below.

Producer



Processor



Intermediary



03

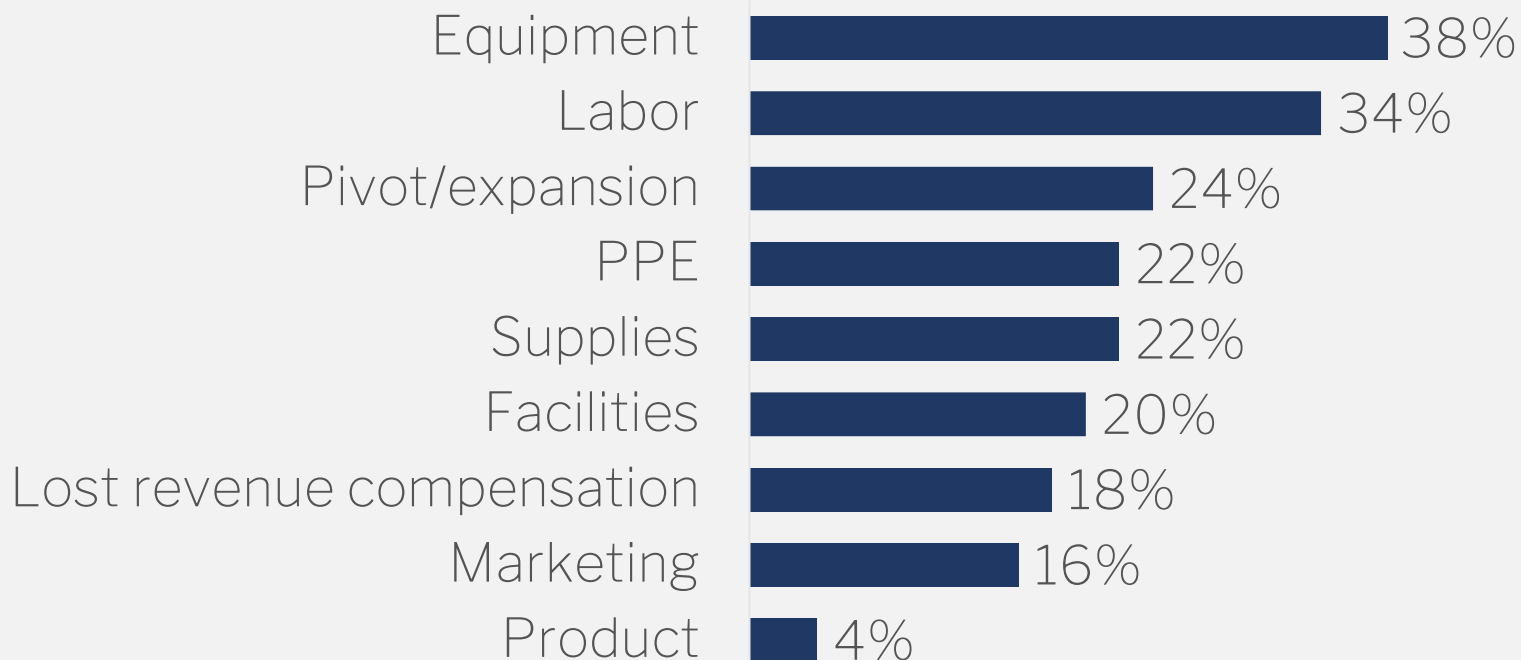
Grantee Outcomes



Photo: Five R Ranch

Grantee Outcomes

This chart shows the categories in which grantees used their funds, as described in the 50 grantee reports analyzed. The following slides provide examples of how funds were used in each category, and the impact that grantees expressed that these funds had on their businesses. Many grantees used funds in more than one category, so categories sum to more than 100%.



Fund use fell into three main categories:

1. Capital purchases or improvements
2. Covering expenses associated with COVID-safe operations
3. Covering lost, delayed, or uncertain revenue or product

Grantee Outcomes

Overall, the grant's flexibility allowed grantees to meet their unique pandemic-related needs and test creative ideas to improve future operations.

Grantees represent a diverse array of food systems actors who were affected differently by the COVID pandemic, and the flexibility of RRF grants allowed them to respond to these challenges according to their unique needs.

In many cases, grant flexibility empowered grantees to try out ideas that were previously unattainable due to tight finances. This grant not only kept many grantees in business; it also enabled many to take steps that they could not previously afford to take.



"More than the funds received, the exercise of notating our intended market shift and the work we have done as a team to come up with that plan (largely inspired by this grant) has been invaluable!"



"We are forever morphing as this situation does. It really helped to get the grant as it gave us the opportunity to think ahead and move forward."



"With the funds covering the expenses incurred it freed up our resources to keep our organization solvent and able to look to 2021 with new ideas and the ability to recover from 2020's many challenges."

Grantee Outcomes

Grantees from historically marginalized groups often focused on food equity and access, so the grant supported equity both through RRF funding decisions and grantees' fund use.

