

Summer Field Work 2009: Food and Agriculture in the Rockies



The Colorado College
State of the Rockies Project

2009-10 Research Focus: Food and Agriculture in the Rockies: Current Challenges and New Trends

Agriculture has a symbiotic relationship with the Rockies region, making use of the land, water, and environment while simultaneously shaping settlement patterns, demographics, economic prosperity, and land use. The 2007 Agricultural Census, in data released early 2009, reveals gradual changes in both national and Rockies agriculture. The number of farms and ranches are growing even as total farmland area is shrinking, Mega-agricultural enterprises are also taking center stage in farm production, and new products are matching changing food preferences. The result: a dynamic landscape of agriculture and food.

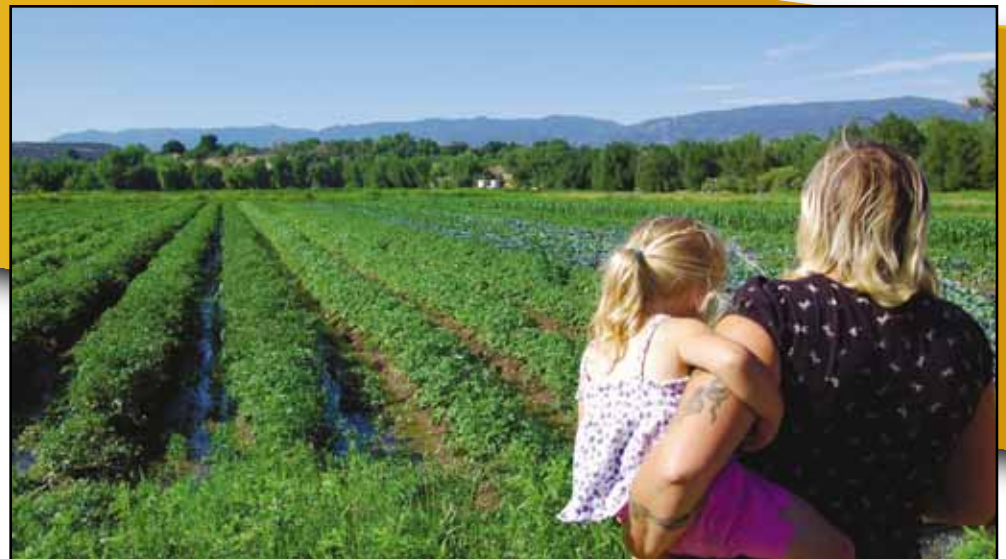
The 2009-10 student Project Researchers spent the summer of 2009 investigating agriculture in the Rockies Region. Their analysis of multiple data sets, mapping projects, academic papers, interviews, and field experience provide a unique and comprehensive look at the challenges and successes of agriculture in the Rockies.



July 6, 2009

Six students and two staff from the Colorado College State of the Rockies Project set out in a van for a week on the road in the Rocky Mountain Region. The first stop was at Javernick Family Farms, a third generation farm in Canon City, Colorado. Beki Javernick gave the Project a tour of her family's 70 acre farm. The Javernicks are not certified Organic, but fall into a new niche market often called "beyond organic." They raise vegetables, flowers, and beef using holistic management techniques.

A few miles down I-25 in Santa Fe, New Mexico, the Rockies Project met with Courtney White, the Executive Director of the Quivira Coalition. The Quivira Coalition was formed to provide common sense solutions to the grazing debate by encouraging ecologically sensitive ranch management. White discussed with the Rockies team these management practices and the future of ranching in the region.





July 7, 2009

After a night in Albuquerque, New Mexico, the Rockies Project drove down to Hatch, New Mexico, to visit the Franzoy family and their farm, the Chile River. Chile River farm was homesteaded in the early 1920's by Joseph Franzoy, and today his descendants continue to grow some of the finest chiles and onions in the world. Expanding on the original site, the farm now spans 850 acres in the Rio Grande Valley. Victoria and Tammy Franzoy gave the Project a hands-on tour of the fields and operations, concluded with a visit to the home of Frank and Doris Franzoy. Frank and Doris worked on the farm since they were young, and in their mid-90's still work an impressive garden behind their house. The Rockies Project was too early for a sample of field-fresh, mouth burning chiles, but were given 150 pounds of onions to bring back to Colorado.





