

# Growing a Community Economy

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Often when we think of economy, it's about the immense data we've collected, such as identifying growth indicators, statistics on industries, Gross Domestic Product, (GDP), market trends and much more. It also includes the ways we can improve or increase our bottom line, increase jobs, educate our workforce or improve their skills to match employers' needs and most importantly, sustain what we have. Generally, the people, natural resources and community are not part of that equation or even the data. Economics and the way it is measured means that larger and bigger is often better and that everyone will benefit equally from the way we do business.

The 4 corners area never really had much manufacturing and has generally relied on tourism, agriculture, ranching, forestry and the extraction industry as our primary economic base. Because of our locale and overall sense of "place", most of us in the area rally around our entrepreneurs, farmers and ranchers, with a sense of pride, celebrating that independent spirit.

How does a rural area like ours define a 21<sup>st</sup> century economy? How do we differ from larger towns and cities? In these times, those small communities that thrive will have more:

- Resilience and greater self reliance
- Strong, local businesses and institutions
- Increased local purchasing by consumers and residents
- Greater percentage of local procurement of government and institutional contracts
- Broader localization of food and energy sectors

A community economy is one built from the bottom up that is focused on people, the environment and the community it serves. The Democracy Collaborative, out of Washington DC, has called this approach "Community Wealth Building". I call it "Growing a Community Economy" because Montezuma County has been working at this for a long time.

We have established anchor institutions like Southwest Health and Axis Health, Southwest Colorado Community College, and 5 governments. We have innovative and creative businesses and non-profits working to improve the health and well being of our residents and students.

Montezuma County has many community assets that include:

- Greater energy efficiency
- Expansion our healthy, regional food system
- Strong agricultural base

- Land conservation efforts
- Urban development strategies
- Strong banks
- Partnering more actively with our anchor institutions
- Keeping local \$\$\$ local!

Additionally, we are building on our agricultural system and improving distribution of local food to schools, institutions and individuals. We realize that local food is a strong anchor for our region. Food production, manufacturing, distribution and retail outlets can only help us build a stronger, local economy while conserving our natural resources.

Montezuma Community Economic Development Association, (MCEDA), is an active supporter of moving in this direction of a community economy. An economy where those seeds that are planted by small, locally owned businesses can thrive and prosper. Our goal is to engage with and support all local businesses in growing and expanding through networking, sharing resources and information in a way that takes people and community into consideration. A community economy is about an inclusive and regenerative economy that is locally rooted and place based. It is not about the numbers. It is about the people and building on the incredible assets and wealth Montezuma County already has. Invest in Growing a Community Economy. Join MCEDA today! <http://www.montezumaceda.org>