

2025



COLORADO
Department of Agriculture

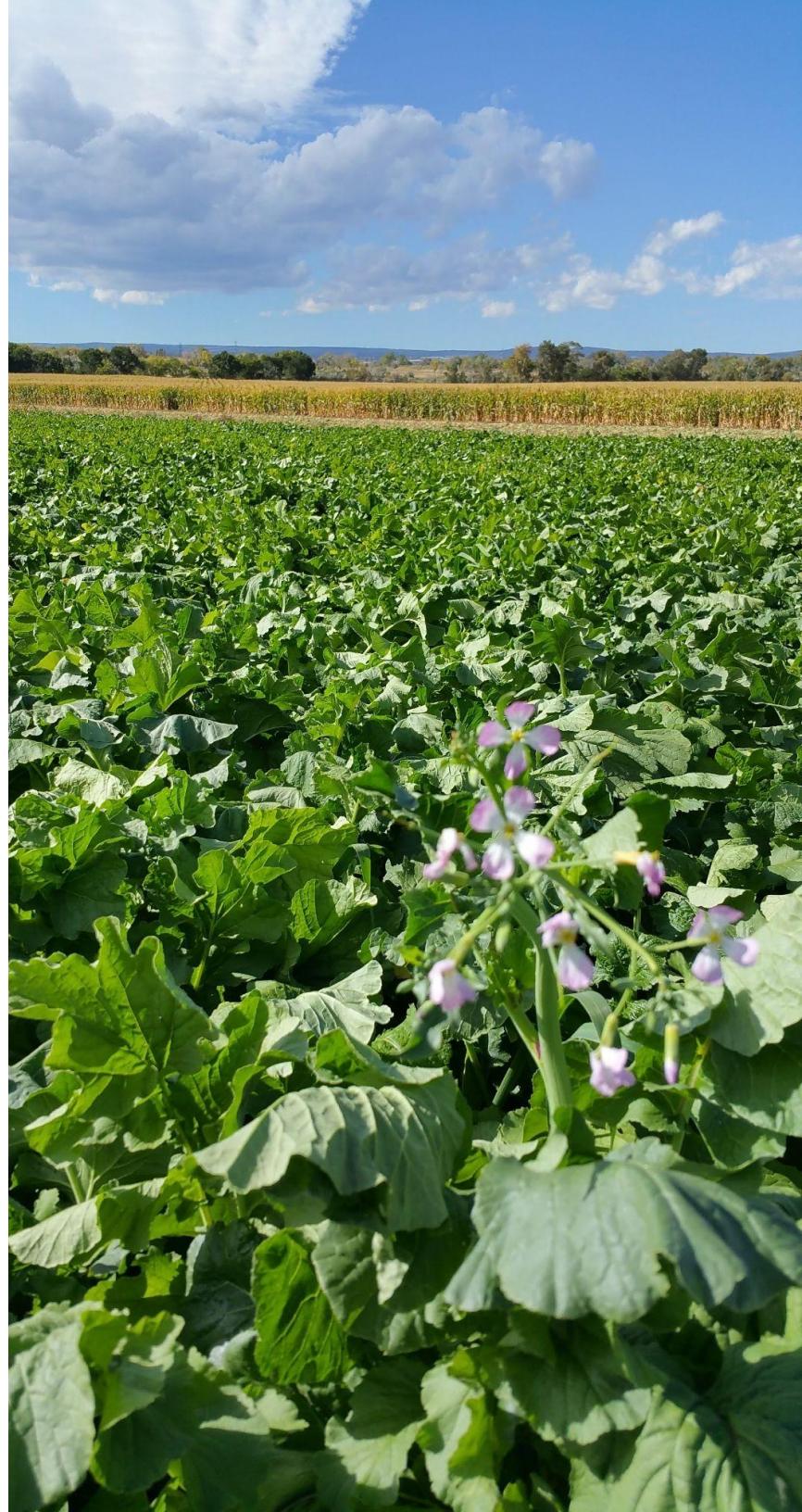
Soil Health Program Annual Report



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Colorado Soil Health Program - Overview

The Colorado Soil Health Program (CSHP) is a voluntary, producer-driven initiative established in 2021 under House Bill 21-1181 to improve soil health, water quality, and agricultural resilience statewide. Administered by the Colorado Department of Agriculture (CDA), CSHP supports farmers and ranchers in testing, adopting, and refining soil health practices through financial incentives, technical assistance, soil monitoring, and locally delivered outreach.

CDA partners with conservation districts, eligible entities, universities, and nonprofit organizations to deliver CSHP statewide. These partners serve as regional hubs for producer enrollment, soil sampling, technical support, and on-the-ground implementation. CSHP reaches diverse cropping systems, grazing operations, climates, and watersheds across Colorado, supporting the implementation of soil health practices such as cover cropping, reduced tillage, adaptive grazing, nutrient management, and improved irrigation and water management strategies.

