Boulder County owns just over 22,000 acres of productive agricultural land. A diversity of operations are found throughout the county—from small-scale diversified vegetable farms to medium sized cattle operations to large-scale commodity crop producers. Land is leased to local farmers and ranchers who are Boulder County’s valued partners in conservation.

### Ag by the Numbers

#### The Land
- 12,678 irrigated acres
- 3,443 dryland acres
- 6,201 rangeland acres
- 2,098 acres out-of-production
- 255 properties

#### The Leases
- 127 leases
- 66 tenant farmers
- 55 leases renewed
- 2 leases went out to bid
- 2 new acquisitions

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Lease Type</th>
<th>Quantity</th>
<th>% Revenue</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Cash Rent</td>
<td>89</td>
<td>47%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Crop Share</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>53%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

#### The Water
- 61 incorporated ditches
- 31 unincorporated ditches
- 13 reservoirs
- 57 directly held water rights
- Representation on 20 irrigation company Board of Directors
Agricultural Resources is the only Parks & Open Space Division that is self-funded. Gross revenue from ag leases totaled $1,263,151 in 2020. Revenue had been declining over the last several years due to a variety of weather-related factors, however the revenue in 2020 saw an upturn. Favorable weather conditions and higher commodity prices resulted in the highest revenue since 2017.

### 2020 Gross Revenue by Category

- **Cash Rent**: $586,525 (47%)
- ** Alfalfa/Grass Mix**: $8,398 (1%)
- ** Alfalfa**: $46,309 (4%)
- ** Annual Grass**: $17,130 (1%)
- ** Barley**: $148,438 (12%)
- ** Corn**: $228,434 (18%)
- ** Sugar Beets**: $85,144 (7%)
- ** Triticale**: $29,152 (2%)
- ** Misc**: $0 (0%)

### Net Revenue For Six Years

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Gross Revenue</th>
<th>Crop Share Expenses</th>
<th>Water Assessments</th>
<th>Net Revenue</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2015</td>
<td>$1,217,689</td>
<td>$350,236</td>
<td>$366,620</td>
<td>$500,833</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2016</td>
<td>$1,291,989</td>
<td>$414,866</td>
<td>$397,316</td>
<td>$479,808</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2017</td>
<td>$1,128,419</td>
<td>$404,724</td>
<td>$453,156</td>
<td>$270,539</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2018</td>
<td>$904,396</td>
<td>$322,870</td>
<td>$455,134</td>
<td>$126,393</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2019</td>
<td>$1,080,415</td>
<td>$348,968</td>
<td>$432,260</td>
<td>$299,187</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2020</td>
<td>$1,263,151</td>
<td>$429,271</td>
<td>$464,250</td>
<td>$369,630</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The Cropland Policy, originally adopted in 2011, links the goals of the Boulder County Comprehensive Plan with the operational activities of Parks & Open Space on agricultural properties. The policy addresses a number of elements including administration of ag leases, development of market and small acreage farms, management of the department’s extensive water portfolio, livestock management, insuring the economic vitality of operations, and monitoring of soil health, agricultural inputs, and water quality.

**Operating Plans**

Cropland Policy requires Operating Plans (OP) for agricultural leases. Once completed and signed by all parties, they become a part of the lease and as such are legally binding. The main goal of the OP is to capture the operations so that staff and tenants have a clear understanding of the goals and objectives for the property. It’s also intended to demonstrate how Ag Resources staff and tenants will work together to provide better stewardship for the land. The OPs are developed by agricultural resources staff in cooperation with the lease holder and include elements such as: water rights, crop maps, grazing records, and existing infrastructure. Other important information include elements such as: water rights, crops maps, grazing records, and existing infrastructure. Other important information in the OPs include resource management considerations such as weeds, wildlife, riparian corridors, and cultural resources that might be present on any property.

**Monitoring Programs**

Ag staff monitors various natural resources as outlined in the Cropland Policy. In 2020, there was a continuation of monitoring programs including:

**Soil Health**

- Staff assessed some properties that are in need of rehabilitation and tests were completed, which helped to guide improvement measures.

**Pollinators and Pesticides**

- Integrated Pest Management (IPM) is required by all tenants.
GE Transition

Boulder County’s goal is to reduce, and ultimately eliminate, the current use of Genetically Engineered (GE) crops (Bt corn and glyphosate-resistant corn and sugar beets) on county open space in a way that is understandable and fair for affected tenants. To that end, the consulting firm Mad Agriculture was employed to help guide this effort.

