

Boulder County

Sustainability Tax

2023 Report



Sustainability,
Climate Action
& Resilience

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Introduction

In 2019, Boulder County residents approved a 15-year extension of the Boulder County Sustainability Tax, a 0.125% sales and use tax, that runs through the end 2034. The ballot language read:

“Collections of a current 0.25 percent sales and use tax that helps fund Boulder County’s expenses of acquiring and managing open space expires on Dec. 31, 2019. This measure would authorize Boulder County to continue collecting half that tax, 0.125 percent, for another 15 years starting on Jan. 1, 2020, and spend those revenues on ‘sustainability’ services, such as programs that promote water conservation and energy consumption, increased solid-waste recycling, increasing farmers’ production of organic food and food for local consumers, and the use of mass transit and other alternative modes of transportation.”

Over the past several years, and in large part thanks to the support of this tax, Boulder County has become a strong leader in local climate action—not just for Colorado, but for the whole world. The holistic work made possible by this tax has benefitted the Boulder County community far beyond reducing carbon emissions alone, supporting programs spanning from public health to transportation to waste management. This holistic approach to sustainability and climate work is critical to an equitable future in Boulder County and beyond.

This report highlights work from 25+ programs funded by the Boulder County Sustainability Tax in 2023, featuring snapshots of community experiences, earned media coverage, and more. Highlights include **local, national, and international news features**, a **record-setting solar co-op**, a **70% adoption rate for electrification and high-efficiency home standards** in rebuilding from the Marshall Fire, and our **most effective per-dollar** business decarbonization program to date, PACE’s commercial landscaping equipment electrification pilot.

This report contains data from 2023 only, unless noted otherwise.

Boulder Reservoir Air Quality Monitoring Station

The Boulder Reservoir Air Monitoring Station performs sampling for pollutants associated with oil and gas production. Real-time data is available to the public via the Boulder AIR website (boulderair.com). Air quality monitoring provides critical data that informs policy and regulation decisions, which is more important than ever as the region continues to face dangerous public health impacts from air pollutants.

- Continuously monitors air for methane, nitrogen oxides, and **13 volatile organic compounds (VOCs)**
- Supported successful testimony to **Regional Air Quality Council** and **State Legislature** in support of stricter emissions control
- Hosted an official visit from Assistant Secretary for Health for the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, **Admiral Rachel Levine**.

Circular Economy Funding

The Circular Economy Funding program, previously known as Zero Waste Funding, assists Boulder County and Broomfield organizations – including local governments and small businesses – in launching projects focused on conserving resources through sharing, reusing, repairing, and recycling practices.

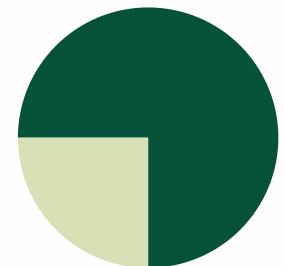
- **EcoCycle** expanded on-location composting systems at **two local farms**
- **Nude Foods Market** invested in new equipment to maximize operations efficiency
- A **large condominium complex** upgraded its recycling infrastructure and educational materials



In June 2023, Assistant Secretary for Health for the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Admiral Rachel L. Levine, toured the Boulder Reservoir Air Quality Monitoring station to learn about Boulder County's clean air initiatives.

“We need to partner at the Federal, state, and local levels to ensure a healthier, more climate-resilient future for all those living in the United States. Taking lessons learned from innovative programs like those of Boulder County, and working at the community-level to apply those solutions across the country is key.”

Admiral Rachel Levine
Assistant Secretary for Health



Boulder County's Zero-Waste Action Plan estimates that **75% of waste** generated in the county can be kept out of landfills through composting, recycling, and other circular economy practices.

Climate Finance Research

Boulder County collaborated with national economics experts to develop and distribute financial strategies and best practices focused on supporting local government climate action goals. The research concentrated on establishing impactful and equitable public *green banks* to capitalize on opportunities provided by the Inflation Reduction Act (IRA), and exploring methods for local governments to divest from the fossil fuel industry.

