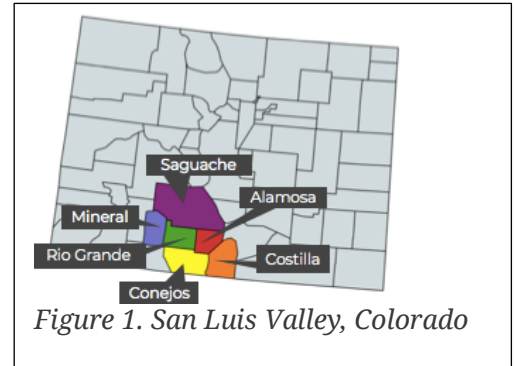


## San Luis Valley, Colorado

The San Luis Valley (SLV) encompasses six Colorado counties – Alamosa, Conejos, Costilla, Mineral, Rio Grande, and Saguache – along the southern border of Colorado with New Mexico. It is bounded by Sangre de Cristo Mountains in the east, the San Juan Mountains in the west, the San Luis Hills of southern Colorado in the south, and the Continental Divide in the northwest. The Valley itself is a broad, arid, largely flat alpine basin, 75 miles wide, over 120 miles long, and totaling approximately 7,500 square miles. It has an average elevation of over 7,600 feet above sea level and receives, on average, between seven and nine inches of rain annually, making it one of the driest regions of the State of Colorado.



**Table 1. Value-Added Agriculture Business Establishments**

Category	Total Est.	Establishments by Number of Employees						
		1-4	5-9	10-19	20-49	50-99	100-249	250-499
Farm Product Raw Material Merchant Wholesalers	3	3	0	0	0	0	0	0
Farm Supplies Merchant Wholesalers	14	5	2	2	3	1	1	0
Food manufacturing	18	9	2	2	3	1	1	0
Grocery Product Merchant Wholesalers	36	18	4	4	6	2	2	0
Grocery Stores	77	37	10	8	14	4	4	0
Nursery, Garden Center, and Farm Supply Stores	113	55	14	12	20	6	6	0
Refrigerated Warehousing and Storage	1	1	0	0	0	0	0	0
Specialty Stores	114	56	14	12	20	6	6	0
Support Activities for Animal Production	2	2	0	0	0	0	0	0
Support Activities for Crop Production	117	59	14	12	20	6	6	0
Warehouse Clubs and Supercenters	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	1

Source: 2016 Census Bureau County Business Patterns  
\*Aggregated across all six counties

The Valley contains approximately 496 establishments positioned to provide value-added support to local farms and ranches (Table 1). Additionally, as of 2015, two-thirds of school districts in the Valley either have or intend to develop farm-to-school programs (Table 2) and the region has received over \$1 million in local food system investments from the U.S. Department of Agriculture (Table 3).

**Table 2. Farm-to-School Programs**

	Count	Percent
<b>School Districts (Total)</b>	6	-
With schools engaged in F2S activities	2	33.3
Not engaged in F2S, starting in 2014-15	1	16.7
Not engaged in F2S, but plan to in future	1	16.7
No plans for F2S	2	33.3
<b>Total Schools</b>	18	-
Schools Participating in F2S**	3	16.7

Data from 2015 USDA Farm to School (F2S) Census

\*Includes data for all six counties in the Valley

\*\*Conservative estimate – several districts reported F2S without indicating number of schools

**Table 3. USDA Local Food System Investments**

Recipient	Year	Type	Amount
Rio Culebra Growers Educational Corporation	2012	Grant	25,000
Rio Culebra Cooperative	2010	Grant	38,000
Rio Culebra Agricultural Cooperative	2010	Grant	149,000
Colorado Potato Administrative Committee	2016	Grant	85,799
MJ Investments, LLC	2010	Loan	796,000
<b>Total</b>			<b>\$1,093,799</b>

Source: 2019 USDA Local Food Systems Compass<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> See [www.ams.usda.gov/local-food-sector/compass-map](http://www.ams.usda.gov/local-food-sector/compass-map) for more information.

**Table 4. Population, Employment, Poverty, and Education**

	Alamosa	Conejos	Costilla	Mineral	Rio Grande	Saguache	Colorado	U.S.	
<b>Population (#)</b>	16,353	8,213	3,590	793	11,623	6,255	5,359,295	318,558,162	
<b>Unemployment (%)</b>	8.7	10.3	11.6	2.1	9.4	7.7	6.0	7.4	
Poverty *	<b>Total Pop.</b>	<b>31.4</b>	<b>22.1</b>	<b>30.4</b>	<b>8.2</b>	<b>19.2</b>	<b>22.6</b>	<b>12.2</b>	<b>15.1</b>
	Under 18 years	39.9	29.2	53.3	15.9	27.8	35.5	15.7	21.2
	Hispanic/Latino	38.4	27.6	31.5	16.5	22.2	26.1	21.0	23.4
	White	23.8	16.1	30.3	6.1	16.9	16.6	8.8	10.6
Edu.	High school+ (%)	83.8	84	77	96.6	83.4	80.8	91	87
	Bachelor's + (%)	25.8	18.3	20	42.5	22.6	25.5	38.7	30.3

Source: 2012-2016 American Community Survey 5-year estimates

\*Poverty Rate indicates the percent of people in each group reporting below poverty income in the previous 12 months.

