

Amendment #24: Citizen Management of Growth

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Colorado Livestock Association opposes the Growth Initiative. Amendment 24 is the environmentalists' latest effort to hinder Colorado's booming growth and development. However, this growth initiative does as much to stop agricultural progress as it does urban sprawl. This measure will effectively regulate agricultural development, expansion and economics to the point of impeding industry management, success, and longevity. This proposed initiative declares all cities and counties with populations exceeding 10,000 to develop "growth area maps". This includes seventy-four (74) percent of Colorado's farms and ranches.

Confined Animal Feeding Operations

Under the proposed requirements of the initiative, local governments are not allowed to permit confined animal feeding operations outside mapped growth areas. Furthermore, these operations are not practical inside mapped growth areas. Incidentally, the initiative does not define what a confined animal feeding operation is. Some existing definitions of the term include all operations that confine animals (as few as one) in a pen for forty-five (45) days or more in any twelve (12) month period. Therefore, this limitation could include all horse stables, dairies, feedlots, swine facilities, poultry operations, and dog kennels, to name just a few. Confined animal feeding operations purchase the majority of cattle, corn and hay produced in the state. If the future of these operations is limited, their ability to continue purchasing these supplies will be limited as well. Therefore, the economic viability of Colorado's farms and ranches is at stake - the very core of open space.

Family and Employee Housing

In addition to limiting the number of new Ag operations, the construction of farm and ranch employee housing on existing and future operations will no longer be permitted. The measure clearly states that housing construction outside the growth areas shall be limited to no more than 3 lots of 2 acres to accommodate immediate family members of an agricultural property owner. Employee housing is crucial to an Ag operation given that many farms and ranches are located great distances from the nearest town. This housing limitation would pose a serious management problem.

Private Property Rights

This initiative's greatest assault on private property rights with respect to agricultural economics is the fact it artificially determines property values. Mapped growth area boundaries will be lines of economics. Those individuals owning land within the boundary will see their land values increase as the demand for land to develop increases. Individuals residing outside the line will see their land values plummet. The impacts upon farm economics will be: 1) farmers and ranchers will have limited ability to borrow operating capital from banks as their loan limits are tied to the value of their land, and 2) families in agriculture, who do not have conventional retirement plans, will lose their accumulated asset value. Taking their land value is taking their retirement package. Given today's economic situation for those in agriculture, this takings issue will financially cripple many family farms. Farms and ranches provide a great deal of Colorado's open space. Nobody better understands the value of land, respects open space more or is saddened more by the continued loss of land to development than those in agriculture. However, a one size fits all growth management plan is not the answer.

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