- Published **two reports** that help local governments pursue climate-forward financial practices
- Partnered with industry experts, **John F. Kennedy School of Government** and **350 Colorado**, to co-author this memo
- Nearly **2,000 downloads** across **12+ countries**

Climate Innovation Fund (CIF)

From 2022 to 2023, the CIF supported five projects focused on carbon removal and landscape resilience and restoration. Partnering with Carbon Direct, the CIF provided financial support and technical carbon accounting assistance to grantees and hosted demonstrations for media, lawmakers, scientists, and community stakeholders.

- **136+ acres** of land positively impacted by regenerative soil health practices
- **\$540,000** awarded to **five organizations**
- **120+ metric tons of carbon** pulled out of the air and back into our soils
- Grantee **Ollin Farms** presented their research on Indigenous perspectives and sustainable family farming to the **United Nations**



State and Local Government and the Formation of Green Banks provides guidance for governments looking to set up equitable and impactful financial systems. The memo shares strategies for multi-agency collaboration to leverage IRA funding and support investment needs.



Zach Hedstrom of Boulder Mushroom partnered with CIF grantee Boulder Watershed Collective to pilot using mushrooms to cut wildfire risk. The fungi, spread over wood scraps in fire mitigation areas, speed up wood decomposition and retain soil moisture, cutting fire risk and reducing the need for heavy machinery to haul out waste.

CIF projects were featured in...

Newsweek

BBC NEWS **The Washington Post**

Climate Policy Action Leadership (CPAL)

Boulder County launched CPAL in early 2023, aiming to increase access to and engagement with climate-related legislative and rulemaking processes. County staff worked with community leaders selected through a holistic application process. The group covered equity mapping tools, policy advocacy strategy, community engagement, and more. Members made public comments on climate and environmental justice issues of their choice. The county gathered insights on community concerns, perceptions, and priorities to inform future efforts.

- **Seven community leaders** trained on public policy engagement, selected from over **40 applicants**
- **Community-informed public comments** delivered on issues including air quality, utility and industrial emissions, environmental remediation, building electrification, and oil and gas development

Community Spring Cleanup

In partnership with communities, Boulder County's Resource Conservation Division hosted Spring Cleanup days to help residents divert household and yard waste from landfills. Services provided included mattress and tire recycling, yard waste mulching and composting, safe disposal of appliances using chlorofluorocarbons, electronic waste and scrap metal recycling, and Styrofoam collection.

- **Six participating communities:** Allenspark, Gold Hill, Jamestown, Nederland, Niwot, and Ward.
- Nearly **40 tons of waste** diverted from landfills, including 6.2 tons of mattresses and 7.4 tons of tires



CPAL members and county staff pose for a photo at one of their first meetings. The Collaborative spent over a year together focused on mutual learning, with members and staff sharing insights on climate policy, community impacts, and more.



Mattresses and tires piled up and ready for recycling at the Nederland Community Spring Cleanup event. The collected waste was brought to EcoCycle and the Boulder County Recycling Center for processing so that components could be reused and repurposed.

Community Sustainability Grants

Boulder County's Environmental Sustainability Matching Grant Program provides grants to municipalities in the county to tackle sustainability projects important to their communities. In addition to supporting capacity gaps, the program also boosts collaboration across the county, creating a more impactful, regional sustainability approach.

- Supported **17 projects** across **nine municipalities**
- **\$603 thousand** disbursed, bringing program total to **\$2.5 million+** in **10 years**
- **Four funded projects focus specifically on water quality and conservation**, promoting drought resilience and improved environmental health

Farm Stand Pilot

Engagement with local agricultural producers revealed that permits for farm stands are hard to access. The Farm Stand Pilot tested a way to solve this problem, by providing free farm stand designs that come with a pre-approved building permit. This design was tailored to the needs of agricultural producers, with strong collaboration with and across county departments. The first offering free farm stand designs with pre-approved building permits will be made available to the public in the summer of 2024.

- **13 agricultural producers** throughout the county provided insights into ideal farm stand design
- **Two expert working groups** in the region have reviewed project updates and provided feedback
- **Trackable cost-savings model** for local agricultural community



A local landscaper testing out new commercial electric equipment. The City of Boulder was awarded grant funding to subsidize the purchase of electric equipment for businesses, a highly effective strategy for reducing greenhouse gas emissions and air and noise pollution.

Additional coverage of Sustainability Grant recipients can be seen in...



Preliminary mockup of one farm stand design that will be available for county agricultural producers to use without the need to obtain additional permits. The pilot team intends to have several layout options for farms to choose from.

