



Arizona
Food Bank
Network

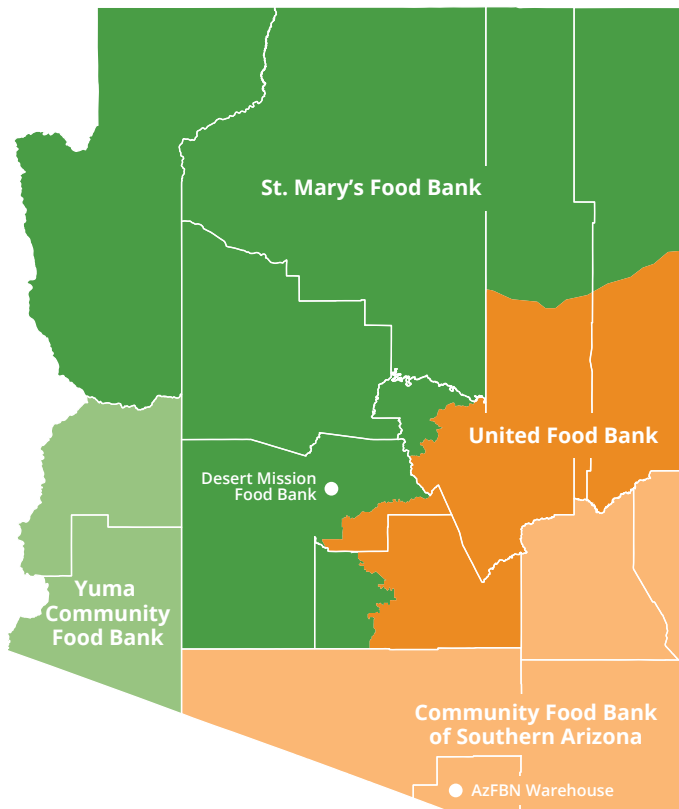
Anti-Hunger *Playbook*

57th Arizona State Legislature
First Regular Session



A legislator's guide to ending hunger in 2025

Arizona Food Bank Network & Members



Our members



In partnership with



About Us: The *Arizona Food Bank Network* (AzFBN) is a nonprofit organization dedicated to creating a hunger-free Arizona. Our mission is to develop solutions to end hunger through food banking, public policy, and innovation. We support our member food banks through the transportation of food, mostly donated fruits and vegetables, to a statewide network of food banks and agency partners. This includes sourcing food—much of which would have been headed to a landfill—and channeling it equitably to food banks across the state and beyond from the AzFBN warehouse in Rio Rico. AzFBN also dedicates resources to protecting the most vulnerable people at risk of hunger in the state, including children and older adults.

AzFBN Member Food Banks: AzFBN member food banks (above) provide emergency food assistance to people in all 15 counties through a network of nearly 1,000 food pantries, community centers, homeless shelters, and other partner agencies. Collectively, these food banks distributed more than **190 million pounds of food—roughly 146 million meals**—to Arizonans in need in 2024.¹ The map above reflects each food bank's service area.

NOTES: HonorHealth Desert Mission Food Bank is a member within St. Mary's Food Bank Alliance's service area. The AzFBN Produce Program is a collaboration between AzFBN's produce rescue team, food banks, and produce donors.

A Note from April Bradham, President and CEO

To new and returning lawmakers, welcome to the first regular session of the 57th Arizona State Legislature! With each new session we are excited to continue the momentum from the last—because it is your dedication to helping us end hunger that leads to long-term impacts and change for Arizonans across the state.

First and foremost, we want to thank you for making history in 2024. For the first time in Arizona's history, lawmakers prioritized access to school meals by investing state general funds into the program. Specifically, the \$3.8 million investment covers meal copays for low-income families—and it has already proven to be a success! Analysis shows that because of this policy, which was initially implemented with temporary federal resources in January 2023, an additional 1.3 million school meals are being served to low-income kids each month and average daily participation in the program has increased by 28 percent.² With your support, approximately 40,000 kids from low-income homes will get nutritious meals in schools, even if their parents don't have the \$0.70 it costs to buy both breakfast and lunch.