Equity is often defined in terms of **distribution of resources** (more resources to those with more need or to correct systemic inequities) and **outcomes that are achieved** (outcomes cannot be predicted by any group's identity).

The program prioritized funding to groups who are under-resourced in agriculture (BIPOC- and woman-identifying organizations, in particular) to address systemic inequities in agricultural system funding and participation, and the grant achieved this goal.

The prioritized organizations often had a strong emphasis on food access and equity in their communities, often citing food equity as their primary goal or concern and using funding to support work that builds equitable food access.

 "In response to local food access inequalities exacerbated by COVID-19, [we] opened a seasonal, pay-how-you-can farmer's market where shoppers purchase food from local vendors in a safe environment while supporting economic recovery."

Funding equity

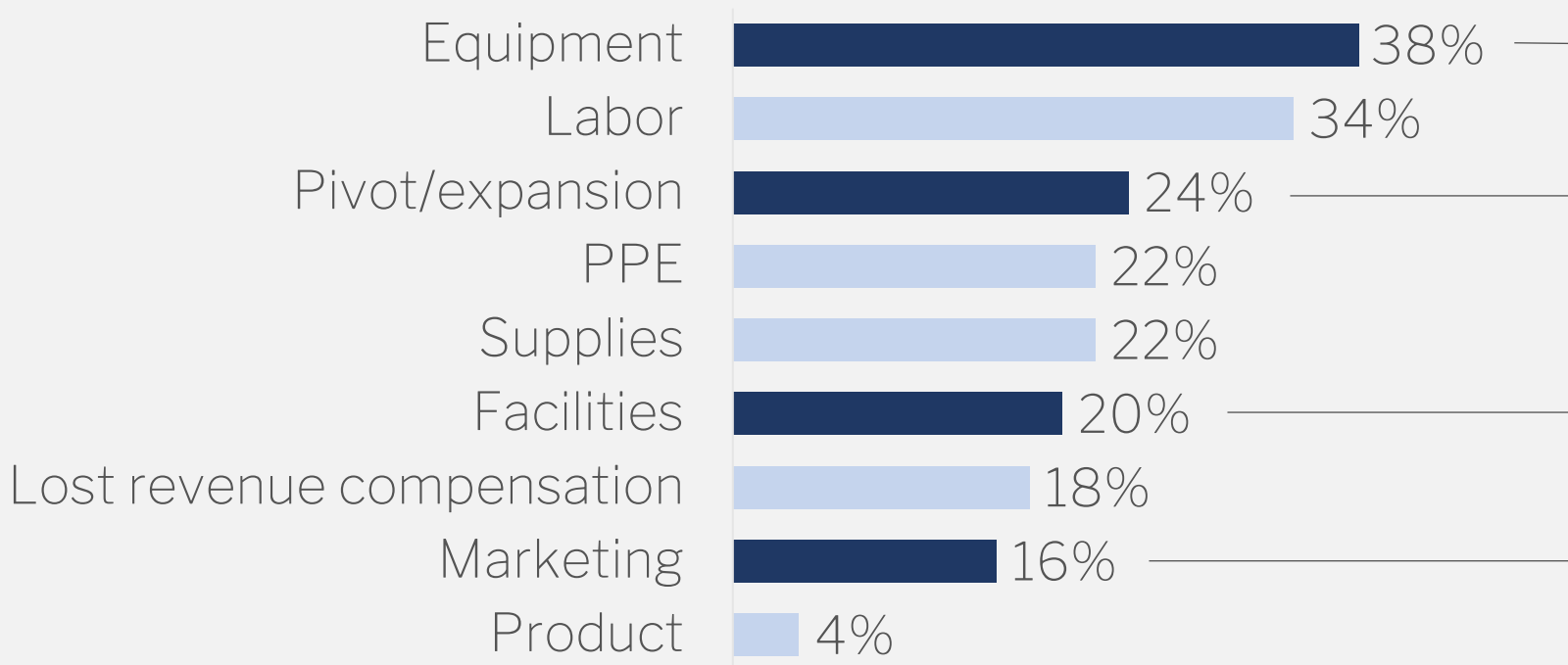
The program prioritized entities who are under-resourced in agriculture (e.g., BIPOC, women).

Outcome equity

Grantees from under-resourced groups tended to have a heightened focus on food access and equity.

Grantee Outcomes

Grantees frequently used funds to make **capital purchases or improvements**, which often supported business pivots or expansion.



- Many grantees purchased or improved capital assets such as cold-storage facilities, freezers, refrigerated trucks, livestock facilities, and web storefronts, which allowed them to:
 - Keep their products fresh longer while experiencing instability in demand and processing access and/or
 - Pivot their business model and/or expand to new markets.

Grantee Outcomes

Several grantees shared that their capital purchases and improvements helped them improve operations, expand their reach, and thereby better serve their communities and improve local food systems.



"This gives us storage space for frozen beef so we can feed more people in a local, community-oriented way."



"We've been able to expand our offerings on our online store and serve far more people, including hundreds of individuals on SNAP and WIC."



