

Arizonans Preventing Hunger Action Plan 2017

Nine Strategies to Increase Food Security



The Arizona Hunger
Advisory Council

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THE NEW FACE OF HUNGER



The face of hunger has changed dramatically! Food Insecurity* now affects almost one in six Arizonans.¹ The working poor live from paycheck to paycheck without savings. And 2.6 million Arizonans live below 200 percent of the federal poverty line.² When faced with a car repair, an increase in rent, or a medical emergency, these individuals and families fall behind in payments and cannot free themselves from crushing debt. As the cost of living rises³, hunger affects seniors on fixed incomes, adults working at two or more jobs, and children who worry about empty refrigerators instead of math homework.

Since the Great Recession of 2008, the lines at food banks have continued to grow longer, including persons who formerly donated to those food banks.⁴ Emergency food providers are stretching to a breaking point. And low-income persons living in “food deserts” lack access to nutritious foods. These are just some of the needs that we can address together.

The Arizona Hunger Advisory Council of the Department of Economic Security invites you (your agency, business, church, school, etc.) to join in taking effective action steps to prevent hunger in your community. The Council supports efforts to implement the Arizonans Preventing Hunger Action Plan available for download at <http://tinyurl.com/AZHungerActionPlan>.

*The US Department of Agriculture defines food insecurity as “A condition where persons lack reliable access to a sufficient quantity of affordable, nutritious food.”⁵

THREE CENTRAL GOALS



This document contains nine strategies to achieve our three central goals. Achieving these goals will reduce the prevalence and severity of poverty and hunger in Arizona while boosting the economy.



1 INCREASE ECONOMIC SECURITY FOR PEOPLE, COMMUNITIES, AND THE STATE OF ARIZONA.



2 CULTIVATE A STRONG REGIONAL FOOD SYSTEM



3 MAXIMIZE THE EFFECTIVENESS OF ARIZONA'S FOOD ASSISTANCE SAFETY NET

1

INCREASE ECONOMIC SECURITY FOR PEOPLE, COMMUNITIES, AND THE STATE OF ARIZONA

- 1.1 Establish a livable wage that reduces the number of working persons living in hunger and poverty
- 1.2 Ensure government and communities support local hunger and poverty prevention programs
- 1.3 Increase employment opportunities for the working poor

1.1 ESTABLISH A LIVABLE WAGE

In Arizona, the “working poor” are confronted with difficult choices — do they pay the rent or buy needed medicine? Do they seek needed dental care or purchase nutritious food?

Jobs with fair wages are the cornerstone of a strong, prosperous economy. Families and individuals that make a good wage are able to afford their rent, pay for medicine, and put food on the table. Unfortunately, the state of Arizona does not follow the trend of fair wage jobs. Despite working, many individuals are living in poverty and rely on nutritional assistance programs to get by.

MINIMUM WAGE IN ARIZONA: 2010 TO 2020⁶





Community-minded business leaders can make a difference in the welfare of their community by investing in their employees' wages. The negative consequences of low-paying jobs occur not only to workers and their families but also to all levels of government in the form of lower tax revenue and slowed economic growth, producing a vicious economic cycle.

Raise Arizona, a project launched by the Arizona Community Action Association, is encouraging businesses to voluntarily raise wages to a livable wage of \$14.13 per hour. Businesses that establish a livable wage ensure that their employees are able to afford housing, food, and health care expenses with enough left over to put into savings. This promising strategy helps the working poor become financially self-sustaining and resilient in dealing with financial challenges such as inflation and recession.

We request that state and local governments play an active role in encouraging employers to pay livable wages. When Arizona workers receive livable wages, they will not have to rely on credit and borrowing when emergency strikes. They will be able to avoid an endless cycle of increasing debt due to increasing interest payments. As they achieve financial security, workers will be able to contribute more to Arizona's tax base and prosperous economy and live without the fear of again being hungry.

1.2 ENSURE BUSINESS, FAITH GROUPS, NONPROFITS AND GOVERNMENT SUPPORT LOCAL HUNGER AND POVERTY PREVENTION PROGRAMS

Businesses, faith-based organizations, nonprofits, and governmental entities each play a vital role in supporting local hunger and poverty prevention programs. The needs of vulnerable individuals and populations ,who turn to such programs are unlikely to be met solely by the private sector or solely by the public sector. Each has an important role to play in assisting individuals and families to become more financially stable.



The Business Community

In addition to paying employees a living wage and otherwise providing financial support, businesses can assist their employees in developing stability and reducing vulnerability, often without incurring significant costs. Businesses can encourage employees to serve as volunteers for causes that help assist vulnerable populations and seek out and provide their employees with information about nonprofit and community programs.



