RURAL GROCERY INITIATIVE **JUNE 2025 CASE STUDY** FARM
RUNNERS



Table of Contents

Acknowledgements	03
Executive Summary	04
ntroduction	06
Historical, Geographic, and Economic Context	07
Origins of Farm Runners	08
Growth and Evolution	09
Operations	11
Diagram of Model	13
mpact Summary	14
Overcoming Challenges	15
Key Findings and Lessons Learned	16
Conclusion	21
About the Project	22
References	23
Appendix 1	25
Appendix 2	28

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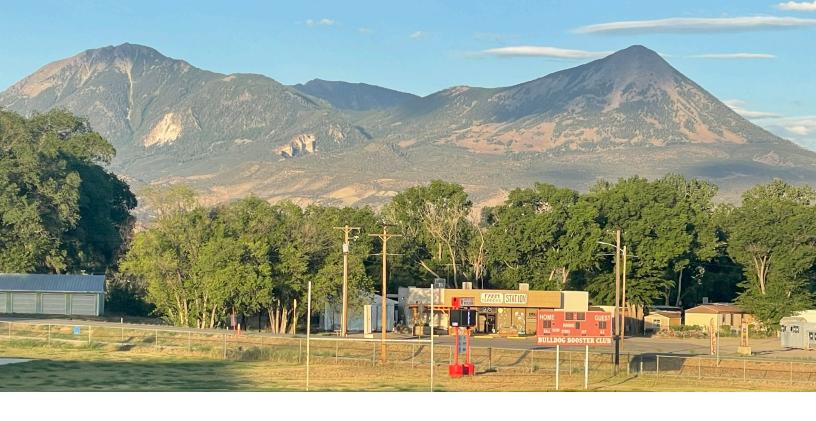
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Photos throughout the case study are courtesy of Farm Runners.







EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Farm Runners is a for-profit local food distributor with headquarters in the small town of Hotchkiss, Colorado. It was established in 2015 to "help new and established family farms find a market for their product while making it easier for consumers to access the amazing food grown here in Western Colorado." In addition to wholesaling local food, Farm Runners found an innovative way to reduce waste and improve food access by operating its own small grocery store, called The Station, out of its aggregation facility in downtown Hotchkiss. In 2024, the company paid \$1.6 million to producers in the Western Slope of Colorado.

This case study examines the steps Farm Runners took to scale and adapt over time. Lessons learned from this case study aim to support other businesses and communities that are seeking innovative methods of integrating more local food into independent grocery stores.

OVERVIEW OF FARM RUNNERS

LOCATION — Hotchkiss, Delta County, Colorado

POPULATION - 1,147

OWNERSHIP STRUCTURE - LLC

YEAR ESTABLISHED - 2015

KEY PARTNERS — Over 100 local producers, 450 chefs, 60 grocery stores, three food hubs, and two school districts; Colorado Department of Agriculture

PROBLEM — Farmers were spending significant time and money traveling to reach markets, which limited their ability to focus on growing food and raising livestock.

SOLUTION — Farm Runners distributes local food to wholesale customers across the Western Slope of Colorado. It also minimizes food waste by selling excess product at The Station, a grocery store and deli in Hotchkiss.

KEY OPERATIONS — Local food distribution; retail sales at brick-and-mortar grocery store

INCOME SOURCES — Sales to wholesale and retail customers

SUMMARY OF KEY FINDINGS AND LESSONS LEARNED

Business Model and Operations: Farm Runners focuses on distributing local food from small- and mid-sized farmers to wholesale customers. In 2024, Farm Runners distributed local food from over 100 farmers within a 200-mile radius of Hotchkiss, CO. Their product was delivered to 450 chefs, 60 grocery stores, three food hubs, and two school districts. It also operates a seasonal CSA and small retail grocery store and café called The Station. Wholesale customers, including restaurants, grocery stores, food hubs, and schools, account for roughly 75% of business income, and retail customers account for the rest.

Financial Strategy: Farm Runners operated for nearly a decade before receiving its first grant in 2024. Instead, the owners subsidized business income by working multiple jobs over several years – a lifestyle that could not have been sustained long-term. Eventually, the business became stable enough that they quit their other jobs and hired additional staff. A key factor supporting business growth is proximity to affluent communities, since wealthy residents and visitors can afford to pay higher food costs and therefore prop up the local food system. The Station also accepts both SNAP and Double Up Food Bucks, part of the GusNIP Nutrition Incentive Program.

Equipment, Technology, and Infrastructure: Farm Runners uses an e-commerce platform that enables wholesale customers to easily browse current inventory and place orders online. While this technology has significantly streamlined operations, one downside is that Farm Runners has less direct communication with wholesale customers.

Product Offerings: Because it is based in the North Fork Valley, which has a high concentration of organic specialty crop growers, Farm Runners has easy access to a wide variety of locally grown products. The business supplies both organic and conventional food produced within a 200-mile radius of Hotchkiss. At its grocery store, roughly three-fourths of product offerings are locally sourced.

Because some food items are unavailable locally, Farm Runners fills in the gap by purchasing from a national distributor (UNFI) a regional distributor (Italco).

Partnerships and Community Engagement: Farm Runners took the time to build genuine relationships with both wholesale customers and producers. It strives to visit all 100+ farms that use their distribution network. Through a recent partnership with the Colorado Department of Agriculture, Farm Runners is delivering local food to retailers located in low income, low access areas across the Western Slope.



INTRODUCTION

Founded in 2015 by Emma and Matthew Kottenstette after witnessing how farmers struggled to move their own products, Farm Runners has steadily grown to become a widely recognized local food distributor, reaching both urban and remote rural communities across the Western Slope of Colorado.

What started with small delivery runs out of a minivan steadily grew over the course of a decade to significantly expand local food access across the state. In 2024, using fleet of five trucks, Farm Runners moved products from over 100 farms to 450 chefs, 60 grocery stores, three food hubs, and two school districts. The company also owns and manages a small grocery store, café, and seasonal CSA out of its 2,400-squarefoot aggregation facility in downtown Hotchkiss.

Across the country, demand for local food continues to grow, but its full potential has not been realized. This is due, in part, to the fact that many distributors and wholesalers have volume requirements that small and midsized producers cannot meet. Farm Runners, however, has developed a sustainable business model by tailoring its services to local food producers and independent retailers, bridging the gap so that producers can access more stable marketing outlets, and independent retailers can offer more high-quality products that give them a competitive edge.

This case study demonstrates the positive impact that a midsized distribution company can have on local and regional food systems. It provides an overview of how Farm Runners was established, how it evolved over time, key business operations, challenges, and lessons learned along the way. Lessons learned from this case study aim to support other endeavors across the country that are working to integrate more local food into independent grocery stores and other retail outlets.



