



Colorado Proud
Western Slope Ag Recovery: Discoveries and Growth, from Peach Freeze to Pandemic
Roundtable Q&A
July 28, 2020

The following questions were received via chat during the event, but time did not allow for response. These questions were posed to appropriate panelists following the event, and their responses are below.

Have there been COVID cases in fruit workers? *(Response courtesy of panelist Commissioner Kate Greenberg, Colorado Department of Agriculture.)*

There have been outbreaks in some food and ag areas, and the state is concerned about that and keeping all workers safe. For that reason, we continue to work on this everyday: through centralized coordination with state emergency operations center; advocating for community-led outreach where trusted local leaders are supported by the state in helping outreach through their networks; supporting the Colorado Department of Public Health and Environment in creating ag worker guidance; and leaning on local partners for culturally- and linguistically-appropriate information, etc. It's also why Governor Polis has advocated directly with Vice President Pence for PPE and targeted testing.

Was all Western Slope fruit crops affected with the April freeze? If so, what was the impact on apples, pears, etc.? *(Response courtesy of panelist Bruce Talbott, Talbott Farms.)*

All fruit was impacted though Delta County's higher elevation orchards in Cedaredge, Hotchkiss and Paonia were much less damaged. Delta County probably has half a peach crop but only makes up somewhere between 10 and 20% of Colorado Peaches. They likely have 60% of an apple crop where they make up 95% of Colorado's apples. There was a decent cherry crop in Paonia but very little on Antelope Hill which is one of our major producers. I would guess the statewide cherry crop at under 10% and apricots might have had a couple percent. Pears are probably in the 20 to 30% range with most being in the Palisade area.

How have prices of peaches changed, if at all? Has increased demand for local food improved market conditions? Or have disruptions in national supply chains reduced market opportunities? *(Response courtesy of panelist Bruce Talbott, Talbott Farms.)*

Pricing for this year's Colorado peach crop varies as there is really not enough volume to establish a competitive market. Our own wholesale price is set at \$1.30/lb as compared to last year at \$1.05/lb with \$1.00 on major promotions. Availability in the major chains will be extremely limited with no add volumes available. I believe the roadside market is probably 50% above last year being mostly in the \$2.00 to \$3.00/lb range. Even with price increases, the revenue for this crop will be relatively insignificant and the challenge is to maintain relationships with major buyers in such a

manner that they are excited about working with us next year when there is major crop volume. Local preference for Colorado peaches and customer pressure on major chains to promote Colorado peaches has been extremely important over the years. The other Colorado fruits have less prominence and customer awareness but also benefit from the buying local movement. It is my hope that that trend will continue and strengthen.

Given that famous CO Proud peaches are dependent on immigrant labor, how are CO farmers working on immigration reform? (Response courtesy of panelist Bruce Talbott, Talbott Farms.)

Colorado has been a leader in advocating for Immigration Reform and more specifically a balanced quality Ag Labor Program. Senator Bennet was one of the four leaders in the Senate to champion a program a few years ago which failed in the House. Senator Gardner has also been a strong advocate for Immigration reform. Both Senators have held multiple Ag community meetings amongst stakeholders in the Packing Shed here in Palisade. We have unfortunately never garnered significant support from Colorado's delegation on the House side. I've personally had the opportunity to serve two terms on American Farm Bureau's Labor Committee and two terms on the USDA's Fruit and Vegetable Industry Advisory Board where labor was given high priority. Both of these are Washington DC based.

There is a general consensus in Washington that the US needs a better Ag labor program. Other stakeholders in the immigration reform discussion perceive that their best leverage for inclusion of whatever programs or benefits they are advocating for will come by trading support for these interests against support for Ag labor reform. In essence, an improved Ag labor program is being held hostage in a much bigger immigration reform discussion and in spite of how important it is to Agriculture, the average American has not experienced serious food shortages and is not worried about the domestic food supply resulting in little pressure on especially urban lawmakers to prioritize solutions to the problem.

Resources

July 28 Roundtable Recording:

<https://www.dropbox.com/s/77bfotvast16aec/Colorado%20Proud%20Western%20Slope%20Roundtable.mp4?dl=0>

Colorado Department of Agriculture COVID-19 resources:

<https://www.colorado.gov/pacific/agmain/COVID19>

COVID-19 Resources for food and agricultural businesses:

<https://www.colorado.gov/pacific/agmarkets/covid-19-resources-2>