"This funding will help us...double or more our production for the year to meet the increasing demand for local meat. With the increased production we will also be hiring two more part-time employees and giving more hours to current staff. This money really helped us get over a hurdle and just go for it."

Grantee Outcomes

While many grantees used funds to improve the efficiency of existing processes or access to existing products, some business pivots involved creating an entirely new product or service that grantees expect to remain a future revenue source.



“We also used funds to pivot our production towards goat milk soap that we produced and sold at the Farm Stands hosted by our neighbor, Growing Gardens. We anticipate utilizing goat’s milk soap production to continue to share our work with a growing audience and to bring in revenues in the future.”
- Mountain Flower Goat Dairy



Grantee Outcomes

Nearly all grantees have adapted their model in some way that they expect to be sustained beyond the pandemic.

In particular, **intermediaries** developed new models for reaching and serving consumers and producers, such as meal delivery, web storefronts, and CSA boxes, while many **producers** transitioned their primary customer base from restaurants to individual consumers. Both groups were enthusiastic about the way these shifts built excitement about and access to fresh foods in their communities.



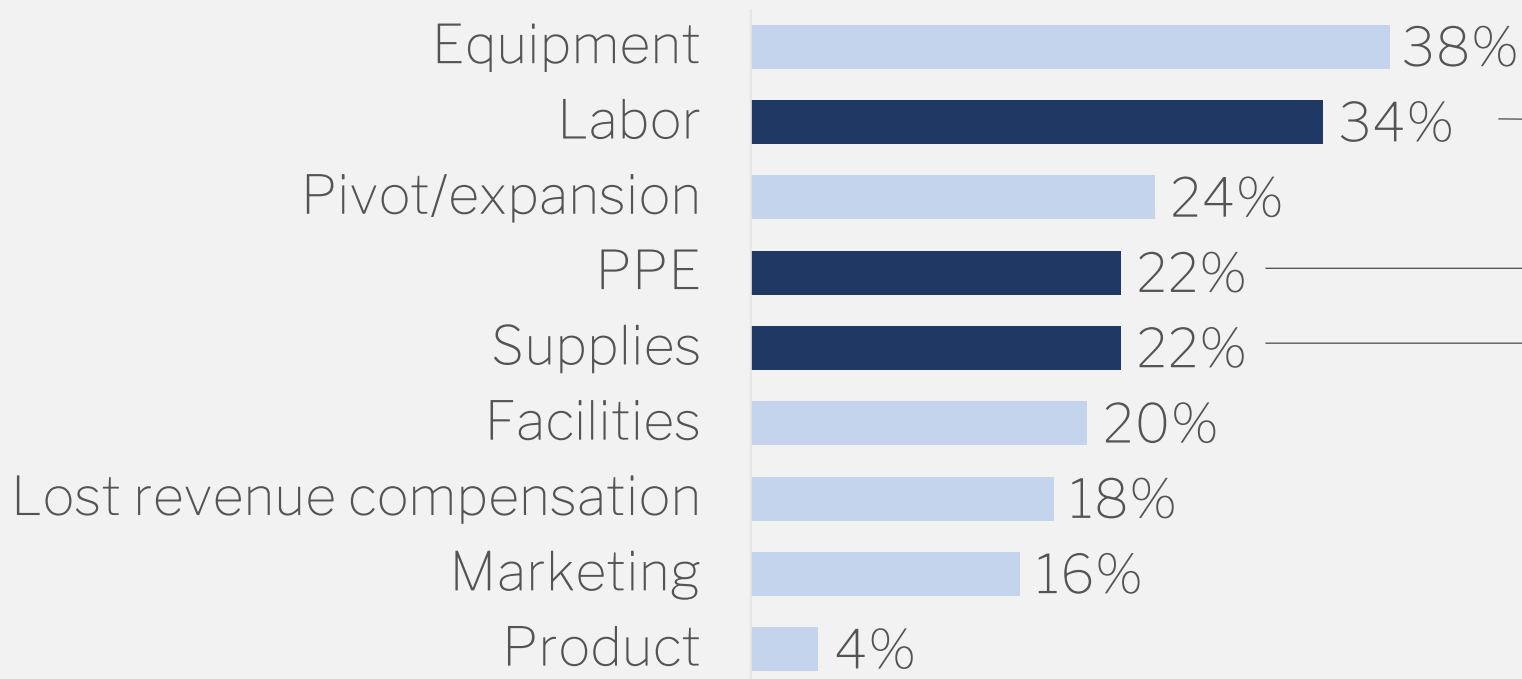
“We added an online ordering component to our business model. The year-round sales opportunities this was able to provide for Colorado farmers and ranchers and local food businesses has been substantial. We hope to continue offering this form of sales opportunities.”



“Greater opportunity opened up to sell grass-fed beef locally, and we are tooling up to meet growing demand. I intend and hope to keep my foothold in this market.”

Grantee Outcomes

Many grantees used funds to cover expenses associated with COVID-safe operations. Grantees shared that funds supported an average of 3.8 jobs.