HISTORICAL, GEOGRAPHIC, AND ECONOMIC CONTEXT

Located west of the Continental Divide, the Western Slope of Colorado is home to nearly 600,00 people.² Despite having only 10% of Colorado's population, it holds roughly one third of the state's land mass and 70% of its water.³The largest city of the Western Slope is Grand Junction (population 65,560)⁴ followed by Durango (population 19,071).⁵

Historically, coal mining was a crucial driver of the Western Slope's economy. Over 1,700 coal mines were active at one time or another throughout Colorado's history.⁶ However, as demand for coal waned and prices dropped, many mines closed over the years and employment in coal significantly decreased. Only seven mines still operate in the region today.⁷

Tourism remains another key industry, with popular skiing and hiking destinations near towns like Crested Butte, Telluride, Aspen,

Vail, Breckenridge, and Glenwood Springs.⁸ Having a vibrant tourism industry brings a lot of wealth to the area, but that tends to be distributed unequally.^{9,10}

Yet another economic sector that continues to grow is agriculture. The Western Slope's North Fork Valley has rich soil and boasts the "largest concentration of organic/sustainable growers in the state." 11 World renowned for its fruit production – such as apples, peaches, pears, and more – its agricultural landscape is also characterized by diverse vegetable crops and vineyards, as well as grazing cattle and sheep. 12 In most counties of the Western Slope, half to two thirds of farms range from 10 to 180 acres. In Mesa and Delta Counties – which rank first and second, respectively, for Colorado's fruit, tree nut, and berry production – about 90% of farms are less than 180 acres. 13

DEMOGRAPHIC COMPARISONS	
of Hotchkiss, Delta County, and Colorado	

DELTA COUNTY

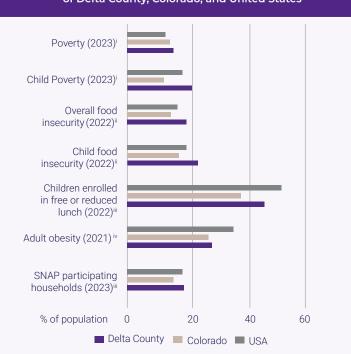
COLORADO

HOTCHKISS

VARIABLE

Population	1,147	31,353	5,810,774	
Median household income (in 2023 inflation-adjusted \$)	\$58,125	\$58,330	\$92,470	
Median age in years	43.2	48.4	37.5	
% of population under 18, over 65 ⁱⁱ	23.1, 20.4	19.3, 27.8	21.4, 15.2	
% of population 25 & older who earned a bachelor's degree or higher	20.0	25.7	44.7	
Race/ethnicity	, as a percentage	of the population:		
White	88.6	86.7	73.5	
Black	0.0	0.8	4.0	
Asian	0.0	0.6	3.2	
American Indian and Alaskan Native	0.2	0.7	1.0	
Native Hawaiian, Other Pacific Islander	0.0	0.0	0.1	
Two or more races	3.8	8.9	12.7	
Some other race	7.4	2.2	5.4	
Hispanic or Latino	18.1	14.2	22.2	
Source: 2023 American Community Survey 5-year estimates				

FOOD ACCESS AND POVERTY COMPARISONS of Delta County, Colorado, and United States



Sources: (i) 2023 American Community Survey 5-year population estimates (ii) Feeding America's Map the Meal Gap, 2022 (iii) National Center for Education Statistics, 2022 (iv) CDC's Behavioral Risk Factor Surveillance System, 2021



ORIGINS OF FARM RUNNERS

DEFINING THE PROBLEM

In 2011, Emma and Matthew Kottenstette moved to Hotchkiss, a rural community in Colorado's Western Slope, to apprentice on a local farm. They quickly discovered that small farmers and ranchers faced a common challenge: distribution.

According to Emma, "[The farmers'] biggest problem was getting their products sold, because they were traveling so far to get their products to a customer...Everybody was doing their own distribution." Producers were spending significant time and money navigating the mountain roads to reach grocery stores and restaurants, which hampered their ability to focus on growing food and raising livestock.

Given the significant need for distribution services, Emma and Matthew were inspired to take action. In April 2015, they established Farm Runners LLC to distribute local food across the Western Slope of Colorado. According to its website, the mission of Farm Runners is "to support beginning and established family farms by building community relationships around regional food." ¹¹⁴

FIRST STEPS

For the first two years, Farm Runners was a bootstrapped operation that grew out of personal savings and sweat equity. During this time, Emma and Matthew continued working second jobs, usually putting in 80 hours per week, and did not pay themselves through Farm Runners: all profits stayed within the business.

The Kottenstettes relied heavily on interpersonal relationships – purchasing product from farmers in their network and then visiting local retail outlets to sell it. Initial delivery runs were made using their personal vehicle and a minivan. They were also granted free access to Colorado State University's decommissioned research station, which was used to aggregate, sort, and store local product.

During this stage of the business, annual gross sales hovered around \$30,000. Farm Runners purchased from roughly 35 farmers and sold to roughly 55 wholesale customers.

A key turning point for Farm Runners occurred in 2017, when they were able to hire another staff member to help aggregate and sort orders. That same year, the business took out its first loan from a local bank for \$250,000 and purchased a 2,400-square-foot former gas station to accommodate their need for more storage. The building, which had been closed for nine years, required minimal renovation, although the state continues soil remediation due to underground gas leaks.

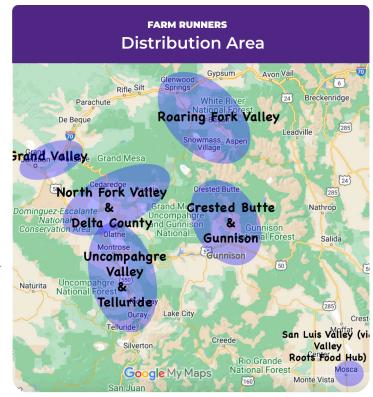


GROWTH AND EVOLUTION

Having moved their headquarters to downtown Hotchkiss, residents soon began knocking on their door and asking to buy locally sourced food. Because Farm Runners would occasionally have extra unsold product, they decided to start the "Friday Friend Store" as a way to reduce waste and support community needs. According to Emma, "The Friday Friend Store became so popular that we started buying produce to have at the Friday Friend Store. And then we were like, 'Well, let's just open a store.'"

To accomplish this, two-thirds of the building was designated for wholesale operations and one-third for the grocery store, which they called "The Station." They added shelving, display coolers, and a Point of Sale system. Over time, Farm Runners experienced so much customer demand that they hired more help and expanded their product selection beyond what could be sourced locally, ordering items through a national distributor, UNFI, and a regional distributor, Italco. They started accepting SNAP and Double Up Food Bucks. Over time, they also added a kitchen to serve grab-and-go breakfast, lunch, and take-home meals.