The GE Transition project is in full swing and our consultant seeks to blunt the impact of the transition away from GE crops by working jointly with tenants in exploring the potential of alternative crops. Tenants participating in the program had small trials of cover crops, heritage wheat varieties, conventional (non GE) corn, forage crops, and assorted bean varieties. The goal is to double the number of acres for each trial from five to ten acres for each of the nine tenant participants.

Bean Project

The BoCo Beans project is a collaboration between local farmers, Boulder County Parks & Open Space Agricultural Division, and Boulder County Public Health. There were 98,000 lbs of pinto beans grown on Boulder County Open Space in 2020 and marketed to local institutions including jails, hospitals, schools, food banks, and farmers’ markets. These institutions frequently provide food to individuals who lack access to healthy foods which builds equity in the food system. Providing dry beans such as pintos and black beans to local institutions provides a healthy, high-fiber plant-based protein source for organizations that administer meals to large groups. Beans are also a cost-effective protein source that can be stored for longer periods of time than animal-based sources of protein. The procurement by local institutions and organizations of locally produced products reduces transport costs and the associated carbon emissions, promotes resilient food supply chains, and ensures the continued livelihood of local producers.
Highlights of our 2020 Accomplishments

In the face of a growing population in Colorado and the demand for water in an area affected by an increasingly dryer and hotter climate, the water resources group is challenged with retaining and maximizing the water portfolio owned by the county. Below are a few of their accomplishments in 2020:

- Delivered 170 acre feet (55.4 million gallons) of water to Lagerman Reservoir to help restore ecosystem health.
- Passed State Dam Safety Inspections at Gaynor and Steele Lakes.
- Initiated a water quality sampling program at Little Gaynor Lake to monitor the health of the ecosystem.
- Restored four (4) reservoirs along St. Vrain Creek, including groundwater reservoirs Lake 3, A-Frame, and West Lake, and 598 acre-feet (194.86 million gallons) of decreed storage at Lake 4.
- Supported stream restoration projects on St. Vrain Creek and the Niwot Diversion Reconstruction project.
Highlights of 2020 Accomplishments

Finding a balance between agricultural operations and the wildlife that abound in Boulder County is a challenge that we address every year. Below are some of the actions that were taken in 2020 to help in this effort:

- Revegetated over 100 acres of land damaged by prairie dogs.
- Eleven tenants participated in the prairie dog control program and treated 13 properties.
- Completed comprehensive mapping of prairie dog colonies on 151 properties, 57 of those property were marked as clear.
- Completed dusting for plague at the South County Grasslands and Rabbit Mountain.
- Improved Preble’s mouse habitat by constructing riparian fencing and implemented rotational grazing efforts.
Highlights of 2020 Accomplishments

Managing projects on infrastructure such as irrigation structures, fencing, road work, culverts, drain tiles, construction of structures, etc., on the lands that we steward is an ever-changing and growing need. Below are some examples of work that was completed in 2020:

- Performed 20 maintenance projects
- Installed 6,455 feet of new fence
- Installed a permanent power supply to the center pivot on the Boulder County Land Venture property, which replaced a diesel generator that had been used for power, resulting in reduced operating costs.
- Improved access to the James Construction agriculture property, which allows customers easier access to buy produce.
- Installed 1200 feet of new pipeline to improve water conveyance to the neighboring property and improve the field conditions on the IBM property.
Soil Revolutions Conference During a Pandemic

Like many other gatherings in 2020, the Soil Revolution Conference had to be canceled. To keep the momentum going and continue to encourage improved soil health, the Soil Revolution Conference partnered with local soil health advocates to produce a series of short videos highlighting soil health projects and progressive producers in Boulder County and beyond. Videos highlighting Boulder County farmers, programs and projects, statewide initiatives, and regional research projects are posted on the Soil Revolution Conference website and YouTube channel.
The Covid-19 pandemic had a major impact on agriculture in 2020.
Gross rental income totaled $1,263,151 with a net revenue of $369,630.
Approximately 3,325 acres, or approximately 21% of county-owned cropland is certified or transitioning to organic or pesticide-free.
The Ag Division co-hosted the virtual Soil Revolution conference.
Multi-year Carbon Sequestration project with Colorado State University studying effects of compost and cover crops on irrigated cropland and rangeland.

Photos (clockwise):
Horses on winter pasture at Toteve; organic squash on Darby; rangeland in full bloom at Centennial Ranch; corn planted using strip-tillage on Macy.