



**Parks &
Open Space**

Agricultural Resources Division



Annual Report

2024 Edition

End of Year Summary

2024 AGRICULTURAL RESOURCES AND WATER RESOURCES STAFF

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Introduction

We are pleased to present the Boulder County Parks & Open Space (BCPOS) Agricultural Resources Division's 2024 Annual Report. The county manages a range of activities on its 26,000 acres of agricultural land, and this report highlights key achievements while outlining the continued work needed to maintain and protect these resources.

The dedication of our staff and producers to preserving Boulder County's agricultural legacy is clearly reflected in the quality of their work. This region has a rich history of farming and ranching, and it is an honor to partner with our producers so that we all can benefit from thriving agricultural lands for generations to come.

Parks & Open Space continued to make significant investments in soil health in 2024, through its soil health grant program and restoration work on degraded lands.

Thank you for celebrating our shared accomplishments this past last year.

Mike Foster
Division Manager

Agriculture on Open Space

By the Numbers

Leases:

- 123 leases
- 55 leaseholders

Water:

- County staff currently hold 25 incorporated ditch company board positions

Lease Type (by gross revenue):

- Cash Rent 52%
- Crop Share 46%
- Grazing 2%

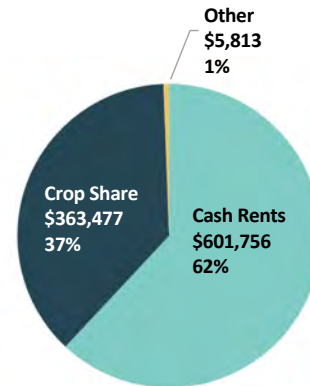
Organic Farming:

	2022	2023	2024
Total Acres	2,048	1,744	1,744
Certified Organic	1,192	1,303	1,376
Transitioning	490	275	202
Pesticide-Free	366	166	166

Crop Name	Acres
Corn	2,319
Wheat	1,949
Alfalfa	1,600
Barley	933
Alfalfa/Grass Mix	699
Table Food	535
Sugar Beets	398

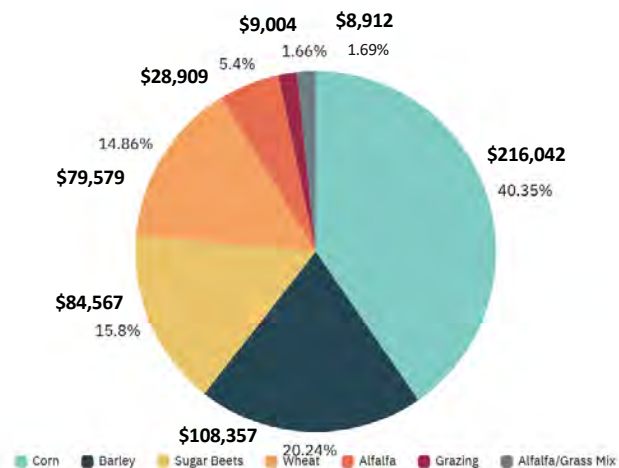
2024 Revenue

Gross Revenue by Rent Type



The Agricultural Resources Division partnered with 55 leaseholders on 123 leases in 2024 to manage public land, maintain and improve infrastructure, increase water efficiency through improved water measuring and delivery systems, engage the community in agriculture, and explore opportunities for our producers to meet local demands for food, fiber, forage, and fuel.

In June 2024, snow-pack was 171% of median and reservoirs storage for the South Platte Basis was above average. In early summer, conditions shifted and Boulder County experienced severe drought and sustained high temperatures. Denver Water's records put the summer of 2024 as the fifth-hottest on record. Due to a lack of rainfall, many dry-land producers were not able to produce viable cover crops and forage for their grazing operations. Irrigated crop yields were good, however some crops were lost or damaged by hail late in the season. Input costs were slightly higher and commodity prices remained about the same as 2023.



Project Management



Accomplishments:

- Haley Demolition
 - Removed an old grainery that was a safety concern.
- Faul AG Staff Cleanup
 - Removed trash and junk left from the previous AG leaseholder.
- Asset Management System (AMS)
 - Launched AMS to document our assets (e.g. fences, barns, etc.).
- Fencing
 - Installed 6 miles of new perimeter fence on seven properties.
- Center Pivots
 - Installed new center pivots on Canino 7M that converted over 200 acres of flood irrigation to highly efficient irrigation system.





Livestock on Ag Land

Grazing Program Summary

The Agricultural Resources Division manages livestock grazing on over 12,300 acres of Parks & Open Space properties. In 2024, the grazing program included 28 leaseholders on 92 properties throughout Boulder County. Our leaseholders raise a variety of livestock including domestic cattle, sheep, goats, pigs, horses, and more.

Moving forward in 2025 and beyond, our focus will be on working with our agricultural leaseholders to develop operating plans that promote sustainable and economically viable grazing practices that benefit wildlife, soil health, water quality, and native plant diversity.

