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Southeastern Colorado farmers honored

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The Rocky Ford Growers' Association was formed to strengthen and protect the reputation of the world famous Rocky Ford melons following the food safety crises that happened in 2011. Farmers with no connection to the local farmers around La Junta and Rocky Ford inadvertently started an anti-cantaloupe panic when several of their melons were found to be the source of a listeria outbreak. Strict guidelines regarding the area where the melons are grown and innovative conservation, growing and processing methods for the melons have since stabilized the market and insured a bright future for the next generation of families in the Arkansas River Valley. Accepting the Innovation in Conservation Award for the RFGA was John Knapp.

Michael and Glenn Hirakata of Hirakata Farms, who are cousins, invested in a state-of-the-art processing facility for the melons and helped to organize the RFGA. They were a source of hope and stability during the troubling times following the listeria crisis. Accepting the Innovation in Conservation Award for Hirakata Farms was Glenn Hirakata.

The Stuart P. Dodge Award for a lifetime achievement in conservation went to Corwin Brown of Springfield. He is a nearly lifelong resident of southeastern Colorado, working as a landowner, rancher, ranch broker and land appraiser and serving the Colorado Cattlemen's Association in a variety of official and unofficial leadership roles. He was also involved in the creation of the Colorado Cattlemen's Agricultural Land Trust and was a board member of the Pinon Canyon Expansion Opposition Coalition.