EnergySmart

EnergySmart offers electrification and energy efficiency assistance to Boulder County residents, including expert advising, financial incentives, and rebates. Services target general home efficiency, comfort, energy bill concerns, and specific upgrade measures including insulation, air sealing, heat pumps, solar, induction, and more.

- **500+ new enrollments** from community members
- Supported **635 home upgrades** across 400 homes
- **265 air source heat pumps** installed: over 3x more than in 2022

Colorado Affordable Residential Efficiency (CARE) Program from Energy Outreach Colorado

CARE offers income-qualified residents with energy efficiency improvements and emergency heating system replacement. In 2023, Boulder County provided funds to expand reach throughout the county and to replace fossil fuel-powered systems with high efficiency heat pumps when appropriate.

- Energy efficiency and HVAC improvements provided to **50+ Boulder County homes**
- **Four homes damaged by the Marshall Fire** received additional support and targeted repairs

Boulder County Solar Co-op

In partnership with Solar United Neighbors, the county launched a vendor-neutral co-op to facilitate a solar panel group buy for interested residents.

- **438 county residents** signed up for the co-op, flying past the initial goal of 200 members
- Members undertook the **largest single solar group buy in state history**, poised to break state records for kilowatt generation capacity from a group buy



EnergySmart participants can access Canopy, a software platform that helps guide home sustainability decisions and connects users to rebates and incentives by just answering a few questions. This software is free for residents to use.

“The Solar Co-op is like having a friend on your side to walk you through the process. I’ve had several bids [for solar installation] recently, and this is the best price by far, which means I get a payback I’m happy with.”

– Jared Friedman, Boulder County Solar Co-op Member



A young Solar Co-op member poses in front of her home, which now features brand-new, highly efficient solar panels installed at a discount through a group buy.

Farm to Early Care & Education

This program teaches young children about healthy food through gardening, taste tests, field trips, meals, snacks and more, aiming to increase access to nutritious, locally grown food, and new experiences.

- Distributed **over 7,000 pounds** of nutritious food
- Provided **119 field trips to farms** and gardening and nutrition classes to local child care programs
- **95% of participating families** reported that their children have more access to local produce

Fruit and Veg Longmont

This program serves Longmont families who are ineligible for federal food assistance programs but are still food insecure. Families are enrolled through trusted community partners and receive monthly coupons to purchase fresh fruits and vegetables at various retailers, including farmers markets, farm stands, and small minority-owned grocers.

- **227 families**, or **over 1,000 individuals**, served
- **95% of participants** had reduced food insecurity
- Support from **ten local community partners**

Healthy Homes Program (HHP)

Residents of low-income or older housing are subject to higher levels of health risks, like poor indoor air quality, than those living in new housing. HHP partners with existing community outreach programs to reach these residents and assess homes for hazards.

- Provides **testing for 5+ hazards** including radon, mold, lead, and asbestos
- As a new program, HHP aims to provide **40 home assessments** in 2024



A young pepper plant grows on a Boulder County farm. Children across the county were able to see local agriculture in action and form connections to their food through the Farm to Early Care and Education Program.

Fruit and Veg Longmont Community Partners include...



HHP Community Partners include...



**COLORADO STATE UNIVERSITY
EXTENSION**



Keep it Clean Partnership (KICP)

KICP is a collaborative program supported by the county and five municipalities focused on improving water quality and health across the Boulder St. Vrain Watershed. Together, the six communities fund staff, education and outreach, training opportunities, creation of water quality data reports, and training events for stormwater professionals.

- Supported **programming for 4,000 students** across the county
- KICP trainings reached **165 stormwater professionals** from **43 organizations**
- Watershed health PSA ads reached riders on **1,000 RTD buses**

Landscape Desertification and Restoration Analysis

In partnership with the City of Boulder, Boulder County provided funding for an assessment of climate risks and environmental resilience throughout the county. Desertification and soil loss fueled by climate change threaten ecosystem function, land values, and resilience to natural disasters like fires and floods. This region-wide assessment will create a standardized tracking system, outline land management best practices, and build awareness of desertification risks.

