

2021-2024  
Agricultural Support  
Tri-County Action Plan



HIGH DESERT  
**FOOD**  
& **FARM**  
**ALLIANCE**

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# Introduction

## *Who We Are*

The High Desert Food & Farm Alliance (HDFFA) is a non-profit based in Bend, Oregon that serves all three counties in Central Oregon: Crook, Deschutes, Jefferson, and the Confederated Tribes of Warm Springs. HDFFA was founded on the belief that local food should be accessible to everyone, and that food connects us to each other.

Oregon State University (OSU) Extension partners with communities in every county of Oregon to provide information, services and expertise to meet local challenges and help every Oregonian thrive. OSU is committed to creating positive change through programs and providing spaces where each person feels safe and welcome.

## *Our Mission*

HDFFA's mission is to support a healthy and thriving food and farm network in Central Oregon through education, collaboration, and inclusivity.

## *Our Programs*

HDFFA's four main programs include Agricultural Support (for farmers, ranchers, and value added producers), VeggieRx (vegetable and fruit prescription program), Grow & Give (fresh food donations) and other food access work, and our Food & Farm Directory (48 page guide to finding locally grown, raised, and crafted foods).

## *Tri-County Action Plan*

The Tri-County Action Plan (CAP) is a guidance document developed by the High Desert Food & Farm Alliance (HDFFA) and Oregon State University (OSU) Extension to guide programmatic elements and agricultural support for farmers and ranchers across the region. This project is funded by USDA's Beginning Farmers and Ranchers Development Program Grant from the National Institute of Food and Agriculture. The plan focuses on family-owned farmers and ranchers growing and raising food intended for consumption in Central Oregon through either direct-to-consumer markets or wholesale outlets.

As part of this County Action Plan, HDFFA and OSU Extension worked with farmers and ranchers throughout Central Oregon to perform an analysis to better understand the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats (SWOT) facing the agricultural community. The results from the SWOT analysis were used to determine priorities for training and educational opportunities. The opportunities laid out in this Tri-County Action Plan will be used from 2021 to 2024 as HDFFA and OSU Extension coordinate trainings annually. Trainings are tentatively scheduled in this document, but are likely to change as coordination begins.

## SWOT Analysis

The SWOT analyses for farmers and ranchers were coordinated by the High Desert Food & Farm Alliance and Oregon State University Extension Service. The intention of the analysis was to gain insight on the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats currently facing small-scale food producers throughout Central Oregon. The coordinating team, made up of Annie Nichols (HDFFA), Scott Duggan (OSU Extension), Tracy Wilson (OSU Extension), and Clare Sullivan (OSU Extension), worked to recruit farmers and ranchers from all Central Oregon counties, Deschutes, Jefferson, and Crook, with diverse representation from both experienced and beginning producers.

