



40 Years of Developing Solutions to End Hunger

Prince's "Purple Rain" was showering the airwaves. Apple's first Macintosh was on sale. The internet? Just being created in distant places like universities and labs. Cell phones? They existed, barely, but were anything but convenient and portable.

Excuse the nostalgia, but the Arizona Food Bank Network (AzFBN), known then as the Arizona Food Bank Association (AAFB), was officially incorporated in 1984 — 40 years ago!

Two years later, food banks, grocers, and government agencies collaborated around the need for a coordinated food distribution effort, creating the Maricopa County Emergency Food Coordination Project. It had one full-time coordinator. AzFBN (sorry, AAFB!) became a separate, registered nonprofit organization. And so AzFBN was born.

In the beginning, AzFBN's hunger relief efforts were limited to community citrus gleaning projects, statewide food drives, grocery salvage (leftover product like dented cans and things close to expiration), and Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA)-funded bulk orders. AzFBN was essentially a couple of fearless folks in a cubicle, putting their heads together about how to truly end hunger within their lifetime.

Vast refrigerated warehouses and regional collaboration were a dream — one that has, **with support of member food banks, supporters, advocates, and donors**, largely come true!

"I am excited to see the growth that has occurred," said Ginny Hildebrand, AzFBN's former president and CEO from 1985-2013. "The expansion to continue to support fresh produce acquisition and distribution is a terrific step. And the support of Summer Food and After School Nutrition programs is wonderful to see," she told us recently.

You don't have to read beyond the first two words of AzFBN's mission statement to know what we do best after all these years: 'developing solutions.' We don't claim to have all the answers, but we do have a network of powerful pantries, food banks, and partners who — as sure as there is peanut butter stocked on their shelves — come together to find solutions. Addressing food insecurity will always be a collaborative effort, Ginny continued.

Inside this special 40th anniversary newsletter, you'll see AzFBN's progression from our first statewide food banking conference to our first time collaborating with the Arizona Department of Agriculture. You can trace the lines between each of our member food banks' inception with the population growth in those areas, marking moments in history — tough times like recessions and presidential campaigns of the past.

You'll see all the way through to our most recent milestone: the purchase of a warehouse at 13 Calle Cristina in Rio Rico, Arizona. In June 2024, AzFBN closed on a 36,000-square-foot warehouse. And we have big plans!

(Continued on Back Page)

Our Members



COMMUNITY
FOOD BANK
OF SOUTHERN ARIZONA



Growing the Arizona Food Bank Network 1984-2024

1984

The **Maricopa County Emergency Food Coordination Project** transitions to the **Arizona Food Bank Association** (AFBA, now known as Arizona Food Bank Network) with five initial members: Society of St. Vincent de Paul, Desert Mission Food Bank, St. Mary's Food Bank, Westside Food Bank, and United Way/East Valley Food Demonstration Project.

1986

The **Hunger Hotline** is established, and the first Emergency Food Providers Directory is published and distributed.

1987

AFBA becomes the **Association of Arizona Food Banks (AAFB)**.

1988

Due in part to AAFB's advocacy, **Congress passes the Hunger Prevention Act**, making the Temporary Emergency Food Assistance Program (TEFAP) a discretionary-permanent USDA program and providing a reliable source for commodity foods for food banks. Program was later renamed the Emergency Food Assistance Program in 1990.

1994

Yuma Community Food Bank joins AAFB.

1998

AAFB leases two tractor/refrigerated trailer trucks for the **Arizona Statewide Gleaning Project (ASGP)** to transport donated and purchased food for Arizona food banks. This marks the organization's first formal role in transportation. **By 2004, the ASGP is distributing about 76.6 million pounds of product annually!**



"The changes that happened during my tenure at AAFB were truly what laid the foundation for the functioning of food banks not only in Arizona, but across the country. I am excited to see the growth that has occurred since I retired."

Ginny Hildebrand, FORMER CEO OF AZFBN

2005

Arizona Legislature passes the **Nutritional Standards Bill (HB2544)** to establish minimal nutrition standards for elementary and middle public school meal programs in Arizona. (This preceded the school nutrition programs we know today.) **AAFB/ASGP sends help to areas ravaged by Hurricanes Katrina, Wilma, and Rita.**

2006

The **Food Bank Directory** is launched on the AAFB website. **(In 2024, this page has an average of 10,000 views each month.)**



2013

The **AAFB Children and Youth program** is started with funding from Share Our Strength/No Kid Hungry and the Virginia G. Piper Charitable Trust. Long-time anti-hunger advocate and **AAFB CEO Ginny Hildebrand retires** from AzFBN after 28 years. Ginny started as the organization's administrative assistant in 1985. **Angie Rodgers steps into the role** as the president and CEO of AAFB.