In April 2025, USDA terminated the Partnerships for Climate-Smart Commodities award that supported rapid program expansion. In response, CDA shifted CSHP from expansion to stabilization, continuity, and long-term planning through the development of a program Roadmap. Despite the early conclusion of this funding, CSHP established a strong foundation that will inform future program direction.

Program Highlights (2022–2025)

- **400+ producers enrolled** statewide
- **60,000+ acres influenced** across diverse systems and watersheds
- **1,200+ producers engaged** through outreach and education
- **Technical assistance provided**, including soil sampling and soil moisture monitoring
- **Strong local delivery model** through conservation districts and trusted partners
- **Demonstrated links** between soil health practices, water outcomes, and producer decision-making
- **High participant satisfaction**, with surveyed producers indicating intent to continue practices post-program

The CSHP Roadmap: A New Operating Model

In response to this grant termination, CDA refocused CSHP through a [Colorado Soil Health Program Roadmap](#) that emphasizes longevity, flexibility, and locally grounded delivery.

While the program's first iteration concluded earlier than anticipated, CSHP established a strong foundation for soil health in Colorado. The roadmap reflects a strategic transition—from rapid, grant-driven expansion to a more resilient, adaptable soil health framework—ensuring that the lessons learned, partnerships built, and momentum generated through CSHP continue to inform and support Colorado agriculture into the future.



The CSHP Roadmap: A New Operating Model

The Roadmap outlines a strategic shift from rapid expansion to long-term endurance, focusing on building a stable, service-driven program that can persist through changing funding and policy conditions. It emphasizes diversified funding to avoid single source dependency, continued reliance on conservation districts and trusted local partners for delivery, and a clear pivot towards a focus on education, technical assistance, and producer support rather than enrollment volume. Key highlights include positioning CSHP as a statewide soil health connector, launching a Soil Health Hotline to provide timely guidance, developing Soil Health Learning Labs for hands on regional education, and aligning soil health efforts across state agencies and partner programs, including water focused initiatives. Together, these priorities establish CSHP as durable infrastructure for soil health, water resilience, and agricultural viability



The CSHP Roadmap

Soil Health Hotline

Even when immediate on-site support is not available, addressing producers' concerns by phone or email and linking them to local resources delivers significant value with minimal effort.

Implementation Steps

1. Establish Communication Channel

- Determine methods for hotline access, including telephone, voicemail, and email.
- Develop a standardized process for logging and tracking inquiries to ensure accountability and follow-up.

2. Create Knowledge Resources

- Compile comprehensive Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs) and references specific to regional soil health practices.
- Maintain updated links to local experts, extension offices, and demonstration farms.
- Share guides, fact sheets, technical tools, and case studies.

3. Promote Hotline to Producers and Partners

- Disseminate information through newsletters and email campaigns.
- Disseminate hotline opportunity through channels including a formal press release
- Encourage partners to share hotline information within their networks to maximize outreach and engagement.



The CSHP Roadmap: Soil Health Learning Labs

Program staff will facilitate and provide technical expertise to field events showcasing innovative practices that build management skills in water-limited climates. These learning labs will maximize impact by focusing on educating key stakeholders such as conservation districts, conservation entities, land trusts, and peer networks who can amplify these efforts within their communities.



