



Growers' Association Model for Boulder County Parks and Open Space Agriculture Leases



May 25, 2007

THIS IS A MODEL FOR DEVELOPING ACCESS TO BOULDER COUNTY PARKS AND OPEN SPACE AGRICULTURAL LAND (BOCO-POS AG) FOR SMALL FARM OPERATIONS, DEFINED HERE AS FARMS SMALLER THAN 20 ACRES. THE ASSOCIATION MODEL WILL BRING TOGETHER SEVERAL PRODUCERS ONTO ONE PARCEL OF LAND. PRODUCERS WILL COORDINATE MANAGEMENT OF THE SHARED RESOURCES (WATER, ROADS, SOIL, ETC.)

Justification:

- POS-AG will have parcels for lease that are larger than the size required by some small parcel farmers. Irrigation and other management needs limit the ability to have multiple leases on small parcels.
- Boulder County is home to direct marketing opportunities (farmers' market, restaurants, Community Supported Agriculture, produce stands, etc.). Many of these farms operate on less than 20 acres.
- Farmers have approached POS-AG requesting access to lease smaller parcels
- The 2005 "Everybody Eats" survey of Boulder County agriculture predicts a trend toward this same small-scale, intensive, high-value farming model
- An association model would also create a mechanism for new farmers to start farming in Boulder County, given the prohibitive cost of farm land currently
- The POS-AG Small Farm Committee has developed a list of needs for fruit and vegetable operations directly marketing their products.

Prerequisites for Interested Growers

Each grower in an association must meet **one** of the following criteria:

- Farmer/main operator on a vegetable/fruit/flower/herb farm >1/2 acre for at least 1 full season
- Gardened a large (20 x 20 feet) garden plot for at least 3 full seasons*
- Will sublease from another farmer with at least 3-years farming experience
- Are an intern/apprentice/farm worker with at least 2 years farming experience vegetable/fruit/flower/herb farm >1/2 acre (1/2 acre = 21,780 square feet)
 - * At least one person in the Growers Association must have more than this level of farming experience

Assumptions:

- Farmers will be able to work together as an association to manage shared resources and have the ability to carry out their proposed operation
- Farmers have the skills to execute a successful farming enterprise
- Adrian Card, CSU Extension Agent, Agriculture/Natural Resources, Boulder County, will assist farmers with initial group facilitation and technical advising

Protocols

- Farmers interested in small farm parcels will work with Adrian Card as a first contact. Specifics on leases and infrastructure will be negotiated with Ag Division manager, Ag Supervisor, Ag Specialist, Ag Lease Administrator
- POS-AG will ensure efficient delivery of irrigation water to the property. When sufficient resources are available at a specific property, POS-AG may develop and maintain potable water spigots for washing fruits and vegetables and 110V (220V also if possible) electrical boxes for various applications. **Most properties that POS-Ag manages DO NOT have potable water taps nor electrical lines run to the property**

Association Model Example (This is a Hypothetical Scenario):

The Peck Property is 18.5 acres. Producer A wants to grow 3 acres of mixed veggies for the farmers' market. Producer B wants 10 acres to grow sweet corn and winter squash/pumpkins in rotation. Producer C wants 1 acre to grow strawberries and raspberries. Producer D wants 4 acres to grow mixed vegetables and cut flowers. Growers form a business model such as a Limited Liability Corporation or Limited Liability Partnership. These producers submit a bid on the property as the "Peck Growers Association" at \$100 - 150 per acre. The bid is accepted based on the general requirement of the tenants to provide good land stewardship.

All growers agree to abide by USDA-NOP Organic Standards (not all want to be certified but all agree with the philosophy) so as not to jeopardize the certification of others in the association. The association meets in February to discuss planting plans for the season and to work out an irrigation schedule based on forecasted crop water needs. Growers have walked the property extensively and are aware of the varying soil texture. Those with sandier soils express their needs for more frequent but shorter duration irrigation options.

Individual farm plot boundaries are determined and service roads are established. Row lengths are laid out to allow for sufficient tractor turnaround (about 30 feet). These considerations take up the remaining 0.5-acre.

POS-AG develops the Holland ditch lateral to decrease water losses from the ditch. A holding pond and electrical access at grower expense will need to be created for pumping irrigation water for the drip and sprinkler irrigation systems used by the Peck Growers Association members.

Water for washing is made available from the well in the Peck Barn and electricity is made available from the meter near the Peck Barn (may not be potable)

Two 8' x 40' insulated metal cargo containers are moved to the property at grower expense for use as portable walk-in coolers with the electricity, subject to land use regulations.

For More Information:

Initial interest: <http://www.coopext.colostate.edu/boulder/AG/smallfarms.shtml>

(see Boulder County POS-AG Small Farm Committee section)

And contact Adrian Card at 303-678-6383 or acard@co.boulder.co.us

Specifics on parcels and leases: POS-Agriculture Resources Division, 303-678-6200 (main desk), Luke Stromquist (Div Manager) - 303-678-6234, Rob Alexander (Ag Supervisor) - 303-678-6239, Phill Leffler (Ag Specialist) - 303-678-6111, Glenda Rowe (Administrator of Ag Leases), 303-678-6226