CSU Extension Venture Capital Fund Proposal Form

I. **Title of Proposed Project**
   
   Local Food Systems: Using Extension as a Platform to Connect and Inform Producers, Consumers and Policy Makers

II. **PI Name(s) and Contact Information (PI, or at least one Co-PI, must be an Extension employee)**
   
   Dawn Thilmany McFadden, Adrian Card and Martha Sullivan

III. **Will this be a state-wide project, or have multi-county emphasis? If multi-county, list all counties that will be participants.**
   
   Statewide

IV. **Indicate which Core Competency Area(s) this work falls under, or if it addresses the Front Door mission.**
   
   - [ ] Strong Families, Healthy Homes
   - [X] Nutrition, Health and Food Safety
   - [X] 4-H and Youth Development
   - [X] Community Resource Development
   - [X] Natural Resources and the Environment
   - [X] Competitive & Sustainable Agricultural Systems
   - [X] Front Door Mission

V. **CSU Extension Work Team Affiliation**
   
   Agritourism (Sustainable Community Development), Small Acreage Management (Natural Resources & the Environment), Agriculture & Business Management (Competitive & Sustainable Agriculture Systems), Food Safety Education, and Nutrition Education for Low Income Audiences (Nutrition, Health & Food Safety)

VI. **Situation Statement**
   
   Increasingly, policymakers, consumers and producers are interested in understanding the dynamics of where our food comes from, primarily with the goal of “localizing” food system processes and transfers to reduce negative environmental impacts of regional food imports, increase local marketing opportunities for producers, and motivate a larger share of the population to make their food purchases closer to home and from smaller-scale producers. There are high profile indications that local food systems are gaining consumer and public attention in the US market. For example, in 2007 at least two bestselling books focused on local foods, and “locavore” was named new word of the year by the New Oxford American Dictionary. Numerous national media outlets, including Time magazine, have dubbed “Local, the New Organic” (Cloud 2007), and some locavores represent consumer advocates and activists focused on local economies.

   Emerging public policy platforms and new concerns about broader local food system issues suggest the need to provide applied research to those supplying (producers) and consuming (schools, other institutions, general public) in local markets, as well as to consider the expansive realm of food system issues in the local policy context, beyond what consumers can impact as individual households. However, understanding and promoting local foods can be a complex task given the inexact definitions of the terms involved, and the variety of people involved in these discussions and projects. Therefore, Extension, as the front door to CSU, is well-positioned to engage producers, consumers and communities in policy, economic analysis and market development discussions.

   In fact, CSU-Extension personnel around the state have begun addressing local food system issues in their research and outreach activities, and there are many state and local initiatives in which Extension is already playing a role. For example, 1) there is growing interest in a statewide Colorado Food Policy Council, accompanied by emerging local food policy councils, 2) CSU is bringing online MarketMaker technology with the Colorado Department of Agriculture, and 3) there are several regional and community-based efforts focused on food security, food-based economic development, land and farm conservation, and the role of food and nutrition in shaping quality of life. Moreover, there are three campus Centers and initiatives that address some aspects of local foods (Organic program, Center for Fair and Alternative Trade, School of Global Environmental Sustainability). The breadth and interconnectedness of these issues and projects call for better coordination of research, tools and outputs through CSU-Extension to leverage resources and knowledge that will address producer challenges, marketing questions, and policies and regulations that impact the local food system.

VII. **Project Description**
   
   This project will position CSU-Extension as the front door for food systems research and activities throughout Colorado by:

   1) coordinating the work plans and outputs of all Extension staff and faculty working on local food issues throughout the state (including Ag and Resource Economics, Horticulture, Food and Human Nutrition, Food Safety, Family and Consumer Sciences);
2) integrating local food systems knowledge into Extension’s newly-established Building Farmers program, enhancing the curriculum, and seeking revenue-generating ways to expand the program;
3) organizing tools (marketing, production, mapping tools) for communities interested in studying and influencing their local food systems, and teaching those communities how to use them;
4) providing coordinated technical assistance to communities on local food systems issues (e.g., helping them to identify the appropriate level of analysis, identify salient local and regional issues; locate and interpret data to better inform their decision-making);
5) evaluating different certification or conscious-consumer programs that producer groups may use to secure consumer patronage, and investigating other issues that may present roadblocks to increased direct marketing efforts such as farm labor issues, safe food handling, understanding new types of commercial transactions, and state regulations;
6) connecting producers and consumers (through MarketMaker or food policy councils, for example) and providing information so they can make more responsible and educated decisions on local food issues; and
7) leveraging resources across work teams by permitting project members to collectively apply for grants that will extend project activities beyond the 2-year venture capital grant period and reach a wider group of producers and communities throughout the state (grants targeted include Western Center for Risk Management Education, National Institute for Food and Agriculture, Western Sustainable Agriculture and Education program (both Farmer/Rancher grants to producers and a new sub-regional grant available to those investigating agricultural issues in the Mountain/High Plains area).

VIII. Anticipated Impacts/Outcomes of this Work

Short term impacts:
1. Coordinated work plans across all CSU-Extension personnel and allied work teams involved in local food systems activities on campus and around the state—which will lead to streamlined activities by region, such as facilitation of county/regional food policy councils, regionally offered Building Farmers programs and support of farmers markets and other food supply chain enterprises.
2. Nascent food policy councils or groups interested in local foods issues (such as Larimer County) will have information resources and model processes from which to learn (such as the Boulder County food policy group, Growing Partners of Southwest Colorado, or contacts to groups in other states).
3. A producer database for MarketMaker will be developed and promoted to producers across the state, via the Colorado Department of Agriculture and county Extension agents, and we will begin to design innovative marketing strategies to leverage this new, state-level resource.

Mid-term impacts:
1. Communities will have a Colorado portal to local food systems research and activities from across the state and the US, as well as contacts for specific questions, and access to staff and faculty who have data, research activities or community-level involvement in a project.
2. Development of an Extension Web page that provides links to the following topics:
   - Resources for consumers (examples of tools, projects across Colorado and the US).
   - Resources for farmers/ranchers (link to MarketMaker; technical and financial resources).
   - Resources for education and program development (data & indicators, analytical tools) for use by policymakers, elected officials, citizens, and educators throughout the state.
   - Example processes and projects that communities have undertaken to address needs and issues within their local food systems, with contact information for follow-up.
3. Work teams can collaboratively apply for grants across disciplines to advance work on local food issues (such as small farmer/rancher grants to develop alternative production, marketing or processing); National Institute for Food and Agriculture (NIFA) competitive grants to fund research on small and mid-sized farms, Managed Ecosystems or Rural Development. Other opportunities to expand funding and technical assistance include developing a Cooperative Development Center through USDA Rural Development or coordinating with CSU’s existing Center for Fair and Alternative Trade Systems.
4. Expand the Building Farmers program to: 1) address new areas such as food safety and regulatory issues impacting direct marketers; 2) reach producers in other parts of the state not currently served under this program; and 3) increase program revenues (through new topics and target populations).

Long-term impacts:
1. The local food systems team will assist one county or area in defining: 1) its local food system components; 2) opportunities and constraints to identifying and increasing local ag production; 3) identifying all community members involved in local foods issues, and developing a community plan;
and 4) innovative direct marketing channels. Analysis and evaluation will show that economic development based on food supply chain enterprises improve competitiveness, and provide positive local economic indicators.

2. The international fair trade movement and some emerging domestic food assurance programs have treatment of farmworkers as major tenets of their certification process and we believe these issues are important in Colorado given the attention given to immigration reform and farmworkers as potential new farmers. Since there are some consumer activists who are driven by these and other “fair returns” principles, we hope to pilot a program with Grant Family Farms to explore partnering with long-term farmworkers as producer partners to improve their economic outcomes and support this potential new farmer population.