Meanwhile, Farm Runners continued to expand its producer network and wholesale accounts, which was achieved through oneon-one visits and word of mouth. In 2024, the company distributed local food from over 100 farmers to 450 chefs, 60 grocery stores, three food hubs, and two school districts. Using a fleet of five trucks ranging in size, pick-up and deliveries are made within a 200-mile radius of Hotchkiss. To distribute USDA organic produce and maintain the USDA organic label, Farm Runners became a USDA certified organic distributor. However, they also still distribute



products that are conventionally grown. The company's top priority is selling local food from local farmers, regardless of their certifications or growing practices.

In late 2024, Farm Runners signed a three-year contract with the Colorado Department of Agriculture to support distribution in hard-to-reach places. This is part of Colorado's Community Food Access Program, which established a "Community Food Consortium" composed of small food retailers and producers located in low income, low access areas. 15 Consortium members meet quarterly to discuss distribution and operational challenges. As a benefit, retail members can receive tax credits on food distribution fees and exclusive discounts from regional food hubs and distributors. Through its contract with the state, Farm Runners serves consortium members across the Western Slope, offering discounted prices and access to other member benefits. The state reimburses Farm Runners for mileage and labor, as these deliveries would not be financially viable otherwise. In addition, through this program, Farm Runners will receive financial assistance to construct a larger food aggregation facility.



TIMELINE OF

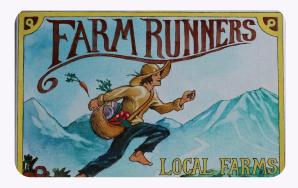
Farm Runners

2011

Emma and Matthew Kottenstette move to Hotchkiss, CO, to apprentice on a vegetable farm.

2015

Farm Runners, LLC is established. The Kottenstettes begin distributing local food to wholesale accounts using their personal vehicle and a minivan.



2017

Farm Runners purchases an old gas station in downtown Hotchkiss to use for aggregation and storage. Later that year, they start operating the "Friday Friend Store" to sell excess wholesale product.

2018

Farm Runners opens The Station, a grocery store that primarily sells local products and some non-local staples.

2024

Farm Runners receives its first grant for a flash freezer and related equipment. Farm Runners contracts with the State of Colorado to service hard-to-reach retailers in the Western Slope.

OPERATIONS

Numerous activities happen day-to-day and week-to-week for Farm Runners to operate. Often, these activities happen concurrently. The business involves building relationships with farmers and customers, marketing, picking up products, sorting, delivering, and retailing at The Station – not to mention other behind-the-scenes administrative tasks, like scheduling employee hours. The key aspects of Farm Runners' operations are outlined below.

BUILD WORKING RELATIONSHIP WITH LOCAL PRODUCERS

Producers who are new to the distribution network discuss their anticipated production volume and Farm Runners' buying capacity. This transparency helps both parties with business planning. Producers also sign an agreement that outlines key details about their growing practices, licenses, certifications, and insurance (Appendix 1). The agreement establishes clear expectations on product standards, packaging, pick-up and delivery, invoicing, and other logistics. Additionally, producers must have an On-Farm Food Safety Plan, which protects Farm Runners from liability and meets the requirements of health departments, auditors, and insurance providers.

BUILD WORKING RELATIONSHIP WITH WHOLESALE CUSTOMERS

Farm Runners builds its customer base through face-to-face interaction. A strategy that has proven extremely successful is visiting potential wholesale customers and offering product samples. If they are interested in ordering product through Farm Runners, wholesale customers simply create an account on Local Food Marketplace,* the online catalog and e-commerce platform linked to the Farm Runners website.

*Note: Brand names appearing in this publication are for product identification purposes only. No endorsement is intended, nor is criticism implied, of similar products not mentioned.



BUILD FARM-TO-WHOLESALE SALES CHANNEL

On Wednesday each week, Farm Runners sends an email to its producer network asking for product availability and prices, due by Thursday at 1:00 PM. With that information, the online catalog is updated in Local Food Marketplace. (Producers can also log on to the website and list available products if they wish, but most send by email.) Then, Thursday afternoon, Farm Runners sends a newsletter to wholesale customers, highlighting a few farms and reminding them to place orders by 5:00 PM on Sunday.

PICK UP AND AGGREGATE PRODUCT

Once orders are received from wholesale customers, they are sent to producers on Sunday night. Producers harvest on Monday. On Tuesday morning, Farm Runners sends three trucks to pick up the product, and each truck makes between 3-12 stops depending on the season. Trucks typically carry no more than \$10,000 worth of goods. Producers provide an invoice for the current order, and Farm Runners provides a check for the invoice submitted two weeks prior. They use net 15 payment terms where Farm Runners is expected to pay producers within 15 days. This is a shorter turnaround than most large distributors and supports cash flow for the producer. Product is then brought back to The Station, where wholesale customer orders are sorted. An invoice is created for each customer (Appendix 2).

DELIVER PRODUCT TO WHOLESALE CUSTOMERS

Farm Runners has three delivery routes on Wednesday and three delivery routes on Thursday. With each delivery, wholesale customers receive an invoice.

RECEIVE PAYMENT FROM WHOLESALE CUSTOMERS

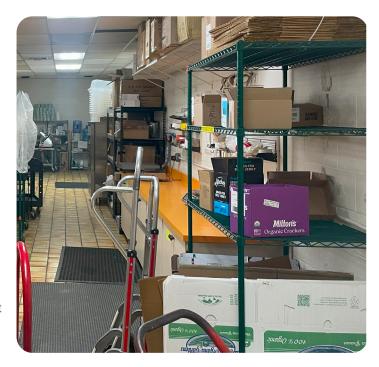
Generally speaking, wholesale customers have net 15 payment terms, although some of the larger accounts require net 45. Other customers will pay on delivery. Having net 15 payment terms gives the buyer some time to inspect the product and report anything that seems amiss. When this happens, Farm Runners will adjust and

resend the invoice. Though rare, they may also ask the farmer for a credit (for instance, if a product spoiled faster than it should have).

SELL TO RETAIL CUSTOMERS AT THE STATION AND CSA MEMBERS

Like other wholesale customers, The Station places orders with Farm Runners each week. If, for some reason, Farm Runners has excess product that wasn't sold to wholesale customers, it is sold at The Station. The Station currently employs four retail associates, who also support in other areas of the business. Four other employees also work in their deli.

For 18 weeks between June and October, Farm Runners delivers CSA shares. Starting in May, customers can purchase a season's worth of local food. That food is then delivered in weekly increments in boxes that contain fruits, vegetables, and other local goods. It also includes a newsletter, "chock-full of recipes, storage tips, and fun facts." To accommodate a variety of incomes, household sizes, and schedules, customers can pay for a full share, a small share, or a flex share, which allows customers to reduce the number of boxes they receive. Customers can pick up their boxes at locations in seven cities across the Western Slope: Aspen, Carbondale, Crested Butte, Glenwood Springs, Gunnison, Montrose, and, of course, Hotchkiss. CSA drop-offs are part of the truck delivery route.







