ECONOMIC IMPACTS OF THE SOUTHERN ROCKY MOUNTAIN AGRICULTURAL CONFERENCE 2023

Rebecca Hill, Matt Burkard, Larry Brown, & Jim Clare

With appreciation to the Adams State University students who collected the data—Christian Santistevan, Diego Jones, and Caitlin Adams and the SRMAC organizers. Funding for the this study was provided by Economic Development Administration Technical Assistance Grant - Project #05-79-06066, Monte Vista Chamber of Commerce, CSU SLV Extension, and the City of Monte Vista.

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Executive Summary:

The Southern Rocky Mountain Agricultural Conference (SRMAC) has been taking place in Monte Vista for 41 years. It is unique among agricultural shows in that it began strictly as an educational event and is one of the few that remains a true educational event, now married with what has grown into a significant agricultural trade show. The conference serves the farming and ranching communities with education topics ranging from water saving production practices and latest research findings to legislative and market updates, and from financial management and estate planning to soil health and farm family health. It also serves as a major peer to peer networking opportunity and connects ag producers directly to ag service and supply businesses. The conference brings in a variety of individuals from Colorado and other states. These individuals spend dollars in the local communities and those dollars support local industries and provide broader economic impacts to the community. The community recently made a major investment in building a new facility with both conference and large event capabilities, at which the SRMAC is hosted. This gives the valley a premier facility to host many events and activities. Given the recent investment in the facility and the economic impacts that this conference has on the local community, the SRMAC committee reached out to the Regional Economic Development Institute (REDI) to conduct a study to quantify the economic impacts the conference has on Monte Vista, Alamosa, and the larger San Luis Valley region.

This study quantifies the economic impacts of the SRMAC conference and explores what is important to conference participants and vendors. To evaluate the economic impacts, we developed and conducted two surveys, one survey targeted conference participants and speakers and the other targeted at the conference vendors. In addition, we collected expenditure information from the conference organizers and incorporated those expenditures into the analysis. Each survey gathered information on participants’ expenditures in the community and the region as well as general information on their conference experience. The survey was conducted from February 7th – 9th, 2023 during all three days of the conference. Surveys were administered by Adams State Students, One Colorado State University Graduate Student, and a Colorado State University Extension Professor. Each surveyor was given a surveyor number so that checks to ensure consistency across all surveys in the sample could be conducted. Sample participant responses were aggregated to the entire population of conference participants using registration data given by the SRMAC conference board. All conference vendors were surveyed so no aggregation from sample to population was needed for the vendor survey.

Using Economic Impact analysis methodology and the IMPLAN software we estimate the economic effects of the conference on Monte Vista and the San Luis Valley Region. This type of analysis looks at forward and backward linkages in the economy considering that the economic impacts of the
conference are not limited to the ‘direct effect,’ defined as the activity itself. Expenditures related to the conference are also linked to other related sectors, in this case, ‘indirect effects’ for support businesses and ‘induced effects’ such as employee spending in other industries. Together the direct, indirect, and induced effects reflect the ‘multiplier effect’ of visitor spending on the local economy. Because local economic development depends on bringing outside money into the economy – and preventing local money from leaking out – our economic impact calculation distinguished between spending by locals and visitors from outside the region. We used only the expenditures from non-local participants and the IMPLAN economic modelling software to generate annual estimates of employment and output supported by the conference. We find that the economic impact of the SRMAC conference on the San Luis Valley region is $181,216.58 and 2.1 jobs while the economic impact to Monte Vista is $39,118.31 and 0.39 jobs. It is important to note that these numbers only account for new dollars that are being brought in from outside the region due to the conference, it does not include local resident spending.