July 8, 2009

After visiting Hatch, the Rockies team spent the night in Truth or Consequences, New Mexico, relaxing at Elephant Butte State Park and grilling fresh onions and Big Jims at the motel. The next day the team returned South to visit the Las Uvas Valley Dairy, one of the five largest dairy operations in the nation. Dean Horton, the dairy's owner, talked with researchers about issues in the dairy industry, and his son, Loren Horton, gave the Rockies team a tour of the operation.

The Las Uvas Valley Dairy produces milk from 15,000 cows who are each milked three times per day. Due to low milk prices, over 100,000 dairy cows in the U.S. have been sent to slaughter. The Hortons are dealing with the same market constraints; they have slaughtered nine percent of their herd and currently are only making 60 cents back for every 1 dollar put into production.





July 9 and 10, 2009

After leaving the dairy, the Rockies team traveled down to the U.S. - Mexico border at Douglas, Arizona. During their stay in Douglas, researchers attended the annual meeting of the Malpai Borderlands Group, a coalition of ranchers, environmentalists, and government employees who share an interest in protecting the region's grasslands. During the meeting, researchers learned about various wildlife and vegetation restoration projects, and went into the field with Van Clothier, a stream restorationist working in the Malpai region. The afternoon taught researchers a lot about not only the geomorphology of the region, but gave them a unique insight into immigration, wildlife, and environmental issues on the border.

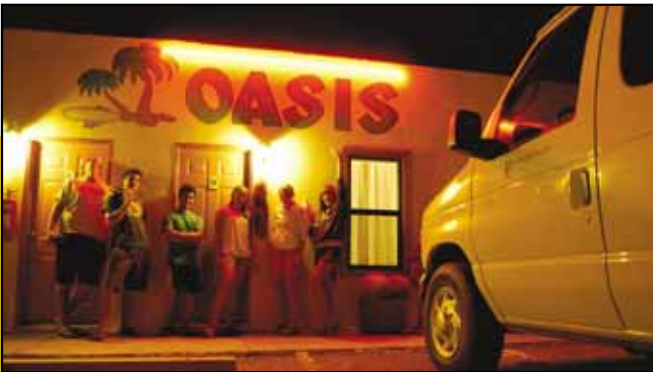


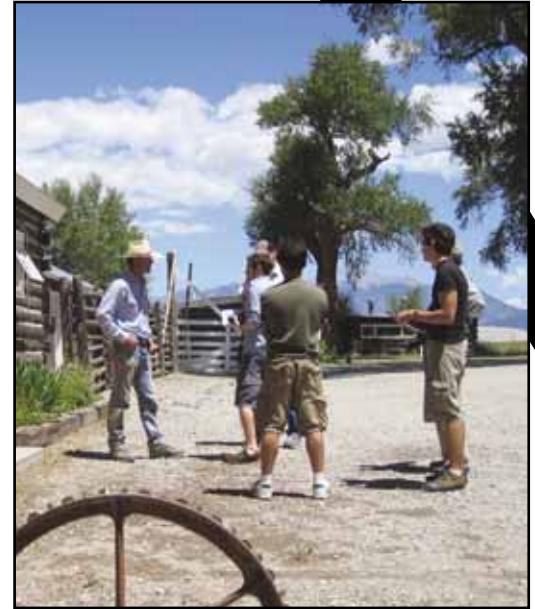


July 11 and 12, 2009

The Rockies team left Douglas and headed north to Marana, Arizona, just outside Tucson. In Marana, researchers toured cotton fields and braved the midday Arizona sun. Arizona ranks tenth nationally in cotton production, but is the top cotton producer in the Rockies region. Jon Post, the farmer who provided the tour, spoke frankly about agriculture policy, immigration issues, and the benefits he experienced when he changed to a genetically modified bollworm resistant cotton.