- Study will target **3+ vulnerable ecosystems** throughout the county, including grasslands, rangelands, and agricultural lands
- Boulder County is on the project's **Technical Advisory Committee** and is assisting in selecting a consultant to complete the analysis



Yami from Lafayette, K-2 Grand Prize winner of the 2023 Boulder St. Vrain Watershed Art Contest hosted by KICP. 122 students from over 25 schools submitted art that explored the connections between people, plants, and animals in the St. Vrain watershed.



Ads on buses, social media, trailhead signs, and more remind residents to be mindful of how their actions can impact our watershed.



A farmer poses with a soil sample on Boulder County agricultural lands. Sustainable land management practices that build and retain healthy soils help keep food production local and pull carbon out of the air and into the ground.

Land Use Code Amendment

Previous versions of the Land Use Code prevented local agricultural producers from using external sources of organic waste in on-site composting, meaning they could only compost their own organic waste, even if they had extra capacity. Boulder County worked with the agricultural community to pass a Land Use Code Amendment that reduced these barriers for on-farm composting, helping agricultural producers divert organic waste from community members away from landfills and into farm compost piles.

- More local compost means **less carbon pollution emitted** in transporting heavy materials and waste
- Code updates are straightforward and **easier for agricultural producers** to follow
- New opportunities for the county to **monitor and understand compost activities**, including volume of organic materials diverted from landfills

Marshall Disaster Wind Damage Repair and Recovery

The high winds that drove the Marshall Fire also severely damaged manufactured homes across the county. In partnership with the City of Boulder, Boulder County has been assisting residents at the Sans Souci, Table Mesa Village, and San Lazaro neighborhoods with damage assessments, repairs, and more.

- **400+ manufactured homes** sustained damage from high winds on the day of the Marshall Fire
- Boulder County has disbursed **nearly \$70,000** in funding disbursed to impacted residents to assist with damage assessments, repair costs, and more



Compost piles at farms throughout Boulder County, which are used to add nutrients back to local agricultural lands. Updates to the Land Use Code will help keep organic matter cycling in the Boulder County ecosystem, keeping waste out of landfills and supporting local farms in their efforts towards a more circular economy.

On the day of the Marshall Fire, wind gusts reached over

100 mph

...well over the threshold for damaging homes from wind forces alone.

Additional coverage on the impacts of high winds on Boulder County's manufactured homes:



THE COLORADO SUN

Mobility for All

The *Mobility for All* program centers equity and inclusivity in improving multimodal transportation access for historically marginalized populations, including older adults, individuals with disabilities, youth, households with low incomes, Spanish speaking households, and veterans. *Mobility for All* offers educational campaigns, direct transportation assistance, and equitable programs to promote sustainable transportation options.

- **300+ engagement events** with community members in 2023
- Provided **nearly 350 trips** to mountain residents in Ward, Nederland, and Rollinsville, connecting residents to food, medical services, and more
- Helped **200+ community members** transition to the new mobile-app based EcoPass system

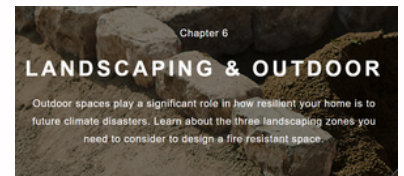
Rebuilding Better

Rebuilding Better is a suite of support services available to Marshall Fire victims that assists rebuilding efforts, targeting resilient, high-performance, fossil-free, and electrified homes. Services include expert advising, newsletters connecting residents and contractors with up-to-date news and rebates, and a website with tutorials, recommendations, and more.

- **550 homes** are currently rebuilding to high performance home standards
- **70% adoption rate** for electrification and high-performance home standards, now **a global benchmark** for this type of initiative
- **11% of homes** being rebuilt meet ENERGY STAR Next Gen, Passive House (PHI/PHIUS) meaning they will be **100% electrified and burn no fossil fuels** on site



Mobility for All staff at the Louisville Senior Center Resource Fair sharing information about how to get around town using different transportation options. Team members offer assistance in English and Spanish.



The Rebuilding Better website uses a chapter-by-chapter design to guide residents through their rebuilding process, providing answers and resources when people need them. The website is available in English and Spanish, with tools for both homeowners and builders navigating the challenging Marshall Fire recovery process.

Rebuilding Better coverage has included...



Partners for a Clean Environment (PACE)

PACE is Boulder County's one-stop-shop for business sustainability, offering expert advising, financial incentives and rebates, and more. Services cover energy, waste, water, and transportation.

