



THE PROJECT

WHY RYE?

The Rye Resurgence Project (The Project) is a community-rooted, market-building effort, working to grow awareness and demand for San Luis Valley (SLV)-grown, high-alpine rye to secure a sustainable future for this unique agricultural region of Colorado.

Women-founded and backed by local farmers, Colorado water groups, and craft food and beverage businesses, the Project officially launched in early 2024 as a response to rapidly decreasing groundwater levels and an increase in dust bowl conditions across the San Luis Valley.

A naturally resilient and hearty winter cover crop, rye gives farmers additional options for major water savings and improved soil health. The high-elevation conditions of the region in turn impart a unique depth to the flavor profiles of the rye grown here, a high-alpine terroir unique to the Valley.

Building a value-added market for SLV rye with craft business partners and consumers gives local farmers a way to keep farming, all while saving water to restore aquifers, improve soil health, and earn a living wage without the added risks and burdens that typically fall on the producer as environmental and economic needs shift under the pressures of a changing climate.

Rye Resurgence Project co-founders Sarah Jones of Jones Farm Organics and Heather Dutton of the San Luis Valley Water Conservancy District see hope for the San Luis Valley in rye - a new path forward in an old-world crop.





THE PLACE

Colorado's San Luis Valley is the largest high-alpine desert in North America at an average elevation of 7,600 feet. Home to the Great Sand Dunes National Park and Preserve, the valley is bordered by the San Juan and Sangre de Cristo Mountains and receives only 7-10 inches of precipitation each year.

Though valley residents comprise a fraction of a percent of Colorado's population, the area contributes nearly 40% of Colorado's agricultural productivity, and has been a vibrant agricultural center since before Colorado's statehood.

However, decades of severe drought and climate impacts have diminished San Luis Valley Aquifers. Community conservation efforts have improved the confined aquifer. However, the unconfined aquifer, which supplies the most productive and intensely irrigated area of the valley, dropped close to the lowest recorded level in history in September 2024.* This vital part of Colorado's food supply chain now faces a perilous future without new economic and environmental pathways.

That's where rye comes in. Rye requires about 12 inches of water to grow, where crops such as barley or potatoes require an average of 18-24 inches. This difference is huge in a region that is working to find ways to conserve water in order to balance Rio Grande water use with supply.

*Data sourced from Rio Grande Water Conservation District, 'Change in Unconfined Aquifer Graph 1' -https://www.rgwcd.org/well-information.







YEAR ONE

PROJECT ROOTS START AT THE FARM

A healthy economy depends on a healthy environment. Leading into the Rye Resurgence Project's first full year, the Project contracted with 10 San Luis Valley farmers who planted 4,500 acres of winter rye following the 2023 fall potato harvest. Project farm partners used minimal water to establish the cover crop to dramatically reduce reliance on groundwater and preserve the Rio Grande.

The total number of acres planted and associated soil health benefits and erosion reduction far exceeded the initial project goals. Reduced wind erosion was noticeable in areas adjacent to the fields during the winter and spring months.

Although surface water supplies were below average in 2024, the valley had some meaningful snowstorms and received above average rainfall in the early summer months. This moisture aided rye production and the goal to keep overall groundwater pumping low. The total annual water savings from the 2023 planting to 2024 harvest is an estimated 4,670 acre-feet!



