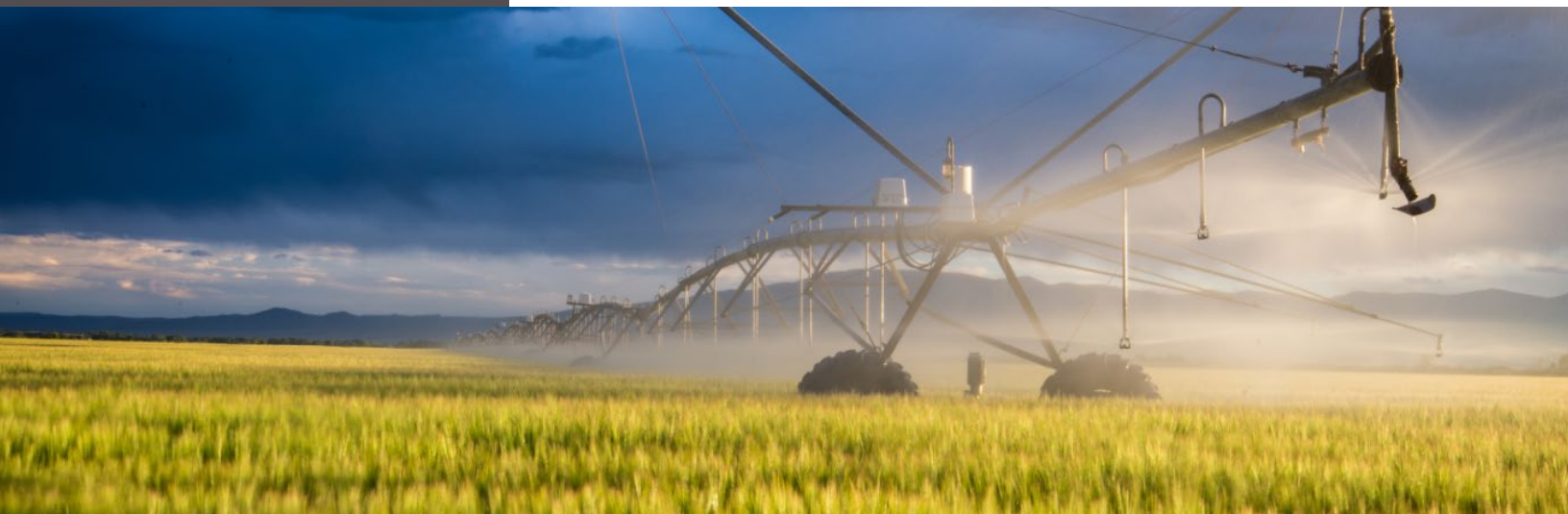


# Colorado Ag Water Alliance

"Committed to the preservation of agriculture through the wise use of Colorado's water resources"



## 2025 Annual Report

# Our Mission

The Colorado Ag Water Alliance (CAWA) is comprised of agricultural leaders from across Colorado committed to the preservation of agriculture through the wise use of Colorado's water resources. Members represent major facets of production agriculture, as well as partner organizations such as the Colorado Water Institute, Colorado State University, Colorado Department of Agriculture, and the Colorado Water Conservation Board.

# What We Do

CAWA works with the agricultural community around the state to host events and meetings for producers to discuss and learn about agricultural water issues. These issues range from water quality, administration, research on conservation and efficiency, funding, to water law. We also work with producers to navigate funding programs to improve irrigation infrastructure and implement conservation and efficiency projects.

# Our Members

Colorado Association of Conservation Districts  
Colorado Cattlemen's Association  
Colorado Corn Promotion Council  
Colorado Dairy Farmers  
Colorado Egg Producers  
Colorado Farm Bureau  
Colorado Fruit & Vegetable Growers Association  
Colorado Horse Council  
Colorado Livestock Association  
Colorado Pork Producers Council  
Colorado Potato Administrative Committee  
Colorado Association of Wheat Growers  
Rocky Ford Growers Association  
Rocky Mountain Farmers Union

[www.coagwater.org](http://www.coagwater.org)





# Outreach

In 2025, CAWA and Colorado Cattlemen's Association hosted a total of **50 meetings** and presentations around the state with farmers, ranchers, researchers, and water resource professionals. We reached **1,015 people** in **23 counties** through these meetings and presentations. We work with special districts, nonprofits organizations, stock growers, and ditch companies to plan and host meetings that meet the needs of agricultural producers in their area.