- Awarded **50%** more rebate dollars than 2022, achieving a **2.5x increase in carbon emissions reductions** and a **3x increase in cost savings** for businesses

Commercial Landscaping Equipment Electrification Program Pilot

Gas-powered landscaping equipment can be worse for the climate than driving a passenger vehicle. In 2023, PACE set out to target those emissions by connecting local landscaping businesses with rebates, educational materials, and demo events to make the switch to electric alternatives.

- Replaced **167 pieces of commercial landscaping equipment** with electric alternatives
- Saved **403 metric tons of CO2 annually**; PACE's most effective program per dollar

Restaurant and Refrigeration Equipment Grant

This grant helps small, locally owned food service and sales businesses replace inefficient refrigeration and restaurant equipment with brand-new, energy-efficient models, and gas-powered cooking equipment with electric alternatives.

- Slashed new equipment turnaround from **3-6 months** to just **1-2 weeks**
- Helped **33 businesses** replace **56 pieces of equipment, saving \$72k+ annually** on energy



Landscaping professional testing out electric equipment at a PACE demo event.

Electric landscaping equipment has improved tremendously in recent years, and is better for the long-term health of landscaping workers: better air quality, less noise, and less equipment vibration mean less strain on their lungs, ears, and joints.

"The PACE program seemed too good to be true... covering 70% of the costs as well as shipping and delivery is something we've never seen before."

- Yuki Chen, owner of Colorado Wok in Lafayette



Chen used a Restaurant Equipment Grant to transform her restaurant. Her previous outdated refrigeration units struggled to maintain consistent temperatures.

Policy and Regulation

Sometimes, enabling local change means engaging with policy outside of our immediate community. Boulder County has staff members who work directly with legislative sessions and regulatory rulemakings to help Colorado move towards outcomes that are beneficial to our communities, progressive on climate, and equitable in impact.

- **All seven bills** the climate policy team engaged with passed with favorable outcomes, with direct impacts from county engagement
- Hired a **climate policy equity associate** to support critical initiatives like ozone rulemaking and social cost of greenhouse gas rulemaking
- Policies from 2023 will save an estimated **62 million metric tons of CO2 equivalent per year** over the 2005 statutory baseline

Colorado Communities for Climate Action (CC4CA)

Boulder County helped establish CC4CA, a coalition of 43 local Colorado governments advocating for strong state and federal climate policy. CC4CA advocates for ambitious state climate-protection goals, reducing carbon pollution through strengthened policies on electricity generation, energy efficiency, transportation, waste management, and ensuring that all of Colorado benefits from the clean energy transformation.

- In 2023, CC4CA evaluated more than **80 bills** and directly engaged on **46 bills**
- In 2024, CC4CA reviewed **78 bills**, took a position on **61**, and also supported **91 witnesses** and participated in **44 committee hearings**

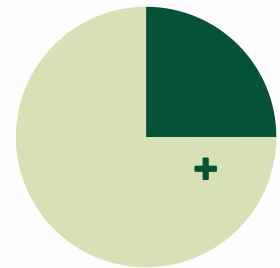
Both independently and as a part of CC4CA, Boulder County is consistently engaged in state policy and regulation relevant to our climate goals. The team's commentary has been featured in...

THE DENVER POST

Colorado Public Radio



THE COLORADO SUN



CC4CA's member jurisdictions represent over a quarter of Colorado's population...and counting!



CC4CA is governed by a Board of Directors of representing all of the member communities. In 2023, these representatives came together for a multi-day retreat to set priorities for achieving state and federal policies that are critical to the success of local climate goals.

Restore Colorado Grants with Zero Foodprint

Boulder County led the Colorado launch of Zero Foodprint with support from one of USDA's first Urban Agriculture Grants. Partnering with Mad Agriculture, the program supports local soil health by partnering with restaurants who contribute 1% of each customer bill to a grant fund. The initiative was adopted and scaled by the Colorado Department of Agriculture, and Zero Foodprint uses this pilot as a template for replication and expansion across the country.

- **30+ restaurants**, including **Michelin star**-recipients, **James Beard Award** winners, and all Boulder **Subway locations** are contributing towards climate beneficial soil health projects
- **\$600,000** generated for soil health projects across **11,268 acres** of Colorado farm and ranchland
- **42 Colorado farms/ranches** have received grants

Sustainable Food and Agriculture Fund

The Sustainable Food and Agriculture Fund aims to support projects that build resilience and decrease environmental harm in Boulder County's local food system across four areas of work: farmer education, farmers market infrastructure, sustainable local food and crop processing, and programmatic support for frontline farm workers.