2017

AAFB and its members create the **Southwest Produce Cooperative (SPC)** to streamline equitable resource sharing among food banks in the region, including the four regional Arizona food banks. Today, the **SPC has 16 members, and in 2023, AzFBN moved over 51 million pounds of food throughout the cooperative!**

"When I think about my time at AzFBN, I'm proud that we started a Friends of the Farm program, relying on local agriculture to help feed our communities across the state. [...] I am really excited about the work that AzFBN has in front of them for advocacy, for feeding people today, as well as the partnerships that they have for schools and communities, churches, [and] businesses."

Angie Rodgers, FORMER CEO OF AZFBN, CURRENT EXECUTIVE DEPUTY DIRECTOR OF THE AZ DEPARTMENT OF ECONOMIC SECURITY

2019

AAFB becomes the Arizona Food Bank Network (AzFBN). An official name change and rebrand usher the organization into a new decade. The AzFBN **Children and Youth program** is expanded to include other **vulnerable populations**, such as Tribal communities, developing the comprehensive and adaptable "Innovation" program as we know it today.

2020

COVID-19 pulls the world into crisis and AzFBN acts as disaster response. AzFBN, with support from state funding, launches **Friends of the Farm**, the country's first farm-to-food-bank program working exclusively with small growers and producers.

2022

AzFBN adopts the **No Borders No Limits produce program** based in Nogales, previously managed by Community Food Bank of Southern AZ. After nearly 10 years, CEO Angie Rodgers departs to accept the role of director of the Department of Economic Security.

2023

On the AzFBN team since 2015, **April Bradham steps into the role of president and CEO**. Taylor Swift makes a generous donation to AzFBN on the first stop of her iconic "The Eras Tour."



2024

AzFBN purchases its first warehouse! After leasing for two years, the No Borders No Limits warehouse in Rio Rico, Arizona, is officially under AzFBN ownership, thanks to a loan funded with help from the Local Initiative Support Corporation (LISC) and the Arizona Community Foundation.

"When I started working with the Gleaning Project back in 2000, I was hired as one of three drivers on a very small but mighty team. I helped with everything from building relationships with local and national partners to filling in for the director at logistics meetings. [...] In my mind, a huge goal for this work was always to have a warehouse, and now we have one full of food in Rio Rico."

Sylvia McKeever, AZFBN LOGISTICS MANAGER

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!



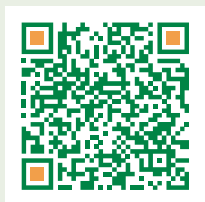
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From rescuing more produce for families across Arizona and beyond to diverting what can't be used for families from the landfill to farmers and composting and incorporating job training to get more people prepared for higher-paying jobs, all the work of the decades behind us set us up for a future where even more positive change is possible.

The one thing we haven't been able to do in 40 years is end hunger for all Arizonans, so that remains our vision. But thanks to food banks and everyone who knows that this work must continue, the accomplishments of this network have increased equity, visibility, innovation, the amount of healthy food available, and so much more.

It's as exciting — and daunting, honestly — to look forward as it is to look back, although we're more into Taylor Swift, the power of the internet, and cell phones, and (those of us who are old enough) are stunned at how different life is now compared to then. But we also know that in another 40 years, people will be listening to music and connecting with each other, too.

What will it look like when we reminisce about 2024? We can't even guess, but we hope that if our vision of a hunger-free Arizona hasn't been achieved, we're at least closer to ending hunger. 2064 — we see you.



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There Is Enough for Everyone

"Donde come uno, comen dos" — "where one eats, two can eat." Although that's the literal translation of the phrase, the meaning is much simpler: There is enough for everybody.

Mercedes, the repack quality control specialist for AzFBN's No Borders No Limits Produce Program in Rio Rico, Arizona, told us that she thinks about this phrase all the time. And that makes sense — Mercedes plays a big part in making sure that everyone in Arizona and beyond has enough to eat.

Our Repack team works every day, going through produce piece by piece and placing it with care into family-friendly mixed-produce boxes that contain a variety of fruits and vegetables.

In her role, Mercedes keeps a close eye on the quality of the produce, ensuring as much as possible that everything that goes into a box will still be fresh by the time it gets to a food bank and to a family in need of this fresh, healthy food.

You can get to know Mercedes and what leading quality efforts for the Repack team means to her, as well as about more updates regarding our Rio Rico operations — **just scan the QR code above!** Thank you for all your work for hungry Arizonans, Mercedes!