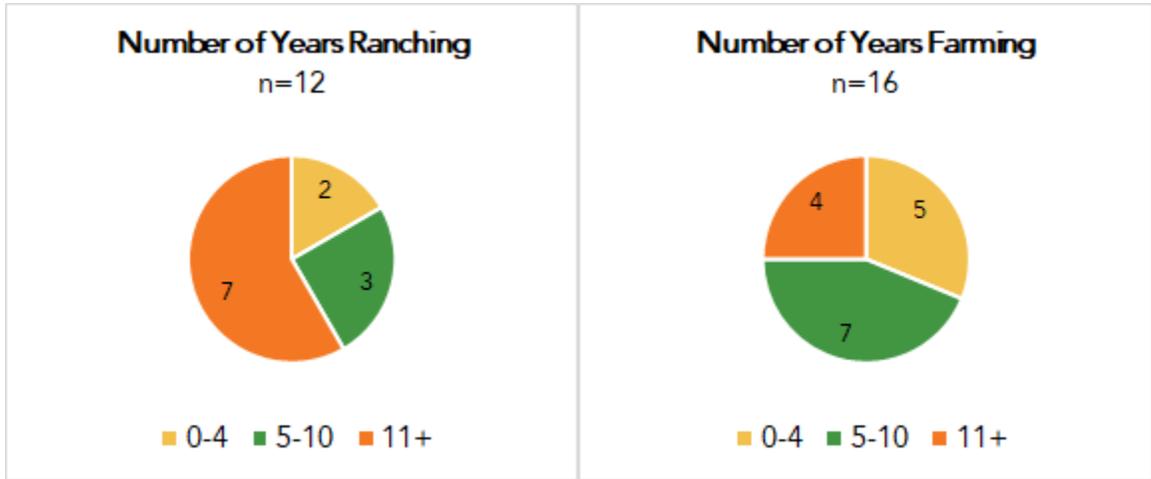
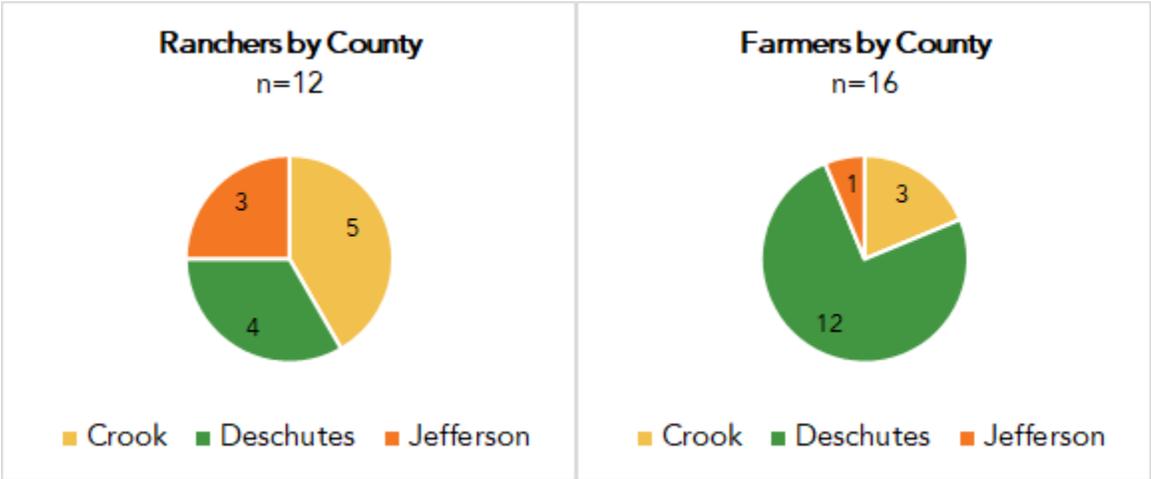
Participants were offered two options to provide feedback:

1. a virtual Zoom meeting led by a third-party facilitator asking questions about internal and external factors influencing their operations divided between specialty crop growers and livestock producers
2. a survey with answers directly from the aforementioned workshop with an option to add other factors

The workshops were held during January 2021 and the survey was open to producers in February 2021. In total, 28 Central Oregon producers participated with 16 farmers and 12 ranchers represented. See the next page for additional information on the demographics of participants.

Information gathered during the SWOT analysis workshops and surveys was synthesized and grouped to capture recurring themes and elements provided by the participants. See the tables under Findings for a matrix of strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats identified during the workshops and surveys. Strengths and weaknesses are classified as internal to the operation while opportunities and threats are classified as external to the operation. Answers in this table are not representative of the whole and should not be inferred as widespread consensus amongst participants.

