As of December 1, more than 337,000 people in Arizona have tested positive for COVID-19, and many more are struggling with hunger as a result of the pandemic. Nearly 1.3 million Arizonans could face food insecurity this year, many for the first time.2

How Has the Arizona Food Bank Network Responded?
Since mid-March, AzFBN and its member food banks have worked tirelessly to meet the demand for emergency food assistance, which, at times, spiked to three times the daily average.

- Distributed 151 million pounds of food, or roughly 116 million meals, to Arizonans in need from March through October—nearly 20 percent more than last year
- Led frequent ongoing mobile distributions in tribal communities and other hard-hit areas
- Supported small growers, low-income families, and the local food network through Friends of the Farm, our farm-to-food-bank pilot program
- Delivered food boxes and prepared meals to seniors, families, and homeless individuals, in partnership with organizations that serve these groups
- Modified distributions to drive-through, low-touch service and collaborated with the National Guard to replace volunteers and relieve overworked staff

SNAP Provides Critical Support
In October, Arizona's unemployment rate was 8 percent. Although this is lower than where it was this summer (11 percent), this still leaves hundreds of thousands of households without enough income to make ends meet. The Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) helps families put food on the table.

- An average of 895,000 Arizonans participated in SNAP each month since the pandemic began, and nearly half of them were children. That's 10 percent more than the 2019 monthly average.
- The average amount of SNAP each person received rose from $118 to $165 per month, due to the emergency allotments authorized by the USDA through the Families First Coronavirus Response Act.
- Beginning in May, Arizonans could use SNAP to purchase groceries online at participating retailers, minimizing COVID-19 exposure risk for people struggling with hunger.

Schools & Pandemic EBT Help Feed Kids
Nearly 600,000 children in Arizona are eligible for free or reduced-price meals in school, and, in a typical month, schools provide about 14 million meals to students. With USDA’s extension of meal flexibilities, schools are able to offer free meals to all kids through June 30, 2021. In the spring, more than 780,000 kids across the state received Pandemic EBT, which helps families buy groceries to replace missed school meals. Additional P-EBT benefits will be distributed to eligible children during the current school year.
What Can Congress Do?

Food banks can't fight hunger alone. Additional COVID-19 relief is urgently needed.

1. Boost SNAP

The Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) is the nation's most effective nutrition program, especially for children. It can provide up to nine meals for every one meal provided by a food bank. SNAP isn't just a help to families though; it also stimulates the economy. Every $1 of SNAP generates between $1.50–$1.80 in economic activity, resulting in an average of $157 million a month infused into Arizona's economy in 2019.6

To limit the depth and duration of the COVID-19 health and economic crisis, AzFBN supports:

A 15 percent boost in the maximum SNAP monthly benefit, to increase Arizona's average benefit per person from $118 to $138 per month. This is especially critical for the lowest-income households, which are ineligible for SNAP Emergency Allotments.

An increase in the minimum SNAP monthly benefit from $16 to $30, to help seniors and other vulnerable groups at a time when their health is at risk.

2. Support Food Banks

Two key USDA food programs are ending on December 31: the Food Purchase & Distribution Program (FPDP, formerly Trade Mitigation) and the Farmers-to-Families Food Box Program. These have been critical in meeting increased demand at Arizona's food banks, both before and during the pandemic. In fact, FPDP supplied about half of the 81 million pounds of food distributed through the Emergency Food Assistance Program (TEFAP) in fiscal year 2020. With demand as much as 60 percent higher since the start of the pandemic, a loss of 50 percent of the food supplied by the USDA will contribute to food insecurity statewide.

In addition, as food banks in Arizona distribute more and more food to families in need that are impacted by COVID-19, the capacity of the emergency food network is stressed. Additional TEFAP resources are needed for coolers, freezers, trucks, and infrastructure to store and distribute food across the state. This investment is critical to meet the current need and build resiliency for future crises.

For more information, please contact AzFBN Public Policy Manager Ashley St. Thomas at ashley@azfoodbanks.org or 602-775-5035.

SOURCES
3. AzFBN member food banks are Community Food Bank of Southern Arizona, HonorHealth Desert Mission Food Bank, St. Mary's Food Bank Alliance, United Food Bank, and Yuma Community Food Bank.
4. St. Mary's Food Bank Alliance launched the Arizona Tribal Food Distribution map, which is updated daily.
6. Moody's Analytics and the USDA estimate that every $1 in SNAP generates between $1.50–$1.80 in economic activity. The figure cited is an average of the “total monthly issuance” of SNAP statewide in 2019 ($95,122,426) multiplied by 1.65 ($156,952,003), using 2019 DES Monthly Statistical Bulletins.