The Arizona Food Bank Network (AzFBN) was excited to make some history of our own last year. We celebrated our 40th anniversary, purchased a warehouse in Rio Rico to house our growing produce rescue program, and coordinated the distribution of more than 51 million pounds of fruits and vegetables that might have otherwise gone to a landfill. Our farm-to-food-bank program, *Friends of the Farm*, which launched with state resources in 2020, purchased food from more than 111 local farmers in the past year, distributing that food to 48 hunger-fighting organizations in 10 counties.

Despite these achievements and ongoing hunger relief efforts, as legislators, you know the negative impact of rising food costs and inflation on our neighbors. For the fourth year in a row, Arizona's food banks are serving more clients each month with limited resources, so we need your help to find and strengthen long-term solutions to food insecurity in our state. Your unique perspectives and legislative abilities will help achieve the goal of a hunger-free Arizona. As the leading statewide anti-hunger organization, AzFBN is committed to collaborating with you to continue this work.

Whether you're new to the Legislature or a seasoned lawmaker, we look forward to serving as a resource for any of your questions about food security in your district and statewide. Thank you for your continued support!



Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'April Bradham'.

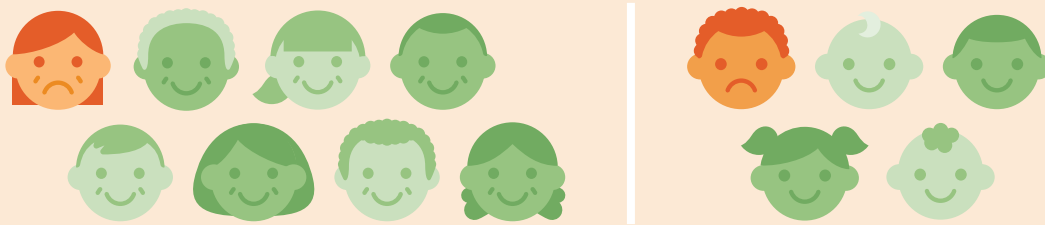
April Bradham
President and CEO

What is food insecurity?

Food insecurity is the inability to reliably access sufficient nutritious food to support an active, healthy lifestyle, due to a lack of physical, social, or financial resources.³ Solving food insecurity requires both immediate relief, such as emergency food assistance from food banks, and long-term solutions, such as policies that supports every person's ability to meet their basic needs.

Who is food insecure in Arizona?

Feeding America's most recent *Map the Meal Gap Study*⁴ estimates that approximately **963,130 Arizonans (13.1%) are food insecure** and **293,950 children (18.5%) are food insecure**. That's an increase of more than 20% from the previous year.



More than 1 in 8 Arizonans & nearly 1 in 5 children are food insecure.

Who goes to food banks?

An older adult on a fixed income who can no longer afford their groceries. A second grader who can't stay awake in class because they didn't have breakfast. A parent who is working two jobs and still can't make ends meet. These are just a few of the **600,000 Arizonans food banks serve every month**—an increase from 450,000 just a few years ago.

Who lives below the poverty line in Arizona?⁵

Poverty and food insecurity are closely linked. **The most recent Census data available (from 2023), shows that 12.4 percent of Arizonans were living in poverty.**⁶ While a robust economy and low unemployment played a role in mitigating challenges, soaring food prices and high inflation over the past year have left many families struggling to cover essential expenses.

What is SNAP?

Food banks play a vital role in ensuring children, families, and older adults can access essential nutrition. But they can't end hunger by themselves. They collaborate closely with major federal nutrition programs like the *Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program* (SNAP, formerly food stamps) and others detailed on the next page.

SNAP is the nation's most extensive and impactful anti-hunger program. Eligible households use an electronic benefit transfer (EBT) card to purchase food at more than 4,200 retailers and grocers across Arizona.

\$1.99	SNAP benefit per person per meal (2024 monthly average) ⁷
\$261,033,572	infused into Arizona's economy each month (2024 monthly average) ⁸
946,520	Arizonans participating in SNAP each month (2024 monthly average) ⁹
42%	Arizonans who participate in SNAP are children ¹⁰
28%	Arizonans who participate in SNAP are older adults or people living with disabilities ¹¹
46%	SNAP participants in Arizona are in working families ¹²
80	farmers markets, mobile markets, farm stands, and grocers that accept Double-Up Food Bucks, the nutrition incentive program that helps SNAP participants access more fresh fruits and vegetables ¹³

Nutrition Programs

Beyond SNAP and food banks, several state and federal programs exist to support Arizonans facing food insecurity. Here’s a closer look at the critical resources making a difference.

