

Agricultural Summit
Envisioning the Future of Agriculture in La Plata County
November 9, 2009
7:00 -9:00 pm
Durango Recreation Center

I. Presentation

A short film on the beef industry was played followed by a presentation by Marjo Curgus, consultant on the CommunitybyDesign team, on best practices for agricultural conservation and land use policy. The powerpoint presentation is available at www.laplatacountyplan.com under Project Documents.

II. Break out Discussion

Participant were broken into 5 smaller groups and instructed to answer the following questions:

- *What are the current challenges with farming and ranching in La Plata County?*
- *What opportunities, if any, exist for supporting and promoting agricultural viability in La Plata County?*
- *How does current land use policy either help or harm agricultural viability?*
- *What types of land use policies could benefit agricultural production and viability?*
- *What other issues and concerns do you have for La Plata County?*
- *What would you like to see different in the future? What do you want La Plata County to look like in 20 years?*

1. What are the current challenges with farming and ranching in La Plata County?

- Economy needs to be stronger in order to find ways to survive
- Shipping resources in and out expensive
- Locker storage – necessary for meat and vegetables
- Land costs – incentive to buy workable land, entice young people
- Government mandates
- Neighbors dictating uses
- Making a living
- Taxes – inheritance, capital gains, etc.
- Costs
- Cap and trade
- Labor
- Access to markets
- Regulations that interfere with markets
- Capital
- No monetary incentives for young people
- Costs of the land
- Buy high, sell low

- Making a living
- Disappearing agricultural land
- Unfriendly to agriculture –no incentives
- Out of state regulations
- Ag vs. small values differ
- 35 acres rule has been harmful. Difficult to subdivide, can't afford to do development.
- If too big weed patch, too sell less must go through planning process.

2. What opportunities, if any, exist for supporting and promoting agricultural viability in La Plata County?

- There are creative ways to profit from the land
- Need economies of scale
- Cash crops and alternative crops
- Need opportunities in leasing – do only 1 crop, small operation
- Do outfitting too as alternative job
- James Ranch is an example of diversified operation
- Incentives for purchasing and local products within the county
- Harvesting of wildlife
- Carbon sequestration
- Energy production
- Leasing land on partnerships
- Agricultural taxes
- Carbon sequestration
- Payments for ecosystem services
- Promotion of local products
- Water for homes
- Season extension and micro-farming
- Second jobs
- Value added products
- Windmills
- Dude ranches
- Incentives to keep together rather than ranches providing open space at “our” costs
- Transportation costs to move products. Keep 0.20 cents for \$1.00 generated. Public needs to understand costs of food.
- Educate public renewable energy resources. Ag community understands.
- Need to allow gas/oil production holding ranches together. Larger ranches with wells – help agriculture by not double taxing – this is Christy Zeller – Jim explained not double taxed.
- Earmark for agriculture.
- County value added grants – alternative crops, etc
- Other enterprises are difficult to do – permits required

3. How does current land use policy either help or harm agricultural viability?

- Think don't want growth
- If zone land, it won't be worth anything
- Less property tax
- Does not help housing, urban sprawl, ability to have a second income, costs of compliance
- Fragments ditch water
- Sprawl 35 acres
- La Plata County has Right to Farm Ordinance
- Right to farm in county/state
- Community education – private property rights
- Farmers/ranchers feed wildlife cannot be expected to feed deer/elk. DOW has step in planning fence (*difficult to read*). Predators problem.
- Coloring map puts value in property, must have process that allows for change over time. Most systems using map process work well because everyone afraid of variance flexibility

4. What types of land use policies could benefit agricultural production and viability?

- Need flexibility to survive
- Need affordable land trusts
- Extend the planning that exists – long term future plan, flexibility for future generations
- Community supported ranch hands/housing
- Cheap housing incentives – increases large /second home owner numbers in CO
- County balance the loss of incentives taken by the state and federal government
- Storage facilities
- Agricultural marketing coop
- Anything we want to or need to
- Least costly and easier and quicker
- Make it easier to make additional money off the land – weddings, lumber, wood
- A place to market livestock
- Education to citizens about agriculture
- Keep farming and ranching
- Want “property rights” for large land owners – allow to use (minerals?), oil and gas to hold together farm.
- How do you balance right to subdivide with holding together farms – right to farm?
- Trying to stitch together diversity of land uses into single system
- Subdivide developments where open space is set aside for farming
- Use GIS system to map and identify land uses, values
- Change development rights where more development rights on less productive lands
- Realtor needs to be notice right to farm.
- Not need special use permit for doing things on ag land

- Internal TDR – development on small parcels, private property rights within bounds

III. Report Back

- Define uses that agricultural properties could have on them – eliminate confusion (B&B, etc.)
- How can we get counties to allow improvements without entire subdivision development process (e.g. rental unit)
- Encourage long term planning without 3 year limit – maybe longer
- More flexibility for on site worker housing
- How to benefit from wildlife?
- Recruitment of young people into agriculture
- Housing for kids/employees/huge problem
- Permitting process for other uses. Need a business permit to cut and sell wood. Too cumbersome. People give up. No incentives for ranchers to be able to sell a little piece of land to keep major operation going. Too much urban sprawl created by regulations. Less regulation == more open and agricultural lands.
- Development an issue. 35 acre rule harmful. But difficult to subdivide smaller parcels. Have more opportunity to be developer of vision.
- Special use permits and Class II permits for agriculture.
- Value added grants for alternatives. Have had difficulty with class II permits that prevent business.
- What about private property rights?
- Need to make sure goals are not conflicting and hurt agriculture.
- Current regulations pit neighbor against neighbor.
- Should have less input from neighbors. Should be things that impact e.g. boundary adjustments, runoff, etc.
- If want to plan for growth, need to plan for roads, water, sewer. Only do land use regulations, no real planning.
- With regards to question #4, can only have so many dude ranches, and B&Bs.
- Fragmentation of land causes fragmentation of water/ditches/weeds on 35 acres. Ranchette owners do not know how to manage it. (dust)
- Identify ways to market what we grow and how to haul it out of here.
- Educate people about agriculture.
- Ability to keep farming and ranching. When only get negativity, its hard. Don't have other skills to run other business for example.
- Do a farm plan (like design resource center). Has some measure of entitlements.
- Distribution process – how to minimize land uses conflicts and PIA for landowners.
- Vending outlet – barriers to local sales, some local market. EG health inspector for failure to have proper kitchen – cannot even sell banana bread at farmers market or sell raw milk. Barrier.

IV. Next Steps

To continue this effort at involving the agricultural community in the comprehensive plan process and pursue ideas discussed during this meeting, it was agreed to form an ag subcommittee to the Working Group. Volunteers were solicited. This subcommittee will work to help guide county policy to support agriculture. In addition to the regular public involvement process, the agricultural community will be kept informed through emails and additional meetings as ideas related to agriculture are developed.