IX. Partnerships

- Colorado Department of Agriculture-Markets Division (Wendy White): sponsor and assist with marketing workshops, and launch and maintenance of Market Maker Web site.
- Colorado State Food Policy Council-currently led by LiveWell Colorado (Dawn Thilmany, Adrian Card, Laura Ridenour): connect and promote food policy councils across Colorado.
- Local and regional food policy councils: Boulder County (Adrian Card), Growing Partners of Southwest Colorado (Jim Dyer): provide case study information about food policy council formation.
- Sustaining Colorado Agriculture Work Team (Dennis Lamm and Adrian Card): link producers to appropriate technical assistance in production and processing, link work team members to project.
- Colorado Department of Local Affairs (Martha Sullins): connect DOLA regional staff with Extension to coordinate education activities throughout the state.
- Colorado Farmers Market Association: platform to increase direct marketing and educate producers and consumers on benefits of local food systems to health, economy and community.
- Colorado Organic Producers Association (Jim Dyer, Addy Elliot): connect to organic producers throughout Colorado.
- Agriculture of the Middle (USDA Research Coordinating Committee): a resource on the changing policy context for small and mid-sized farms, new business and marketing strategies, and research and education through its network of scientists.
- Department of Ag and Resource Economics (Dawn Thilmany): provide or coordinate technical assistance to producers on marketing alternatives.
- Center for Fair and Alternative Trade Studies, CSU Dept of Sociology (Doug Murray): assist with certification and multidisciplinary approach to trade and marketing initiatives. This is the connection to the Grant Family Farms farmworker pilot program and primary partner to explore conscious consumers.
- Colorado Extension Nutrition Education Program (Marisa Bunning): provide education and outreach to low-income and other vulnerable populations regarding fresh, local and nutritious foods.
- CSU Department of Food Science and Human Nutrition (Marisa Bunning and Garry Auld): education on food safety practices and regulations applicable to direct marketing.
- CSU Extension, County Information Service (Martha Sullins): provide data, research assistance, program-building around the state, collect information for Web site, facilitate project evaluation.
- Local Living Economy of Northern Colorado (GailMarie Kimmel): through their Community Marketplace and new Conscious Consumer Trust in Fort Collins, help provide new marketing channels for producers.

X. Action Plan, Including a Time Line for the Project

This venture capital grant project will run from January 2009 through December 2010. At that time, we will have established the basis for a formal Extension presence and program that will permanently support local food system issues. The project timeline is as follows:

Year 1 (calendar year 2009):
- Conference call with all project team members to discuss the project timeline, identified areas for immediate versus future collaboration, and integrating Extension work plans regarding food systems issues. Plan first team meeting. Discuss applying for an interdisciplinary NIFA grant (formerly NRI).
- Begin building Extension Web resources and tools. Profile current food systems-related projects and activities throughout Colorado.
- Apply for a Western Center for Risk Mgmt Education grant to expand the Building Farmers program for the Front Range and Southwest Colorado. Identify 2 producers to support with case study seed grants.
- Promote MarketMaker to Colorado producers through Extension and DOLA and expand its database.
• Produce one white paper on product certification in conjunction with COPA and the Center for Fair and Alternative Trade (this also has applicability to other niche products and services such as agritourism).
• In collaboration with Extension staff, identify a county or region that needs support in assessing food system dynamics, developing a food policy council or otherwise developing Year 2 (calendar year 2010):
  • Survey Colorado MarketMaker users on the interface’s functionality and any changes needed. Changes may include adding a growing calendar for those interested in locating local and seasonal farm products.
  • Solicit feedback on Extension’s local food systems Web page. Make needed improvements.
  • Work to pilot the farmworker partnership with Grant Family Farms, with support from the Center for Fair and Alternative Trade, to explore innovative ways to nurture farmworkers as new producers.
  • Identify 2-3 producers who can apply for SARE Farmer/Rancher grants to examine farm- or ranch-level issues in production or marketing that have broad application to other producers (e.g. extending production seasons for some crops, varietal trials).
  • Expand the Building Farmers program to a new area in Colorado.