## What we talk about

**Presentations** to special districts, stock growers, agricultural organizations and other entities are a significant part of our outreach. In many of these presentations we spoke about **funding infrastructure projects**, how to navigate funding programs, and the opportunities to leverage grants from multiple sources to implement a project. CAWA has also been sharing the **results of our first completed water quality project** with Colorado State University and ranchers on the Western Slope. We have also been sharing the **early results of the Drought Resilience Project** with farmers and ranchers.

Sometimes, it can take multiple meetings with a community over an entire year to organize and plan these projects. Some of the meetings in 2025 involved:

- Working with agricultural producers to **improve aging reservoirs**. During these meetings, we discuss the needs of the reservoir owners, opportunities for funding, and what can be done to make these reservoir projects provide benefits to sectors beyond the agricultural community.
- Working with ditch companies and National Resource Conservation Service (NRCS) to **navigate programs like EQIP Water Management Entity**, and assist those ditches with the process.
- **Tours for the public and other producers** to visit various Drought Resilience Projects around the state

# Grant Writing & Support

In 2025, the grant landscape was turbulent. Many federal grant opportunities were eliminated or significantly reduced. State and local sources of grant funding became much more competitive. However, CAWA was still able to help agricultural producers secure grants for various projects around the state.

CAWA works with producers, ditch companies, special districts to help organize projects, write grants, and managing grants for projects related to irrigated agriculture. Members of the agricultural community often lack the capacity to apply for and manage these types of grants.

In 2025, CAWA secured **\$1,320,031 in grants** for the following projects and the project recipients provided **\$1,359,687.27 in matching** funds:

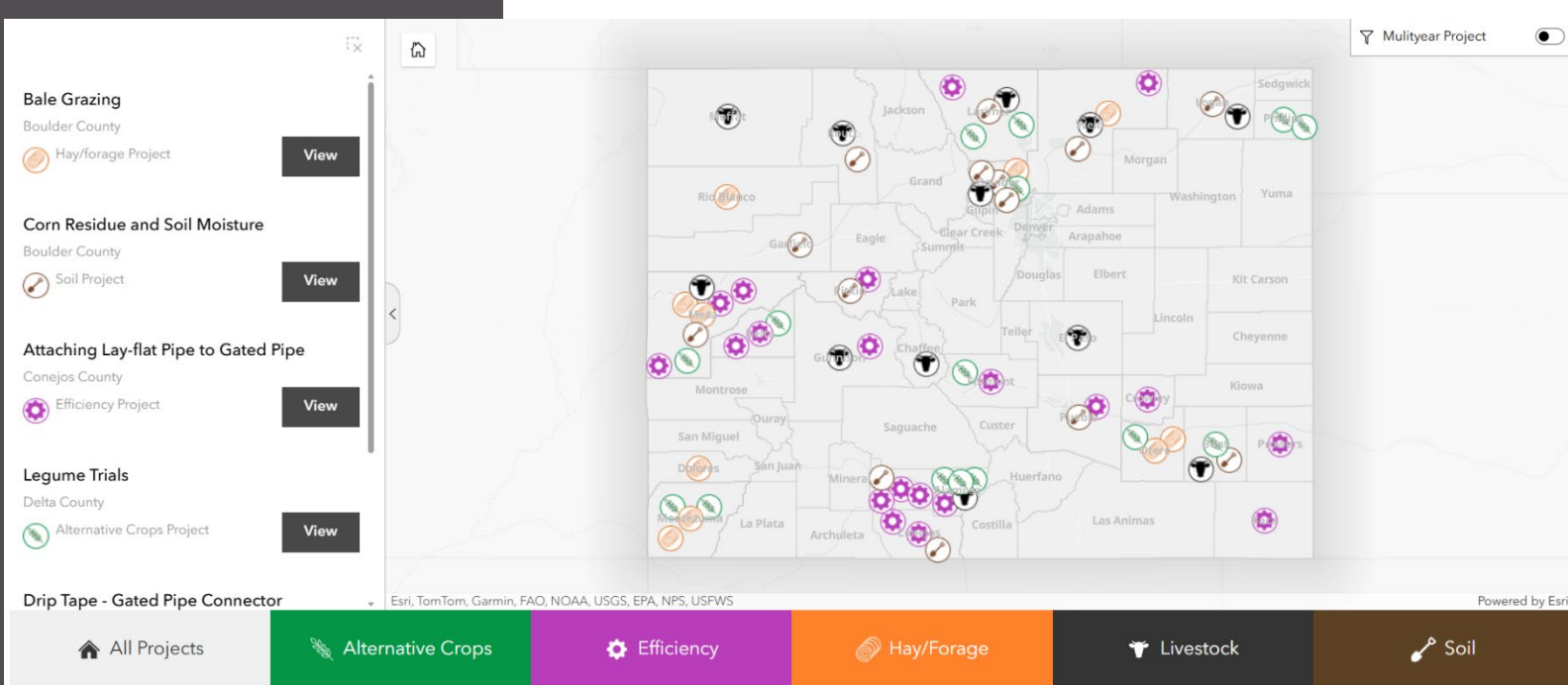
- Lake Meredith outlet rehabilitation
- Doran Creek Reservoir construction
- Meadow Creek Reservoir outlet rehabilitation
- Plumb & Dailey Ditch Company return structure
- Owl Creek Lateral efficiency design
- Parker Basin siphon project
- North Platte Basin education and outreach project
- Bruce Park Reservoir outlet design
- South Side Highline Ditch headgate improvement
- Sunnyside Ditch piping project
- Del Monte Ditch headgate and piping project
- Crowley County Drip Irrigation and Water Quality Project
- The Ag and Food Lab - Water Resource Development for Farm Incubator Program
- Low Water Use Project: Ute Mountain Ute Tribe
- San Luis Valley Revegetation Projects

