

**For Immediate Release**

February 14, 2024

**Media Contact, BIC:**

Linde Marshall, Media Relations  
Business Incubator Center  
lmarshall@gjincubator.org  
970-623-9388

**THE BUSINESS INCUBATOR CENTER AWARDED HIGHLY COMPETITIVE GRANT TO PARTICIPATE IN THE INAUGURAL ECONOMIC RECOVERY CORPS.**

**JANIE VANWINKLE, LOCAL RANCHER, ANNOUNCED AS FELLOW FOR THIS EFFORT**

*With the grant award, BIC will launch AgriWest, a unique initiative, intended to support agricultural sustainability and food security systems in western Colorado. The local fellow is at the core of the initiative, guiding outcomes.*

MESA COUNTY, CO – Reacting to a problem may be the typical way to deal with issues. Keeping the problem at bay by stopping it in its tracks before it develops is the better solution.

That is the philosophy behind AgriWest, an initiative about to be undertaken by the Business Incubator Center thanks to a grant from the federal government’s Economic Recovery Corps.

AgriWest, if it is to succeed, will require vision, collaboration and hard work. Quite simply, the goal is to bring together the various stakeholders in the local agricultural economic sector to first, identify current concerns or forecasted problems detrimental to the long-term success of the industry, and second, find and enact solutions to those problems before they become impediments or threats to western Colorado’s production agriculture ecosystem.

AgriWest was one of 65 initiatives awarded funding from the federal Economic Development Administration from the more than 500 that applied. The charge was to identify a unique economic project or area within a community, and then bring together local experts to identify a successful path forward that can be scalable or applied to other like communities across the nation facing a similar issue.

Agriculture has often been considered a recession-proof industry. However, experts agree that the industry must be “future-proofed” to protect vital economic resources from threats from such things as water scarcity, more frequent and severe droughts, workforce and transportation concerns, and quickly evolving technologies.

By applying an approach that includes industry leaders from around the region, studying trends and understanding research and best practices and by doing all of that collaboratively new ideas can be brought forth for policy discussion and consideration.

“AgriWest is a unique, groundbreaking initiative led by the Business Incubator that will help revolutionize agricultural and food security systems in western Colorado,” said Dalida Sassoon Bollig, the CEO of the Business Incubator Center. “With 40 percent of the region’s economy relying on agriculture, AgriWest is set to emerge as a critical and positive tool for the future. It has the potential to shape regional agriculture economic development strategies and fortify the agricultural sector while honoring the region’s agricultural roots.”

To further strengthen the Economic Recovery Corps’ effort, one fellow per initiative has been identified to help guide its success on a local level. Each fellow has industry expertise matching the local initiative they are paired with and intimate knowledge of the community and region they will serve as they facilitate meaningful discussions and bring forth collaborative solutions.

In western Colorado, the Business Incubator is thrilled to announce that Janie VanWinkle has been accepted as the fellow to lead AgriWest. Janie is a rural Colorado native and lifelong beef producer. Having grown up in Unaweep Canyon and later on, the Dolores River between Gateway and Uravan, Janie learned about land, livestock and water at an early age. She and her husband own and operate a successful cattle ranch; VanWinkle Ranch strives to provide high-quality beef, responsible land and livestock stewardship, and create a viable, economically-sound industry while furthering economic development in the region.

Over the course of the 2.5-year (30 month) fellowship, VanWinkle will provide technical assistance, planning, and capacity-building support for the initiative.

VanWinkle said: “Success will look like honest conversations with all voices in our industry to create a roadmap for a sustainable future for our region as we tackle water scarcity, increased food and production costs and the benefits and challenges present with workforce, transportation, production, tourism, technology and changes to the industry. A focus on financial and economic success for both legacy producers and new innovators will be a priority.”

Mesa County Commissioner and Board Chair Bobbie Daniel said she whole-heartedly endorses and supports AgriWest. She said she has had many one-on-one conversations with constituents involved in agriculture. “This grant creates an opportunity to break down silos and align our efforts and work together,” she said. “This initiative is a ground-up, locally driven effort with real experience informing the solutions.”

#### *About the Economic Recovery Corps*

*The Economic Recovery Corps (ERC) is a new, collaborative initiative designed to accelerate recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic in distressed communities and regions throughout the U.S.*

*by connecting organizations with the talent and capacity needed to advance new ways of doing economic development that promote economic resilience and transformative change. To learn more, visit <https://economicrecoverycorps.org/>*

**About BIC:**

*For over 38 years, the Business Incubator Center (BIC) has been supporting the launch, growth, stabilization, and long-term success of business enterprises in Mesa County and the surrounding region. BIC aims to stimulate the local economy through creation and retention of the most sustainable jobs possible, helping form capital and aiding business creation through initiatives & programs aimed to spur growth and innovation. BIC offers entrepreneurial support through eight programs including the Small Business Development Center, the Incubator Intensive Program, the Commercial Kitchen Program, Mesa County Enterprise Zone, Mesa County Loan Fund, GJ MakerSpace, F-Works Coworking Space and Strategic Training for Nonprofits. Visit <https://GJIncubator.org> to learn more.*

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