**Participant Survey:**

*General Conference Questions:*

During the three days of the conference 177 conference participants were interviewed, of which 166 completed the entire survey. Only one person from each group traveling to the conference together was surveyed. Since each of the surveys collected could represent more than one individual the sample collected represented a total of 285 non-local travelers. For this analysis non-local was defined as participants who did not live in the six county (Alamosa, Conejos, Costilla, Mineral Rio Grande, and Saguache) San Luis Valley region. Overall, the average group size for our sample was 2 travelers, for non-locals the average was a bit greater at 2.3 travelers. Group sizes ranged from 1 traveler to 15 travelers in a group. Conference organizers provided a total participant count based on conference registrations. This registration information was used to aggregate up from the survey sample to an estimate of the total population of conference participants.

Each conference participant interviewed was asked which of the following categories best represented them: Colorado State University employee or student, Adams State employee or student, member of the public, involved in an agricultural support industry, or directly involved in production agriculture. Summary results from this question can be found in Figure 1. 70% of participants indicated that they were either directly involved in agricultural production or involved in an agricultural support industry, indicating that the majority of participants attending SRMAC are involved in an agricultural industry. 10% of the respondents indicated that they were part of an academic institution (Colorado State University or Adams State University). Only 15% of respondents indicated that they were members of the general public.
Conference organizers were also interested in learning how conference participants heard about the conference. Choices for this question were as follows: Radio, local newspaper, word of mouth, social media, Potato Country magazine, Spudman Magazine, Country Advocate, Potato Advocate, Holyoke Enterprise, Imperial Republican, SRM Ag Conference website, or other. Figure 2 represents the percentage for each of these categories. No participants indicated that they learned about the conference from Spudman Magazine, Country Advocate, Holyoke Enterprise or the Imperial Republican. The other two magazines (Potato Country Magazine and Potato Advocate) combined only received 1% of the responses, indicating that potential conference participants may not be being reached by magazine advertisements. The largest category of responses (44%) was in the ‘other’ category, most of these indicating that they go every year and just know about the conference. This was followed closely by word of mouth with 37% of the respondents.

Figure 2: How did you hear about the conference, percentage of respondents.
To gain a better understanding of where non-local conference attendees spend the night while attending the conference, we asked the participants what town they would be spending the night during their time at the conference: Monte Vista, Alamosa or other. Figure 3 presents the results from this question indicating that the majority (70%) of non-local participants choose to stay in Alamosa, while 20% choose to stay in Monte Vista, and 10% choose to either stay somewhere else in the region or commute from their homes outside the region. This suggests that there may be an opportunity for Monte Vista to capture more of the accommodation dollars from the conference in the future.

*Figure 3: In what town will you be spending the night during your time at the conference, percentage of respondents.*

At the end of the survey, respondents were asked two open-ended questions to allow them the opportunity to provide input on their motivations for conference participation and suggestions for the future. Some key takeaways from these open-ended questions are outlined below:

**General comments:**

- Most participants who decided to stay in Alamosa (as opposed to Monte Vista where the conference venue is located) noted that they chose to stay in Alamosa due to the availability of a specific hotel chain that they were familiar with.
- The conference is extremely valuable for folks in Production agriculture, and including more industries has been a big plus.
- Tours or more information on local places to visit would be fun to feature or to recommend during the conference to showcase the community.
- More advertising would be beneficial, particularly in the Del Norte area.
- Overall respondents were impressed with how well informed everyone was and had a positive experience.
Comments on reason for attending the conference:

- The majority of responses indicated that the reason for attendance was for the educational program and networking, for example:
  - Learn about new farming practices and equipment.
  - Learn about regenerative soil health strategies.
  - Great networking and fresh ideas.

Comments related to the facility:

- Overall respondents indicated that the new building has been a real positive to the experience and they are thankful that the conference is in this venue.
- However, some feedback for improving the facility and experience in future years was given including:
  - More organized parking.
  - Conference rooms were cold.
  - Wi-Fi connection needed improvement.
  - When educational events are going on cannot hear the loudspeaker.

Comments related to the trade show:

- General sentiment that trade show was professional with a good diversity of vendors. Several even commented that it is the best expo they attend.
- However, some feedback was given for improving the trade show including:
  - Too much focus on potatoes and cows with vendors.
  - Vendors clean up too early and need to stay until after lunch on the last day.