IMPACT SUMMARY

In 2024, Farm Runners distributed local food from over 100 farmers to 450 chefs, 60 grocery stores, three food hubs, and two school districts. About 80% of total product went to restaurants, with the remainder mostly going to grocery stores. Wholesale customers (restaurants, grocery stores, food hubs, and schools) accounted for roughly 75% of business income, and retail customers (The Station,

CSA) accounted for the rest. The Station typically does \$10,000 in local food sales each week, and \$1,500-\$3,000 in non-local food sales. Their best-selling products are fruit (especially peaches) and eggs.

\$2.0 MILLION IN LOCAL FOOD SALES TO WHOLESALE CUSTOMERS: 515 WHOLESALE CUSTOMERS: 450 60 3 2 CHEFS GROCERY FOOD SCHOOLS DISTRICTS 100+ PRODUCERS SERVED BY FARM RUNNERS 77% OF SALES AT THE LOCALLY SOURCED 16 PART-TIME 4 FULL-TIME STAFF EMPLOYED 125 DAILY SHOPPERS AT THE STATION



OVERCOMING CHALLENGES

Scaling the business involved delicately balancing supply and demand. As Emma explained, "There are gluts of products when everybody has tomatoes, or everyone has peaches, or everyone has whatever that crop is at that time of year. But for the most part, I would say 90% of the time, we just don't have enough. So we're constantly working with farmers and trying to figure out how to better plan so not everybody has everything at the same time."

In 2024, Farm Runners purchased a flash freezer, along with other equipment to go with it, including trays, buckets, a label printer, stickers, packaging supplies, and more. This will allow Farm Runners to extend the shelf life of local food and sell it at their retail location. "[Customers are] going to be able to purchase these frozen goods throughout the year to be able to have fresh product. We are trying to figure out how to use those gluts when we have them so that we can just keep the money flowing to the farmers," said Emma. The purchases were made using a non-

reimbursement grant administered by the Colorado Department of Agriculture's Small Food Business Recovery and Resilience Program. The program used State and Local Fiscal Recovery Funds authorized by the American Rescue Plan Act that were awarded to the State of Colorado by the U.S. Department of the Treasury.¹⁷

Another ongoing challenge for Farm Runners is capacity. Wholesale customers currently receive one Farm Runners delivery per week. Grocers have expressed that they would like more deliveries per week, however, to have a continuous supply of fresh food without running out. Farm Runners is still working on growing their staff to make this a reality. The company currently employs four full-time and sixteen part-time staff. They also envision hiring a dedicated client liaison who interfaces more regularly with chefs, grocers, schools, and producers. Doing so would help Farm Runners maintain and deepen the relationships that took years to build.



KEY FINDINGS AND LESSONS LEARNED

BUSINESS MODEL AND OPERATIONS

Distribution remains a crucial yet underappreciated aspect of local and regional food systems, as there are still comparatively few companies that provide this service to small- and mid-sized farmers. Major wholesale markets are out of reach for many local food producers, since they may be required to pay slotting fees, obtain certifications, supply large volumes, and maintain a minimum turnover rate. Without access to distribution services, producers are forced to deliver their own product or rely on direct-to-consumer sales, both of which take significant time and labor and therefore limit potential business growth.

Farm Runners, on the other hand, is filling the local food distribution gap. With its primary mission to serve farmers, the business has tailored its day-to-day operations to make their services easily accessible. Through Farm Runners, local food producers can get products into retail outlets across the Western Slope that would not have been possible otherwise.

Independent retail is key to making this business model work. These outlets value local food as a way to differentiate themselves from competition. Independent retailers typically have fewer vendor requirements and are often more flexible. Aside from selling eggs to Natural Grocers, a national grocery chain, Farm Runners has been unable to access larger retail networks, since those stores typically require Good Agricultural Practices (GAP) and Good Handling Practices (GHP) certifications. For now, Farm Runners has decided

not to pursue expansion into this retail sector because many of their farmers are not certified.

While Farm Runners also sells to schools, it is only on a limited basis. School Food Authorities (SFAs), which often handle purchasing for a district, generally require food safety certifications, higher insurance coverage, and a consistently large volume of a limited type of product (the top three SFA purchases in 2023 were fluid milk, apples, and beef). For this reason, Farm Runners has typically only sold to schools through special grants or one-off or events, such as the Colorado Proud School Meal Day.

As it looks to the future, Farm Runners could consider introducing more requirements of local food producers in order to access larger institutional and retail markets. Doing so, however, runs the risk of excluding some farmers they aim to serve. Farm Runners will have to weigh this tradeoff as it continues to grow.

In addition to selling local food to wholesale customers, Farm Runners found an innovative way to reduce waste through the Friday Friend Store: anything left over from wholesale customers was sold to retail customers in Hotchkiss. Eventually, after observing grocery demand in the community, it grew into a full-fledged grocery store open five days a week. By adding a café and deli at The Station, Farm Runners achieves higher margins on breakfast and lunch items which contributes to overall business sustainability.

FINANCIAL STRATEGY

Emma and Matthew started Farm Runners using whatever resources were readily available to them: their existing relationships, personal vehicle, and Colorado State University's decommissioned research station. Before investing in costly infrastructure and equipment, they first tested the feasibility of this model and steadily grew the business over time. In addition, the business operated for nearly a decade before receiving its first grant in 2024. This was intentional: the Kottenstettes wanted to build a business that did not rely on grants to operate, since grant awards can never be guaranteed. In lieu of grants, Emma and Matthew worked at other jobs while trying to grow Farm Runners, often putting in 80-hour weeks. This lifestyle was unsustainable and could have easily led to business closure. After two years of working in this manner, they were finally able to quit their other jobs, hire additional staff, and scale operations.

Farm Runners benefits from its proximity to affluent communities, like Aspen, which help prop up the local food system. Wealthy residents and visitors eat at high end restaurants and have the means to purchase high quality, more expensive groceries. While Farm Runners does not exclusively deliver to high-income areas,

FARM RUNNERS KEY FUNDING SOURCES					
DATE	FUNDING TYPE	USE OF FUNDS	AMOUNT		
2017	Loan	Building purchase	\$250,000		
2017	Loan	Truck	\$25,000		
2024	Small Food Business Recovery and Resilience Program Grant, Colorado Department of Agriculture (Round 1)	Flash freezer and related equipment for retail operation	\$50,000		
Small Food Business Recovery and Resilience Program Grant, Colorado Department of Agriculture (Round 2)		Packaging equipment, dishwasher, steam oven for retail operation	\$50,000		
2024	Community Food Access Program Contract, Colorado Department of Agriculture (spread over 2.5 years)	Distribution route expansion and construction of new aggregation facility	\$310,000		
Total: \$685,000					

this customer base is a key factor in its success. Regions with lower income levels may have a harder time sustaining this business model if fewer community members can afford to pay the higher cost of locally sourced food.