If you or your ditch company are interested in finding grants or loans for your project, let us know and contact us below!

[coagwater@gmail.com](mailto:coagwater@gmail.com)

**(720) 244-4629**





# Drought Resiliency Projects

31

new and continuing projects in 2025.

\$390,680

awarded to farmers and ranchers to implement their projects

\$89,947

spent on technical assistance to help with projects

2025 was the third year for CAWA’s Drought Project. We are still funding new projects but are learning a lot from past projects and continuing to review the results and lessons learned.

Our next step is to start identifying projects to scale-up, create a blueprint on how to scale-up those projects, and begin working with partners to expand successful projects

You can learn more about all our past projects and reports on our website in the section on the [Drought Resilience Program](#).

This program would have not been possible without significant funding from the Colorado Water Conservation Board and the Walton Family Foundation. Funding for projects also came from the Colorado Department of Agriculture, Northern Colorado Water Conservancy District, New Belgium Gives, and the Colorado Springs Utilities.

# Water Quality

In 2022, we began our first water quality project with three ranchers on the Western Slope. The goal was to better understand the water quality impact from irrigated hay meadows. There is very little data on what impact these agricultural operations do and do not have on water quality. Thanks to the ranches that participated and the Colorado State University Agricultural Water Quality Program (AWQP), we learned that mountain meadow hay systems in Colorado are not major contributors of nutrients to surface waters and, under most conditions, act as sinks rather than sources of sediment and phosphorus.

The team from Colorado State University installed edge-of-field monitoring stations in the Upper Yampa, Lower Colorado, and Upper Gunnison Basins. The stations collected data on nutrients (nitrogen and phosphorus) and sediment over three years (2022-2024).

According to the data, nutrient concentrations in runoff were consistently low across all sites and years. Nitrate was rarely detected. Phosphorus concentrations were generally low but variable. Outflow phosphorus concentrations were often equal to or lower than inflow concentrations, indicating that perennial meadow systems can act as nutrient filters. Sediment was also consistently reduced in outflow waters.

The final report for the project can be found on the CAWA website in the Water Quality Section. This initial project has led to more work on the topic of water quality.

- CAWA and CSU are currently working with four farmers in Mesa County on a similar project with edge-of-field monitoring equipment. We are collecting baseline data and investigating the impact of best management practices on water quality.
- CSU is beginning a project with multiple ranchers in Routt County to better identify fertilizer practices that help a rancher's bottom line and water quality.

None of this work would have been possible without funding through the Nonpoint Source Program at the Colorado Department of Public Health and Environment from the Environmental protection Agency's 319 Grant Program.





In 2022, CAWA began working with Farmers Conservation Alliance (FCA) out of Hood River, Oregon. Our former colleague, the late Terry Fankhouser, would speak about how many of our organizations lacked the people and resources to effectively go after large-scale federal funds for infrastructure improvements. Terry thought that it made a lot more sense trying to find the right partner we could trust, than building that capacity from the ground up ourselves. After four years of working with FCA, I think Terry was right, and **we have a partnership with an organization we can really rely on.**

FCA works closely with a community to **identify infrastructure goals and opportunities, collect data, meet with stakeholders, complete preliminary design, and identify a path forward to funding large-scale infrastructure projects.** This work can take a few years and requires grants to help cover the costs of pre-development. It has been very instructive to watch FCA work and see the impact of planning and pre-development on securing funding.