# Workshop and Survey Demographics



# Findings

## Ranchers

	Positives	Negatives
Internal	<p><b>Strengths</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Animal welfare</li> <li>● Herd health</li> <li>● Work ethic</li> <li>● Product marketability (i.e. local, organic, natural)</li> <li>● Loyal customer base</li> <li>● Community relationships</li> <li>● Rancher-to-rancher relationships</li> <li>● Animal productivity</li> <li>● Quality of meat</li> <li>● Soil health</li> <li>● Customer service</li> <li>● Access to industry professionals</li> </ul>	<p><b>Weaknesses</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Meat processing bottlenecks</li> <li>● Livable wage as a rancher</li> <li>● Packaging options</li> <li>● Marketing and brand awareness</li> <li>● Labor costs</li> <li>● Feed costs</li> <li>● Irrigation shortages</li> <li>● Regulatory costs</li> <li>● Time constraints</li> <li>● Inconsistent supply</li> <li>● Access to funds</li> <li>● Cold storage limitations</li> <li>● Business planning</li> <li>● Debt</li> </ul>
External	<p><b>Opportunities</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Improved awareness of grants</li> <li>● Training on marketing and social media</li> <li>● Resource sharing platform</li> <li>● Quarterly networking opportunities between ranchers</li> <li>● Labor sharing</li> <li>● Business planning workshops</li> <li>● Agritourism</li> <li>● Internship opportunities</li> <li>● Beef quality assurance certifications</li> <li>● Mentorship opportunities</li> </ul>	<p><b>Threats</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Water shortages</li> <li>● Processors going out of business</li> <li>● Predators (i.e. coyotes)</li> <li>● Rising energy costs</li> <li>● Drought</li> <li>● Feed shortages</li> <li>● Disease (i.e. worms, bovine viral diarrhea)</li> <li>● Climate change</li> <li>● Increased property taxes</li> <li>● Power outages</li> <li>● Electronic Identification Tags</li> </ul>

All answers are ranked from most to least responses and are not representative of the group as a whole.

Farmers

	Positives	Negatives
Internal	<p><b>Strengths</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Customers</li> <li>• Community support</li> <li>• Nutrient-dense foods</li> <li>• Market diversification</li> <li>• Property size</li> <li>• Relationships with support organizations</li> <li>• Collaboration between growers</li> <li>• Grant opportunities</li> <li>• Genetic variety</li> <li>• Volunteers</li> <li>• Ample market share</li> </ul>	<p><b>Weaknesses</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Labor costs</li> <li>• Green packaging</li> <li>• Weather protection</li> <li>• Limited customer knowledge</li> <li>• Work-life balance</li> <li>• Access to experienced labor</li> <li>• Distribution</li> <li>• Equipment costs</li> <li>• Lack of capital</li> <li>• Crop planning</li> <li>• Business planning</li> <li>• Bookkeeping and accounting</li> <li>• Irrigation management</li> <li>• Limited buying power</li> <li>• Storage capacity and cold chain</li> <li>• Inconsistent supply</li> <li>• Marketing</li> </ul>
External	<p><b>Opportunities</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Breakdown of conventional supply chain</li> <li>• Customer education campaign</li> <li>• Local food events</li> <li>• Cooperative processing/storage/distribution facilities</li> <li>• Resources for beginning farmers</li> <li>• Leasing farmland farmer to farmer</li> <li>• Demographic shift to people with more discretionary income</li> <li>• Regenerative agriculture</li> <li>• Wholesale readiness</li> <li>• Population growth</li> <li>• Equipment sharing</li> <li>• Institutional buying power</li> <li>• Crops aligned with consumer tastes</li> <li>• Drought in other regions</li> <li>• Resources for grant writing</li> </ul>	<p><b>Threats</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Water/irrigation shortages</li> <li>• Late and early freezes</li> <li>• Sporadic weather events (i.e. hailstorms)</li> <li>• Food Safety Modernization Act</li> <li>• Volatility of growing season</li> <li>• Pests (wireworm, spider mites, rodents, thrips, codling moth, Colorado potato beetle, cabbage moth)</li> <li>• Pollinator depletion</li> <li>• Disease (fire blight, botrytis)</li> <li>• Deschutes River Basin Habitat Conservation Plan</li> <li>• Market disruptions</li> </ul>

All answers are ranked from most to least responses and are not representative of the group as a whole.

## Identified Programming Areas

Based on the feedback from the SWOT analysis, HDFFA and OSU Extension worked to identify topics that they could pragmatically and collaboratively address. The following list includes issues of importance that will be addressed through training and educational opportunities outlined in the Training Plan and Additional Opportunities sections below. Multiple trainings may be performed on each of these topics year over year.

