

Drought Advisors Capacity and Research Project

Final Performance Progress Report

1. Recipient Name:	Rocky Mountain Farmers Union (RMFU)	3. Report Date:	11/21/2024
2. Address:	7900 East Union Ave #200, Denver, CO 80237	4. Reporting Period End Date:	11/20/2024
Report Frequency – Bi-annually			
Project Quantitative Report			
	Activity Type	Deliverable Quantity	Description of Activity Type
	Drought Advisors' Organizing Meetings Held	55	<i>Organizational meetings held to develop resources, to develop the Drought Plan Program, and plan ongoing programming.</i>
	Drought Plan Program Participants	38	<i>Total number of producers either actively participating in or completed with all requirements of the Drought Plan Program.</i>
	Reimbursement Stipends Issued	25	<i>Number of Drought Plan Program participants issued grant funds reimbursing for drought plan implementation expenses.</i>
	Stipend Funds Issued	\$20,566	<i>Total amount of actual stipend funds distributed to Drought Plan Program participants.</i>
	Site Visit Feedback Interviews Completed	21	<i>Number of in-person operational site visits and feedback interviews conducted with participants of the Drought Plan Program.</i>
	Virtual Feedback Interviews Completed	1	<i>Number of virtual feedback interviews conducted with participants of the Drought Plan Program.</i>
	Survey Responses Collected	33	<i>Number of survey responses collected from producers who participated in the Drought Plan Program.</i>
	Presentations Offered at Conferences, Meetings, or Events	5	<i>Drought resources distributed and presentation given by Drought Advisors team.</i>
	Additional Resources Developed or Improved	3	<i>Number of resources developed to meet deliverables of grant or project mission, in addition to the major project deliverables.</i>
6. List of any presentations by members of the Drought Advisors team during the reporting period			
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> September 30th, 2024; Drought Advisors (2021 – present), presented by Retta Bruegger at the Annual Extension Forum in Fort Collins, CO. October 8th, 2024; Drought Plan Program Networking Event, presented by Tori Kauffman and Retta Bruegger, virtual meeting. October 24th, 2024; Drought Advisors: Extension Drought Programming for Agriculture in Colorado, presented by Retta Bruegger at the Extension Disaster Education Network Conference in Salt Lake City, UT. November 13th, 2024; Drought Plan Program: Impacts, Findings & Takeaways, presented by Tori Kauffman at the Drought Advisors Monthly Meeting, virtual meeting. November 22nd, 2024; Drought Advisors: Drought Programming for Agriculture in Colorado, presented by Retta Bruegger for the International Visitors Leadership Program hosted by WorldDenver, virtual meeting. 			
7. List Any Additional Resources Developed or Improved during the reporting period			
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Drought Advisors Website: https://droughtadvisors.org 			

(Funded as a part of the match for this grant from the Colorado Department of Agriculture's (CDA's) Drought Stimulus fund.)

- Custom trained drought chatbot (demo); developed by Griffin Moores, Communication Specialist at the CSU Office of Engagement and Extension, along with Retta Bruegger to see if a chatbot trained on Drought Advisors materials could help improve the way people get answers to challenging and complex questions related to their land and operations.
- Printed 40 copies of the Colorado Agricultural Drought Handbook for Drought Advisors and producers.

Project Qualitative Report: Task 1, Drought Advisors Program Developer

Progress meeting each major deliverable under the project.

The Project Manager, Tori Kauffman, focused on carrying out site visits and concluding the Drought Plan Program (See: Task 2), analyzing data and reporting results for the impact manuscript (See: Task 3), and preparing for the conclusion of this project during the reporting period. She continued to manage the administration/communication for the program, reviewed and approved all reimbursement requests for drought plan implementation expenses, and issued stipend checks accordingly to participating producers. She also carried out feedback site visits and interviews of participants in the Drought Plan Program.

Tori has continued administrative tasks for Drought Advisors, including scheduling team meetings and the management of the Drought Advisors email, website, and social media accounts.

Challenges or obstacles encountered and mitigation strategies you have employed.

N/A

Planned major activities for the next six months.

N/A

Additional Information that would be useful to assess this project's progress.

N/A

Success stories or best practices.

The position of the Project Manager on the Drought Advisors team has increased the capacity of this project in ways that would be difficult to achieve without this role.

This role has allowed the team to pursue feedback from participating producers in the Drought Plan Program via in-person site visits. This level of follow-up would not have been possible without this role. Further, the information obtained from these visits will allow Drought Advisors to ascertain the impact of the Drought Plan Program to direct future work and projects taken on by the team or partnering entities.

In addition, the Project Manager has put significant time and energy into checking in and following up both participants of and advisors for the Drought Plan Program to ensure that the program's deliverables were completed. This was critical to ensuring both that participants gained the maximum benefits available from the program and that the stipend funds were distributed. Without the level of accountability made possible by the Project Manager role, it is unlikely that a similar number of participants would have completed the program or that a similar quantity of funds would have been distributed to producers.

Project Qualitative Report: Task 2, Drought Assistance Program (now called the Drought Plan Program)

Progress meeting each major deliverable under the project.