- Many grantees, particularly **intermediaries**, used funds to adopt COVID-safe operations, including
 - Additional labor to safely staff and offer paid time off,
 - PPE for employees & customers,
 - Supplies and equipment to meet distance and sanitation requirements, and
 - Signs and other supplies to educate customers about COVID protocols.

Grantee Outcomes

Funding kept many grantees afloat amid increased **operating expenses** associated with adopting COVID-safe protocols. Importantly, grantees felt they were **able to keep their staff and customers safe** through

1. Hiring additional staff (e.g., to support curbside pickup or traffic control),
2. Offering paid time off for employees with COVID exposure, symptoms, or positive test results,
3. Funding the equipment, supplies, and employee and customer education needed to reduce the spread.



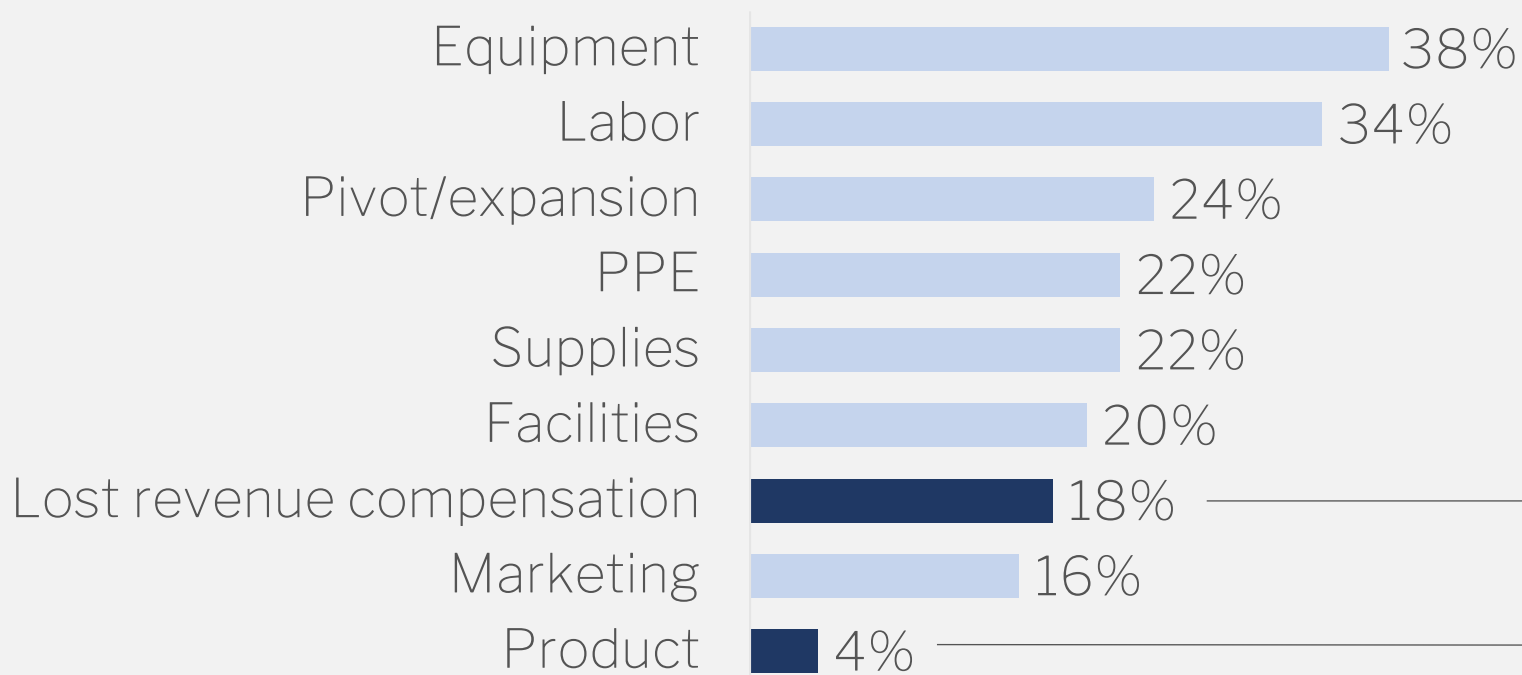
"Without these funds, we would have not been able to operate in the black this season. We would have struggled to fund the additional staff members and equipment needs that were necessary for the 2020 season."



"This funding mainly helped us adapt to new COVID requirements to make our CSA program and farmers market safe for our customers. Without this grant, we would have had significantly more capital expenses than we had budgeted for, which we would have had to cover before our income stream started in the spring."

Grantee Outcomes

Funding helped some grantees **cover** normal business expenses during periods with **lost, delayed, or uncertain revenue or product**.



- Some grantees used funds to weather the storm while facing uncertainty. For example:
 - Purchasing unexpected livestock feed after a drop in sales or processing delays,
 - Covering loan payments and operating expenses, and
 - Purchasing product from other farmers to start generating sales revenue after a late harvest due to COVID uncertainty.