Traveling 1,800 miles, researchers saw the diverse land, people, and culture of the Rockies region. From mountains to rivers to desert, from one green chile to the next molè, researchers learned about challenges and progress in the Rockies, how citizens are working to shape the future, and how Colorado College students and the State of the Rockies Project fits into the warp and weft of the Rocky Mountain Region.





July 22 and 29, 2009

Back in Colorado, the Rockies team took day trips to the Medano-Zapata (MZ) Ranch near Mosca, Colorado, and the Aurora Organic Dairy near Platteville, Colorado. The MZ Ranch, which sits on the eastern edge of the San Luis Valley, was purchased by the Nature Conservancy in 1999 to preserve the integrity of the wild-life, land and water of the Valley. Still, the MZ remains a working ranch. Under the management by Duke and Janet Phillips, the MZ runs 2,000 head of cattle and 1,000 head of bison on 103,000 acres using Alan Savory's guidelines for sustainable, rotational grazing.

Once a confined animal feeding operation, the Aurora Organic Dairy's 400 acres and 900 cows were converted to organic in 2003. Beyond the organic certification, the dairy is working to reduce its carbon footprint. Most notably, they process their milk, up to 5,000 gallons per hour, on site in a 40 million-dollar state-of-the-art milk and cream processing facility. Ninety percent of the milk processed at Aurora is ultra-pasteurized, which extends the shelf-life of each carton to 60 days. Rockies researchers were given a tour of the pastures, milking, and processing facilities, and were even allowed to taste-test the cow feed.



Colorado College State of the Rockies Project

Students Researching, Reporting, and Engaging:

The Colorado College *State of the Rockies Report Card*, published annually since 2004, is the culmination of research and writing by a team of Colorado College student researchers. Each year a new team of students studies critical issues affecting the Rockies region of Arizona, Colorado, Idaho, Montana, Nevada, New Mexico, Utah, and Wyoming.

Colorado College, a liberal arts college of national distinction, is indelibly linked to the Rockies. Through its Block Plan, students take one course at a time, and explore the Rockies and Southwest as classes embark in extended field study. Their sense of “place” runs deep, as they ford streams and explore acequias to study the cultural, environmental, and economic issues of water; as they camp in the Rocky Mountains to understand its geology; as they visit the West’s oil fields to learn about energy concerns and hike through forests to experience the biology of pest-ridden trees and changing owl populations. CC encourages a spirit of intellectual adventure, critical thinking, and hands-on learning, where education and life intertwine.

The Colorado College State of the Rockies Project dovetails perfectly with that philosophy, providing research opportunities for CC students and a means for the college to “give back” to the region in a meaningful way. The *Report Card* fosters a sense of citizenship for Colorado College graduates and the broader regional community.



Research

During summer field work, the student researchers pack into a van and cover thousands of miles of the Rocky Mountain West as they study the landscape, interview stakeholders, and challenge assumptions. Back on campus, they mine data, crunch numbers, and analyze information.



Report

Working collaboratively with faculty, the student researchers write their reports, create charts and graphics, and work with editors to fine-tune each *Report Card* section. Their reports are subjected to external review before final publication.



Engage

Through a companion lecture series on campus, the naming of a Champion of the Rockies, and the annual State of the Rockies Conference, citizens and experts meet to discuss the future of our region.

Each *Report Card* has great impact: Media coverage of *Report Cards* has reached millions of readers, and the 2006 report section on climate change was included in a brief presented to the U.S. Supreme Court. Government leaders, scientists, ranchers, environmentalists, sociologists, journalists, and concerned citizens refer to the Colorado College *State of the Rockies Report Card* to understand the most pressing issues affecting the growing Rockies region.

www.stateoftherockies.com

