Tools for Taming Exurban Sprawl
at the County Level

8:30—9:40 a.m.
Friday, April 22, 2005
Sturm College of Law

Moderator: Rich McClintock
Program Director
Livable Communities Support Center, Civic Results
Denver, Colorado

Panelists: Peter Italiano
Director, Department of Community Development
Douglas County
Castle Rock, Colorado

Will Shafroth
Director
Colorado Conservation Trust
Boulder, Colorado

Brian Muller
Professor
University of Colorado College of Architecture and Planning
Denver, Colorado

William Coyne
Land Use Advocate
Environment Colorado
Denver, Colorado
TAMING EXURBAN SPRAWL
State of Colorado
Population 4,551,000

Douglas County
Population 251,292
Sprawl

We know what it rhymes with...

But what is it?
Douglas County
DC unincorp = 15.6% of MV area

O.S. Tax 1994
DRCOG O.S. goal = 1616 sq mi
DC total O.S. = 338 sq mi
DC O.S. = 21% of MV OS goal
82% of the unincorporated population lives in the PUA and SUA areas, which are 7% of unincorporated DC.
Exurban Development
Urban, Suburban, Exurban, Semi-urban

It’s all about growth management...

... and Community Vision
Douglas County Community Development
Stakeholder Outreach Efforts

Growth Management
- Produces balanced tax base and revenues for public needs
- Produces attractive properly functioning communities

Economic Development
- Produces job opportunities and a healthy economy
- Produces community support

Community Relations
- Produces a quality living environment
- Produces community support

Revision Date: 3/9/05

Produces a stable political environment
Produces job opportunities and a healthy economy
Produces balanced tax base and revenues for public needs
Produces attractive properly functioning communities
Produces community support
Produces a quality living environment

Revision Date: 3/9/05
Large Lot Development in Colorado: Past and Future
Rocky Mountain Land Use Institute

Brian Muller, Paul Glasgow and Michael Hincke
University of Colorado, Denver
Urban Growth:
Denver Front Range, CO

YEAR: 1930

Based on data from the USGS
Front Range Infrastructure Project
Alternative Growth Futures Lab
Department of Planning & Design
University of Colorado, Colorado Springs
5/16/11
Larimer, Boulder, Jefferson, and Douglas Counties: Urbanization 1870-2024

Year: 1870
Cluster Zoning Scenario

- More structures per area
- Clustering of structures
- Protection of other lands
Urban Centers Scenario

• Subdivisions
• Water and sewer
• More development in cities

URBAN CENTERS
Front Range

Future Development
Maintaining Colorado’s Agricultural Landscape
What is the Problem?
Farmland Is In Retreat

• Every single minute of every day, America loses two acres of farmland.

• We lost farm and ranch land 51% faster in the 90s than in the 80s.

• We're losing our best land—most fertile and productive—the fastest.

• From 1992-1997 we converted to developed use more than 6 million acres of agricultural land—an area the size of Maryland.

• The rate of loss for 1992-1997, 1.2 million acres per year, was 51 percent higher than from 1982-1992.

• The rate of conversion of prime land was 30 percent faster, proportionally, than the rate for non-prime rural land from 1992-1997. This results in marginal land, which requires more resources like water, being put into production.

• 244,500 acres of ag land have been lost to development in PA from 92-97, or 48,900 per year
Farming on the Edge
High Quality Farmland in the Path of Development

Legend:
- High Quality Farmland & High Development
- High Quality Farmland & Low Development
- Federal & Indian Lands
- Urban Areas
- Other
Land Prices Increasing

• Rural land is cheap for developers
• More development increases land prices
• This makes it difficult for farmer to enter or expand
• Tougher to pass land to the next generation

• Rural land is cheap for suburban developers, who are willing to pay landowners far more than what the flat, well-drained land they prefer for building is worth for agriculture.

• As people from surrounding urban and suburban areas move into rural communities, large land parcels are divided up and prices soar far beyond the economic value for agriculture. This is especially true now, given low commodity prices and uncertainty of tobacco in the Southeast.

This has significant impacts:

• High land costs make it difficult for new farmers to enter agriculture or for existing producers to buy or rent land to expand operations.

• Transferring land from one generation to the next also becomes difficult, as federal and estate taxes are assessed at the time of death and are based on the “highest and best use” of the property.
Non-Farm Residents Bring Conflicts

- Increase in new neighbors and conflicts

- Remaining operations become fragmented by development

- New residents resent sights, sounds and smells of production agriculture

One thing that is important to keep in mind with regards to the effect that urbanization has on agriculture is that it is not just the farmland that is being paved over that should be of concern.

