



*We envision southwestern Colorado being renowned for an orchard culture and economy based on the legendary quality & diversity of Montezuma Valley fruits.*

## **OVERVIEW and STRATEGIC PLAN: 2026-2030** December 2025

[Montezuma Orchard Restoration Project](#) (MORP) works to preserve Colorado's fruit growing heritage and restore an orchard culture and economy to the southwestern region. Our initiatives benefit farmers, community members, businesses, and students of all ages in a rural area challenged with one of the highest poverty rates in Colorado. In the face of climate change, drought, and agricultural water deficits, MORP believes there is an urgent need to help area farmers plan for future water shortages, and a timely opportunity to demonstrate innovative orchard management practices as we rebuild a resilient fruit economy. Our efforts span from preserving historic fruit varieties and fostering a resilient food system to reviving a significant agricultural heritage, all of which enhance the culture, economy, and quality of life in the region.

The roots of the Montezuma Orchard Restoration Project were established when co-founders Jude and Addie Schuenemeyer began their horticulture careers in 2001. For fifteen years, they ran a nursery that had originally been in operation for over 50 years, catering to a clientele that often reminisced about the apple varieties of their youth. Their inquiries revealed numerous old trees still standing in the region—some forgotten, others cherished by families who held onto their memories. In 2008, they established MORP with the belief that the vibrant orchard culture and economy that once flourished in southwestern Colorado could be rebuilt.

In 2014, MORP became organized under 501(c)(3) fiscal sponsorship, now provided by [Onward! A Legacy Foundation](#). Under the guidance of its Co-Directors and Advisory Team, MORP has successfully managed over a dozen state and federal grants and numerous projects funded by private foundations, while also increasing its membership to over 500 dues-paying members. MORP has emerged as a national leader in orchard preservation, engaging orchard owners, gardeners, fruit enthusiasts, historians, cider makers, educators, students, fellow non-profits, research institutions, media, and more in its mission.

Montezuma Orchard Restoration Project seeks to accomplish its *vision of southwestern Colorado being renowned for an orchard culture and economy based on the legendary quality and diversity of Montezuma Valley Fruits* through three main program areas:

**Preservation:** This includes activities aimed at preserving historic apple cultivars and safe-

guarding historic trees and orchards through thorough documentation and maintaining a cultivar collection.

**Education and Outreach:** We offer orchard and grafting workshops, establish orchards in schools and communities, and conduct historic research to foster awareness and knowledge.

**Cultural and Economic Revitalization:** This encompasses orchard restoration and harvest, a mobile juicing service, and the sale and donation of apple trees.

Through these programs and direct engagement with knowledgeable individuals, we are witnessing a resurgence of interest in heritage orchards, both locally and across Colorado.

## MILESTONES

Since its founding, MORP has made significant progress towards its mission.

- ◆ 6K+ historic fruit trees located and surveyed at [RegisTREE](#).
- ◆ 200+ heritage apple cultivars identified & preserved.
- ◆ 2K+ rare & endangered apple trees planted in school, community, research, & conservation orchards.
- ◆ 3K+ students taught lessons on Colorado's fruit growing history & how to graft.
- ◆ 10K+ apple trees grafted for sale or donation to the public.
- ◆ 2 historic orchard sites saved for future generations.
- ◆ 1M+ dollars raised & invested to rebuild the critical land & infrastructure needed to store & process the region's previously wasted heritage fruit into a value-added juice product.
- ◆ 8K+ bushels of fruit (apples, pears, cherries, peaches) turned into 102+K liters of Pure & Local juice.

## PROGRAM AREAS, GOALS, OBJECTIVES, CAPACITY, & RECONCILIATION

### PRESERVATION: HISTORY, CULTIVARS, AND ORCHARDS

Montezuma Orchard Restoration Project is dedicated to preserving Colorado's fruitful legacy. To that end, we strive to inspire a whole new generation of orchard owners to help move forward the hard work and vision of Colorado's early fruit growers.

**GOAL #1: Identify and conserve Colorado's rare fruit cultivars and fruit growing history while revitalizing historic orchards and planting new ones.**

#### *Objectives*

1. Locate, survey, inventory, and identify Colorado's historic orchards and their associated histories.
2. Operate the MORP tree nursery to propagate, distribute, and raise awareness of Colorado's rare and endangered apple varieties through sales and donations.
3. Develop, maintain, and update orchard and fruit databases, along with historical context to document and preserve our fruitful legacy, linking to similar projects statewide and nationally.
4. Create and implement a collection management plan based on MORP's fieldwork, DNA results, rediscoveries, fruit networks, and the Old Colorado Apple's list of historic varieties to restore to local orchards.
5. Establish community, research, and conservation orchards as living history museums and genetic banks, engaging the community through education and agro-tourism.
6. Seek opportunities to own and/or manage historic orchard properties indefinitely.