EQUIPMENT, TECHNOLOGY, AND INFRASTRUCTURE

As it grew, Farm Runners needed to streamline its ordering process. Initially, the team would call producers to check product availability and then call customers to take orders. This was time-consuming. Today, ordering occurs through Local Food Marketplace,* an e-commerce platform that enables wholesale customers to easily browse current inventory and place orders online. It automatically applies the correct markup for different types of accounts in the system: grocery stores and schools have a markup of 35%, while restaurants have a markup of 43%. Farm Runners and other food hubs occasionally collaborate when they are short on product, so they exchange goods at a reduced 16% markup.

Local Food Marketplace also generates invoices that list products by producer, which helps with traceability and food safety (Appendix 2). This transparency also means wholesale customers start to recognize local producers: if a certain product performs well, customers are more likely to reorder from that producer in the future. On the other side, producers can see who their repeat customers are and how much they typically order, which supports business planning.

One downside of using an online ordering system is that Farm Runners has less direct communication with wholesale customers. Although it was time-consuming, their old system of calling to collect orders provided an opportunity to catch up. Today, there are fewer occasions for one-on-one engagement with wholesale customers. To address this problem, Farm Runners has considered hiring a client liaison to help maintain that personal connection.

***Note:** Brand names appearing in this publication are for product identification purposes only. No endorsement is intended, nor is criticism implied, of similar products not mentioned.

FARM RUNNERS SPACE BREAKDOWN

USE OF SPACE	SQUARE FEET**
Dry storage	230
Refrigerated storage	1330
Frozen storage	340
Customer-facing retail	800
Bathroom	60
Office	40

**Note: There may be overlapping functions for the same square footage.

Some cold storage is located outside of the building.

FARM RUNNERS EQUIPMENT AND TECHNOLOGY

VEHICLES	5 refrigerated box trucks with lift gates (ranging in size)1 minivan
COOLERS AND FREEZERS	4 walk-in storage coolers1 walk-in storage freezer
PROCESSING	 Flash freezer Deli equipment Metal tables and sinks for food sorting and preparation Separate washing and sanitizing stations for food and workers
WAREHOUSE	 Pallet Jacks Dollies Carts Certified weigh scales Ramps
SHELVING, DISPLAY	 Open face vegetable display cases Produce coolers Display freezer Display fridge Retail shelving and display tables Deli display cases
TECHNOLOGY	 Computers Printers Square (Point of Sale system at The Station)* Local Food Marketplace (online catalog for wholesale orders)*

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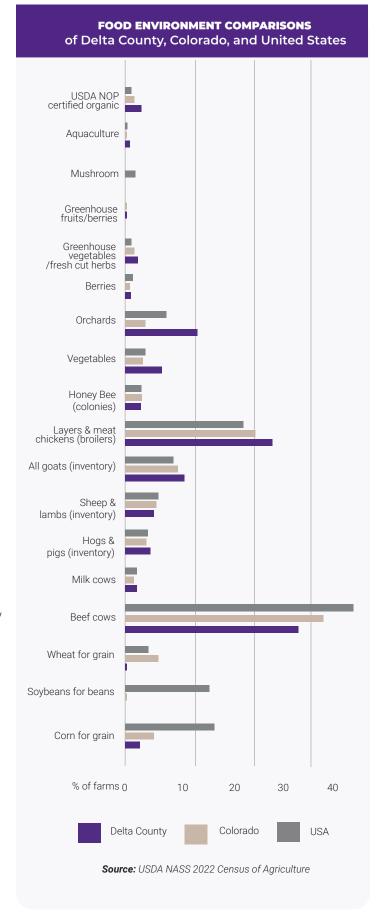
PRODUCT OFFERINGS

The North Fork Valley, where Farm Runners is based, has a high concentration of organic specialty crop growers. The region is particularly well-known for fruit production and vineyards. This agricultural landscape makes it easier for Farm Runners to buy and sell a wide variety of local products.

Customers of Farm Runners can shop for products in six main categories:

- Produce (Arugula, chard, collards, kale, lettuce, sorrel, spinach, nettles, microgreens, cilantro, garlic, horehound, lemon balm, onion, scallions, herbs, beets, carrots, parsnips, potatoes, radishes, turnips, sunchoke, mushrooms, asparagus, kohlrabi, broccoli, cauliflower, bell peppers, chiles, corn, okra, squash)
- **2. Fruit Stand** (apples, berries, cherries, peaches, rhubarb)
- **3. Butcher Shop** (beef, chicken, pork, goat, lamb, mutton, bison, elk, venison, yak)
- 4. Dairy & Eggs (butter, cheese, eggs, milk)
- **5. Pantry** (beverages, bread, tortillas, chips, cookies, coffee, tea, dried fruit, grains, dry beans, honey, nuts, seeds, oil, preserves, spices)
- **6. Body Care** (essential oil, hydrosol, lip balm, lotion, sachets, salves, soap)

This business model may be less feasible in other parts of the county where there are fewer farms and businesses that can supply locally produced goods.



PARTNERSHIPS AND COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

Genuine relationships with local food producers and wholesale customers are crucial to Farm Runners' ethos. This approach allowed the business to grow and is what sets it apart from major distribution companies. While taking the time to build and maintain relationships might be considered "inefficient" to some, doing so has fostered lasting trust and loyalty, making the business more resilient in the long-term. To help deepen relationships, Farm Runners is working toward visiting all 100+ farms that use their distribution service.

The recent partnership with the Colorado Department of Agriculture may also strengthen Farm Runners' business viability. Through its Community Food Access Program, the department will pay Farm Runners over three years to deliver local food to retailers located in low income, low access areas across the Western Slope. This means Farm Runners can now expand its customer base in places that were previously too costly to reach. The hope is that eventually, these retailers will be able to cover delivery costs on their own without any subsidization. As a new initiative, its long-term impact is yet to be seen.



CONCLUSION

Since its humble beginnings, Farm Runners has steadily expanded across Colorado's Western Slope to become a thriving and reputable business. Using a slow and deliberate approach, Emma and Matthew Kottenstette identified gaps in the local food system and secured their place in overcoming distribution challenges and improving food access

for their community. The business is driven by its mission to support local farmers and owes much of its success to authentic relationships with both producers and customers. This case study aims to provide useful insights for other communities and businesses seeking to expand local food access in retail markets.



ABOUT THE PROJECT

METHODOLOGY

This research project was broken into four phases:

PROJECT OVERVIEW

This case study is part of a larger research project that highlights innovative models for increasing access to local foods in independent and locally owned grocery stores. Through in-depth explorations of businesses and organizations that are leading the way, we sought to answer the following research question: What lessons can be learned from innovative local sourcing models that could help locally owned, independent, and rural groceries become better integrated into local and regional supply chains? To read other local sourcing case studies in this project, visit www.ruralgrocery.org.