Comments related to the educational sessions:

- Again, overwhelmingly respondents complemented the organizers on the value of the educational sessions. Some suggestions for future improvements in this area are as follows:
  - More support for Spanish speakers.
  - Some of the events overlapped making it difficult to attend the desired sessions.
  - Would love to have a session from produce buyers.

Expenditure Questions:

The majority of the survey focused on questions related to the participants expenditures to attend the SRMAC conference. We asked participants to break down these expenditures by location for the following three geographic regions: Monte Vista, Alamosa and elsewhere in the San Luis Valley. In addition to being asked where they stayed the night and the cost of their accommodation, participants were asked to give their expenditure in the categories below:

- Gasoline/related automobile expenses.
- Food/drink: Restaurants.
- Food/Drink: Grocery stores.
- Ag Purchases or bookings at the conference.
- Shopping (other than a the conference).
• Entertainment (movies/bars/etc...).
• Other purchases, asked to specify the purchase.

The responses to these questions were then combined with earlier responses as to the size of the party and the number of days they spent at the conference to ascertain a per person per day expenditure estimate for each of the categories, which was then aggregated up from the sample to the estimated population of non-local conference attendees. The economic impact generated from the conference involves just the new dollars that are brought into the region from outside the region, for this reason we only included the expenditures from non-local residents in our economic impact calculations. Summaries of the non-resident expenditures are discussed in the next section.

Non-Resident Expenditures:

Table 1 below shows the aggregate expenditures in each of the collected categories for the estimated population of non-local participants. Estimates in Table 1 represent spending in the entire San Luis Valley Region, Figure 4 illustrates how these expenditures are divided across the three surveyed regions: Monte Vista, Alamosa and Other areas of the San Luis Valley. Total direct expenditures from non-local participants (note that this does not include vendor expenditures which we will outline in the vendor section of this report) were just under $50,000 with over half of those expenditures coming in the form of agricultural purchases or bookings. It is important to note that $408,871.63 dollars were spent by non-locals to Monte Vista. To ensure the accuracy of our estimates and to error on the side of a conservative estimate, these expenditures were not included in the economic impact analysis. These expenditures were comprised of several very large purchases and we were not able to determine if these purchases were made with local vendors, and thus assumed that these dollars were made to non-local vendors and leaked out of the local economy. The next largest category was lodging. Figure 4 shows how these dollars are spread across the region, with Alamosa capturing the greatest share of all the expenditures except for in the grocery and liquor stores category where Monte Vista and Alamosa had almost equal proportions. Also of note is the large share, at 41%, of gasoline/automotive expense dollars which are spent in the San Luis Valley Region but not in either Monte Vista or Alamosa.

Table 1: Total non-local spending by category, San Luis Valley

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Expenditure Category</th>
<th>Total Expenditures Non-Residents</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Lodging</td>
<td>$15,266.39</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gas/Auto Expenses</td>
<td>$4,340.46</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Food/Drink - Restaurants</td>
<td>$6,535.95</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Food/Drink - Grocery Stores/Liquor Stores</td>
<td>$683.23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ag Purchases or Bookings</td>
<td>$28,086.55</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shopping (other than at the conference)</td>
<td>$910.11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Entertainment</td>
<td>$845.24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other Purchases</td>
<td>$7,543.63</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td>$48,945.18</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

** Agriculture Purchases or Bookings represent both the purchases for which payment was made to the vendor at the show, as well as orders placed (booked) at the show for which payment will be made in the future at the time of future delivery of the goods or services.**
A final note on conference expenditures is that the expenditures outlined above only include the expenditures in the region from conference participants that live outside the San Luis Valley region and do not include the expenditures of residents. While not new dollars being brought into the region residents spending money while participating in the SRMAC conference creates economic activity in both Monte Vista and the greater San Luis Valley region. None of the economic activity from local participants was included in the economic impact calculations.