School Meals: Nourishing Minds, One Meal at a Time



The *National School Lunch Program* (NSLP) and *School Breakfast Program* (SBP) ensure that children from low-income households have access to nutritious meals in school. In the 2023–24 School Year, **1,031,629 Arizona students participated, with 58% qualifying for free or reduced-price meals.**¹⁴

In the FY-25 budget, Arizona invested state resources into school meals for the first time in its history. The funding subsidizes the “reduced price school meal copay” for families—that is, the 30 cents for breakfast and 40 cents for lunch that low-income families are required to pay. (See the box below for eligibility.)

Analysis of a similar policy in place from January 2023–June 2024 using federal resources showed a **28 percent increase in school meals served to low-income students at no cost** to families and **an additional 1.3 million meals served each month.**¹⁵ (See Page 9 for more details.)

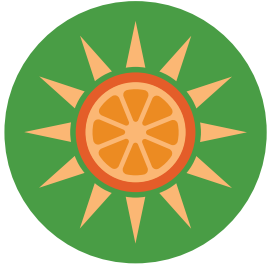
Child Nutrition Programs: Income Eligibility Guidelines*¹⁶

Annual Household Income At or Below

Household Size	Federal Poverty Line (FPL)	Free Meals (130%)	Reduced Price Meals (185%)
1	\$15,060	\$19,578	\$27,861
2	\$20,440	\$26,572	\$37,814
3	\$25,820	\$33,566	\$47,767
4	\$31,200	\$40,560	\$57,720
5	\$36,580	\$47,554	\$67,673
6	\$41,960	\$54,548	\$77,626

*Guidelines are effective from July 1, 2024 through June 30, 2025

Summer Meals: Bridging the Gap When School's Out



Child hunger spikes during summer when school meals are unavailable. Programs like the **Summer Food Service Program (SFSP)** aim to close this gap, offering meals at schools, food banks, parks, and other locations, as well as “to go” options in rural areas.

- **Impact:** This past summer, 1,230 sites across Arizona served more than 3.4 million meals to children and teens.¹⁷
- **Innovations:** Roughly 17 percent of sites were able to offer innovative new models of service, including grab-and-go meals, home delivery, or mobile distributions. These “non-congregate” options are available in some rural parts of Arizona to both help working families and cut costs for providers.

SUN Bucks: Nutrition Support over Summer Break



New in 2024, SUN Bucks is a grocery benefit that ensures low-income families can still put nutritious meals on the table when school cafeterias close for the summer. Children who are eligible for free or reduced-price school meals can receive \$120 per summer. Families can combine SUN Bucks with other programs like SNAP and Summer Meals, ensuring even greater support.

The Arizona Department of Education (ADE), in partnership with the Arizona Department of Economic Security (DES), was able to **issue SUN Bucks to more than 700,000 eligible students in 2024.**¹⁸

Invest in Children's Health and Academic Success



School meals contribute to the health and well-being of children. Both national and Arizona-focused research show that access to healthy school meals improves student attendance, academic achievement, and standardized test scores while also increasing food security, reducing obesity, and supporting mental and physical health.¹⁹

In the FY-25 budget, the 56th Arizona Legislature demonstrated its commitment to children across the state by making its first-ever investment in school meals—a groundbreaking step toward healthier kids and stronger communities. This \$3.8 million investment subsidizes the reduced-price school meal copay for families, eliminating the \$0.30 for breakfast and \$0.40 for lunch that low-income families previously had to pay.

Proven Impact: Building on the success of a similar policy implemented with federal resources from January 2023–June 2024, the results of this initiative speak volumes, according to an ASU analysis demonstrating:

- A **28% increase** in meals served to low-income students across Arizona,
- A **10% daily increase** in children receiving lunch and a **7% daily increase** in children receiving breakfast, and
- An additional **1.3 million meals served per month.**²⁰

Arizona food banks, schools, and partners witness firsthand the profound impact of poverty and food insecurity on children. We also see the life-changing role of school meals. Like textbooks and transportation, school meals are a cornerstone of a child's education and future success.