The Faith Community

Faith-based groups can provide a strong spiritual base of support to families to help them become more secure. They also may help to identify persons who could benefit from programs and encourage parishioners to volunteer and donate.



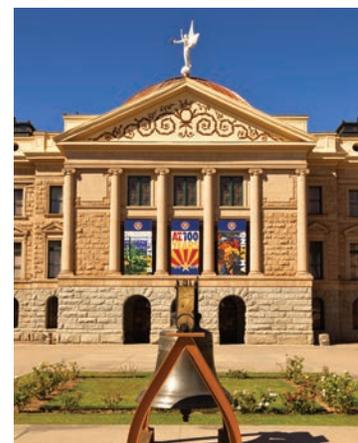
Nonprofit and Community Groups

Nonprofits, philanthropists and community groups help vulnerable populations in a variety of ways. They connect vulnerable persons to services and resources, as well as provide direct support. For example, nonprofits may provide emergency foods to help vulnerable families and solicit food in donation drives. By providing volunteer opportunities for youth in vulnerable populations they engage youth in solving problems and instill the value of community service. They also keep track of needs and outcomes, conduct research to identify unmet needs, and educate vulnerable individuals, policymakers and the community at large about the needs of and opportunities for vulnerable populations.



Government

Government plays a vital role in helping to solve the problems of vulnerable individuals and families. Tax revenues are used to fund government programs and non-governmental entities that address the problems of vulnerable populations. Taxation and funding at both the federal and the state levels should ensure that Arizona's vulnerable populations receive necessary assistance. Government should allocate funds to organizations that serve vulnerable populations and allow organizations to allocate and distribute the funds to meet the unique needs of their respective communities.



1.3 INCREASE EMPLOYMENT OPPORTUNITIES FOR THE WORKING POOR

Arizona's working poor, those who are either working or actively looking for work for at least 27 weeks per year but remain under the poverty level, require additional educational and employment supports to increase their skill base and maintain higher paying occupations.⁷

Increase Educational Opportunities Prior to Entry to Kindergarten

Early Childhood Education (ECE) is the foundation on which a person's ability to manage and grow from life's stressors is built. ECE instills behavioral, social and cognitive skills that are necessary to mitigate economic and social risk factors while leading to successful outcomes for students.⁸ Increasing appropriations to public schools to build and administer their own ECE programs will allow more children to gain the benefits of ECE and enable schools to tailor their programs to the needs of their surrounding communities in a culturally and linguistically relevant way.

Continue Educational Supports at the Post-Secondary Level

by Developing Training Partnerships with Businesses in Need of Employees with Specialized Skills

Higher-paying careers require education beyond the secondary (i.e. high school) level. Progression into an age when the integration of technology is a key requirement determining the success or failure of a business calls for an ever-increasing number of well-trained workers who will have the knowledge needed to create, maintain and innovate business technology.

While concentrating on building a base of skilled persons for employment in a technologically advanced position, Arizona must also support programs benefitting those who will manage vital resources, such those provided by the agriculture industry.

Several low-cost or no-cost programs, enriched with knowledge and materials from leading educational institutions across the country, exist to aid in the development of much needed skill sets. The table contains only a small fraction of the total number of free educational courses.

PROVIDER	PRIMARY PROGRAMS	WEBSITE
Coursera (online courses from multiple universities)	Business, Computer Science, Data Science, Engineering and Social Science	www.coursera.com (online courses)
edX (online courses from multiple universities)	Business, Computer Science, Food and Nutrition, Data Analytics, Finance, Life Sciences, Humanities and Social Science	www.edx.org (online courses)
Codecademy (Hands-on learning; offers instruction related to the most in-demand software skill sets)	Computer Programming with a focus on programming languages, scripting languages, web development and SQL	www.codecademy.com (online courses)
Google's Python Class	Python, a powerful, easy-to-learn and commonly used programming language that powers a diverse range of desktop and web-based applications	https://developers.google.com/edu/python/ (online courses)
Multiple Universities (University of Florida, Purdue, Utah State University and more)	Irrigation conveyance and design, sustainability, soil sampling and testing, pesticides and their impact on the environment, weed control, social issues around genetically modified crops, plant biotechnology and the risks and benefits of orchestrating cell separation in plants	Several websites are dedicated to offering free, online agriculture courses on topic as diverse as farm business management to using unmanned aerial vehicles (UAV) to monitor crops.
University of Arizona, College of Agriculture and Life Sciences — Cooperative Extension (CALs-CE)	Non-formal education in Agricultural topics with the intent on improving lives, communities and the economy	http://extension.arizona.edu/yavapai (in-person delivery)



