



Hunger-Free AZ News

spring 2023



Goodbye 2022, Hello 2023

Here at AzFBN, we are welcoming the new year with lots of hope and great appreciation for the accomplishments of the past year. 2022 was a year of recovery and rebuilding after the trials of post-pandemic life. For many in our network, the challenges included serving more people, as **many member food banks reported their highest-ever numbers thanks to record-breaking inflation and the rise in rent costs.**

Our team — knowing the need for food was greater than ever — was hard at work, and I must say we were able to make great strides in the fight against hunger in Arizona. Here are some of those wins:

- **Added a brand-new program:** the *No Borders No Limits Produce Program*, which provided more fresh and nutritious produce for our food banks and Arizonans in need!
- **A streamlined application for older adults** when applying for food assistance (SNAP), ensuring more seniors can access nutritious food.
- **More funding for our *Friends of the Farm Program*** to distribute locally grown produce and strengthen the local food system.
- **Assisted our food bank network and partners with projects** like urban farming, sustainability training, tribal food sovereignty, and staffing through AmeriCorps VISTA.
- **Worked with Arizona State University to study the need for school meals** among Arizona families, the results of which led the *Arizona Department of Education* to allocate funds to help families by covering the cost of reduced-price meals, making all qualifying kids eligible for free meals at school.
- **Helped food banks across the state provide food** to more than 400,000 Arizonans EVERY MONTH of the past year.

SIGN UP FOR OUR MONTHLY E-ALERT to stay up to date on anti-hunger work on our website, azfoodbanks.org, or follow us on social media for the latest news at [@azfoodbanks](https://www.instagram.com/azfoodbanks).

Our Members



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What Is VOAD? — AzFBN and the Arizona Chapter of Voluntary Organizations Active in Disaster

More than 50 years ago, nonprofit organizations, government agencies, and volunteer groups realized the need to join forces in order to coordinate responses during disasters. Most often, these disasters are things like flooding, hurricanes, and other major storms, but they can also include wildfires and even the COVID-19 pandemic.

In 1970, a group called *Voluntary Organizations Active in Disaster* (VOAD) was founded to meet this need. **AzFBN is a member of the Arizona chapter of VOAD, which coordinates the efforts of nonprofits and other disaster responders, encouraging collaboration, cooperation, and communication.**

Staff from member organizations participate in training workshops and create community disaster plans that outline how each agency will respond during a disaster. When disaster strikes, each member knows what role they are expected to play, enabling this team to mobilize quickly. This work is in partnership with local government agencies and emergency management teams.

VOAD members also help meet long-term disaster recovery needs and educate communities about ways to prevent or reduce the impact of future disasters.

AzFBN brings expertise to VOAD to help move food quickly and efficiently to those who need it most. Together with our member food banks, we coordinate this response and work with them to prepare and deliver loads of emergency food, water, and other necessary supplies to disaster areas. We also help the emergency response team manage volunteers, and organize the stream of incoming donations so that urgently needed items are distributed quickly, and those that will be useful later are stored. Additionally, AzFBN serves as a central point of contact for sharing information with the public.

During the pandemic, member food banks responded to drastically increased demand for food assistance, while also facing significant supply chain challenges and reductions in donations. AzFBN supported member food banks as they adjusted and managed through these difficulties.

Together with our Arizona VOAD partners, AzFBN continues to prepare for future emergencies and raise awareness about policies that could prevent future disasters.

Agency Sustainability Program Helps Food Pantries Identify Gaps

Ending hunger is a tall order, and that is why the Arizona Food Bank Network team knows that one group or organization cannot do it alone. Ending immediate-need hunger in Arizona (and the world!) requires collaboration and support between all agencies, big and small. The *Agency Sustainability Program (ASP)* was born out of a need to ensure smaller food banks had the tools and resources available to them in order to operate at their best, as well as ensure their sustainability.

Since its inception, the program has “graduated” four food banks, and is working with two more.

The ASP includes both monetary grants and trainings, with a focus on agencies in rural or remote areas of Arizona. These small charities often need support to increase their capacity and improve their infrastructure. Trainings are tailored to the individual food banks, but can include topics like grant writing, board governance, marketing and website management, inventory management, and fundraising.

The grant funds provided can include the support of operations while the director of the organization focuses on the execution of the fundraising plan for the year, enhancing inventory controls, or donor and budgeting management. The main goal is to set up food banks for long-term success!

Trinity Walsh, the current AzFBN agency training coordinator and *AmeriCorps VISTA* volunteer, has been hard at work supporting food banks working through the program. Here are some updates on their progress:

- **Both food banks have participated in grant writing, board governance, and fundraising trainings** and, in turn, have had successful holiday distributions (both have also seen an increase in volunteers and donations!).
- **One of the food banks will start hosting its first-ever AmeriCorps VISTA volunteer** this year, who will be working to develop the food bank’s volunteer network, increase brand awareness, and engage in resource development.
- **Both food banks have committed to two more years of involvement** — which means more capacity building for them and more food available for the families they serve.

TO LEARN MORE about ASP and the work of our AmeriCorps VISTA volunteers, send an email to info@azfoodbanks.org or visit azfoodbanks.org/ameri-corps-vista-program.



Hunger Relief License Plate

Have you seen this license plate when driving around Arizona, or do you even have one yourself? The Hunger Relief license plate costs \$25 (plus postage and handling) and benefits AzFBN. **Get yours when you renew your Arizona license plate** and help end hunger one "plate" at a time. A big thanks to everyone who has this special plate. See you on the road!



Want to Help?

Visit our website and subscribe to our email list. We'll send you legislative action opportunities so that our elected officials and policymakers will hear your voice!

Contact Us

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No Border No Limits Produce Repack Program Makes Healthy Fresh Food Available

One of the many things we celebrated this past year was the addition of our *No Border No Limits Produce Program*, which rescues as much produce as possible from vendors and produce houses in the Nogales/Rio Rico produce corridor. The Rio Rico transportation and warehouse team often gets many truckloads of one type of fruit or veggie at a time, and that is great! But can we expect families receiving a food bank box to, for example, eat only oranges all week? Out of necessity and for the sake of nutritional variety (not to mention making things easier for food banks that get food to families) the *RePack Program* was born!

The RePack Program is simply what its name states: a program where the No Borders No Limits Produce Program team takes the many loads of oranges, apples, and tomatoes (and more!) it receives and repacks them with a variety of other fruits and vegetables, most donated, but some purchased, too. **This makes truck-loads of one kind of produce into family friendly boxes available at food banks.** Some of the boxes go to very rural parts of the state, where a variety of fruits and veggies are often not available or close by.

Another benefit of RePack is that loads that are questionable – where some of the produce is going bad, but a lot of it is still safe and can be used, can be sorted to remove the waste and preserve the part of the load that is still good. This means we can accept more loads that we would otherwise have turned away.

Just this past year the team sent out 16,000 RePack boxes – a week! But the team is working hard to double that number 2023. That means more healthy, fresh food available to people in need across Arizona and beyond!

IF YOU WANT TO LEARN MORE about this program or the operations of our *No Borders No Limits Produce Program* team, keep your eyes on our social channels for an upcoming virtual tour video or visit the team's page at azfoodbanks.org/no-borders-no-limits.