Grantee Outcomes

Some grantees faced uncertainty in or stagnant revenue resulting from, for example, lost restaurant contracts, processor delays, delayed planting schedules, lost labor, lost agrotourism, and lost sales channels (e.g., stock shows). The funds helped these grantees cover expenses they may not have been able to cover due to these disruptions, helping to keep many grantees in business.



"During the 2020 COVID-19 year, we were unable to sell any yaks so did not have the income needed to buy necessary hay to feed. In a normal year, sale of animals provides the money necessary to buy hay. We are hoping Spring will bring us more chance of selling yaks to reduce numbers and feed costs since meat processors are unable to meet the demand from producers."




"The funding was extremely helpful with getting our season going with the loss of all our early season revenue. It gave us the ability to purchase goods needed to generate cash flow once the farmers market started for us in August."

Grantee Outcomes

Other notable outcomes include:

- The impact of the changes grantees made during COVID often **extended beyond the grantee and to their community**, including **meeting a surge in demand** for local foods and open-air markets during COVID and **combating food insecurity** in their communities.
- Funds were mostly used as planned, and any deviations were usually the result of changing needs as the pandemic situation evolved.

 "We also prioritized outreach to our SNAP/DUFB communities and food insecure communities through targeted marketing and pop-up markets in food-insecure neighborhoods. This emphasis on equity for the market will hopefully continue to help the market adapt to needs of the community. We will be hosting our regular off-season markets (March-May) at a community center in one of the food-insecure neighborhoods to begin that shift."

 "We were not able to put money into marketing or some of the pivot actions we wanted, but we were able to sell and deliver meat that we wouldn't have if we didn't cover losses."

04

Grant Process Reflections



Photo: Two Roots Farm

Grant Process Reflections



Matt Barry

Chief Development Officer, National
Western Center & RRF Manager

Fund manager's perspective: Genesis of the fund

Research conducted at CSU recognized that supply chain disruptions resulting from COVID – for example, indefinite restaurant closures and decreased institutional buyers – were going to cause ripple effects in Colorado food systems and beyond. The CFFSRT came together quickly to get rapid grants to producers, focusing especially on marginalized groups that are historically underserved by public programs (e.g., BIPOC and women). The intention was to support small- and medium-sized producers in covering COVID-related losses, but the team quickly learned that producers were responding to the crisis by going beyond covering gaps to initiating business model pivots that had the potential to generate long-term transformations in grantees' operations.

Grant Process Reflections

Fund manager's perspective: Fund process

The CFFSRT quickly generated foundation support for the first round of the fund, earned coverage with statewide news media, conducted extensive outreach to solicit applications, and made rapid funding decisions. The fund benefitted from the CFFSRT's data and policy workgroups and leveraged the information and insights from the fund to inform other strategies.

Although the grant committee represented a variety of perspectives on how to strengthen food systems, members listened to each other and did not try to drive their agenda forward when making funding decisions. While there was a shared desire to build resilient Colorado food systems, the grant process primarily had a rapid-response orientation rather than a systems-transformation orientation, mainly due to the urgency of the response.

Still, despite the time constraints and varying views represented, the team was able to make rapid grant decisions, successfully prioritize underserved groups, and provide support that – for many grantees – enabled transformational activities.

“On the whole, we were effective in prioritizing the underserved groups that we focused on. The third round had an elegant and fair weighting toward those groups to make sure they got funding, both in terms of numbers and the percentage of request fulfilled. I felt good about outreach among all partners and their networks; awareness was pretty widespread.”
-Matt Barry, fund manager

Grant Process Reflections

Fund manager's perspective: Outcome of the fund

The fund provided critical support to small- and medium- sized food system actors across Colorado. However, the grants did not necessarily have a transformational impact on regional food systems. Put another way, although the grants supported business model pivots that grantees expect to outlast the pandemic, the grants did not catalyze a food systems transformation by, for example, building networks within the food system and aligning intentionally with a theory of change that was developed at the outset. This was due in part to the fast-moving nature of the process – there was not enough time to build a resilient food system orientation while also rapidly getting urgently needed grants out to food systems actors.

The team working on the project gained a lot of valuable field-level insight from the process that will contribute to future efforts to build resilient regional food systems. But “it’s unclear if food system transformation type of funding is an area where there’s continued funder interest,” as most foundation funders (and CARES Act funding) were oriented toward rapid COVID response.


“The program ended on the rebuild side of the equation. In a year or five years, the impact of the program will not be at the outcome level, it will be at the output level. [The program] didn't drive systems change. We did a lot of really good work with the resources we had, but lasting change is unlikely to happen without more work or effort. Mission incomplete.”
-Matt Barry, fund manager

Grant Process Reflections

Grantees found the application process simple.

Grantees had a range of previous experiences applying for grants – some had extensive experience, but many were first-time grant applicants. Regardless of experience, most grantees appreciated the simplicity of the application overall, calling it “perfect,” “straightforward,” “user-friendly,” and “extremely easy.”