PROJECT TEAM

This research project was carried out through a Cooperative Agreement between the Rural Grocery Initiative at Kansas State University and USDA's Agricultural Marketing Service. Funding was provided through USDA Cooperative Agreement No. 23-TMLRF-KS-0021. The Rural Grocery Initiative aims to sustain locally owned rural grocery stores to enhance community vitality and improve access to healthy foods. It does so by identifying, developing, and sharing resources that support grocers and rural communities. The Agricultural Marketing Service administers programs that create domestic and international marketing opportunities for U.S. producers of food, fiber, and specialty crops. It also provides the agriculture industry with valuable services to ensure the quality and availability of wholesome food for consumers across the country and around the world.

PHASE ONE -

In Phase 1, the project team developed a Project Advisory Committee to confirm project goals. The Project Advisory Committee was made up of key stakeholders who convened virtually four times over the course of the project to provide feedback and direction.

PHASE TWO -

In Phase 2, the project team solicited examples of innovative local sourcing models from across the country. As examples were received, the project team conducted preliminary research using secondary sources and saved this data in a catalog. This preliminary research allowed the research team to categorize models and determine which five examples to interview.

PHASE THREE -

In Phase 3, the project team conducted interviews with two to four stakeholders (e.g. grocers, producers, distributors, community organizations, etc.) from each of the five distinct local sourcing models selected.

PHASE FOUR -

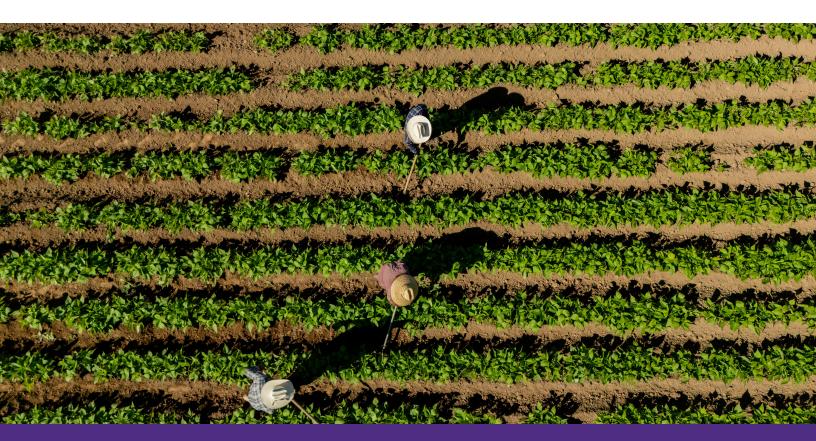
In Phase 4, the team drafted in-depth case studies about each model and worked with a graphic designer to develop visuals. These resources were then promoted to partners and stakeholders.

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APPENDIX 1: PRODUCER AGREEMENT

Bus	ines	s Name:					
Owi	ner's	Name: _					
Ema	ail: _						
Pho	ne N	lumber: (Cell)		_ (Work)		
Mai	nage	r's Name	:				
Mai	nage	r's Email			Phone Number: (Cell)		
Farı	n W	ebsite:					
Add	lress	S:					
Pick	(Up	Instructi	ons:				
• >	0						
A)	<u>Upe</u>	erating					
	1.	Is your t	arm operation your pr	rimary source of	income?Yes	No	
	2.	please i a. b. c.	ndicate how your farn Certified Organic. Na I have attached a Certified Naturally G "Organically Grown" your farm; all inputs Research Board) Using synthetically d ———————————————————————————————————	n products are grame of certifying a copy of my mos rown. Date of las but not certified are naturally der derived fertilizers	agency:	pesticides, herbicides, of meet the standards of displaying the standard displaying the standards of displaying th	or fertilizers are used on the Organic Materials ed:
			Is there anything else		us to know about your producti		
	3.	If yes, L F agencie	cense/certification na roducer agrees to pro roducer agrees to ma s in order to sell produ	ame and number ovide copies of lic aintain all certific ucts to Farm Rur	ell your product? Yes/No (Circle conses or certificates at Farm Fations and licenses required by the same series.	unners' request. state or federal regulat	

	4.	To sell farm products to Farm Runners <i>by weight</i> you must have a State Certified Scale. Do you have a State Certified Scale? Yes / No (Circle One)
	5.	Do you have liability insurance? Yes / No (Circle One) Who is your insurance provider?
		What is your coverage?Producer agrees to provide proof of insurance at Farm Runners' request.
	6.	Farm Runners requires producers to maintain a food safety plan that addresses high priority food safety risks.
		☐ I have filled out and attached the One-Page High Priority Food Safety Checklist
		If you do not yet have an On-Farm Food Safety Plan, would you like any help or resources to complete one? Yes / No (Circle One)
B)	Pro	duct Standards (Please Initial)
	1.	Producer agrees that to use Farm Runners services, they may only sell products they themselves have grown or processed. For example, you cannot buy tomatoes from another producer and re-sell them to Farm Runners. You can, however, sell salsa you have made (in a commercial kitchen) that contains tomatoes you have purchased from someone else.
	2.	All farm products will be properly harvested, handled, and stored. All products must be free of visible dirt, spoilage, an insect contamination. All products must be at proper storage temperature prior to Farm Runners pickup. All staff shall be trained to follow these guidelines.
	3.	All products must be properly packaged in clean, food-grade packaging material . Bagged products must be in a new, transparent, food-grade bag and sealed with a twist tie, zip-tie, or tape. Boxed products must either be in a new box or include a new box liner. No product should be able to spill from its package or touch other surfaces when moved. Produce will be rejected if it is stored in <i>garbage bags</i> , <i>re-used liquor boxes</i> , <i>boxes that once held meat</i> .
	4.	At the time of pickup or drop-off, all products must be packed and ready to go in <i>clean</i> , <i>stackable</i> boxes or Farm Runners-issued reusable crates. Farm Runners drivers are not responsible for transferring product into transportable containers or returning containers to producers. <i>Produce will be rejected if it is not stackable</i> .
	5.	No individual package will weigh more than 50 pounds.
	6.	Products will be of market/"Number 1" quality, unless otherwise discussed. Farm Runners reserves the right to refuse products should quality expectations not be met.
	7.	All product packages must be clearly labeled with the following: Farm Name Product Name Quantity Harvest/Pack Date Lot Number Organic certification info (if applicable)
		Further labeling instructions may be requested.
	8.	Farm Runners reserves the right to refuse any products that do not meet the expectations detailed in this section. Should quality expectations not be met, Farm Runners also reserves the right to sell the product at a discount and to apply a proportional credit to the producer's invoice. All credits and discrepancies will be communicated via email the week of sale.
C)	Pro	oduct Pickup and Delivery (Please Initial)
	1.	Producer agrees to have products ready for pick-up on Tuesdays by 8 A.M. If products are not ready for pick up, the producer agrees to deliver products to the Farm Runners headquarters by 2 P.M. If either party wishes to change pick-up days or delivery times, communication should occur prior to 8A.M. on scheduled pick-up day.
	2.	Farm Runners offers the complimentary service of on-farm pickup. This service is not guaranteed for all producers. Farm Runners reserves the right to request product drop-off based on product volume and farm location.
D)	Pay	yments and Invoicing (Please Initial)
	1.	Producer agrees to have an invoice ready for Farm Runners' driver at the time of product pick-up or delivery. The invoice must be made out to Farm Runners and include:

		a. Invoice Numberb. Business Name (and who checks should be made out to if not to business name)
		c. Itemized Product List with unit priced. Totaled dollar amount due.
		If invoice does not include all elements listed above, a new invoice will be requested and payment will not be remitted until it is received.
		Late invoices will be paid on a quarterly basis. If an invoice is received after the culmination of the annual quarter in which product was received, Farm Runners reserves the right to dismiss payment.
	2.	Payment: Farm Runners agrees to pay net-15 from the day invoices are received.
	3.	Producer agrees not to directly serve any customer account that has already been opened and served by Farm Runners on behalf of the producer.
E)	Pro	oduct Availability List and Order Cycle (Please Initial)
	1.	Product availability will be communicated via email or phone by Thursday, 2pm. Farm Runners will send a courtesy reminder on Wednesday morning.
	2.	Products will only be listed as available if the following information is communicated to Farm Runners by 2pm on
		Thursday: a. Product Name (including relevant variety name)
		 b. Unit of Sale (by the pound, case, bunch, each, etc.) c. Price per Unit (this is the price Farm Runners pays to the producer)
	3.	Changes in availability, quality, or pricing of products must be communicated via email as soon as possible. Once product availability has been published for the week (Thursday afternoons), there can be no change to pricing.
	4.	Pricing: Farm Runners sets final customer pricing based on producer's price, <i>plus</i> a margin to cover the cost of distribution services (including administration, bookkeeping, cold and dry storage, food safety adherence, credit card/banking fees, delivery, communications, marketing and more).
	5.	Orders will be sent out via email (to the primary email listed at the top of this form) by 9pm on Sundays.
		ms and requests outlined in this document are subject to change. In the event there are changes to policies or expectations, unners will give producers 14 days notice prior to change.
Pro	duce	er name, Farm/Business name, date
Sig	natu	re

APPENDIX 2: INVOICE FOR FARM RUNNERS ORDER PLACED BY THE STATION

Note: To streamline operations, invoices that Farm Runners generates for The Station automatically apply a markup to reflect retail prices. In other words, the unit prices below are the retail prices that customers pay at the grocery store.

Invoice

Farm Runners	Invoice #: 67623
PO Box 891	Wednesday, April 02, 2025
Hotchkiss, CO 81419	Net 15

Station	
235 Hwy 133	
Hotchkiss, CO 81419	

Qty	ltem	Unit	Unit Price	Total		
Abur	Abundant Life Organic Farm					
1	Spinach ORG	Retail case -12/5.25 oz.	\$94.24	\$94.24		
6	Yak, Ground	By the pound (6 @ \$14.20)	\$14.20	\$85.20		
Berry	/ Fungi Farms	•				
6	Mushrooms, Lion's Mane	1/2 lb. bag	\$11.69	\$70.14		
6	Mushrooms, Nameko	1/2 lb. bag	\$11.69	\$70.14		
6	Mushrooms, Oyster Pearl	1/2 lb. bag	\$9.03	\$54.18		
Big B	's Juices					
1	Juice, Cherry Apple ORG	Case- 12/ 16 oz.	\$30.10	\$30.10		
1	Juice, Spiced Apple Cider ORG	Case- 12/ 16 oz.	\$30.10	\$30.10		
Chan	Chamberlain Farms					
4	Chard, Baby	5.25 oz. retail bag	\$6.84	\$27.36		
2	Cilantro	4 oz. bag	\$6.08	\$12.16		
10	Kale, Baby	5.25 oz. retail bag	\$6.08	\$60.80		
3	Mint	2 oz. bag	\$3.04	\$9.12		
3	Oregano	2 oz. bag	\$12.16	\$36.48		
8	Salad Mix	5.25 oz. retail bag	\$6.84	\$54.72		
4	Scallions	By the bunch	\$3.42	\$13.68		

Day	spring Eggs			
5	Eggs, Duck	Dozen	\$12.16	\$60.80
12	Eggs, Free Range Large CARTONS	Half-dozen	\$4.18	\$50.16
2	Eggs, Free Range Large CARTONS Case -15/ 1 doz.		\$114.00	\$228.00
3	Eggs, Free Range Large FLATS	Case-15 doz.	\$91.20	\$273.60
Dele	ectamenti Eats			
4	Micro Broccoli	2 oz. Container	\$9.12	\$36.48
4	Shoots, Pea	2 oz. Container	\$7.60	\$30.40
Dra	m Apothecary			
1	Sparkling Water, Cardamom & Black Tea	Case 6/4- 12 oz. cans	\$36.10	\$36.10
1	Sparkling Water, Citrus & Blossoms	Case 6/4- 12 oz. cans	\$36.10	\$36.10

Qty	Item	Unit	Unit Price	Total		
1	Sparkling Water, Holy Basil & Lemon Adaptogenic	Case 6/4- 12 oz. cans	\$36.10	\$36.10		
Ela Fa	Ela Family Farms					
2	Applesauce, Apples Aplenty ORG	24 oz. jar	\$6.06	\$12.12		
0	Applesauce, Apples Aplenty ORG	Case - 12/24 oz.				
1	Applesauce, Just Jonathan ORG	Case - 12/24 oz.	\$69.92	\$69.92		
Farm	Runners Kitchen					
5	Peppers, Green Bell Slices IQF*	16 oz. bag	\$7.52	\$37.60		
6	Sweet Corn, Olathe Kernels*	16 oz. bag	\$6.52	\$39.12		
Figur	e 8 Farming					
25	Salad Mix, Gourmet Mesclun	4.5 oz Retail Bag	\$5.12	\$128.00		
Grey Owl Gardens						
6	Turnips, Gold ORG	By the pound	\$6.08	\$36.48		
6	Turnips, Purple Top ORG	By the pound	\$6.08	\$36.48		
Happy Hogs						
8	Pork Bratwurst	4 lg. links ~ 1 lb. (8 @ \$10.47)	\$10.47	\$83.76		
8	Pork Bratwurst, Jalapeno Cheddar	4 lg. links ~ 1 lb.	\$10.47	\$83.76		
8	Pork Breakfast Sausage	By the pound (8 @ \$7.75)	\$7.75	\$62.00		
10	Pork Chops	By the pound - bone in (15.28 @ \$10.47)	\$16.00	\$160.00		
8	Pork Chorizo	By the pound - Ground (8 @ \$7.75)	\$7.75	\$62.00		
6	Pork Hot Italian Sausage	4 lg. links ~1 lb. (6 @ \$10.47)	\$10.47	\$62.82		
0	Pork Kolbassi	4 lg. links ~1 lb. (0 @ \$9.63)				
3	Pork Shoulder Roast	Each - Small (~3 lb.) (9.410001 @ \$9.70)	\$30.43	\$91.29		