- 2.1 Strengthen Arizona's food system through local food policy councils
- 2.2 Expand fresh, healthy food production locally
- 2.3 Develop transportation solutions to increase access to nutritious foods

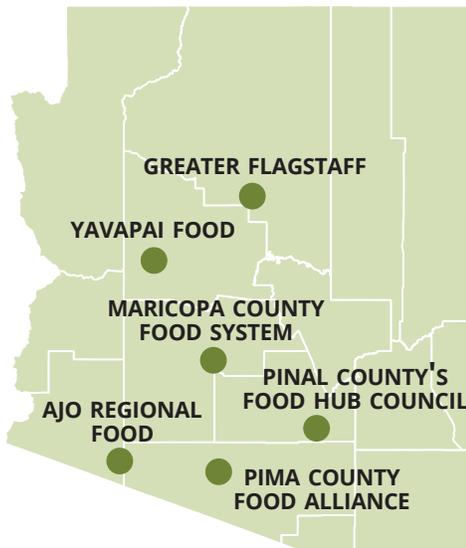
2.1 STRENGTHEN ARIZONA'S FOOD SYSTEM THROUGH LOCAL FOOD POLICY COUNCILS

Across the US and Canada, food policy councils have emerged to provide democratic leadership for addressing food security, food safety, and food system labor issues at community, tribal, regional, county, and state levels.

These councils seek improvement in the sectors of the food system, including:

- Food production
- Food procurement
- Environmental sustainability
- Economic development
- Food access
- Food processing
- Food recovery
- Labor

They act on behalf of the population they serve to identify needs and problems in the food system and advocate for specific improvements. They bring representatives together from the different sectors of the food system to build a common understanding and power base for advancing policies and legislation affecting the population, business community, and government. They provide an informed, integrated perspective to create systemic and meaningful improvements in the food system.



These organizations provide leadership in their geographic areas and have the potential to address state-level policies and legislation. Their effectiveness in accomplishing collaborative projects and initiatives demonstrates the value of food policy councils in Arizona and across the nation.

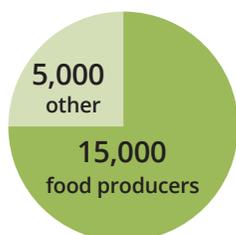
Communities should support their local food policy councils and learn about their local food system. Creation of new food policy councils where there are currently none in place will also be a critical part of creating sustainable movement in our statewide food system. Councils should collaborate on an ongoing

basis to share key learnings and create a statewide network to increase the amount of food for food assistance programs.

2.2 EXPAND FRESH, HEALTHY FOOD PRODUCTION LOCALLY

Nearly 2 in 3 Arizonans are overweight or obese — and by 2030, nearly half a million Arizonans will face diet-related illnesses.⁹ We can support local farmers and create a healthier, hunger-free Arizona by expanding fresh, healthy food production locally.

AG PRODUCERS IN ARIZONA¹⁰



ARIZONA IMPORTS¹¹



PERCENT OF ARIZONA FARMS BY SIZE¹²





Currently, local Arizona farms provide roughly 30% of Arizona's food supply. Small and midsize farmers struggle to compete in the marketplace, and most small and midsize farms lose money each year.¹³

Some strategies to expand fresh local food include:

- Increase in the number of existing small and midsize human food producers.
- Increase in the number of new small and midsize food producers.
- Increase in annual retail sales from small and midsize food producers.
- Increase in the number of fresh food donations to local food assistance programs.

This strategy requires creating more retail sales opportunities for small and midsize food producers by establishing food hubs where farmers sell fresh produce that is processed and packaged with local branding for sale to grocers, restaurants, social institutions, and other retail outlets. The lack of food hubs has largely limited farmers to selling at farmers markets.