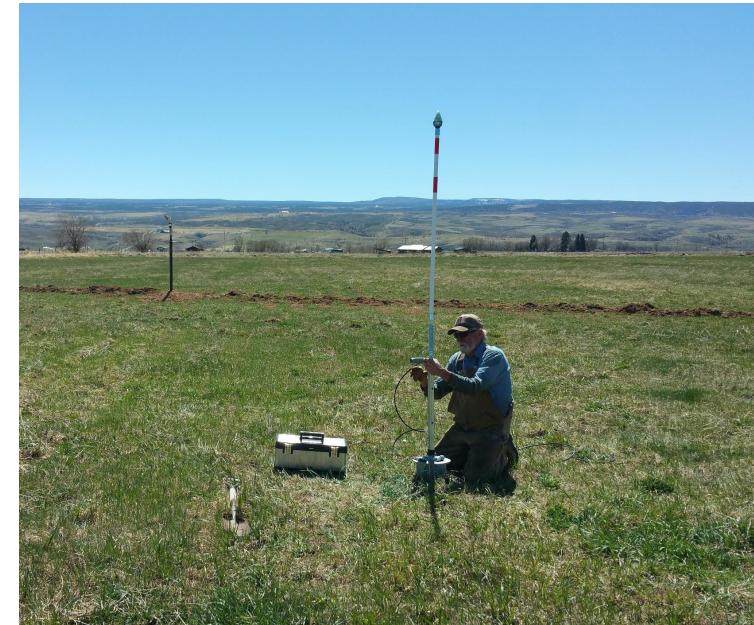
Implementation Steps

1. Identify regional demonstration sites and soil health mentors.
2. Define target audience: identify key stakeholder groups to maximize outreach.
3. Select topics: align subjects with regional needs and priorities.
4. Determine format: choose suitable event structures based on the goals, audience and resources of the event.
5. Develop agenda and activities: balance learning, discussion, and hands-on work.
6. Engage experts: invite researchers and practitioners
7. Allocate resources: budget, logistics, staffing, materials.
8. Promotion: execute communications and marketing plan.
9. Follow-up: measure effectiveness, distribute resources, and document learnings.

The CSHP Roadmap: Dry-Up and Revegetation

De-watered lands present a valuable opportunity: with proactive revegetation and soil health practices, they can be stabilized, restored, and new opportunities for conservation and income generation can be developed, demonstrating the creativity of Colorado's land stewards. Revegetation is a long and resource-intensive process, and proactive measures are more effective and less costly than reactive efforts after degradation occurs.

We recognize the growing challenge of dry-up ground over the next decade. CSHP is positioned to provide advisory and facilitative support in ongoing mitigation efforts.



Implementation Steps:

1. Collaborate with members of the Soil Health Advisory Committee to support groups that are developing best management practices for lands undergoing water removal ('dry-up') [as outlined in this SHAC recommendation letter](#).
2. Partner with the State Land Board to provide technical advice when state land is dried up
3. Utilize funding to advance dry-up and revegetation demonstration projects.
4. Compile resources and technical materials for inclusion in a CDA reference guide.



The CSHP Roadmap - Grant Distribution

The CSHP will continue to provide funding for soil health projects and equipment when it is available. CDA is currently working with the USDA to finalize terms for the Advancing Markets for Producers (AMP) grant. This may be a massive opportunity for Colorado producers in the coming years and will include a soil health component. CDA has also received water plan grant funding from the Colorado Water Conservation Board. These funds will be distributed through the new CSHP Soil Health and Optimizing Water (SHOW) grant.



The CSHP Roadmap - SHOW Grant

The SHOW grant provides a total of \$400,000 in funding, to be distributed among eight awardees. Selected proposals will receive up to \$50,000 to establish or expand projects that enhance soil function, focus on optimizing water resource management on working lands, and provide educational opportunities to the agricultural community. Projects will emphasize innovative, scalable approaches that improve soil function and strengthen water management on farms and ranches.

Eligible Entities:

- Individual Farmers and Ranchers
- Producer-Serving Organizations
- NGO's
- Research Institutions
- Local Governments, Conservation Districts
- Tribal Nations



Eligible Projects must meet both of the following requirements:

- Implement one or more practices on a farm or ranch or multiple farms/ranches to demonstrate a tie between soil health and water resource management.
- Incorporate demonstrations, peer-to-peer learning, or other outreach components to share project outcomes with agricultural stakeholders.

Roadmap - CSHP Hub and Statewide Connector

The final goal of the Roadmap is to position the Colorado Soil Health Program as the primary resource to lead and facilitate soil health initiatives statewide. CSHP aims to engage interested groups, identify their resource needs, and support their efforts accordingly.



“What is needed is a soil health connector hub that knows what everyone is doing regionally and understands the capabilities of different groups.”

— Regan Velasquez (rancher, consultant, peer-to-peer advisor)