Several grantees noted that they appreciated the Fund’s quick response times, flexibility in how grantees could answer questions, and use of web-based platforms for application and reporting.

 “I felt that the application process was well thought out and didn't seem too burdensome. I loved how everything was submitted online and that it could be done without much fuss.”

 “I have been engaged in philanthropy, grant-writing, and fundraising for a long time, and the way you were able to deploy capital quickly and efficiently is humbling, awe inspiring, and makes such a meaningful difference.”


 “I found the process quite accessible and intuitive as I had not written a grant request before this.”

Grant Process Reflections

Grantees had ideas for how to make the process even simpler and more accessible in the future, particularly those with less experience applying for grant funding.

- Grant writing and grant finding support for those with less experience.
- More insight into the selection and award amount determination processes.
- Longer character limits to describe more complex plans.
- Less prescriptive question prompts. (Some grantees found some questions irrelevant, and some found the application too long, especially those who received relatively small awards [<\$2,500].)
- Better and earlier advertising and program information (e.g., ability to apply twice and application timing).


 “We wish we would have known about other grant opportunities that may have helped achieve more financial needs.”


 “I'd be interested to know how your selection process was conducted, and how you chose to give the amounts you did. Seeing as we applied for a considerable amount more, I'd be interested in how you envisioned we used the partial funding.”

Grant Process Reflections


There was an overwhelming sense of gratitude for the funding and grant process in grantee reports and focus groups.

The gratitude related to both the **funding** itself and the **support of small agriculture** signified by the grants.

 “We are very grateful to have been able to receive the funding we did. It made a great impact on us being able to continue our operation and not go out of business.”

 “This grant saved our year for feed. We did not have to sell off some of the breeding stock to pay for feed. Thank you so much!!!”

 “Thank you so much for this opportunity, it made the market this season possible for so many Northern Colorado local farms and food producers.”

 “I was delighted with being awarded a grant to accomplish a step forward for my operation that I knew I had to do but couldn't figure out how to afford it on my own. We would have limped on for maybe years and been hobbled by our lack of infrastructure.”

05

Building Resilient Food Systems



Photo: Starling Farm

Building Resilient Food Systems

Grantee reports and focus groups included questions to elicit grantees’

- Thoughts on the **biggest challenges** they envision facing in the future as small- and medium-sized organizations and
- Ideas about how to **build resilient and equitable regional food systems** in Colorado.

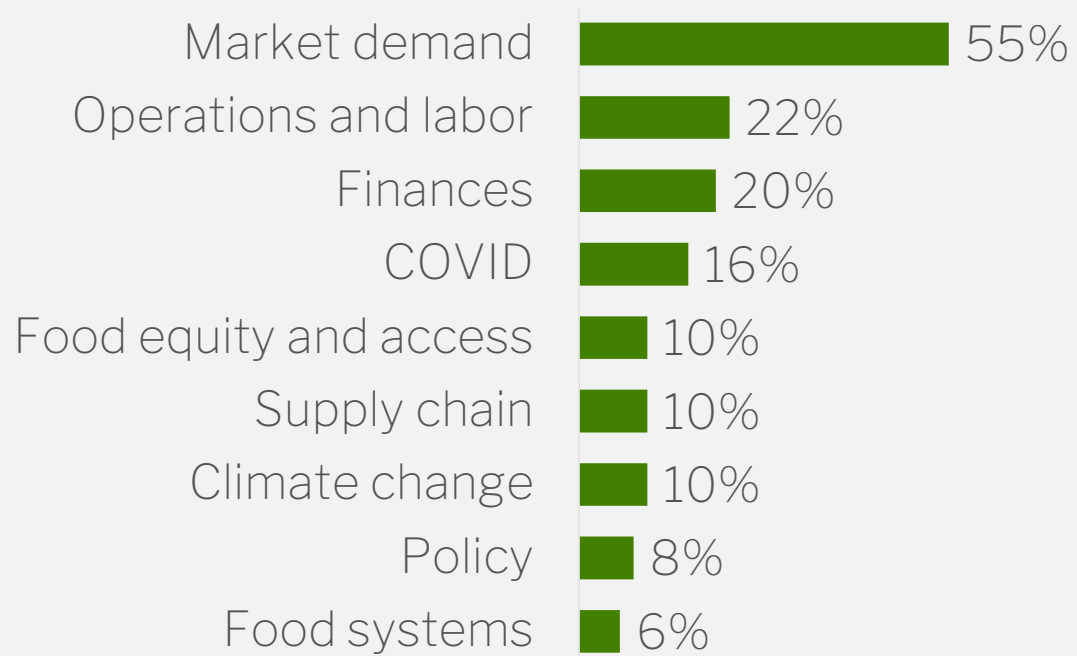
Although grantees did not paint a full picture of a resilient and equitable system, the ideas they named in their reports and discussions collectively include elements of such a system. This section reviews the challenges grantees anticipated facing in the future, as well as the ideas, organized by theme, that they believe will help them overcome these challenges and contribute to building resilient and equitable food systems.