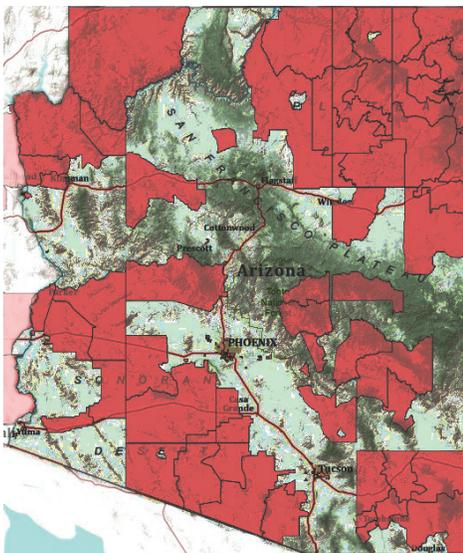
Since the average age of farmers in Arizona in 2012 was 61 years, it is necessary to train younger persons to start farming and ranching.¹⁴ Incubator farms and farm/ranch internships should be organized to engage millennials in hands-on training, along with reasonable options for providing farm investment and insurance for new farmers. Arizona universities and community colleges play a significant role in developing farmers and ranchers, utilizing Workforce Development federal funds.

The interim action goals needed to achieve the long-term goals include:

- Increase the number of food hubs statewide.
- Increase the number of incubator farms for training new farmers and ranchers.
- Increase the number of new farmers and ranchers trained in hands-on farming/ranching.

2.3 DEVELOP TRANSPORTATION SOLUTIONS TO INCREASE ACCESS TO NUTRITIOUS FOODS

While Arizona is known for its ability to grow significant amounts of healthy, nutritious fruits and vegetables, many residents struggle to access this food. Known as food deserts, these areas have limited grocery stores, farmers markets, and healthy food providers, making it difficult for residents to easily access nutritious food. These residents often have access to corner stores or quick-access stores that are limited in their ability to sell fresh food.



FOOD DESERTS IN ARIZONA¹⁶

The USDA defines a food desert as an area in which at least 500 people and/or at least 33 percent of a census tract's population resides more than one mile from a supermarket or large grocery store (for rural census tracts, the distance is more than 10 miles). The areas in red are considered food deserts.

According to the United States Department of Agriculture, 26 percent of Arizonans live in census tracts designated as food deserts.¹⁵ Individuals experiencing hunger are limited in funds to buy food, and food deserts offer little healthy food to choose from. This creates an even higher risk of ongoing health concerns for these families.



Initiatives are currently underway to address this concern, but the challenge is complex, so additional focus is required. The Department of Agriculture's Food Desert Summit, held in July 2016, brought together a wide range of organizations and individuals to identify innovative solutions. Food policy coalitions and councils are also looking at ways to eliminate food deserts in their local communities.

Much is also being done to encourage organizations to supply fresh food in these areas. Current strategies include:

- Encouraging supermarkets to expand into food deserts.
- Collaborating with farmers markets and CSAs to provide SNAP and WIC recipients with more money to purchase produce.
- Partnering with local convenience stores to provide a consistent variety of produce to their customers.
- Developing unused land into community gardens and urban farms to support residents living in food deserts.
- Promoting development of home gardens.
- Increasing home food delivery programs to homebound and disabled persons, including Meals on Wheels.
- Supplying mobile food delivery services to food deserts.
- Providing public transit services for food deserts.



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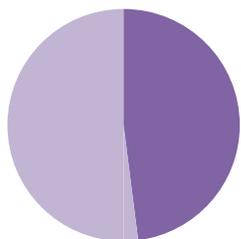
MAXIMIZE THE EFFECTIVENESS OF ARIZONA'S FOOD ASSISTANCE SAFETY NET

- 3.1 Develop policy to remove barriers of participation in food assistance programs
- 3.2 Develop innovative outreach strategies to reach more people in need
- 3.3 Simplify application forms for food assistance programs

3.1 DEVELOP POLICY TO REMOVE BARRIERS OF PARTICIPATION IN FOOD ASSISTANCE PROGRAMS

Federal food assistance programs, like the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), are the nation's most important anti-hunger programs. In 2016, SNAP helped more than 44 million low-income Americans and nearly 1 million Arizonans afford a nutritionally adequate diet in a typical month.¹⁷

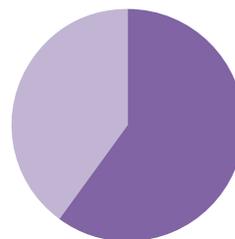
1 IN 2 ARIZONA SNAP RECIPIENTS ARE CHILDREN¹⁸



AVERAGE MONTHLY SNAP BENEFIT¹⁹

\$120

3 IN 5 RECIPIENTS IN ARIZONA ARE KIDS, SENIORS OR PEOPLE WITH DISABILITIES²⁰



In Arizona, the SNAP Partnership is a network of 64 community-based organizations working on SNAP outreach and/or application assistance, committed to using a holistic approach to address hunger.²¹ Nonprofit organizations and government agencies working in the community on SNAP outreach and/or application assistance are part of the Partnership and have provided SNAP eligibility information to nearly 70,000



people, informed over 150,000 people about SNAP at Outreach events, and assisted over 75,000 people in applying for benefits through Health-e-Arizona Plus.²²

SNAP is one of the most responsive and economically efficient federal program providing additional assistance during economic downturns. Disaster-SNAP (D-SNAP) offers short-term food assistance benefits to families suffering in the wake of a disaster. It also is an important nutritional support for low-wage working families, low-income seniors, and people with disabilities living on fixed incomes.

