



## **Poudre Valley Community Farms Organizational Position and Strategic Plan**

### **1. Introduction**

#### **1.1. Background**

The population of the northern Front Range region of Colorado is growing rapidly. The US Census Bureau reports that from 2010 to 2017 the Fort Collins-Loveland Metropolitan Statistical Area grew from 299,630 to 343,976 people, with an average annual growth rate of 2.0%. While projections are for this growth to slow slightly, the population of the region is nevertheless expected to double in the next 20-30 years.

This population growth has led to a rapid increase in both home prices and development of land for housing. For example, Zillow reports that the median sale price for a home in Fort Collins rose from \$218,000 in January of 2012 to \$379,000 in January of 2019, a 74% increase, and the US Department of Housing and Urban Development estimates demand for 5,225 new construction homes between 2017 and 2020.

These trends have placed pressure on agriculture, as beginning farmers and ranchers compete with developers for access to land and water while existing farmers and ranchers face increasing pressure to sell. This has especially hurt vegetable and crop farmers, who typically occupy more valuable development land and need access to water. Many of the local vegetable farmers do not have family land, and after the first few years of establishing their business by leasing small parcels on short term leases, they realize they can't participate in any sort of regenerative planning for the soil they are growing in because they may not be on the same property next year. In order to build a sustainable business they need to secure land - but with the increase in land cost, this is nearly impossible. For example, harvested vegetable acres in Larimer County plummeted from 3,317 in 2007 to 112 in 2017, according to the USDA NASS 2017 Census of Agriculture. This has occurred despite rapidly growing demand for locally-produced agricultural products. The effect on ranching is more difficult to untangle, as many exurban development acreages identify, for tax purposes, as livestock producers despite little to no income.

#### **1.2. An Innovative Approach**

Recognizing these trends, in 2015 a group of farmers and community members from the Fort Collins area came together with the goal of ensuring the long-term presence of farmers and farmland landscapes in their community. After examining numerous models for achieving this goal, the group decided to form Poudre Valley Community Farms, A Land Cooperative (PVCF) as a multi-stakeholder cooperative. PVCF represents a novel and innovative approach to farmland



preservation, wherein community members purchase shares in the cooperative, which in turn purchases threatened farmland and provides long-term competitive-rate leases to established local farmers.

Because PVCF is working in an ultra-competitive and ever-changing environment, in addition to the cooperative-ownership model it uses numerous other methods to secure farmland, including community and municipal partnerships, creative short-term financing, conservation easements, donations, and grants. By building from a core of community ownership, PVCF has established a new model for community-led farmland conservation.

As of 2019, the cooperative has more than 100 member-owners who have collectively contributed more than \$400,000 dollars to the cooperative. In 2018, PVCF purchased its first farmland, a 109-acre property north of Wellington with a five-bedroom house and two shares in the valuable North Poudre Irrigation Company. This property is now occupied by Jodar Farms, a successful pasture-based chicken and pork farm that was in danger of losing their acreage and had an uncertain future without other options in 2018. In addition, PVCF is actively negotiating, along with founding members Nic Koontz and Katie Slota of Native Hill Farm, to establish Native Hill Farm at Montava, a 40-acre vegetable farm to be located within a 4,000 house, net-zero energy use, agrarian urbanism development in North East Fort Collins.

### 1.3. Financial Position

To purchase the 109-acre farm property, which PVCF has named Dixon Station after the nearby historical agricultural train station, PVCF used \$275,000 of membership share money in combination with a \$75,000 donation and \$950,000 in low-interest bridge loan funding provided by six different community members. The cooperative aims to repay the loans through a combination of a conservation easement on the agricultural land, deed-restricted sale of the four-bedroom house to Jodar Farms, and registration of additional cooperative members.

An initial farmland project aimed at providing long-term stability to Native Hill Farm was the original catalyst and project of this community farmland ownership model but it was abandoned after 2 years of negotiation and fundraising when it became clear that an adjacent property would hold a concrete batch processing plant. The emergence of the Montava development as an exciting future location for Native Hill Farm has made it possible for PVCF to use its initial membership drive to assist two farms in establishing new homes. With Native Hill Farm at Montava, PVCF will purchase the 40-acres of farmland within the development from Montava for a nominal fee and then serve as an intermediary between the development and the farmers as well as a long-term guarantor of agricultural business viability on the property. This will help to provide a sustainable working environment not just for Native Hill Farm but for any farms that may occupy the site far into the future.



Through this three-way partnership, Montava, Native Hill Farm, and PVCF hope to serve as a model for similar developments across the country, which have often proved unworkable for the farmers, the developers, or both. While the land purchase costs will be minimal for the Montava property, PVCF will use cooperative funds to support a low-interest loan to develop vegetable farm infrastructure on the currently-vacant property. Through this partnership PVCF will also explore additional avenues to generate organizational revenue once the development is established beginning in 2020.