### Joint Farmer and Rancher Issues

1. Collaboration and connections between farmers and ranchers
2. Consumer education and product marketability
3. Marketing and brand awareness
4. Business planning
5. Irrigation shortages
6. Resource sharing
7. Agritourism
8. Wholesale readiness
9. Soil health and regenerative agriculture
10. Pollinators
11. Mentorship opportunities
12. Networking opportunities
13. Improved awareness of resources and grants

### Farmer-Specific Issues

14. Crop planning
15. Pest management
16. Weather protection
17. Crop disease

### Rancher-Specific Issues

18. Meat processing bottlenecks
19. Beef Quality Assurance Certifications
20. Predators
21. Animal disease
22. Feed shortages

## Training Plan

Training Topic	Organization Lead	Key Learning Areas	Year
Marketing and Brand Awareness	HDFFA	Email communication, social media, brand strategy, target audience,	2021
Wholesale Readiness	HDFFA	Product pricing, sales, distribution, quality and quantity, customer relationships, packaging, specifications, food safety	2021
Agritourism	HDFFA/OSU Extension	On-farm sales, marketing, zoning restrictions, education, events, U-pick, liability	2021
Irrigation Efficiency	OSU Extension	Equipment types, water efficiency, grants and loans	2021
Pasture management and regenerative agriculture	OSU Extension	Rotational grazing, cover crops, permaculture, nutrient run-off, no-till	2021
Predator Management and Regulations	OSU Extension	Deterrents, hunting laws, prevention strategies	2021
Crop Disease	OSU Extension	Plant pathology, common diseases, prevention and mitigation strategies	2021
Beef Quality Assurance	OSU Extension	Cattle health, stockmanship, marketing, emergency planning, quality	2021
Meat Processing Basics	OSU Extension	Inspection types, value-added processing, slaughter, cut and wrap. scheduling, machinery	2021 2022 2023
Pasture Management During Drought	OSU Extension	Invasive weeds, overgrazing, water allocation, land utilization	2022
Business Planning	HDFFA	Cost of production, access to land and capital, insurance, risk management, labor,	2022
Pest Management	OSU Extension	Types, insect lifestyles, integrated management	2022
Improving Pollinator Habitats	OSU Extension	Pollinator-friendly plants, neonicotinoids, nesting sites,	2023
High Tunnel Training	OSU Extension	Types of protection, soil preservation, seasonality	2024

## Additional Opportunities

In addition to the classes outlined in the Training Plan, HDFFA and OSU Extension identified additional opportunities to further support agricultural producers and engage them in the local food system. A list of these opportunities is included below.

### *Building Resilient Food Systems*

As Central Oregon faces a multitude of climate- and weather-related impacts, HDFFA is encouraging farms and ranches to improve their operational efficiency through education and funding opportunities. The Farm and Ranch Resiliency Award was launched in 2021 to reward farmers/ranchers taking innovative steps to become more resilient in the face of production challenges, market disruptions, and a changing climate. The winners' techniques will be featured in short videos to educate other local producers. Additional funds for the Beginning Farmer and Rancher Development Program Grant were also awarded in Summer 2021 and will be used to fund on-farm improvement projects such as irrigation upgrades and high tunnel installations for the 2022 growing season.

Organization Lead: HDFFA

### *Central Oregon Veterans Ranch Trainings and Workshops for Veterans*

In addition to the trainings being coordinated by HDFFA and OSU Extension, Central Oregon Veterans Ranch (COVR) will be hosting six additional training opportunities for veteran beginning farmers and ranchers. Training topics will be determined by COVR operations staff and taught by veteran mentors or an OSU Extension agent.

