



STRENGTHENING BOULDER COUNTY'S LOCAL FOOD SYSTEM

PLANNING FOR LONG-TERM SUCCESS OF THE BCFM FOOD HUB.

Capstone Partner:

Boulder County Farmers Markets (BCFM)

Team Members:

Alexandra Rodriguez & Sam Cochrane

Capstone Advisor:

Dr. Damien Thompson

PURPOSE

The Boulder County Farmers Markets Food Hub plays a critical role in connecting local producers with schools, hospitals, early childhood centers, university dining programs, and other institutional buyers throughout Boulder County. Boulder County Farmers Markets' Food Hub identified the need for a coordinated strategy to strengthen institutional partnerships, streamline communication, and ensure long-term viability for producers who rely on wholesale outlets.

This Capstone project responded directly to these needs by developing tools, insights, and recommendations that help the Food Hub expand its institutional buyer base, enhance the producer experience, and increase market stability for the county's local food economy. The project as a whole addresses the intersection of sustainable agriculture, food access, and regional economic development in Boulder County.

METHODS

To build a comprehensive understanding of institutional partnership dynamics, we conducted a multi-step qualitative research and analysis process that included:



1. Stakeholder Interviews

We conducted interviews across four key groups:

- Food producers supplying the hub
- Institutional buyers
- Food access organizations (SNAP, WIC)
- Local eaters

Interviews revealed communication gaps, purchasing barriers, operational needs, and opportunities for strengthening long-term relationships.



2. Field Visits & Hub Work Sessions

We attended work sessions at the Food Hub, met with leadership and staff, and observed workflows to understand logistical needs, cold storage constraints, and the Hub's weekly operational rhythm.



3. Analysis

We coded interview notes, identified themes across groups, and synthesized findings into user-friendly tools and recommendations.



4. Tools & Platforms

- Google Workspace
- Adobe Creative Suite
- ArcGIS
- Airtable
- In-person meetings and recorded sessions

Scan to View Gantt Chart



DELIVERABLES

Our work resulted in five key deliverables that directly support BCFM's goals and will continue to be used after the Capstone concludes:



1. Institutional Partner Toolkit

A ready-to-use resource for onboarding new institutional buyers.



2. Vendor Resource Guide

A guide designed for food producers entering institutional markets.



3. Grant Martix

A strategic funding tool that identifies, evaluates, and prioritizes grant opportunities to support the Food Hub's infrastructure, operations, and long-term growth.



4. SWOT Analysis

A strategic set of recommendations to strengthen the Food Hub's institutional arm, operations, and funding strategies.



5. GIS StoryMap

The GIS StoryMap visualizes the regional food system landscape, highlighting producer locations, institutional partners, and key insights from our research in an interactive, public-facing format.

INSIGHTS

We found that both producers and institutional buyers expressed the same need, predictability. While they approached the challenge from different angles (planning harvests vs. scheduling menus), both sides emphasized that better forecasting and communication tools would dramatically increase the amount of local food moving through the Hub.

The mutual desire for predictability creates one of the Food Hub's greatest leverage points and helped us shape our final recommendations.

IMPACT

Our project strengthens Boulder County Farmers Markets ability to grow a sustainable, resilient regional food system. The deliverables:

- Provide a professional, repeatable onboarding experience for institutional buyers
- Reduce the burden on staff by creating reusable communication tools
- Support producers who want to scale into wholesale markets
- Increase accessibility to local food for schools, hospitals, and vulnerable communities
- Bolster the foundation for long-term financial stability at the Hub



Masters of the Environment
University of Colorado Boulder

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Deepest thanks to Natalie Condon, Mackenzie Selke, the BCFM team, all producers and institutional partners who participated in interviews, and Damien Thompson for guidance throughout the semester. We appreciate the time, insight, and generosity shared by everyone involved.