**Vendor Survey:**

**General Questions:**

Over the three days of the conference, we were able to interview all vendors who attended the conference. In large part because of the pre-conference communications from the SRMAC planning committee related to this survey, all vendors agreed to participate in the survey with no refusals. Because all vendors completed the survey, the survey results represent the entire population of SRMAC vendors. 93 vendors were surveyed for this analysis, each company was only interviewed once and estimating for their entire group 52% of vendor respondents reported being from outside of the San Luis Valley region. The 93 surveys represented a total of 283 individuals at the conference, of which 80 individuals were from outside of the San Luis Valley region. Questions for vendors were similar to those for participants, including the same questions on their home residence as well as expenditure questions.

Two questions that were slightly different from the participant survey were questions on the number of employees that they brought to the conference and how many years they had participated in the conference. On average, each vendor brought 2.6 employees to the conference ranging from 1 employee to 12 employees, unsurprisingly non-local vendors brought fewer employees on average to the conference (1.7 average). Figure 5 shows the proportion of vendors by number of years they have attended the conference. Over 50% of the vendors reported attendance at the conference for 5 years or less, and around 20% of the vendors reported that their companies have attended this conference for 20 years or more.

**Figure 5: Vendor companies number of years attending the conference, percentage of total vendors**
Vendors were asked one open ended question; “What suggestions do you have that would improve the conference for you or your company.” Key takeaways from the responses to this question are outlined below.

**General Comments:**

- Many vendors commented on how organized the conference was, how easy the venue was to get to, how easy it was to find their booth space and how helpful the conference staff were. However, they did provide a variety of comments on how to improve the experience for next year including:
  - Wishing that vendors would not start tearing down so early, and that they had more time to set up prior to the event.
  - Delivery of food/snacks to the booth would be helpful.
  - Would be helpful to have electricity at the booths, even if there were an extra fee for this.
  - Vendors had suggestions for the timing of events and layout of facilities, these specific comments will be provided to the conference organizers.

- Comments related to the food where on both ends of the spectrum vendors either loved the food or felt like more healthy and local food options were needed. They all seemed to agree on the coffee, it was good coffee.

- Vendors commented on the lack of local restaurants to take potential clients out to and that the restaurants in Monte Vista often closed too early causing them to go to Alamosa for food options.

**Facility Comments:**

- Overall, the vendors appreciated and had positive things to say about the new facilities. But there were a few suggestions provided to help the facilities better serve their needs such as:
  - The sound system was hard to hear.
  - Wi-Fi needs to be improved.
  - It gets cold when the door opens for vendors who are located near the door.
**Education Comments:**

- Most of the education related comments were related to suggestions for future topic choices including:
  - Disease management
  - Soil health
  - Conservation
  - Post harvest related presentation (for example a presentation on storage best practices)
  - Agritourism
- Several comments suggesting that there should be more of an emphasis on industry representation in the talks as opposed to professors and politicians.

**Expenditure Questions:**

The same expenditure categories were asked as were asked in the participant survey, apart from food from restaurants and grocery stores being combined into one category. For this analysis we only included the expenditures of those vendors who were bringing in new dollars from outside of the region and the results below only capture the expenditures of the non-local individuals. Total expenditures, reported in Table 2, were surprisingly close to total expenditures of participants, even though there were far fewer total non-local vendors than non-local participants. Non-local vendors spent more per person in the region and in differing proportions than conference participants (Figure 6). The majority of expenditures were in the lodging category followed by the food category, vendors indicated that not only did they eat out, but they also took clients out to dinner. Alamosa has the greatest share of dollars by at least double in each of the expenditure categories.

*Table 2: Non-local vendor expenditures by category*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Expenditure Category</th>
<th>Total Expenditure Non-Residents</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Lodging</td>
<td>$ 26,646</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Food</td>
<td>$ 13,988</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gas</td>
<td>$ 6,665</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>$ 1,582</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>$ 48,881</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Economic Impact Results:

Only new dollars brought into the economy from participants outside the region are considered new economic activity, thus our economic impact analysis only includes expenditures from non-resident participants, and non-resident vendors. In addition, we included the proportion of registration dollars that were from non-local participants and vendors and spent locally in the economic impact calculations. Total direct spending in the region is outlined in the previous sections and was calculated by multiplying the average per person per day expenditures times the estimated total number of individuals.