- **16,292 people reached** through educational programming
- **2,000+ frontline farm workers** supported
- **500+ acres of land** managed by regenerative practices
- **132,977 lbs of local food** produced



A farmer at Speedwell Farm & Gardens, one of the recipients of Restore Colorado grants, spreading compost on a row of crop plantings.

Restore Colorado has been featured in...

The New York Times

Colorado Public Radio

MARKETPLACE®

Projects Funded by the Sustainable Food and Agriculture Fund have been featured in...

n p r

Daily Camera

BOULDER WEEKLY

Tobacco Education and Prevention Partnership (TEPP) Vape Device Disposal

E-cigarette components are hazardous waste and damage the environment when they break apart. Thousands of vape devices end up in Boulder County landfills every year. TEPP and the Boulder County Hazardous Materials Management Facility provide residents and businesses with safe ways to dispose of vape products and collect data on racial equity and populations targeted by the tobacco industry.

- Collected **7,706 vape devices** from drop-offs at 50 schools, 44 vape shops, and 26 events
- Prevented **800+ pounds of hazardous waste** from ending up in landfills
- **916 participants** completed survey around vape product waste to guide vape waste disposal and media campaign

Transportation Electrification

Boulder County is committed to accelerating the adoption of electric vehicles, supporting the installation of electric vehicle charging stations across the county, and supporting the electrification of buses, carshare, and ride-share services.

- The Boulder County vehicle fleet includes **15 EVs and 13 plug-in hybrid** electric vehicles
- Boulder County hosts **38 EV charging stations**
- The county was selected to receive **\$4.9M in federal funding** to support more equitable EV charging. The Sustainability Tax will supply matching funds to further leverage this federal funding



Boulder County residents can dispose of vape waste for FREE at participating Vape Aware locations throughout the county. Accepted items include disposable devices, cartridges and pods, batteries, and e-liquid. THC devices are not accepted.



County staff at an electric vehicle ride-and-drive demo event at the Boulder County Latino Chamber of Commerce's Tamale Fair.

Boulder County received one of only two 2023 alternative-fueling transportation grants issued in Colorado. See more coverage about how this grant will help residents here:



★ U.S. Senator ★
HICKENLOOPER
for Colorado

Watershed Center and Boulder Watershed Collective

Boulder County provides annual baseline funding to these two watershed coalitions for implementing forest health and watershed health projects, including use as matching funds to leverage grants for these projects, providing community outreach to increase landowners participating in forest treatments, and supporting staffing and administrative needs in accomplishing these tasks. This funding is not tied to specific project deliverables but supports the overall work of these organizations.

- In 2023, the Boulder Watershed Collective treated **97.5 forest acres** for wildfire mitigation, with plans developed for another **627 acres**.
- In 2023, the Watershed Center developed forest management plans for **500 acres** and monitored ecological health at **30+ sites**.

WIC Gap Farmers Market Program

Every week, families signed up for Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants, and Children (WIC) receive a weekly home delivery or coupons to purchase fresh fruits, vegetables, and WIC-eligible food products at the Boulder and Longmont Farmers Markets.

- In 2023, this fund served **788 Boulder county families**, including **1,583 children**
- **95% of participants** report an increase in fruit and vegetable consumption and food security.
- **33.3%** of market participants and **61.9%** of home delivery participants are Hispanic/Latino



Community members touring a property in the headwaters of the St. Vrain Basin to learn about forests, rivers, and how these systems are connected, hosted by the Watershed Center at Camp St. Malo, near Allenspark, CO.




"My family is enjoying fresher, more nutritious food I wouldn't be able to afford otherwise. The pleasant experiences I've had connecting with the community and enjoying the atmosphere at the farmers market have improved my mental health."

- Silvia Navarette, WIC Gap Program Participant



Silvia and her children enjoying fresh, locally produced fruit at a Boulder County farmers market.

Learn More

-  @bouldercountyclimate
-  @bococlimate
-  Boulder County Climate



Sustainability,
Climate Action
& Resilience

bouldercounty.gov/climate