Organization Lead: Central Oregon Veterans Ranch

### *Get a Taste of This Place - Customer Education Campaign*

As part of the Specialty Crop Block Grant awarded to HDFFA in 2018, HDFFA launched the Get a Taste of This Place campaign, which aims to increase consumption of Central Oregon grown foods by making it easier to find them and highlight their uniqueness, while increasing profitability for the farmers who grow and sell them. HDFFA is continuing this campaign in 2021 to further educate Central Oregon consumers about seasonal produce within the region, basic knowledge of local food systems, and where they can purchase from and support local farmers. This is an ongoing project and additional funding will be available for this initiative in January 2022 under the Specialty Crop Block Grant.

Organization Lead: HDFFA



### *Farmer/Rancher Networking Events*

HDFFA's Agricultural Advisory Committee, a group of farmers and ranchers in Central Oregon that advise HDFFA's agricultural support programming, has made it their priority to host two networking opportunities for farmers and ranchers to come together in a social capacity to discuss both farm and non-farm topics. This idea came up multiple times during the SWOT Workshops for needing more opportunities for farmer-to-farmer sharing and learning. The networking opportunities are slated to occur in June and September 2021. Recurrence of these events in following years will be determined by the Agricultural Advisory Committee and success of the events.

Organization Lead: HDFFA

### *High Desert Food Trail*

In collaboration with Travel Oregon, Oregon's Tourism Commission, HDFFA is developing the High Desert Food and Farm Trail in order to highlight local producers offering agritourism experiences and increase on-farm sales. This project is funded through the Beginning Farmer/Rancher Development Program grant and is set to be launched in October 2021. More information on the High Desert Food Trail can be found [here](#).

Organization Lead: HDFFA

### *Mentorship Program*

As part of the Beginning Farmer/Rancher Development Program grant, HDFFA is currently in the process of developing a mentorship program that will pair beginning farmers and ranchers (producing for fewer than 5 years) with mentor farmers and ranchers (producing for over 5 years) to help answer questions and provide guidance. The mentorship program will not have a formalized curriculum but will allow new producers to connect with experts on issues surrounding their farm or ranch. The mentorship program will be launched by the end of 2021.

Organization Lead: HDFFA

The Central Oregon Veterans Ranch is also hosting a mentor at their ranch to advise the operation on improvement of pasture, irrigation, and other operational efficiencies. The mentor works one-on-one with staff members and veterans hoping to start their own farms.

Organization Lead: Central Oregon Veterans Ranch

### *Policy and Advocacy*

HDFFA is working in conjunction with Friends of Family Farmers (FoFF) and Oregon Community Food Systems Network to educate beginning farmers and ranchers on understanding and engagement with public policies that affect farm/ranch operations so that participants can navigate current regulations successfully and engage in shaping future public policy that will enhance their success. This objective will be achieved through a combination of newsletters, website updates, and workshops.

Organization Lead: HDFFA

### *Resource Sharing Webpage*

In order to share the wealth of knowledge and resources available to Central Oregon producers, HDFFA is currently developing a webpage on its site to house all information that may be pertinent to farmers and ranchers with topics on:

- Beginning Farmer and Rancher Resources
- Resources for BIPOC+ Farmers and Ranchers
- Business Planning
- Marketing
- Funding and Grant Opportunities
- Wholesaling
- Land Access
- Agritourism
- Technical Assistance

The resources webpage will be available to the public [here](#) and promoted through HDFFA's newsletter and social media by September 2021.

Organization Lead: HDFFA

### *USDA Meat Processor and Rancher Workshops*

In order to improve mutual understanding by meat processors and ranchers for locally processed meats, 3-5 workshops will be held to discuss barriers and aspects of slaughter including timing, cut and wrap, and waste produced. The workshops will be an opportunity for meat processors and ranchers to problem solve and improve efficiency between all entities.

Organization Lead: OSU Extension



## *Wholesale Capacity Building*

To support the viability of beginning farmers and ranchers, we are focusing on building wholesale business channels through workshops, one-on-one assistance, and the Chef Farmer Mixer. Specialty Crop Block Grant (SCBG) funds will be used to bring on a contracted Wholesale Production Coordinator to lead this initiative.

Organization Lead: HDFFA