The direct expenditure information (actual spending on things like lodging and gas) provides valuable information on the magnitude and composition of gross spending generated by the SRMAC conference. However, spending in different categories has different implications on the economic activity generated from an event. For example, not all these expenditures stay within the community and there are additional spillover impacts from the spending. The spillover effects are called indirect and induced effects:

**Indirect effects:** the impact of local industries buying goods and services from other local industries causing further local economic activity.

**Induced effects:** the impact of labor income being recirculated through household spending patterns causing further local economic activity.

We use the IMPLAN software to incorporate the spillover effects into our economic impact analysis results which are presented in Tables 3 and 4. We report economic impacts using the following two metrics:

**Employment:** The annual average of monthly jobs in an industry (note that this calculation is not equivalent to an FTE)

**Output:** The sales revenue or value of industry production
Table 3: Economic Impacts of the 2022 Southern Rocky Mountain Agricultural Conference on the San Luis Valley Region

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Impact</th>
<th>Employment</th>
<th>Output</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Direct</td>
<td>1.7</td>
<td>$120,058.29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Indirect</td>
<td>0.17</td>
<td>$26,166.73</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Induced</td>
<td>0.23</td>
<td>$34,991.56</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>2.1</td>
<td>$181,216.58</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 4: Economic Impacts of the 2022 Southern Rocky Mountain Agriculture Conference on Monte Vista

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Impact</th>
<th>Employment</th>
<th>Output</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Direct</td>
<td>0.32</td>
<td>$28,627.11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Indirect</td>
<td>0.04</td>
<td>$6,275.30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Induced</td>
<td>0.03</td>
<td>$4,215.91</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>0.39</td>
<td>$39,118.31</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note that the results in Tables 3 and 4 are not additive, the values in Table 3 include the spending that occurs in Monte Vista as Monte Vista is in the San Luis Valley Region. The direct, indirect, and induced effects are combined to calculate the total economic impact to the region. For the San Luis Valley Region the economic impact of the SRMAC conference is $181,216.58 and the conference contributes 2.1 annual jobs to the region. For Monte Vista the economic impact is $39,118.31 and the conference contributes 0.39 jobs to the region.

Discussion/Conclusions:

Through the implementation of two surveys (a participant and a vendor survey) we were able to calculate the economic impacts of the SRMAC conference and provide information on conference visitor and vendor needs and preferences. We find a positive impact to both the region as well as the city of Monte Vista. It is important to note that our analysis does not include expenditures from local residents attending the conference, it only estimates the new dollars that are brought into the region specifically due to the conference. In addition, it is only able to capture a certain category of market benefits, individual expenditures within the community. There are many non-market benefits that the SRMAC conference brings to their community and the region that are significant and positive but difficult to quantify. For example, there is likely an economic benefit to the region from the education and networking that producers and community members receive because of this conference. None of these non-market benefits are captured in this analysis.
Expenditures were viewed through the lens of several different geographic regions: The San Luis Valley as a whole, Alamosa and Monte Vista. The expenditure results show that in all categories Alamosa is capturing the largest bucket of the spending. For hotel spending participant comments suggest that they chose to stay in Alamosa because of the variety of hotel options that are available to them there, including the chain hotels that they are familiar with. With food purchases respondents indicated that they would choose to eat in Monte Vista more frequently if they had more options, they also indicated that the closing time of existing options was a barrier to eating in the Monte Vista area. Respondents also indicated that there was a lack of connection to the city of Monte Vista and what it had to offer, suggesting that maps or tours of the city would increase their likelihood of exploring the city. Overall, our analysis demonstrates the positive economic impacts to the community of the SRMAC conference, participants are happy with the new facilities, and that there are opportunities for Monte Vista to capture more participant dollars in the future.

For questions related to this study, or to receive copies of the survey instruments used please contact Rebecca Hill, Rebec.Hill@ColoState.Edu or 970-491-7119