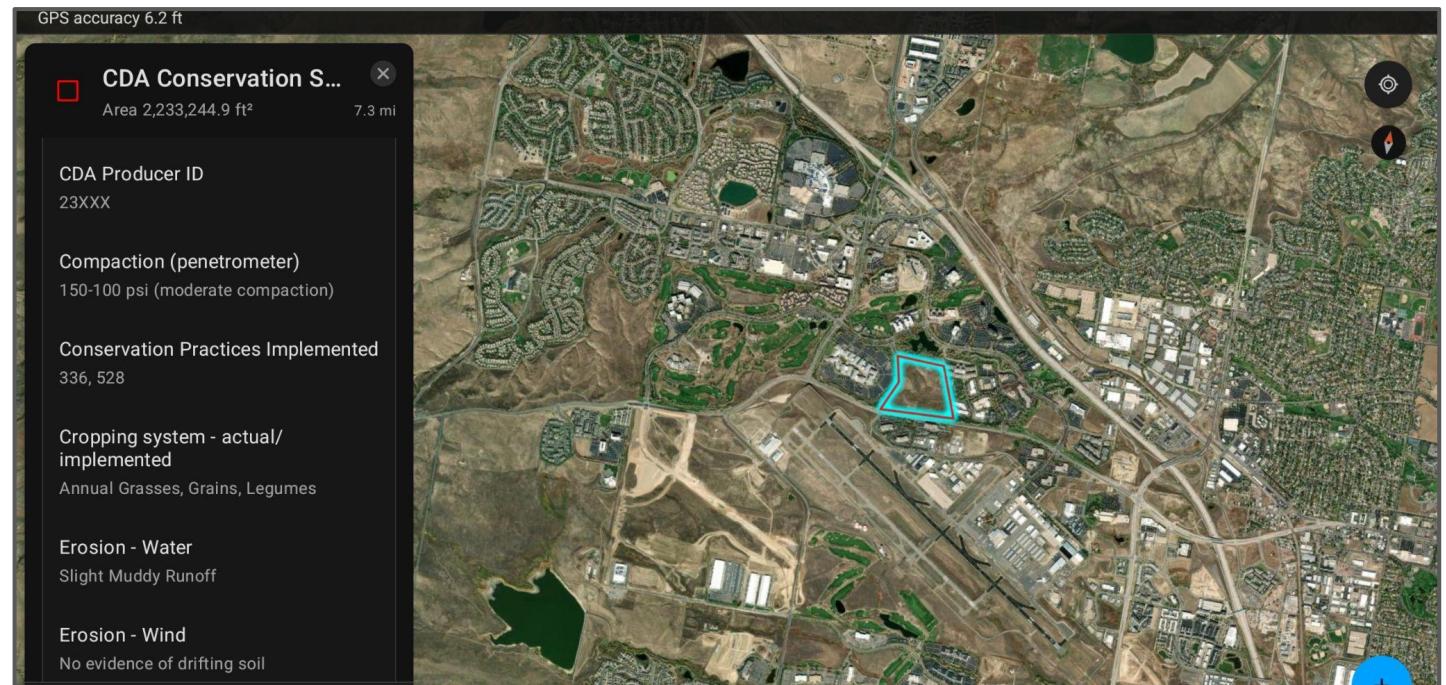
Colorado Soil Health Inventory Development

CSHP Geodatabase Development

CDA staff continues to collaborate with the Governor's Office of Information Technology (OIT) to design and implement a centralized geodatabase to host and manage all CSHP-related data. This effort advances progress toward the soil health inventory outlined in HB21-1181 and establishes a scalable platform accessible to a broad range of audiences.

The geodatabase serves as a secure, centralized resource for staff to access spatial data, including maps of enrolled fields and associated producer information such as crop types, management practices, and soil analysis results. It also enables staff to document technical assistance visits, upload photos, and track field-level activity, improving program management and enhancing producer customer service.

In addition, the platform supports the development of dashboards that present anonymized data for external stakeholders. These dashboards provide insights into what Colorado producers grow, how they manage their operations, and how agricultural practices influence soil health, supporting transparency, learning, and informed decision-making.



2025 Soil Health Budget Overview

In 2025, the CSHP had a tectonic shift in funding strategies. From Jan-April, the program was fully funded by external grants. When USDA terminated the Partnerships for Climate Smart Commodities Grant, the CSHP funding model shifted to internal funds from the ag management fund. These funds first covered the salaries of grant-funded positions for between 0-8 weeks, and then covered the salaries of the two permanent staff, the Program Manager and the Soil Health Specialist. These two positions will be funded by the Ag Management Fund through 2031, per the 2025 Long Bill. The program had also three small grants that covered expenses for the entirety of the year, but all three expire at the end of 2025 or early 2026.

Name of Grant	Amount to CDA in 2025	Grant End Date
USDA Partnerships for Climate Smart Commodities	\$3,261,728	Terminated 4/22/2025
USDA Conservation Innovation Grant	\$318,268	1/15/2026
CDPHE 319 Grant	\$100,067	12/31/2025
CWCB Water Plan Grant	\$126,397	March, 2026
NWFW	\$48,397	December, 2025

Soil Health Program Outgoing Grant Funds

Funded by external grants, CSHP distributed the following amounts to partners and producers

Category	Amount	Description
Producer Incentives	\$1,130,527	Incentives included per acre payments for implementation of soil health practices and grants for specialty equipment
Partner Capacity	\$940,510	Payments to Conservation Districts, STAR, and other local partners who helped implement our program
Research	\$1,342,822	Funding to CSU Dept of Soil and Crop Science, CSU Dept of Sociology to understand best practices, impact of soil health practices, and sociology of producer adoption.



Soil Health Program State Funding

After the sudden termination of the federal Partnerships for Climate Smart Commodities, CDA covered employees salaries for eight weeks as they transitioned to new roles. Since July 1, two permanent employees have been funded through Ag Management Fund. Personnel services in Calendar Year 2025 totaled \$214,992.



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305 Interlocken Parkway Broomfield CO 80021

ag.colorado.gov/soil-health