SNAP must be strengthened to ensure that the program is working well for all persons, including individuals with barriers to access.

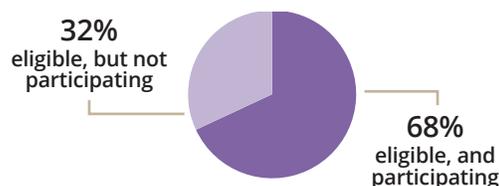
We can better serve food-insecure Arizonans by removing barriers, such as the outdated fingerprint requirement and cumbersome interview requirement. We can also provide persons in prisons and jails opportunities for successful community re-entry with a chance to apply for SNAP.

We need to remember that the core purpose of SNAP is to make sure people have the fuel and nutrition they need so that no child and no families goes to bed hungry day after day and week after week. By efficiently providing the nutritional support people need, we strengthen Arizona and give everyone a chance to succeed.

3.2 DEVELOP POLICY TO REMOVE BARRIERS OF PARTICIPATION IN FOOD ASSISTANCE PROGRAMS

NOT ENOUGH ARIZONANS PARTICIPATE IN FOOD ASSISTANCE PROGRAMS

For example, only 68 percent of eligible Arizonans participate in SNAP. Other programs like WIC and School Breakfast may be underutilized as well.²³



Common Reasons Why Eligible People Don't Participate in Food Assistance Programs, According to Community Organizations

- Lack of Knowledge of Eligibility
- Negative stigmas associated with utilizing food assistance
- Burdensome application process
- They believe other people deserve the assistance more

Research shows various outreach strategies should be employed to effectively reach and educate food insecure households about available food assistance programs. Thus, implementation of a statewide food assistance program outreach plan is warranted. In order to plan, develop, implement and evaluate a robust, Arizona specific outreach plan, the following goals and objectives will be executed:

A statewide outreach strategy team should be developed to increase Arizonans' public knowledge of available food assistance programs.

- The outreach strategy team should meet to discuss the needs of the community and should include one staff member from each food assistance program/ partner agency
- The team should meet regularly to work on outreach plan development, marketing plans, and toolkits
- The teams should share and implement the plan statewide

3.3 SIMPLIFY APPLICATION FORMS FOR FOOD ASSISTANCE PROGRAMS

The federal government oversees several nutrition assistance programs, among them SNAP (formerly Food Stamps), WIC (Women, Infants and Children), and the National School Lunch Program (NSLP).

NOT ENOUGH ARIZONANS PARTICIPATE IN FOOD ASSISTANCE PROGRAMS



USA	45 million ²⁴	8 million ²⁶	30 million ²⁸
ARIZONA	1 million ²⁵	167,000 ²⁷	640,000 ²⁹

Despite program successes in ensuring access to healthy, nutritious food, not all individuals who qualify for the programs are participating. There are many barriers to explain the lack of participation: difficulty obtaining transportation to a local SNAP office, lack of understanding of the eligibility requirements of WIC, and/or NSLP forms not being translated into multiple languages. The biggest barriers to persons applying for these programs are navigating through differing and inconsistent eligibility criteria and the duplicative efforts required of the applicant.

Government must reform the nutrition assistance benefits system by streamlining programs, simplifying forms, standardizing eligibility, and enabling computer systems to talk to each other. Technology updates, while costly, can be completed with help from federal grants to the state. This would make the application process and interview system more efficient and cut red tape for the government and for families. The primary purpose for these programs is to ensure everybody eats and does not go to bed hungry. Simplifying application processes and systems allows more food-insecure person access to food assistance programs and improves governmental efficiency. To measure effectiveness, we would like to see the turnaround time from application to approval of benefits greatly reduced.

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THE HUNGER ADVISORY COUNCIL

Mission Statement

The Council exists to help end hunger in Arizona by providing a forum for the development and advocacy of strategies to end hunger, with particular attention to empowering the disenfranchised in order to attain food security for everyone; and to promote cooperation and collaboration among all agencies and decision makers (both public and private) to eliminate the causes of hunger and reduce hunger where it exists.

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