“I think continued outreach and marketing towards [government agencies, school districts, and independent grocery chains] can help move the food system from purchasing from distribution that brings in out-of-state and out-of-county products. Not to say that these companies can be completely replaced as we cannot grow avocados in Colorado, but [this can] help our food system locally in a meaningful way and encourage new folks to take up farming. Having a demand for a local food system is what we need.”

Building Resilient Food Systems

This chart shows grantees' greatest concerns for the future, as described in the 50 grantee reports analyzed. The following slides describe these concerns. Many grantees had concerns in more than one category, so categories sum to more than 100%.



Concerns fell into three main categories:

1. Market demand
2. Organizational operations and finances
3. Environmental, social, and policy issues

Building Resilient Food Systems

Over half of grantees fear a decrease in **market demand** for local foods. Many grantees noted an increased interest in and need for local food in the face of COVID-related food system disruptions, but many **feared that this need and interest would drop** once the trend was over or as large-scale food supply chains became more reliable. Others feared that an overall **economic downturn could affect consumers' ability to purchase** their products or services. Still others worried about the effect **commodity prices** would have on their revenue.



“Once grants dry up for nonprofits and food banks to purchase food, and grants dry up for other institutions, then there will no longer be an incentive for them to buy local as many of the grants were tied to local-only purchases, or local given priority.”



“As always, there is a small concern that the local food movement will peter out, and demand for the product we've been scaling to provide will dwindle. But every time I voice that concern, most people disagree wholeheartedly.”



“The rich diversity of products at market creates demand that brings more sales to each vendor than any vendor could accomplish alone. Our greatest concern is the fractionation of the market: vendors leaving out of fear that the market will no longer be able to support their sales.”

Building Resilient Food Systems

Some grantees expressed concerns about their own **organizational operations and finances**, such as:

- Maintaining operations and labor at levels that are responsive to fluctuations in demand, and affording to pay living wages.
- Meeting financial obligations in the face of other unpredictable market conditions, such as changes in demand, feed prices, and commodity prices.
- The continued influence of COVID on market demand, operations, and supply chains (e.g., processor availability, access to markets).



“Our most immediate concern is getting the pandemic under control—both for the safety of our community, but also so our customers (restaurants) can have better footing from a financial standpoint. We, of course, also want to feel fully secure from a financial standpoint so that we are able to continue to operate the farm, support our laborers, as well as our community.”



"We have such a bottleneck with processing, and it's so hit and miss trying to get scheduled to process our hogs and our cattle. We're to the point where we're having to schedule to slaughter animals that aren't even born yet."

Building Resilient Food Systems

Many grantees' greatest concerns related to **large-scale environmental, social, and policy issues** that will eventually affect their operations and consumers, such as:

- The effects of climate change on crops, water, and sustainable agriculture practices.
- Inequities in food access.
- Federal and state policies that may negatively affect small agriculture.
- Food systems that may be fragile or fragmented, and that might disadvantage small farms or harm the land.



“We've gone through a tumultuous time, economically and socially, and we don't know how this will affect our communities. We saw a 35% increase in SNAP use at the market, a reflection of how COVID has affected our community members financially. Food insecurity has also increased 3% overall in our county in the last two years.”



“Climate change affects everything, not just weather conditions. Drought has hit me hard here at 8,000' and I see it getting worse before it gets better. Seed adaptation, sustainable agriculture, getting away from the food systems that don't work and committing to a better relationship with the land are all required to begin to regain balance.”

Building Resilient Food Systems

What are the solutions?

Grantees shared many ideas for how to build more resilient, equitable Colorado food systems. Those solutions tended to fall in four categories:

- ▶ **Consumer education and relationships**
Educating consumers about the value of buying local food and building consumers' relationships with local producers.
- ▶ **Food access and equity**
Increasing SNAP, WIC, and Double Up options for local food, and bringing food to communities that lack access.
- ▶ **Strong local agricultural networks**
Connecting small food systems actors to work cooperatively, open market channels, and expand reach.
- ▶ **Funding and policy to support local agriculture**
Grant opportunities and policy that enables small producers, processors, and intermediaries to compete with large ag.

Building Resilient Food Systems

Consumer education and relationships

Grantees believe that the future of local food systems relies on consumer behavior, and they believe that educating consumers about the impact local foods have on the environment, their nutrition, and their local community will encourage consumers to opt for local foods.

Many grantees believed that there are many myths to debunk about the affordability of local food, as well as the greenwashing that happens with many large-ag food system actors (e.g., “organic” does not mean sustainably produced, nutritionally dense, or locally grown).

Grantee ideas

-Farmer profiles and educational posts on social media	-Public school farm visits / education
-Agrotourism	-Farm-to-table dinners & stores
	-Accessible farmer’s markets
	-Strategic marketing to local orgs



“In terms of being able to include our community more in supporting the local food system, that's why the farm-to-table store was really an opportunity to bring people in and educate them about the farmers that they're buying from and make it relationship-based rather than having it be another purchase that they're making at the big box store.”