In 2025, FCA was able to secure funding for the following projects:

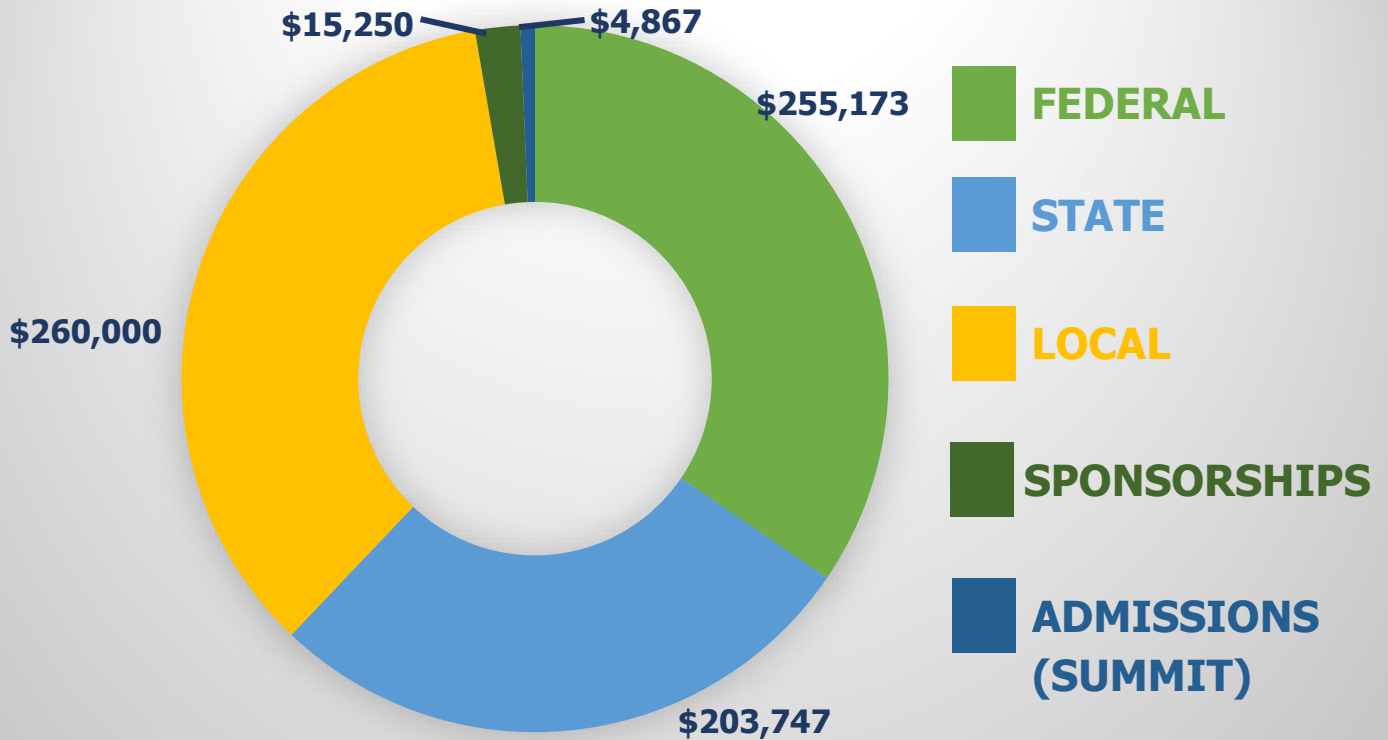
- Orchard Mesa Irrigation District was awarded **\$10.5 million** from the Bureau of Reclamation to implement efficiency improvements in their main ditch system that will result in improved deliveries and additional water in the 15 Mile Reach for fish.
- The Ute Mountain Ute Tribe was awarded **\$9.6 million** from the NRCS Regional Conservation Partnership Program (RCPP). However, those funds were rescinded. FCA and the Tribe plan to reapply for the next round of RCPP.
- FCA received **\$606,481** in local funding to work with the Orchard Mesa Irrigation District, South Side Conservation District, and a group of ditches in Cañon City to work with those groups on predevelopment work for federal funding.
- Collbran Conservancy District received **\$459,760** in funds from the Department of Local Affairs and Natural Disaster Mitigation Enterprise for design on two canal projects.

FCA is also working with communities on navigating **NRCS's Watershed and Flood Prevention Program**, also known as PL-566. The process can take 3+ years but can lead to significant federal funds for infrastructure projects.

- Two communities (Collbran Conservancy District and Ute Mountain Ute Tribe) are currently in the **Preliminary Investigation Feasibility Report (PIFR) phase**. This step involves evaluating project viability, potential alternatives, and costs.
- A group of ditches in the White River recently completed the PIFR phase and hope to be awarded Watershed Plan funds soon. Those funds will go to completing the **Environmental Assessment** for the project.

# Financials

**2025 REVENUE \$739,037**



**2025 EXPENSES \$760,834**