The six counties of the San Luis Valley are home to approximately 47,000 inhabitants as of the 2016 American Community Survey (Table 4), with most residents (77 percent) concentrated in the counties of Alamosa, Rio Grande, and Conejos. The average population density is approximately five to six people per square mile. With the exception of Mineral county, most of the counties of the San Luis Valley report higher rates of poverty than either the State of Colorado or the U.S. at large, with between 19.2 and 31.4 of residents reporting below poverty level income in the 12 months prior to the survey.

Agriculturally, the Valley is most notable for its potato production (Contained under “vegetables” in Table 5). Additionally, the counties in the Valley produce cattle and hay/other field crops. Commodity sales in the six counties of the Valley ranged between \$326 million and \$380 million, according to the 2007, 2012, and 2017 USDA Census of Agriculture (Total for 2017 is conservative as data from Mineral County was withheld). This is approximately five percent of Colorado’s total agriculture sales.

**Table 5. Primary Commodities as Percent of Total Sales**

Commodity	Year	Alamosa	Conejos	Costilla	Mineral	Rio Grande	Saguache	Colorado	U.S.
Barley (%)	2007	3.7	8.1	6.1	(D)	8.2	6.1	0.4	0.2
	2012	(D)	7.2	9.1	(D)	12.6	10.7	0.5	0.3
	2017	6.8	5.4	12.9	(D)	12.7	8.7	0.5	0.2
Cattle and Calves (%)	2007	4.3	30.1	13.3	(D)	6.0	13.6	52.1	20.6
	2012	11.0	30.5	14.2	(D)	7.7	15.5	55.5	19.4
	2017	(D)	28.7	11.9	(D)	6.9	13.2	53.3	19.9
Field Crops, Incl. Hay (%)	2007	(D)	43.6	(D)	(D)	(D)	12.1	5.3	3.3
	2012	(D)	49.3	32.1	16.9	22.2	17.2	5.0	4.1
	2017	13.3	50.2	34.2	(D)	20.3	19.2	5.3	3.6
Grain (%)	2007	5.4	11.0	8.5	(D)	12.2	11.0	17.3	26.0
	2012	(D)	(D)	(D)	(D)	15.3	13.4	18.9	33.2
	2017	(D)	(D)	(D)	(D)	(D)	(D)	16.3	27.5
Vegetables (%)	2007	54.8	5.0	40.7	(D)	65.1	62.8	4.8	4.9
	2012	55.4	(D)	41.8	(D)	50.4	53.5	3.6	4.3
	2017	55.4	(D)	34.4	(D)	53.9	55.5	3.6	5.0
Wheat (%)	2007	1.4	1.9	(D)	(D)	3.3	4.6	7.2	3.6
	2012	(D)	(D)	(D)	(D)	2.1	1.8	6.1	4.0
	2017	0.8	0.3	5.7	(D)	0.8	1.2	4.1	2.0
Crop Totals (%)	2007	94.1	59.6	85.7	(D)	91.4	85.9	32.7	48.3
	2012	87.5	61.8	84.7	16.9	88.9	84.2	31.3	53.8
	2017	90.9	63.2	87.7	(D)	88.7	85.8	29.9	49.8
Animal Totals (%)	2007	5.9	40.4	14.3	(D)	8.6	14.1	67.3	51.7
	2012	12.5	38.2	15.3	83.1	11.1	15.8	68.7	46.2
	2017	9.1	36.8	12.3	(D)	11.3	14.2	70.1	50.2
<b>Commodity Totals (\$1,000)</b>	2007	91,413	31,569	26,660	126	85,360	91,456	6,061,134	297,220,491
	2012	92,528	42,743	28,965	89	106,491	109,988	7,780,874	394,644,481
	2017	89,334	53,941	22,059	(D)	98,956	105,403	7,491,702	388,522,695

Source: 2007, 2012, and 2017 USDA Census of Agriculture.

(D) data withheld by USDA to maintain confidentiality.

\*All dollar amounts are in non-inflation-adjusted values.

\*\*Includes only products produced in quantities equal to or greater than 2 percent of total sales in at least one county in one year.