Hon	nestead Meats	· ·	<u> </u>	
Hon	nestead Meats			
12	Beef Ground	80/20 by the pound		\$111.24
10	Beef Hanging Tender Steak	By the pound (11.6 @ \$9.27)	\$10.75	\$107.50
6	Beef Sirloin Steak	By the pound (7.099998 @ \$15.34)	\$18.15	\$108.90
10	Delta Dog	Links- 4/ 1 lb. (10 @ \$12.14) \$12.14		\$121.40
Kini	kin Ranch			
1	Beef Chuck Roast	10 lb. case (10.48 @ \$12.07)	\$126.49	\$126.49
1	Beef Flank Steak	10 lb. case (10.74 @ \$14.91)	\$160.13	\$160.13
1	Elk Bratwurst	Case - 10/4 ct. (10.06 @ \$12.07)	\$121.42	\$121.42
1	Elk Bratwurst, Jalapeno Cheddar	Case - 10/4 ct. links (10.54 @ \$12.07)	\$127.22	\$127.22
La N	Ailpa Tortilla Factory			
1	Tortilla Chips, Coconut Oil	Case- 12/ 16 oz.	\$70.89	\$70.89
1	Tortillas, Spinach Flour	Half case- 5 pk./ 1 doz.	\$38.00	\$38.00
Lam	born Lavender			
4	Lavender Goat Milk Lotion	8 oz. tub	\$19.15	\$76.60
6	Lavender Hydrosol	4 oz.	\$10.64	\$63.84
4	Lavender Hydrosol	8 oz.	\$15.96	\$63.84

Qty	Item	Unit	Unit Price	Total
8	Lavender Sachet	Each	\$3.19	\$25.52
Livin	g Farm			
6	Lamb, Loin Chops	By the pound (6 @ \$19.88)	\$19.88	\$119.28
Ozuk	e Farm Hand			
1	Kraut, Farmhand Simply Kraut ORG	Case - 6/15 oz.	\$45.14	\$45.14
1	Kraut, Ozuke Citrus & Ginger ORG	Case - 6/15 oz.	\$45.14	\$45.14
1	Kraut, Ozuke Ruby Calendula ORG	Case - 6/15 oz.	\$45.14	\$45.14
Princ	ess Beef			
3	Beef Chuck Roast, Grass Fed	Each (approx. 4 lb.) (8.739999 @ \$13.14)	\$38.28	\$114.84
Rock	ing W Dairy			
4	Half & Half	Half gallon	\$5.93	\$23.72
8	Milk, Creamy Top	1 Gallon	\$5.55	\$44.40
6	Milk, Whole	1 Gallon	\$5.55	\$33.30
1	Portobello Leek Jack RETAIL	Case- 8/ 8 oz.	\$40.05	\$40.05
1	Sunset Cheddar RETAIL	Case- 8/ 8 oz.	\$49.02	\$49.02
Stuai	rt Kramer			
2	Arugula	3 lb. bag	\$45.60	\$91.20
Торр	Fruits			
1	Apples, Fuji ORG	Case - 20 lb.	\$65.36	\$65.36

Tor	tilla La Roca			
6	Chips, Yellow Corn	Bag	\$4.54	\$27.24
1	Tortillas, Corn 4"	Half-Case - 6pk./40ct.	\$43.32	\$43.32
2	Tortillas, Corn 6"	Case - 12pk./ 2 doz.	\$64.75	\$129.50
2	Tortillas, Flour 9"	Case - 12pk./1 doz.	\$64.75	\$129.50
Vall	ey Roots Food Hub			
6	Bison, Ground	By the pound	\$18.53	\$111.18
1	Chickpeas, Black Butte RETAIL ORG	Case 8/ 14 oz.	\$57.56	\$57.56
1	Dr. D's Sparkling Probiotic Drink	Concord Grape 6/12 oz. count	\$17.63	\$17.63
1	Dr. D's Sparkling Probiotic Drink	Hibiscus Cooler 6/12 oz. count	\$17.63	\$17.63
1	Farro, Semi Pearled ORG RETAIL	Case 8/ 16 oz.	\$54.22	\$54.22
1	Head Lettuce, Romaine	Case - 18-20 heads	\$66.88	\$66.88
1	Lentils, Harvest Gold RETAIL ORG	Case 8/ 16 oz.	\$51.50	\$51.50
1	Pickled Garlic	Case of 12/ 16 oz. jars	\$166.18	\$166.18
We	stern Culture Farmstead & Creamery			
6	Chevre	6 oz lemon chive	\$12.16	\$72.96
6	Goat Cheese, Farmhouse Lemon Thyme	Wedge (avg 6 oz.) (2.170002 @ \$31.91)	\$11.54	\$69.24
6	Goat Cheese, Farmhouse Thai Dragon	Wedge (avg. 6oz.) (1.939998 @ \$31.92)	\$10.32	\$61.92
6	Goat Cheese, Feta	6.5 oz in brine	\$11.40	\$68.40

Qty	Item	Unit	Unit Price	Total
West	on Wagyu	•		
5	Beets, Golden TOPPED	by the pound	\$6.08	\$30.40
1	Carrots W/GREENS	Case - 8 bunches	\$60.80	\$60.80
2	Parsley	Bunch	\$9.12	\$18.24
5	Radishes, Red W/GR	Bunch	\$6.08	\$30.40
Whit	e Mountain Farms	·		
1	Fingerling Potatoes, Mixed ORG	50 lb. case	\$99.30	\$99.30
2	Potatoes, Red ORG	50 lb. case	\$70.15	\$140.30
1	Potatoes, Russet ORG	50 lb. case	\$74.83	\$74.83
2	Potatoes, Yellow A Size ORG	50 lb. case	\$70.15	\$140.30
Zeph	yros Farm and Garden	·		
2	Radishes, Watermelon ORG	5 lb. bag	\$41.04	\$82.08
Zia T	ortilla Co.	·		
1	Tortilla Chips, Nixtamal Lime	SALE Case - 20/4oz.	\$39.99	\$39.99
1	Tortilla Chips, Nixtamal Sriracha Garlic	SALE Case - 20/4oz.	\$39.99	\$39.99
Orde	Order Item Total: 368 Sub Total:			\$6,342.58
			,	\$6,342.58

Interest at the rate of 1.5% per month will be charged to all past due accounts.

Thank you for supporting your local farms first!

Loaded by:		
Received by:		