2023-2024 ACRES PLANTED

2023-2024 AF WATER SAVED





YEAR ONE

BUILDING THE MARKET: PROJECT PARTNERS

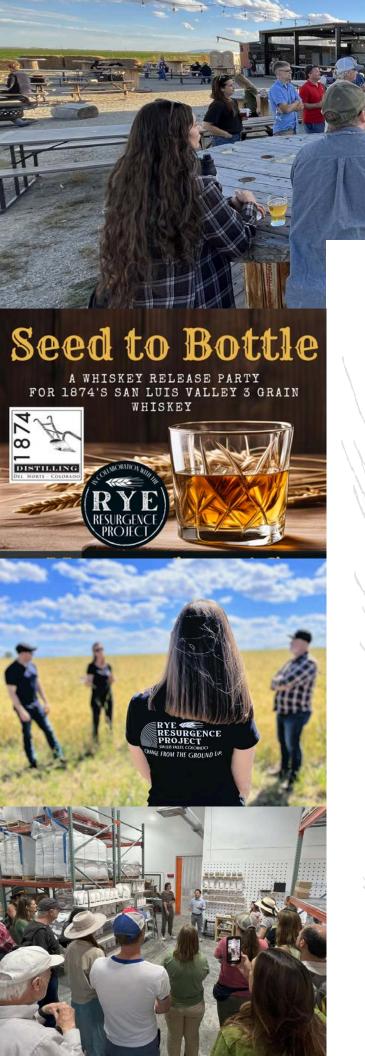
The most critical piece of the Rye Resurgence Project is the investment in value-added market development. Increased rye production will support a sustainable agricultural future in the San Luis Valley, but only if others in the supply chain help build demand and value to take the economic risk and burden off local farmers.

From the Project's inception, staff and partners have committed to investing significant effort and resources in marketing, branding materials, and personnel to develop relationships between the growers and the end users of rye such as brewers, distillers, millers, bakers, and consumers.

In 2024, 443,250 lbs. of San Luis Valley-grown rye was sold and 24 businesses have committed to supporting the Rye Resurgence Project across diverse areas of engagement - from event hosting to crafting specialty beers and seed-to-bottle rye whiskey.

Three new rye-focused collaboration beers dubbed 'The Dust Bowl Series' were also crafted in partnership with the Colorado Farm Brewery in Alamosa. These specialty beers used at least 30% rye malt, showcasing the superb flavor of San Luis Valley rye while also highlighting the project's community-driven vision.





YEAR ONE

BUILDING THE MARKET: COMMUNITY CONNECTION

Since January 2024, the Rye Resurgence Project has built and grown a presence within the larger grain and water communities across Colorado and the United States. Co-founders Sarah Jones and Heather Dutton gave presentations at annual conferences and special meetings and Project staff brought branded storytelling and advocacy to several major conventions including:

- Colorado Water Congress
- Colorado Water Conservation Board Meetings
- CSU Spur's Water in the Water Symposium
- American Distilling Institute Conference
- Colorado Grain Chain's Wheat Stock Festival
- The Great American Beer Festival

The Project also worked with partners to host events including a launch party with Family Jones Distillery in conjunction with the American Craft Distiller's Guild annual convention, field tours for partners and prospective rye buyers connecting crafters and endusers with farmers and the land, and special product release parties for SLV-rye whiskey and craft beer.

At year end, the Rye Resurgence Project shared its story with thousands of consumers, potential partners, and community members at 12 different events from Del Norte, CO to Baltimore, MD.

FOUNDATIONS FOR THE FUTURE

The Rye Resurgence Project is grateful for the incredible support from all who've been involved in every stage of this effort to-date. The Project would not have been possible without the foundational investment of the Colorado Water Conservation Board's Colorado Water Plan Grant to the San Luis Valley Water Conservancy District for San Luis Valley farmers and initial rye market development.

Thanks to the Trinchera Foundation, the Rye Resurgence Project received crucial support for programming and communications around sustainable agriculture, bringing attention to the San Luis Valley community and Rye Resurgence Project efforts to thousands of people from across the country.

Successes and lessons learned from the first full year of the Project will deepen collaborations and relationships as the SLV rye market continues to develop, allowing more farmers to adapt to drought by reducing water consumption while continuing to farm. Thank you to all our Project farmers, partners, and supporters - together we're building resilience in our San Luis Valley and greater Colorado community for our economy, environment, and local food supply.



THANK YOU!

- COLORADO WATER
 CONSERVATION BOARD
- SAN LUIS VALLEY WATER
 CONSERVANCY DISTRICT
- THE TRINCHERA FOUNDATION
- OUR RYE RESURGENCE
 PROJECT PARTNERS