Building Resilient Food Systems

Food access and equity

Grantees were also very aware that access to local foods is not equitably distributed, and grantees were very interested in getting local food to economically, mobility, and socially disadvantaged groups.

For example, many **intermediaries** were interested in expanding markets into food-insecure areas or offering food delivery to people with limited mobility, and many **producers** were interested in learning how they could accept federal benefits funds through the new direct-to-consumer channels they created over the past year.

Grantee ideas

- | | |
|--|--|
| -Expanded SNAP and DUFEB access at markets and directly from producers | -Farmer's markets in food-insecure neighborhoods |
| -Delivery services | -Networks for donating unused crops (e.g., ugly, overripe, or otherwise unsellable). |



“We coordinated about 250 [CSA] shares from producers across the front range to provide food for people that were on WIC benefits. In that case, not only do people get fed, but farmers get paid for their produce, their market channels stay open, and it's [meeting] a need for their communities that are food insecure. They want local food.”

Building Resilient Food Systems

Strong local agricultural networks

Many grantees are interested in **building local food systems networks** to increase collaboration and cooperation, and to improve competitiveness with large-agriculture systems.

Goals included increasing food access, reducing food waste, increasing shared equipment and resources, developing work-trade systems, streamlining funding opportunities, and building professional skills. A few expressed interest in training opportunities for back-office operations, such as bookkeeping, marketing, and other administrative work.

Grantee ideas

- | | |
|--|---|
| -“Glean networks” to ensure unused crops are used productively | -Education and training opportunities |
| -Farmer-community networks | -Equipment and farmer’s market cooperatives |



“I know when this funding came out, there were a bunch of other people and groups talking about doing the same things – it would be great to create a network even bigger and stronger so we don't all work separately toward the same goals but work together to achieve them.”

Building Resilient Food Systems

Funding and policy to support local agriculture

Grantees also deeply value flexible funding opportunities and public policy that supports small ag. Many grantees believe that flexible funding options like the RRF, which allow organizations to meet their own unique needs, are crucial in allowing them to innovate and experiment “without risking the farm.”

Conversely, many grantees also expressed a frustration with public policy decisions that they believe are uninformed and harmful (e.g., the PAUSE Act), primarily to small producers and processors who cannot as easily bear the weight of excessive regulation as large agricultural businesses.

Grantee ideas

- | | |
|--|---|
| -Microgrants to support experimentation | -Subsidies to support paying a living wage |
| -0% interest lending council | -Policy advocacy, especially regarding processing |
| -Decentralized perennial loaning mechanism | |



“If Colorado continues with its anti-agriculture legislation, small producers will go out of business. The Government squeeze on agriculture from all areas is reducing production, constraining required production methods, and eliminating small producers. Government's ignorance of necessary agricultural practices will destroy Colorado's agriculture long-term, reducing food supplies available for residents.”

06

Next Steps



Photo: Alamosa Farmer's Market

Next Steps

Finding

Grantees achieved a lot with relatively small grants. In addition to helping many small businesses stay afloat during COVID, the **grants funded innovations that in many cases will bear fruit for years.**

Focus group participants were excited to connect with each other and repeatedly discussed the **value of building agricultural networks to build sustainable local food systems.** Some believe that current networks are fragmented and could be improved.

Implication

- Food system actors are passionate and innovative but lack flexible funds to implement their ideas.
- Small, flexible, rapid grants are a valuable and cherished resource and should be used to spur the types of innovation that will strengthen local food systems.
- Building a coordinated network of food system actors is a desired and potentially powerful investment.
- Grantees' wants and needs related to such a network are diverse, and their time to participate is limited, so benefits should be high-value and accessible and barriers to participation should be low.

Next Steps


Finding

Grantees' primary future concerns often revolve around their **ability to stay in business amid external threats** (e.g., climate change, policy, large-ag domination).

Grantees were **passionate about getting local food to their communities and breaking down barriers to food access** faced by people living in poverty, people with mobility limitations, and people who live far from markets.

Implication

- Consumer demand is a key to fighting these threats, and grantees believe that education, relationships, and access are the keys to building sustained demand.
 - Policy advocacy plays a crucial role by supporting small-ag-friendly regulation and combating climate change.
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- Again, policy advocacy could help expand federal assistance acceptance in small businesses, and information and technical assistance could help businesses learn how to leverage these programs.
 - Small grants to support expansion into under-resourced communities, consumer education and marketing, and food delivery programs can help bring local food to new communities.

“Once we're all able to go outside safely, the impacts of the pandemic are still going to be felt, and it's because there are issues in our food system that have to be addressed. These grant programs have to continue. We've responded, but we have to rebuild now. We have to make systems that are resilient and that protect everybody that is involved. These grant programs need to be focused on systems change.” 



Questions about this report?
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Photo: Green Junction Farmstead