Colorado State University Cooperative Extension programs are helping Coloradans

- understand and meet the challenges of today’s agriculture;
- learn best management practices that maximize ranch and farm profits and minimize environmental impacts;
- sustain agricultural systems that are both profitable and enhance the state’s diverse natural resources.

The Costs...

- Colorado’s human population has increased dramatically since 1980 and as a result, rural land is under increasing pressure from urban development and is being converted to residential, business, transportation and other uses.
- Drought impacts on the state’s agricultural industry have been substantial—20% of Colorado’s breeding cows have been sold off, with the January 2002 inventory value for livestock in Colorado at $2.22 billion, a loss of approximately 8% from 2001. Data suggest that feedlots have experienced an especially tough time, showing lots of red ink.
- It is estimated that 15% more agricultural producers obtained off-farm employment in 2002, and 15% of farmers (about 4,000) will exit agriculture after this year.
- An indirect measure of the poor economic health of the area’s agricultural industry is the record number of farm liquidation sales reported by local farm auctioneers and the long waiting lists for others wanting their equipment sold off.

Sustaining Colorado’s Agriculture and Natural Resource Systems

Currently, both Colorado’s agricultural and natural resource systems are faced with economic and environmental challenges that threaten their long-term sustainability, their economic significance and their ecological stability. Today’s producers face serious farming challenges—uncertain markets; increasing farm debts, expenses and equipment costs; loss of family farms; and consumer concerns about food safety, environmental impacts and declining rural communities. Meeting the challenge of helping producers remain profitable—a requirement for agriculture sustainability—by reducing production costs and exploring creative opportunities while minimizing environmental impacts provides plenty of educational opportunities.

Colorado State University Cooperative Extension participates with the U.S. Department of Agriculture in the “Sustainable Agriculture Research and Education” program to increase knowledge about—and help farmers and ranchers adopt—sustainable crop and livestock systems, innovative marketing practices, and value-added strategies. Another goal is to increase the level of environmental awareness and stewardship among agricultural and non-agricultural clientele, and find common ground on which agricultural and environmental interests can agree—to help resolve present and future agriculture/natural resource and environmental management issues.

Colorado State University Cooperative Extension educational programs help farmers and ranchers remain profitable while adopting environmentally-sensitive agricultural systems.
The Payoff...

- **Cooperative Extension programs** have shown that agricultural producers who effectively manage their farm risk and increase their operational resiliency are consistently more profitable than average and are better able to preserve their farm’s integrity and enhance the land’s environmental sustainability. Extension efforts have helped 56% of participating agricultural producers & land managers increase knowledge about integrating production practices with environmentally sound decision-making; 72% have enhanced profitability through development of risk management tools.

- Colorado and Nebraska farmers and ranchers who attended a “Human Side of Farming” Conference were introduced to ideas for land preservation, alternative crop and livestock enterprises, new marketing strategies for traditional crops, and ways to bring youth back into agriculture; 77% reported knowledge increases and 75% planned to use the ideas in their operations.

- Up to 80% of Colorado producers and industry consultants attending alfalfa and corn management clinics reported that they increased knowledge and skills about management practices and would make changes in their operations based on what they learned; some participants reported average benefits of $10 to $25 per acre from improved knowledge and skills, with expected cost-benefit totals of $620,000 for 13,000 alfalfa acres, and $178,000 for 125,000 corn acres.

- **Applied research** has helped Colorado's eastern plains farmers develop a more intensive rotation system for dryland crops that reduce tillage practices and increase total crop yield and profits resulting in an increase of $15 million per year to the Colorado economy. In addition, reduced wind and water erosion, and weed, soil and crop disease benefits provide a net positive effect on the environment.

---

**Putting Knowledge to Work**

Colorado State University
Cooperative Extension
Fort Collins, CO 80523
970.491.6421

*We’re on the Web at:*
www.ext.colostate.edu
www.answerlink.info