We will begin restoring several properties through native plant reseeding and improvements to soil health in 2025. We will also collect vegetation and soil data to serve as ecological benchmarks for evaluating the success of our regenerative grazing program.

2024 Achievements:

- 12,300 acres of managed grazing
- 92 total properties
- 28 total grazing leaseholders

2025 and Beyond:

- Virtual fencing pilot project (joint project with OSMP)
- Real-time vegetation and soil health data collection
- Ecological restoration of degraded properties





Water Resources



Accomplishments:

The Water Resources Group became fully staffed in 2024 and began developing a water database to effectively manage the county's irrigation water supplies. This tool will help improve the tracking of water use by property and ensure that water gets delivered to our leaseholders.

The group hired a Water Resources Wildfire Mitigation Specialist. This is a new position funded through the Wildfire Mitigation Tax, which voters approved in 2022. This specialist will coordinate with ditch companies, government agencies and contractors to manage and complete tasks to reduce fire risk along ditch corridors by remove debris piles.

- 36 soil moisture probes installed giving leaseholders real-time access to moisture levels in the soil.
- 36 flow meters on center pivots were used to better manage water use.
- Nine water wells were rehabilitated.
- 291 acre-feet of water delivered into Coal Creek as part of the Kenosha Pond augmentation program.
- 110 asset types, including flow-meters, soil moisture probes, flumes and staff gauges were added to the new asset management software.

Wildlife on Ag Land

Boulder County is home to a variety of wildlife that sometimes use agricultural lands. Parks & Open Space manages these areas to support wildlife movement and habitat whenever possible. Strategies include wildlife-friendly fencing, buffers around raptor nests, and protecting riparian areas.

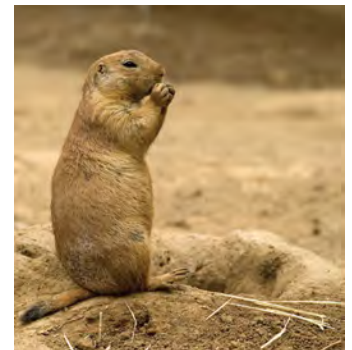
We are working to control prairie dog populations on agricultural lands in accordance with our Prairie Dog Management Plan. We have a dedicated team that are constructing barrier fences, trapping and donating animals, and use lethal control as a last resort.

Summary of Prairie Dog Actions

Overall, 2024 was a productive season with a high number of trapped and donated animals. Additionally, the team worked on 17 properties, clearing nearly 450 acres. The team added new software to help improve mapping of colonies across all of the agriculture properties.

Carbon monoxide cartridges became available again after two years of supply chain shortages. These cartridges enabled for smaller “spot treatment” and will allow more producers to perform treatment in 2025.

- 36,700 burrows treated
- 8,000 feet of barrier fencing built on 13 properties
- 4,725 acres of prairie dog colonies mapped on agriculture properties
- 1,269 prairie dogs donated to the National Black-Footed Ferret Conservation Center
- 841 prairie dogs donated to the Birds of Prey Foundation
- Plague mitigation performed at the South County Grasslands and Rabbit Mountain



Soil Health & Sustainable Agriculture



Maintaining and improving soil health is essential to ensuring farmers can stay resilient in the face of increasing pressures on land and a changing climate. Healthy soils produce better harvests, meaning farmers can harvest more even on small areas of land, and healthy soils mean healthier crops that are more resilient to extreme weather events.

Soil Health Program

The five principles of soil health are 1) maintaining plant growth year-round, 2) plant diversity, 3) soil surface cover, 4) reducing soil disturbance, and 5) incorporating livestock. How these principles are applied in the field varies based on the type of operations and the farm's existing soil conditions.

2024 saw a continuation of the soil health grant program for agricultural leaseholders, which started in 2023. This program seeks to reduce economic barriers producers encounter when trying new methods of production. Parks & Open Space awards up to \$25,000 per grant.

Number of applications: 20

Number of projects funded: 17

Total award amount: \$262,933

Total acres affected: 1,584

Funded projects include; manure, biochar, compost, soil testing, and planting cover crops.

Community Engagement



Photo by Michael Cohan

Agricultural Leaseholder Appreciation Dinner

On February 7, we hosted the annual Agricultural Leaseholder Appreciation Dinner. This was a great opportunity to share a meal and conversation with Boulder County Parks & Open Space leaseholders! 65 guests were in attendance.



Photo by Jimmy McAllen



2024 Soil Revolution Conference Highlights

- 180 in-person registrants with an additional 28 that attended virtually via live-stream.
- 12 BCPOS leaseholders were in attendance.
- Speaker topics focused on plant diversity and their relation to nutrition for livestock, changing micro climates and how agricultural practices change weather patterns, fine tuning soil health practices and application, building climate resilience with soil health, and understanding social and economic factors that affect decision making.
- Colorado Department of Agriculture presentation and roundtable on upcoming programs and tax credits for soil health
- Speakers participated in a roundtable to discuss overarching themes from the day and answered questions from the audience.
- All sessions were recorded and can be viewed on soilrev.org