Call to Action: We urge you to extend the essential investment in school meals in the FY-26 budget and beyond to ensure Arizona's children stay on the path to health, success, and opportunity.

Our Stories: Advocates with Lived Expertise



Corey

Corey found his calling in child nutrition through working with elderly patients in long-term care, which inspired him to make a difference in people's health from an early age. His interest in the role food plays over a lifetime led him to school meals. As the Director of School Nutrition at the Osborn School District in Phoenix, Corey values the open dialogue he has with families about the school meals program, food allergies, and stigma. "There is a lot of stigma with school lunch," he says. Providing meals for free helps with that while also improving kids' focus, attendance, and academic success. "We know hungry kids can't learn, right? I mean, if you're 'hangry,' you can't focus on anything but where your next meal is coming from and when you get to eat it."



Brenda

Brenda and her husband both work but making ends meet is still an ongoing challenge. The decision to visit a food bank wasn't easy though. "I've volunteered at food banks before," Brenda said, "but I still felt the stigma of asking for help." United Food Bank's holiday food distribution provided not only a special meal for her family during a difficult time but also allowed Brenda to put her limited resources toward critical expenses like rent and gas. "It is so nice that there's this wonderful help for the community."



Roychelle

Roychelle, a paralegal and community organizer at the Arizona Village Network, came to anti-hunger advocacy through her own personal experience. She suffered from substance use disorder and served a nine-year prison sentence for drug possession. After transforming her life while incarcerated, she was denied SNAP upon release due to her charges. She has since leveraged her own background to become an advocate for criminal justice reform and reentry support, ensuring fair access to benefits for those in rehabilitation programs. As a paralegal for the Arizona Village Network, Roychelle helps people restore their civil rights and offers resources for job training, housing assistance, and counseling. Understanding the particular challenges people face during reentry, Roychelle serves as a mentor to formerly incarcerated women.

Take Action: Support AzFBN's 2025 Policy Priorities

Support Food Banks

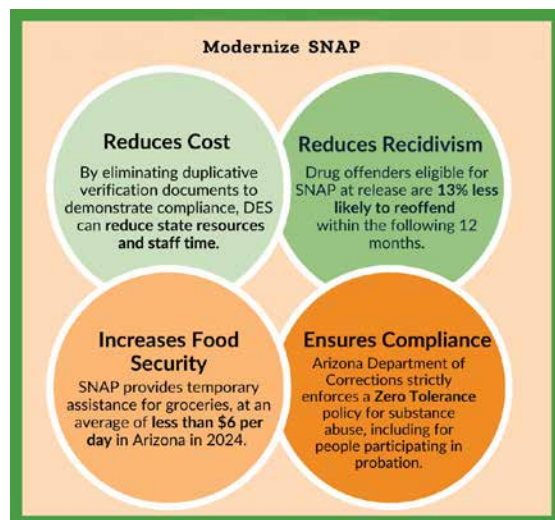


- **Demand at Arizona's food banks has grown** by 25% since 2020—from 450,000 people per month to 600,000.
- In 2024, **food banks distributed more than 190 million pounds of food, and 30% was fresh produce** distributed within Arizona.
- **State resources provide critical support** for transportation, storage, and distribution of fresh produce and healthy food, but have remained static at \$1.75 million.

Modernize SNAP



The *Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP)* provides critical support to Arizonans working to make ends meet, including those re-entering their communities after incarceration. However, a federal law from 1996 imposed a lifetime ban on SNAP benefits for individuals with felony drug convictions. Arizona modified this policy in 2018 by requiring these individuals to meet additional conditions. But **these conditions create duplicative efforts and expenses** at the state level while interfering with efforts to reduce recidivism and foster successful reintegration into society. Drug offenders eligible for SNAP upon release are **13% less likely to reoffend within a year.**²¹



"The SNAP Drug Felon Ban undermines efforts by individuals striving to successfully provide for their families as they transition from prison back into the community."