*Major accomplishments to date:*

- ☑ Rediscovered the Colorado Orange apple.
- ☑ Mapped and documented over 100 historic orchard sites containing thousands of apple trees 80 to 135 years old.
- ☑ Compiled a comprehensive list of historic varieties once grown here, known as the Old Colorado Apple's list, for restoration to local orchards.
- ☑ Established a nursery to cultivate and preserve Colorado's rare apple cultivars.
- ☑ Submitted over 700 apple leaf samples for DNA identification, confirming the diversity of endangered apples still thriving in our landscape.
- ☑ Became a founding member of the [Historic Fruit Tree Working Group of North America](#).
- ☑ Developed the RegisTree collaborative mapping app.
- ☑ Established the Gold Medal, Orchard Hub, and Dolores Community heritage orchards, along with the Colorado Heritage Apple Trials Initiative.
- ☑ Received recognition as one of Colorado's SAVED Most Endangered Places for the historic Gold Medal Orchard, which also functions as a genetic bank and demonstration orchard for MORP.

## **ECONOMIC AND CULTURAL REVITALIZATION**

Colorado's remnant historic orchards and their associated histories tell a compelling story and provide genetics to market heritage fruit, which is vital for growing an orchard economy. Re-establishing this economy involves addressing barriers to production such as labor, harvest, storage, processing, infrastructure, and transportation, while inspiring a new generation of active orchard owners.

**Goal #1: Rebuild the critical land, infrastructure, and networks needed to grow, store, process, and distribute the region's previously wasted heritage fruit into valuable market opportunities.**

*Objectives*

1. Steward and preserve MORP's historic property to serve as an Orchard Hub, providing support to both established and aspiring orchard owners, as well as fruit enthusiasts from diverse backgrounds.
2. Share harvest resources through MORP's Harvest Lending Supplies program.
3. Create economic opportunities for regional farmers and businesses by providing a value-added option for previously wasted crops through MORP's SW Mobile Juicing Service.
4. Manufacture, promote, and sell pure and local fruit juices in compliance with health regulations.
5. Engage and train volunteers and interns in harvest, juicing, and orchard care activities.
6. Identify and respond to opportunities to utilize and market Montezuma Valley Fruits, creating structures to preserve the local orchard heritage and fruit economy for the long term.

*Major accomplishments to date:*

- ☑ Completed market analysis, needs assessment, feasibility study, and business plan for juicing operations utilizing a mobile press to restore southwestern Colorado's orchard economy.
- ☑ Conducted two successful Mobile Cider Press Pilots, during which MORP picked and compensated orchard owners for several thousand bushels of apples pressed into Mon-

tezuma Valley Heritage Blend juice, representing the first market for Montezuma Valley Fruits in nearly two decades.

- ☑ Partnered with The Nature Conservancy to acquire MORP's 36-acre historic orchard property (Orchard Hub) to ensure a home base for the continuation of its mission.
- ☑ Purchased a mobile cider press and established a SW Mobile Juicing Service with Hazard Analysis Critical Control Point (HACCP) certification.
- ☑ Revived use of the historic Montezuma Valley Fruit label on apple juice packaging.
- ☑ Completed phase one of juicing facility construction and orchard establishment at the Orchard Hub.
- ☑ Launched a Harvest Lending Supplies Program and acquired a forklift to support local farmers and businesses.
- ☑ MORP's efforts to rebuild the fruit economy in southwestern Colorado provide a foundational opportunity for others to build upon, evident in the rise of new cider businesses leveraging the story of Montezuma Valley fruits in their marketing and utilizing MORP's research/data for startup funding.

## EDUCATION AND OUTREACH

Education and outreach are crucial for disseminating the knowledge and resources that MORP uncovers and develops. Education has been a central focus of MORP's work and will continue to be so.

### **Goal #1: Serve as an educational resource for our community and beyond.**

#### *Objectives*

1. Conduct hands-on workshops on pruning, grafting, apple identification, and orchard survey and establishment.
2. Assist farmers in planning for sustained apple production in an increasingly arid future by demonstrating and implementing resilient orchard management practices.
3. Continue working in local schools to educate students about their fruit growing heritage and to plant and tend orchards.
4. Participate in sharing the story of old Colorado apples and the state's fruit growing history through outreach, presentations, and research collaborations.
5. Cultivate a robust volunteer program to institutionalize and disseminate resources, expertise, and knowledge.

#### *Major accomplishments to date:*

- ☑ Established eight heritage school orchards in collaboration with the Montezuma School to Farm Project, accompanied by heritage orchard curricula.
- ☑ Authored and distributed hundreds of copies of the Heritage Orchard Handbook.
- ☑ Collaborated with History Colorado to research and write *Colorado's Fruit Growing History: Historic Context of Orchards*.
- ☑ Developed classes and presented to hundreds of interested individuals on Old Colorado Apples and Colorado's Fruit Growing History, as well as MORP's mission.
- ☑ Researched and located the late Miriam Palmer's semi-lost wax apple collection, bringing overdue recognition to her notable work and career, now preserved at the CSU archives.
- ☑ Honored our first group of Golden Noble Legacy Volunteers for their significant contributions to MORP.
- ☑ Successfully partnered with AmeriCorps NCCC teams and Southwest Conservation Corps crews nearly every season since 2014, imparting skills in resilient orchard man-

agement practices while benefiting from their hard work.

