Preserving Agriculture on the Urban Fringe

Our mission...to conserve natural, cultural and agricultural resources and provide public uses that reflect sound resource management and community values.
The Boulder County Vision

- Preserve rural places within the county as growth and development increased
- Direct new urban growth to cities and towns
- Establish land buffers between communities
- Maintain agriculture and agricultural land
Establishing the Vision

- 1978 Boulder County Comprehensive Plan
  - Urban-type growth would only occur in cities and towns and not in the rural countryside
  - Minimum parcel size 35 acres in unincorporated county to maintain rural character
Cluster Development – bonus units allowed in exchange for keeping at least 75% of the land in a conservation easement

10,000+ acres preserved in conservation easements since 1978
Tool: Transferable Density

- Transferable Development Rights – TDRs
  - transfer potential development from rural areas to areas close to urban development
  - Sending sites and receiving sites
  - Sending sites have conservation easement to preclude further development
  - TDR program has brought the equivalent of $35 million to open land preservation
Example of a TDR PUD
Longmont Sending and Receiving Sites
Tool: IGAs

- Intergovernmental Agreements – define where cities and towns will grow and what land will remain as rural preservation
- Super IGA – County-wide binding agreement. Nine cities and towns and the county agree to 20 year vision of where growth will occur.
  - National awards for innovation in planning
Open Space Preservation

- Boulder County Open Space – 30+ years old
- Multiple Objectives for Preservation
  - Wildlife Habitat
  - Urban-shaping Buffers
  - Preservation of Historic Structures
  - Scenic Vistas
  - Agricultural Land
Open Space Taxes

- General Funds appropriated since 70’s
- Voter approved sales taxes 1993 to now
  - Three taxes – 45/100 of a cent now in place
  - Voter approved bonding authority
  - Eight public votes since 1993 – all successful
Land Preserved

- 95,000 acres preserved
  - 65,000 acres fee simple
  - 30,000 acres of conservation easements
  - 50% of the land is in the mountains, 50% on the plains
Agricultural land preservation a major priority

- Preserving not only the land but the agricultural way of life
- 25,000 acres of farms and ranches owned fee simple
- About 80% farmed by tenants prior to our purchase
- 85 lessees – over 100 leases
- Crop Share and Cash Leases
23,100 acres leased to farmers
Farmers, our ‘Partners in Conservation’
Agricultural Revenues

- Net Lease Revenues are about $500,000 - $600,000 annually
- Revenues used to improve our land and agricultural infrastructure
Montgomery Farm east of Longmont
Enhancing Infrastructure

- Infrastructure Enhancements
  - Hay Barns/Grain Bins
  - Center Pivot Irrigation
  - Other Irrigation Improvements
  - Tenants participate in financing of improvements – financial involvement of the tenant encourages financial involvement of the County
Recent Initiatives

- Our land is generally available in larger parcels
- Current Effort to make land available to smaller scale farming
  - Locally Grown Food
  - Market Farms
  - Farmer’s Market Enhancements
Grower’s Associations

- Association of individuals who want to do small parcel farming
- Association a necessity to deal with irrigation/water use issues
- First association last year – this year two more – many more in the future
- Have also lease smaller parcels to individual market farm operators
More local food production means more trained small parcel farmers

CSU Cooperative Extension “Building Farmers” program
- Developed by Extension Agent Adrian Card
- Curriculum focuses on what it takes to operate a small parcel farm
Community Gardens

- Use some open space land next to urban areas for community gardens.

- Partnership with local non-profit – Growing Gardens – to manage gardens/gardeners

- This farm will also be home to a market farm in several years
Farmer’s Markets

- Expand local Farmers’ Markets for direct sale opportunities
- Enhance Boulder County Fairgrounds as site for large Farmers’ Market
The History of Agriculture

- Commitment to remember our past and to provide the public with cultural history information about farming and ranching in Boulder County
Agricultural Heritage Center
Stroh/Dickens Barn and Silo

~ photo by Rich Koopmann
Not everything that can be counted counts; not everything that counts can be counted.

~ Albert Einstein