—**Exoneree Khalil Rushdan**, Founder and Executive Director of the *Arizona Village Network*, a nonprofit that helps and mentors individuals reentering their communities after incarceration

1. Monthly data collected from AzFBN member food banks (listed on Page 1) from January 2024–December 2024.
2. Raval, S., S. Martinelli, and P. Ohri-Vachaspati. *School Meal Participation Before and After State and Federal Policy Changes in Arizona: Policy Brief*. November 2024. ASU (Arizona State University) Food Policy and Environment Research Group.
3. USDA-ERS (United States Department of Agriculture, Economic Research Service). Measurement: What Is Food Security? www.ers.usda.gov/topics/food-nutrition-assistance/food-security-in-the-us/measurement.
4. Feeding America. *Map the Meal Gap Study 2024*. www.feedingamerica.org/about-us/press-room/Map-the-Meal-Gap-2024.
5. In 2024, the federal poverty line was \$15,060/year for an individual and \$25,820/year for a family of three, per United States Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) Poverty Guidelines: <https://aspe.hhs.gov/topics/poverty-economic-mobility/poverty-guidelines/prior-hhs-poverty-guidelines-federal-register-references>.
6. The most recent poverty data available is from 2023. U.S. Census Bureau. *Poverty & Income Data: Arizona*. www.census.gov/quickfacts/AZ.
7. Arizona Department of Economic Security (DES), Family Assistance Administration (FAA). *Statistical Bulletins January 2024–December 2024*. Available for download at <https://des.az.gov/documents-center>.
8. According to a recent USDA analysis of the impact of SNAP during an economic downturn, every \$1 in SNAP benefits spent generates \$1.54 in economic activity. Canning, P., and B. Stacy. *The Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) and the Economy: New Estimates of the SNAP Multiplier*. July 2019. US Department of Agriculture, Economic Research Service. Economic Research Report #265.
9. DES, FAA. *Statistical Bulletins January–December 2024*.
10. Ibid.
11. Center on Budget and Policy Priorities. Feb. 13, 2023. *A Closer Look at Who Benefits from SNAP*: www.cbpp.org/research/a-closer-look-at-who-benefits-from-snap-state-by-state-fact-sheets#Arizona.
12. DES, FAA. Public Records Request: “SNAP Recipients: Seniors & People Living with Disabilities, January–December 2024.”
13. Double Up Arizona. *How It Works*. www.doubleupaz.org/how-it-works.
14. Arizona Department of Education (ADE), Health and Nutrition Services (HNS). *Free and Reduced Price Percentage Report: SY23–24*. <https://www.azed.gov/sites/default/files/2024/01/Free%20and%20Reduced-Price%20Percentage%20Report%20SY%202023-2024.pdf>.
15. Raval, Martinelli, and Ohri-Vachaspati. *School Meal Participation Before and After State and Federal Policy Changes*.
16. ADE, HNS. May 2024. *Child Nutrition Programs: Income Eligibility Guidelines, 2024–25*. <https://www.azed.gov/sites/default/files/2023/05/Income%20Eligibility%20Guidelines%20July%202023-June%202024.pdf>.
17. ADE, HNS. Public Records Request: “2024 Summer Food Service Program (SFSP) and Seamless Summer Option (SSO) Operators” and “2024 SFSP and SSO Meal Counts.” October 2024.
18. DES, FAA. *Statistical Bulletins June–December 2024*.
19. Martinelli, S. F. Acciai, E. Melnick, and P. Ohri-Vachaspati. *Literature Review: Benefits of Healthy School Meals for All*. December 2022. ASU Food Policy and Environment Research Group. See the full report here: [Healthy School Meals for All in Arizona: A Comprehensive Assessment of Benefits, Cost-Scenarios, and Community Perspectives](https://www.azed.gov/sites/default/files/2023/05/Healthy-School-Meals-for-All-in-Arizona-A-Comprehensive-Assessment-of-Benefits-Cost-Scenarios-and-Community-Perspectives.pdf).
20. Raval, Martinelli, and Ohri-Vachaspati. *School Meal Participation Before and After State and Federal Policy Changes*.
21. Yang, C. “Does Public Assistance Reduce Recidivism?” *American Economic Review: Papers & Proceedings* 2017, 107(5): 551–555.

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