- ☑ MORP has emerged as a national leader in the fruit preservation community, receiving extensive coverage in local, regional, state-wide, and national media.

## **ORGANIZATIONAL DEVELOPMENT AND CAPACITY**

**Goal #1: MORP will maintain the resources, expertise, and capacity necessary to carry out its mission sustainably and equitably while seeking grant funding and projects aligned with our strategic plan.**

*Objectives:*

1. Cultivate an engaged, effective, diverse, and self-sustaining Advisory Team that understands its roles and responsibilities, with all members making meaningful annual donations to the organization.
2. Implement fundraising initiatives that foster diverse and sustainable support to meet annual operational needs.
3. Establish and grow a legacy fund and incorporate planned giving into MORP's fundraising strategy.
4. Promote the Sustain-a-Tree membership program to individuals and businesses.
5. Develop a paid internship program to cultivate a new generation of skilled individuals passionate about MORP's mission.

*Major accomplishments to date:*

- ☑ Organized as a program under 501(c)(3) fiscal sponsorship provided by Onward! A Legacy Foundation and formed an Advisory Team.
- ☑ Hired two full-time staff members and successfully completed one paid internship experience.
- ☑ Developed a Sustain-a-Tree membership program to provide financial support for MORP's preservation efforts.
- ☑ Cultivated a membership base of 500 dues-paying members.
- ☑ Managed over a dozen state and federal grants, as well as numerous projects funded by private foundations.
- ☑ Led a successful capital campaign that raised over \$1 million to restore essential land and infrastructure required for revitalizing the fruit economy.

## **RECONCILIATION**

It is essential to recognize that the establishment of orchards in Colorado coincided with the forced displacement, land and water theft, and genocide of Native peoples.

**Goal #1: Acknowledge and learn from the complete truth of history while respecting and supporting the resilience of our Native neighbors today. Through our work and collaborations, we hope that the next generation of orchards will be rooted in kindness, justice, equity, diversity, and inclusion, ensuring they thrive for 100 years or more.**

*Objectives:*

1. Formally acknowledge and apologize for this recent, brutal history connected to our orchard past.
2. Take meaningful steps to incorporate the full truth of history and Native voices in our efforts.
3. Develop programs and networks that connect Native communities to the land, water, fruit, and orchard resources we steward.
4. Plan for mutual stewardship opportunities to further MORP's mission indefinitely and

consider land return should the organization ever dissolve.

*Major accomplishments to date:*

- ☑ Acknowledged this painful history in the historical context of Colorado's fruit growing history, as well as on our social media, website, and outreach efforts with the press.
- ☑ Offered apologies for the recent past, which included proud but harmful narratives from early fruit growers that amounted to genocide, as exemplified in statements such as, "*As aptly said by Dr. Shaw, the energetic fruit-growers of these valleys began planting fruit trees in the fresh tracks of the receding Utes.*"
- ☑ Worked to eliminate or replace hurtful, Eurocentric racist language from documents and our website, such as substituting "pioneer/settler" with "colonizer."
- ☑ Through our tree donation program and educational outreach, we initiated long-term efforts to cultivate meaningful relationships with Native youth, communities, and organizations.

## **PLANNED MILESTONES**

MORP is an organization rich in programs, yet every year poses a challenge to raise the necessary funds to achieve our goals. While we do generate some revenue through tree and juice sales, which helps cover part of our expenses, additional support is crucial—especially given the growing unpredictability of grant funding. In 5 years, MORP will reach or make significant progress to:

- Complete all phases of orchard establishment and irrigation improvements at the Orchard Hub, Gold Medal Orchard, and Dolores Community Heritage Orchard.
- Finish the second phase of construction for expanding the juicing facility.
- Acquire a work truck capable of towing the mobile juice press.
- Expand the Sustain-a-Tree membership program to raise at least \$8,000 per month in recurring donations.
- Establish a legacy fund of at least \$100,000 with a financial plan for ongoing growth.
- Integrate Planned Giving into the Fundraising Strategy.
- Develop the financial capacity to meet payroll reliably for two full-time staff members and one part-time intern.
- Restore the historic structures at the Orchard Hub, prioritizing the old barn.
- Negotiate a long-term management agreement with the owners of Gold Medal Orchard to ensure the orchard site's preservation for future generations.
- Increase combined annual juice and tree sales to \$100,000 or more.
- Expand the major donor base to include at least 10 individuals contributing \$10,000 or more each year, ideally involving members of the Advisory Team and their networks.
- Continue to grow the metric milestones outlined at the beginning of this plan.

Achieving these key fundraising milestones will align organizational capacity more closely with program development, fostering sustainability for the organization.

FOR MORE INFORMATION OR TO CONTACT US:

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*MORP is a program of Onward! A Legacy Foundation. For donation purposes, the EIN is 26-0045741. When making a contribution, please specify that it is for the Montezuma Orchard Restoration Project so our Executive Director, Charles (Chuck) Forth, knows which fiscal program to apply it to.*