Current house and land rental rates at the Dixon Station property adequately cover the expenses associated with owning that property. However, to continue to grow the organization the board determined that it is necessary to have a part-time Executive Director to coordinate the working board and lead strategic development, along with other needed tasks. For fiscal year 2019 this will amount to an expenditure of \$30,000. While this is currently not financially sustainable for the organization, with acquisition of future properties and revenue streams the board anticipates that hiring a permanent full time Executive Director will be possible and needed.



## 2. Vision, Mission, and Guiding Principles

Given the dynamic and challenging farmland conservation environment in the Fort Collins area, as well as the diversity of potential avenues for achieving the cooperative's aims, the executive leadership team of PVCF (the board, staff, and advisors) recognizes the importance of clear strategic guidance for the organization. In 2018 the team therefore embarked upon a strategic planning process to clarify the organization's vision, mission, and guiding principles.

2.1. Vision: *Community Supported Farmland*

2.2. Mission Statement: *We bring together stakeholders and create the connections and relationships necessary to provide affordable - long term - access to farmland for our local food farmers.*

2.3. Guiding principles

To aid in applying PVCF's mission, the executive leadership team of PVCF defined four guiding principles for operating the organization.

1. **Community**- The work will be community-based and community-led and will support the vibrancy and sustainability of the local community.
2. **Cooperation**- Through our cooperative model and our community-centered approach we will support collaboration over competition in all we do.
3. **Resilience**- We will respond to our dynamic environment with innovation and resilience.
4. **Agrarianism**- Throughout we will adhere to an agrarian ethic, as best elaborated by Wendell Berry, which includes care for the land, a preference for enough over too much, a living sense of the need for the continuity of community life in place, and respect for good, meaningful work.



## 2019/20 Goals and Objectives

To achieve the organizational mission, the PVCF executive leadership team has set a series of goals and objectives aimed at proving the concept of the Cooperative Farmland model, scaling by increasing community member engagement and expanding the amount of conserved farmland and number of producers served and stabilizing the Coop by establishing financial stability.

- Goal 1. Establish full, debt free ownership of the Dixon Station property by repaying \$950k bridge loan funders by April 30, 2020.
  - Objective 1. Sell the four-bedroom house and building envelope to Jodar Farms in a deed-restricted sale wherein PVCF has right of repurchase with limited appreciation, closing by March 31, 2020, raising \$400k.
    - Action 1: Develop and sign MOU option for purchase, and sign by May 31, 2019.
  - Objective 2. Fundraise \$300k through a national Natural Resources Conservation Services grant and individual tax-deductible donations to Colorado Open Lands, which will be matched by \$150k from Larimer County, to fund a conservation easement on the 99 remaining acres of farmland by April of 2020.
    - Action 1: Identify potential donors (including corporate) of \$10 - \$50k each by August 1, 2019.
    - Action 2: Identify PVCF contacts for each potential donor by June 15, 2019.
  - Objective 3. Increase 100 memberships and raise at least \$350K by April of 2020.
    - Action 1: Host 3 PVCF member engagement/new member events before the end of 2019. Add 60 new PVCF M-share members and 25 I-shares by Dec2019. work with Jodar to engage current CSA members
    - Action 2: Host 2 PVCF member engagement/new member events in the first 6 months of 2020. Add 40 new PVCF M-share members and 25 I-shares by June 2020. Increase awareness of PVCF through institutional partnerships and community gatherings.
- Goal 2. Support the establishment and sustainability of Native Hill Farm at Montava.
  - Objective 1. Purchase the 40-acre property from Montava for a nominal fee with a deed restriction allowing Montava or designated beneficiaries the right of repurchase (if PVCF does not maintain an active Farm on the property), by the end of 2019.
  - Objective 2. Use impact investments and member funds to build a high-quality vegetable packhouse for Native Hill Farm, to be leased at a reasonable rate, by the spring of 2020.
  - Objective 3. Establish design, business plan and funding model for a revenue-generating multi-use event center at Native Hill Farm at Montava,



construction to begin fall of 2020. This would create a community space that PVCF could use and manage to the benefit of neighbors, PVCF members and local farmers.

- Goal 3. Funding for staffing
  - Objective 1: Hire permanent full time Executive Director by Sept 1st 2019.
    - Action 1: Apply for bridge grant funds from a variety of sources by July 1, 2019.
    - Action 2: Hire contract grant writer to help with research and writing grant applications.
  - Objective 2: Generate sustainable staffing revenue plan by July 1, 2019.
    - Action 1: Develop business plans for event center, city land management, and farm incubator program.
  
- Goal 4. Member and Community education and engagement
  - Objective 1: Plan and execute at least 4 membership events that are geared toward creating community, education and member participation on the farms.
  - Objective 2: Plan and execute at least 2 open working meetings that invite membership to participate and contribute to the work of the co-op.
  
- Goal 5. Increase properties under PVCF management
  - Objective 1: Research and Identify additional available ag properties with good quality soil and available water. Create a SOP and producer guidelines for regenerative soil, land and water best practices.
    - Action 1: Continue conversation with City of Fort Collins and Larimer County about getting local ag producers on Open lands and Natural areas properties.
    - Action 2: Continue historical dialogues with local family owned farms and local land realtors