During this reporting period, the Drought Plan Program concluded. Over the course of the program's two years, 39 producers participated. 36 of these participants completed their drought plans with their advisors and received a \$500 stipend. Three producers met with their advisors and worked on their drought plans but declined to submit a completed plan to the project manager. These participants were given an "incomplete" status and did not receive any stipend funds. In total, \$18,000 in stipend funds were issued to producers for completing a drought plan.

During this reporting period, 25 participants requested stipend funds to reimburse them for expenses related to the implementation of their drought plans. All requests were reviewed and approved by Tori Kauffman. Occasionally, Tori consulted with Retta Bruegger and/or a participant's advisors before approving a request. Each participant who completed a drought plan had up to \$1,000 available for reimbursement, but not every producer requested the total amount of funds. Two participants who completed their drought plans did not submit any requests for reimbursement funds. \$20,566.26 in reimbursement funds were distributed during this reporting period. In total, \$32,016.13 funds were distributed to 34 producers to reimburse drought plan expenses during the entire lifetime of the program.

To assess the effectiveness and impact of the Drought Plan Program, Tori Kauffman visited 21 program participants at their operations between May and July of 2024. The primary purpose of these site visits was to gain qualitative feedback on the program's management, the structure of the drought planning process and materials, and to assess the short-term impacts and the effectiveness of the program. This information was analyzed to assess the impact and success Drought Plan Program as well as to ascertain the need and potential for future work of Drought Advisors and/or its partnering entities. Data collected on these site visits was also analyzed for the Drought Plan Program Impact manuscript (*see: Task 3*).

Challenges or obstacles encountered and mitigation strategies you have employed.

Many producers delayed requesting the \$1000 reimbursement after the completion of their drought plan. The Project Manager has addressed this issue by regularly reaching out to participants to both remind them of the stipend and to discuss potential uses for the funds. To further encourage participants to utilize the available funds, the Project Manager set a deadline of October 1st to submit requests for reimbursement. She also sent multiple email reminders and called individual participants on the phone to ensure they had been given every opportunity to utilize the funds.

Planned major activities for the next six months.

N/A

Additional Information that would be useful to assesses this project's progress.

N/A

Success stories or best practices.

Overall, participants provided very positive feedback about the program. 100% said they would recommend the program and drought planning in general to other producers. In response to the statement "I feel more prepared for drought conditions than I did before participating," 42% responded "strongly agree" and 52% responded "somewhat agree." Participants also reported experiencing personal benefits which included improved feelings of well-being and increased communication with family, staff & community members.

Accountability, structure & agency were influential in producing both the intended goals and unintended personal benefits of the program. Providing accountability & forming relationships of trust with participating producers was key to maximizing impact. The level of accountability and follow-up provided was only possible with the role of the project manager.

This feedback suggests that future projects or programs should be funded to allow for this level of administrative capacity. Further, programs focused on climate resilience for agricultural producers would benefit from addressing adaptive capacity as much as they address adoption of specific practices.

Project Qualitative Report: Task 3, Drought Vulnerability Synthesis (now the Drought Plan Program Impact Manuscript)
Progress meeting each major deliverable under the project.
<p>As an alternative to the original drought vulnerability synthesis, a formal paper based on the findings from the feedback site visits for the participants in the Drought Plan Program is being written to fulfill the requirements of this deliverable. Retta Bruegger of CSU Extension, Jill Zarestky from CSU's Education Department, and Tori Kauffman have been working on this paper and aim to have a draft completed by the end of this reporting period. The manuscript will be submitted to the journal <i>Rangelands</i> for publication.</p> <p>The team also developed an electronic survey to provide more quantitative feedback on the Drought Plan Program and to bolster the data from the site visits. The survey was sent to all 38 participants of the Drought Plan Program by email in May 2024 and received 33 responses (87% response rate).</p> <p>Tori Kauffman analyzed the site visit data from both the summers of 2023 and 2024—along with the open-ended survey responses—utilizing a thematic analysis method.</p>
Challenges or obstacles encountered and mitigation strategies you have employed.
N/A
Planned major activities for the next six months.
Retta Bruegger and Jill Zarestky will perform final edits and formatting on the manuscript and submit it to the journal <i>Rangelands</i> for publication.
Additional Information that would be useful to assess this project's progress.
N/A
Success stories or best practices.
The team appreciates the CWCB staff's willingness to allow adaptation of this deliverable for the original expected deliverable. Publishing these findings will expand the reach and impact of the Drought Plan Program and Drought Advisors by informing the work of others in the field of agricultural drought/climate resilience.

Project Qualitative Report: Task 4, Grant and Project Management
Progress meeting each major deliverable under the project.
Tori Kauffman and Shelley Westphal at RMFU handled grant administration and management, along with assistance from Clinton Wilson at RMFU. The most significant expenses for this period were for Project Manager salary and benefits along with stipend payments to producers for reimbursement requests. There were also significant travel expenses during the months when the site visits were being carried out.
Challenges or obstacles encountered and mitigation strategies you have employed.
N/A
Planned major activities for the next six months.
N/A
Additional Information that would be useful to assess this project's progress.
The funds from in-kind contributions (primarily coming from CSU Extension staff time) exceeded the budgeted in-kind funds by over 50%. This reflects both the commitment to this project from CSU and the significant volunteered time and energy required to make the program a success. It also suggests that future programs may need to have sufficient funding to support staff and/or paid consultants to provide technical support rather than relying on such in-kind contributions.
Success stories or best practices.
N/A