XI. Evaluation Plan for Documenting Outcomes/Impacts
1. Post coordinated timeline and master work plan of activities across five CSU work teams, for accountability to project goals and outputs.
2. Hold meetings 2 times per year and quarterly conference call with all involved faculty and staff.
3. After identifying two communities that could implement a project (needs assessment; food policy council), document increased diversity of groups involved both on- and off-campus (agencies, institutional partners, integrating nutrition education).
4. Producer survey results on Marketmaker and Extension survey on local food systems Web resources.
5. Track the number of annual additions of businesses and data to MarketMaker, especially for niche marketing, farmers’ markets, food supply chain linkages and other direct marketing channels (growth of 10% per year is anticipated).
6. Track number and diversity of participants at educational workshops (Building Farmers program, nutrition education).
7. Track direct grantsmanship (CSU PIs) and resources secured with technical assistance and partnership involving CSU Extension and other personnel.

XII. Sustainability Statement
Many indications point to the sustainability of this project, based on emerging sets of interests and resources available to support local food systems activities.
1. A number of current CSU Extension personnel already invest a good share of their appointment on these issues and, with a more focused local food system plan of work, the shared identity should improve the effectiveness, focus and long-term nature of these efforts.
2. Numerous existing and newly proposed grant programs provide resources for young/new farmers, entrepreneurial food system models, applied research and outreach to address the needs of small and mid-sized farms, the role of conservation and ecosystem services in food system economics, and marketing technical assistance for specialty crop enterprises. Potential grant funding estimated at $10,000-$25,000/year.
3. Several agencies and organizations see CSU as an essential partner in carrying out new programs, including the Colorado Department of Ag and its new funding and programming for Specialty Crops, foodshed assessments for state and local food policy councils, small businesses who need cost-effective research partners for small business and value-added grants, and NGOs who assess and provide technical assistance to overcome barriers to innovative land use, urban farming and community food system models. We can leverage these potential income streams to generate direct (salary, operating cost, graduate assistantships), user fees, and indirect monies for Extension. Potential grant funding estimated at $30,000-$50,000.
4. The Building Farmers program is growing, and the Boulder County program is now being replicated in southwest Colorado. This program will generate user fees for Extension offices in years 1 and 2 of this project, and thereafter, and provide a platform to provide additional outreach and revenue-generating activities such technical assistance to producers on agritourism and branded beef programs, as well assistance on other niche marketing alternatives, on safe food handling, and regulations affecting direct marketing. Potential users fees calculated based on $160 per new farmer tuition and $80 per intermediate or experienced farmer tuition. User fees, estimated at $5,200 per year, will cover some workshop costs.
XIII. Funding Request and Budget Narrative (separate page)

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Personnel:
- One half-time graduate research assistant is requested to work on further enhancements to the Building Farmers curriculum (either through Horticulture, the Center for Fair and Alternative Trade Systems, Food Science and Human Nutrition, or Ag and Resource Economics). This effort may lead to new lectures, workbook components, case studies, or decision making tools.
- Martha Sullivan will allocate 10 hours per month of her time to developing the local food systems Web pages, developing and administering evaluation tools, and providing data and research assistance to communities. 5 hours per month over the two years is requested in addition, to bring the total County Information Service hours to 15 per month.

Travel:
- Mileage at $0.55/mile is requested for travel to work with community groups on food policy issues, to bring presenters to Building Farmers workshops or other outreach events, or to provide travel scholarships to several workshop attendees in need. Travel may also defray costs for off-campus Extension staff to attend local food systems team meetings.

Community Support:
- To assist communities with materials in conducting food assessments, developing a food policy council, developing a community plan for alternative marketing for local producers. Expenditures will include data collection at county or regional level, stipends to have non-CSU technical assistance presenters attend community meetings or workshops, and develop case studies for future Outreach.

Producer Seed Grants:
- Small grants (up to $500 each) are requested to fund producer-initiated projects on production, processing, food safety, alternative marketing, etc., that will serve as case studies for other Colorado farmers and ranchers. The outcome will be new Extension case studies to deliver at workshops.

Workshop/Outreach Materials:
- Copying curricula and publications for producer or community-based workshops. Expenditures will include sample budget information, marketing plans, food safety information, state and local regulations relevant to direct marketing, food assessments or other studies.

Communications:
- Phone, copying and mailing costs to ensure communication among local food systems team members (regular conference calls), contacts with producers, and evaluation of project benchmarks over 2-year project.