Agriculture Division

Annual Report

2021 Edition
2021 AGRICULTURAL RESOURCES AND WATER RESOURCES STAFF

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Introduction

We are pleased to present the Parks & Open Space Agricultural Division’s 2021 Annual Report. Our annual report demonstrates the diversity of operations on the 25,000 acres of BCPOS agricultural properties, highlights our key accomplishments, and gives you a glimpse into the efforts required to steward these lands for the people of Boulder County.

The pride our staff take in their work and in the opportunity to support the continuing legacy of agriculture in Boulder County is apparent in these pages. This region has a rich history of farming and ranching, and it is an honor to partner with our tenant producers so that we all can benefit from thriving agricultural lands for generations to come.

Thank you for celebrating with me the achievements of the last year and for taking the time to get to know our staff and their responsibilities through this report.

Mike Foster
Division Manager
Agriculture on Open Space
By the Numbers

The Land, by Acres Used

Leases
- 128 Leases
- 62 Tenant Farmers
- 34 Leases Renewed
- 4 Leases went out to bid
- 3 New acquisitions
- 6 Ag Operating Plans competed

Water
- 61 Incorporated ditches
- 31 unincorporated ditches
- 13 Reservoirs
- 57 Directly held water rights
- 17 Irrigation Companies have POS Staff serving on the Board of Directors

Lease Type (by revenue)
- Cash Rent 35%
- Crop Share + Grazing 65%

Boulder County Sustainable Food and Agriculture Funding (OSCAR) Grants
- $80,000 to Kilt Farm, Michael Moss
- $40,000 to Red Wagon Farm, Wyatt Barnes
As the chart below illustrates, the revenue in 2021 exceeded the revenue for 2015 which had been the most successful year in this time span. Multiple factors influence revenue; most notably the weather, input costs, and market prices. In 2021 conditions were favorable in all these areas. While we anticipate market prices to remain high, the input costs in 2022 are predicted to be significantly higher than in 2021, which can have a big impact on net revenue in 2022.
Accomplishments:

- New Center Pivot installed on the Barrett property (pictured above) in early 2021
  - 74 acres of land that was flood irrigated will be covered by the center pivot
  - 20% increase to hay production is expected
  - $47,717 was the County’s total cost for the infrastructure and electric service; the remainder was funded by NRCS/EQUP

- Rocky Mountain Fuel 2 pipeline: This system was originally built to share water between the county and a neighbor. The new system separates those uses and will improve water use efficiencies.
  - 1,300 feet of pipeline installed
  - $20,375 total project cost

- Rock Creek Farm Fencing Project
  - 3 miles of new fencing installed to replace old and damaged materials
  - 2,640 feet of Prairie Dog barrier fence installed to protect the neighbors directly adjacent to the property
36 producers were involved in raising a variety of livestock in 2021, including cattle, horses, sheep, pigs, yaks, alpacas, goats, ducks, and chickens.

**Achievements:**

- 12,200 acres of managed grazing
- 4 miles of new fence on 7 properties
- 55 acres seeded with a mix of grasses and legumes to improve soil biology and plant diversity
- Free semi-loads of wood chips from Wildlife Partners and the county sort yard to local ag producers to sequester carbon, accomplish soil health principles, benefit local agriculture, and reduce trucking and disposal fees.
Wildlife on Ag Land

Wildlife is one of the things that people like the most when they’re out enjoying the open spaces of Boulder County. In their wild environment they are wonderful to see, however when they stray onto agricultural lands there is conflict.

Some wildlife, like elk and geese, are considered a nuisance. Elk and geese can be particularly damaging to crops, especially when they get on a field of organic table food. The loss to the farmers can be in the tens of thousands of dollars and finding ways to discourage or prevent elk and geese from invading these farms is an ongoing challenge, but Boulder County is committed to helping farmers find solutions.

Prairie dogs can do damage farms and rangeland. These damages cost BCPOS approximately $13,500 per year in compensation to our tenant farmers as a result of crop loss or injuries to livestock. We are working to control the prairie dog population on ag lands on accordance with our Prairie Dog Management Plan. We have a dedicated team that are constructing barrier fences, trapping and relocating animals, and utilizing lethal control as a last resort.

Summary of Prairie Dog Statistics:

- 3,588 acres were mapped for prairie dogs as part of out annual monitoring
- 11 tenants, on 18 properties, participated in the tenant-control program
- 32 “No Prairie Dog Areas” (NPDs) had lethal control applied
- 9 properties used trapping:
  - 1,499 prairie dogs were trapped, and
    - 601 were donated to the Black Footed Ferret Facility, and
    - 898 were donated to the Birds of Prey Foundation
Ditches & Reservoirs of Boulder County

Highlights:

- 17 ditch companies boards
- 13 reservoirs owned
- 57 directly held water rights
- 3.5 miles of recent stream restoration projects in cooperation with multiple partners
- 599 acre-feet of storage water delivered to Lake 4 in cooperation with the St. Vrain and Left Hand Water Conservancy District. That’s enough water to cover 599 football fields, one foot deep each
- Ongoing water quality sampling program at Little Gaynor Lake to monitor the health of the ecosystem
Leading up to the 2021 end-of-year expiration of a transition plan for phasing out the use of genetically engineered corn and sugar beets and neonicatinoid insecticides on Boulder County Parks & Open Space (BCPOS) agricultural properties, Boulder County staff and commissioners examined the results of the last few years of field and market trials and the impacts on tenant producers. After a lengthy public process, on Dec. 7, 2021, the Board of County Commissioners (BOCC) adopted the 2021 Cropland Policy with the following updates:

- Allow genetically engineered (GE) corn and sugar beet crops to be grown on BCPOS agricultural lands.
- Restrict the use of neonicotinoid pesticides on BCPOS agricultural lands with exceptions approved under specific conditions.
- Allow neonicotinoid seed coatings for current Western Sugar’s sugar beet seed.
- Develop a soil health program.
- Pursue edits of the Cropland Policy; incorporate policy changes and streamline language to remove inconsistent or conflicting language.
- The new Cropland Policy along with a timeline of the History of the Cropland Policy can be found on the county website at https://www.bouldercounty.org/open-space/management/cropland-policy/.
The Soil Revolutions Conference
This year’s Soil Revolution Conference was held December 8, 2021 at the Boulder JCC. In-person and virtual attendance options were available to the public. The recorded sessions are available for viewing on Soilrev.org.

Featured Speakers:
- **Jon Lundgren**—“Practical Approaches to Regenerative Farming with Science” and “Fueling the Soil Revolution On-farm and Off”
- **Daniel Mays**—“Strategies for Successful No-till Vegetable Farming” and “Tools and Strategies for Continuous Improvement of Soil Health on Vegetable Farms”

Local Updates by:
- **Therese Glowacki**—Boulder County Parks & Open Space
- **Nick Colglazier**—Colorado Corn
- **Cindy Lair**—State Legislation Update
- **Elizabeth Black**—Citizen Science Soil Health Project
- **Tim Broderick**—Boulder County, Sustainability Grants
- **Peyton Ward**—Longmont Conservation District Demonstration Plots
- **Clark Harshbarger**—Restore Colorado & Mad Agriculture
- **Vanessa McCracken**—STAR program