

Aspiring Young Farmers Attend Conference

For immediate press release

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The Western Colorado Food and Farm Forum returns to the Montrose Pavilion January 10th with a growing state reputation for offering leading edge workshops for the agricultural community. The conference focuses on the sustainable production of local foods and attracts producers statewide with a special focus on new farmers.

Increasingly the conference has been successful in attracting a contingency of young farmers, intent on growing for local markets. "About 15 young farmers attended the conference last year bringing innovative ideas and great energy to the event," according to organizer, Carol Parker. Those numbers are expected to increase this year through scholarships available via sponsorships from Montrose County and West Slope Ag Center.

Supporting and providing educational opportunities for new producers is very important to conference organizers who realize that the average age of farmers is increasing. "Growing the next generation of farmer is essential to the future of agriculture and we are very interested in attracting those attendees to the Forum," says Isaac Munoz of CSU Extension and planning team member.

Next generation farmer, Mathew Kottensteete said of the conference that, "Being a young farmer with little ties in the industry, ... I have no doubt that the personal communications I had will be career changing as I continue my agricultural ventures. I intend to apply learned business strategies and production advice as I begin to develop an independent venture of my own."

This year a pre-conference workshop will focus on a subject of interest to young farmers - regional seed saving and systems. *Seed Save the Rocky Mountains*, a half day session led by Bill McDorman and Belle Starr, Directors of the Rocky Mountain Seed Alliance will be held at the Montrose Fairgrounds January 9th. It will be followed by a viewing of *Open Sesame*, a documentary about international seed issues related to loss of diversity at Two Rascals Brewery in Montrose.

The theme of this year's conference is ***Unlocking the Secrets of Raising Great Food***. Production and management techniques that focus on growing and marketing great tasting and nutrient dense local foods will be the focus of nearly 20 breakout sessions. Cover cropping, soil health, seed production, variety selection, herd genetics, intensive raised beds gardening, and high altitude permaculture are among the many topics being offered. Because staying profitable is essential, financial planning, marketing, diversifying through value added products, and on-farm food safety will provide valuable information for emerging and experienced producers.

The Valley Food Partnership, the Montrose Office of Business and Tourism, Shavano Conservation District, Rocky Mountain Farmers Union and CSU Extension organize the Western Colorado Food and Farm Forum collaboratively. For more information or to register for the conference and pre-conference workshop please visit: <http://www.foodfarmforum.org> or call 249-3935.