**Table 6. Principal Farm Operator Characteristics**

	Alamosa	Conejos	Costilla	Mineral	Rio Grande	Saguache	Colorado	U.S.	
2007	<b>Total Principal Operators (Count)</b>	<b>316</b>	<b>535</b>	<b>241</b>	<b>15</b>	<b>390</b>	<b>242</b>	<b>37,054</b>	<b>2,204,792</b>
	Primary Occupation Farming (%)	51.9	44.1	34.9	0.0	60.8	62.4	40.4	45.1
	Female Principal Operators (%)	9.5	8.2	12.9	13.3	9.2	10.3	18.7	13.9
	Avg. age of principal operator (years)	56.8	56.8	58	60.8	56.6	56.8	57	57.1
2012	<b>Total Principal Operators (Count)</b>	<b>322</b>	<b>605</b>	<b>251</b>	<b>14</b>	<b>377</b>	<b>277</b>	<b>36,180</b>	<b>2,109,303</b>
	Primary Occupation Farming (%)	51.2	47.4	65.3	57.1	54.1	59.6	49.6	47.8
	Female Principal Operators (%)	10.9	6.9	12.0	21.4	10.9	17.7	19.0	13.7
	Avg. age of principal operator (years)	55	58.7	59.6	56.2	57.5	58.6	58.9	58.3
2017*	<b>Total Primary Producers (Count)</b>	<b>NA</b>	<b>NA</b>	<b>NA</b>	<b>NA</b>	<b>NA</b>	<b>NA</b>	<b>38,893</b>	<b>2,042,220</b>
	Primary Occupation Farming (%)	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	44.0	47.2
	Female Primary Producers (%)	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	33.2	23.9
	Avg. age of primary producer (years)	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	59.5	59.4

Source: 2007, 2012, and 2017 USDA Census of Agriculture

\*For the 2017 Census, “principal operator” was replaced with the analogous term “Primary Producer.” However, data on primary producer characteristics is not yet available at the county level.

As of the 2017 Census of Agriculture, the six counties of the Valley contain over 1,660 farms. This number is down 4.5 percent from 2007, as a spike to nearly 1,850 farms in 2012 (**Table 7**). This contrasts with an overall growth in farm operations for the State of Colorado, but is less than the nation-wide decrease in farms over the same period. The majority of these farms sell less than \$100,000 in products per year. The counties with the highest percentage of farms selling over \$500,000 per year are Alamosa, Rio Grande, and Saguache, which are also the largest potato producing counties.

**Table 7. Farm Operation Characteristics**

	Alamosa	Conejos	Costilla	Mineral	Rio Grande	Saguache	Colorado	U.S.		
<b>Number of farms</b>	2007	316	535	241	15	390	242	37,054	2,204,792	
	2012	322	605	251	14	377	277	36,180	2,109,303	
	2017	280	524	229	19	321	288	38,893	2,042,220	
	% Change 2007-17	-11.4	-2.1	-5.0	26.7	-17.7	19.0	5.0	-7.4	
<b>Average net cash farm income (\$)</b>	2007	90,559	12,760	18,916	(D)	78,479	105,697	26,149	33,827	
	2012	69,445	18,200	23,436	(D)	88,198	100,549	37,271	43,750	
	2017	75,811	33,259	15,775	-7,990	105,529	113,532	29,669	43,053	
	% Change 2007-17	-16.3	160.7	-16.6	NA	34.5	7.4	13.5	27.3	
<b>Average Operating expenses (\$)</b>	2007	211,760	50,140	98,284	56,415	148,159	287,213	146,577	109,359	
	2012	233,301	58,874	104,092	55,983	210,686	322,064	191,004	155,947	
	2017	258,666	81,333	94,215	27,693	225,156	269,884	176,154	159,821	
	% Change 2007-17	22.2	62.2	-4.1	-50.9	52.0	-6.0	20.2	46.1	
<b>Farms by value of sales (%)</b>	\$99,999 or less	2007	74.1	85.8	86.7	100.0	73.1	63.6	86.2	83.8
		2012	77.0	84.0	88.8	100.0	62.3	67.1	84.4	81.6
		2017	70.4	75.6	89.5	100.0	63.2	65.6	86.3	82.1
	\$100,000 to \$499,999	2007	16.8	12.5	9.1	0.0	16.9	20.7	9.7	10.9
		2012	11.5	13.4	8.0	0.0	23.6	16.2	10.5	11.0
		2017	18.2	20.2	7.0	0.0	19.0	18.8	9.3	10.7
	\$500,000 or more	2007	9.2	1.7	4.1	0.0	10.0	15.7	4.1	5.3
		2012	11.5	2.6	3.2	0.0	14.1	16.6	5.0	7.4
		2017	11.4	4.2	3.5	0.0	17.8	15.6	4.4	7.2

Source: 2007, 2012, and 2017 USDA Census of Agriculture. (D) Indicates data withheld by USDA to maintain confidentiality. \*All dollar amounts are in non-inflation-adjusted values.