

Agricultural Stewardship Frequently Asked Questions

Why does Thornton own land in Larimer and Weld Counties?

When Thornton purchased water rights in the 1980s, the farms, houses, and other structures on the farms were all included with the purchase of the water. Thornton still owns most of the land that it purchased in the 1980s.

What does Thornton do with the land that it owns?

Thornton continues to cash rent irrigated land on approximately 12,000 acres to local agriculture producers. An additional 6,800 acres has been converted to dryland grasses that may be grazed or harvested for feed.

What does agricultural stewardship mean?

Thornton owns the land in Larimer and Weld Counties for the water. However, Thornton's responsibilities extend beyond the water that it owns. Thornton's oversight of the properties is a stewardship function as well as a farming function. Stewardship has to balance many competing priorities, including but not limited to farming, range management, grazing, open space, energy development, Thornton's water court decree requirements, and community relationships.

How long does Thornton plan to own land in Larimer and Weld Counties?

Thornton will own the land for several more decades due to requirements in Thornton's water court decree. These requirements state that Thornton is responsible for the revegetated land until three years after all of Thornton's surface water associated with the farms is converted to municipal use. It will take a number of years for Thornton to grow into this water supply and convert all of the water to municipal use.

What does it mean when Thornton revegetates a farm?

The irrigation water has been removed from the farm. The land is then planted to dryland grasses and the weeds and pests are controlled throughout the growing season. Revegetated farms may be grazed, or the grasses may be harvested for feed.

Why does Thornton own houses in Larimer and Weld Counties?

When Thornton purchased water rights in the 1980s, the farms, houses, and other structures on the farms were all included with the purchase of the water. Thornton still owns many of the houses that came with the farms in that original purchase.

Does Thornton rent out houses?

Yes. Applications are accepted year-round and held for 90 days. Visit the Agricultural Stewardship section of the City of Thornton's website for more rental information and a rental application.

Does Thornton rent farms?

Yes, Thornton currently leases approximately 12,000 acres of irrigated land to local area producers. There are over 70 farm leases and 50 different farm tenants in Larimer and Weld Counties. Farm leases are cash based and typically have 3-to-5-year lease terms. Existing tenants have the first right to renew their leases when the lease term expires. If they choose not to renew, the farm is then put out to public bid.

Does Thornton pay taxes in Larimer and Weld Counties?

Yes, Thornton pays taxes to Weld and Larimer Counties. Every other year, when the counties reevaluate property values, Thornton's properties are also evaluated. Although Thornton is not obligated to pay these taxes, Thornton chooses to continue to pay the taxes in order to keep the communities and services available to the local area.

Does Thornton allow hunting?

Thornton does not currently allow public hunting on the farm properties. Thornton does allow the farmers who lease the farms to hunt on the farm properties.

Does Thornton allow grazing?

Thornton does have a grazing program on some revegetated farms. In addition, farm tenants may graze irrigated farm ground in the fall.

Does Thornton sell grass hay?

Yes, Thornton may harvest the dryland grass on its revegetated farms when there is adequate moisture during the year. If Thornton does harvest grasses for feed, the grass feed is sold via a public bid process.

Does Thornton have an office in Weld or Larimer County?

Yes. The Agricultural Stewardship Office is located at 16754 CR 84, Ault, Colorado 80610. Approximately one-quarter (1/4) mile west of the Highway 85 and County Road 84 intersection, on the south side of the county road. Visit the Agricultural Stewardship section of the City of Thornton's website to view the mailing address and office hours for the Agricultural Stewardship Office.

How does Thornton manage its agricultural properties?

Irrigated farms are rented on a cash lease basis. The price per acre is determined by competitive, public sealed bids if a farm becomes available. Otherwise, the lease rates are adjusted every three to five years, depending upon the term of the lease, based upon a rolling, four-year average of the United States Department of Agriculture local cash rents for irrigated farmland in Northern Colorado.

Revegetated farms are typically managed by the Thornton Agricultural Stewardship Office. These farms are maintained by local vendors that are hired to spray, mow, cut and/or bale the grass based upon inspections and recommendations of the Agricultural Stewardship Office. Some revegetated farms are leased for grazing.

What types of crops are grown on the Thornton farms?

Silage corn, shelled corn, alfalfa, pinto beans, sugar beets and onions are some of the crops farm tenants produce.

Are Thornton farms open for public access?

No, neither the irrigated nor revegetated farms are open for public access.

If Thornton (a city government) owns all this land, can I (the public) visit the farms?

The City of Thornton is a public entity, however since the land is located in other counties it is treated just like any other private landowner within that County. No public access is allowed. If a person wanted to visit a particular farm, they would first have to gain permission from the farm tenant (leased farms) or the City of Thornton (revegetated farms) before they could enter. Liability, damage to crops as well as potential harm to visitors from farming operations, animals or other unforeseen hazards do not allow for public access.