For every acre of farmland developed, 2 to 3 more acres now have a subdivision next door.

- This development increases the likelihood of conflict between farmers and ranchers, and their neighbors.

- Remaining agricultural operations become fragmented by housing developments inhabited by people with little understanding of agriculture as a business or a way of life.

- New residents may appreciate the agricultural landscape, but they frequently resent the noise, dust and drifting farm chemicals associated with production agriculture.

An increasing number of ex-urban refugees are suing farmers for doing what they have always done- when there was nobody around to complain

- Public support and perception of agriculture may begins to slip because some farmers are not utilizing good environmental practices
<table>
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<th>What Does This Mean For the Community?</th>
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<td>• Decreasing number of farms and farmers</td>
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<td>• Increased development of farmland</td>
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<td>• Weakened rural economies</td>
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What Does This Mean For the Community??

These impacts can result in :

• Decreasing number of farms and farmers

• Increased development of farmland

• Weakened rural economies

• An urban public that is divorced from agriculture
Why protect farmland and rural landscapes?

Here are some reasons why communities all across the county have decided to do something about the loss of their important farm, forest and ranch land.
Fiscal and Economic Stability

• Agriculture contributes directly to the local economy: on-farm production and input businesses

• Privately owned agricultural land generates more in taxes than it uses in services

For many communities, the main reasons to protect agricultural land are local and personal, and much of the political support for farmland preservation occurs at the grassroots level.

• Agriculture contributes to local economies directly through sales, farmers markets, support services and businesses, and by lucrative secondary markets like food processing

• As seen in AFT’s Cost of Community Services (COCS) studies, privately owned farmland generates more in taxes than it requires in public services.
Farmland keeps taxes in check, because it generates more in taxes than it requires back in public services.

<table>
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COCS studies determine the net fiscal contribution that different types of land uses provide to local budgets.

In these studies economic analysis links costs of services—schools, fire and police, water and sewer, etc—to different types of land uses (residential, open/land, commercial/industrial).

COCS studies have been conducted in at least 95 communities since the mid-1980’s with consistent results: Farm, forest and ranch land contributes more to the tax base than it requires back in public services.

Median numbers: (November 2002)

- Residential $1:1.16
- Farm/Forest $1:0.36
- Commercial $1:0.27
Natural Resource Protection

• Wildlife habitat: food and cover
• Water quality: erosion control, floodplains, groundwater recharge, wastewater filters
• 938 million acres of privately owned agricultural land: America’s dominant land use

• With 938 Million acres (based on 2002 Ag Census) in production, agriculture is the dominant land use in the US, and while it certainly is true that poorly managed agricultural land can have significant ecological impacts………

• Developed land has far more negative long-term implications than agricultural on our nation’s natural resources.
  - Water pollution from urban run-off
  - Roof and road runoff increases with paved surfaces
  - Septic systems can add untreated wastes to surface water and groundwater.

• When well-managed, privately owned agricultural land can provide significant wildlife habitat and environmental benefits. While great strides have been made by public agencies to protect important habitat (Fed=408 million acres of forest, parks and wildlife refuges/State= 108 million) these agencies can not do it all by themselves:

• There has been a lot of emphasis on public land protection in the past, and a growing realization that the future of land protection is on privately owned land.
Heritage and Community Character

• Scenic amenities

• Rural heritage

• Community and tourist appreciation of farming

Sometimes the most important qualities are hardest to quantify.

• Farm and ranch land can provide much needed scenic open space, historical benefits, and recreational opportunity.

• Farmland can provide an important sense of place

• Farmers markets, direct marketing and other alternative agricultural markets tap into the community’s appreciation of local food and family farms.

• These amenities are also appreciated by tourists- ex: Vermont, Lancaster PA, Napa Valley,
What Can Colorado Do To Maintain Rural Landscapes?

1) **Direct growth and infrastructure development into existing developed areas.**

2) **Provide property tax credits to rural land under development pressure.**

3) **Establish purchase and/or transfer of development rights programs.**
What Can Colorado Do To Maintain Rural Landscapes? (Cont.)

4) Increase incentives for clustering development.

5) Clarify the agricultural property tax classification for property tax purposes.

6) Strengthen right to farm legislation.

7) Establish voluntary agricultural enterprise districts.