



Arizona
Food Bank
Network

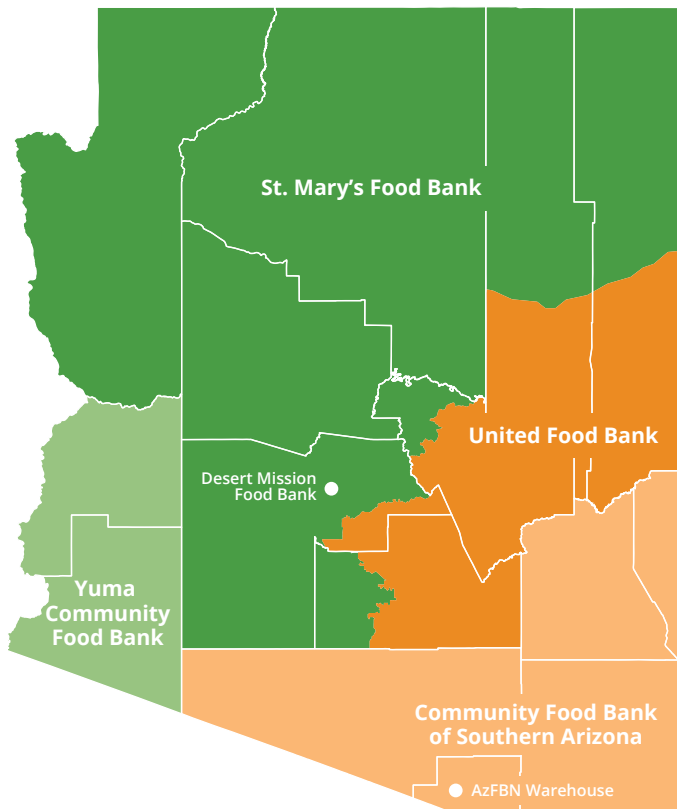
Anti-Hunger *Playbook*

57th Arizona State Legislature
Second Regular Session



A legislator's guide to ending hunger in 2026

Arizona Food Bank Network & Members



Our members



In partnership with



About Us: The Arizona Food Bank Network (AzFBN) is a nonprofit organization dedicated to 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 from the AzFBN warehouse in Rio Rico to food banks across the state and beyond. 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's five member food banks provide emergency food assistance to people in all 15 counties through a network of more than 1,000 food pantries, community centers, homeless shelters, and other partner agencies. Collectively, these food banks distributed more than 168 million pounds of food—nearly 140 million meals—to Arizonans in need between January and November 2025, serving more than 720,000 people each month.¹

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

A Note from April Bradham, President and CEO

Welcome back to the second regular session of the 57th Arizona State Legislature.

As you return to the Capitol, we wish to highlight the significant changes to federal nutrition programs that were enacted shortly after the 2025 legislative session concluded. **With more than 40 years of experience collaborating with the Arizona Legislature, state agencies, and community partners**, the Arizona Food Bank Network (AzFBN) remains a resource to help you understand how these changes, particularly H.R. 1, are impacting your constituents as we work together toward a hunger-free Arizona.

Food insecurity continues to affect Arizona communities at historic levels. In 2025, **more than 720,000 Arizonans relied on food banks each month**, many visiting for the first time. As demand grows and federal policy shifts, state-level decisions play an increasingly critical role in whether families can meet their basic needs with dignity and stability.

That's why, in 2026, AzFBN's priority is to ensure the statewide emergency food network has sufficient funding to serve as a safety net. An emergency food system can only function as a reliable backstop if it is consistently and adequately funded. One-time or unpredictable investments limit the system's ability to respond during economic downturns, benefit disruptions, or disasters. Stable funding allows food banks to plan, partner with local farmers, invest in transportation and workforce capacity, and respond quickly when hunger spikes.

We also know that strong programs like the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) are the most effective tools we have to prevent hunger before families ever need food banks. We will look forward to working together with you to strengthen access to SNAP and other federal nutrition programs for all who are eligible.

As a network, we are committed to innovation, community-driven solutions, and accountability. Last year, our farm-to-food-bank program called **Friends of the Farm** purchased Arizona-grown produce for families across the state, while our **No Limits Job Training Program** in Rio Rico continued building workforce pathways that strengthen both the local food economy and the emergency food system. This year, AzFBN will launch a Community Advisory Council to center the expertise of people with lived experience of hunger in policy and program design.

As we saw during the historic SNAP disruption in early November 2025, a resilient emergency food system is essential when families lack the resources to make ends meet. At AzFBN, we also know, however, that food banks can't end hunger alone. We look forward to working with you this session on addressing the root causes of hunger, protecting nutrition assistance and emergency food infrastructure, and building a hunger-free Arizona for all communities.



Sincerely,

A stylized, handwritten signature in black ink.

April Bradham
President and CEO

Food Insecurity: Quick Facts

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.² Solving food insecurity requires both immediate relief, such as emergency food assistance from food banks, and long-term solutions, such as policy 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* estimates that approximately **1,067,120 Arizonans (14.4 percent) are food insecure** while **291,290 children (18.4 percent) are food insecure**.³ That's an increase of more than 11 percent from the previous year and an increase of almost 34% over the past five years.

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



Who goes to food banks?

AzFBN member food banks serve **more than 720,000 Arizonans each month**—an increase from 450,000 just a few years ago.⁴ Many of our neighbors who rely on food banks are employed but still struggle to afford basic necessities. Whether it is because of changes in employment, sudden expenses, or simply because their wages can't keep up with the cost of living, visiting food banks can quickly become the only option to help feed their families.



Meet Claudio

There's a feeling I never want to experience again: hunger. Not the kind that comes from skipping lunch, but the deep, aching emptiness that brings desperation and uncertainty. That pain in childhood is especially hard—feeling powerless, confused, and without a way to fight back. It shaped my life and became my mission to make sure others don't have to go through it. I've seen how survival can turn into a crime. Now, I create connections and tools to build and nourish my community, so kids don't have to steal to eat. No child should ever have to choose between hunger and survival.

— **Claudio Rodriguez**, Vice President of Policy and Advocacy, Community Food Bank of Southern Arizona

What is SNAP?

Food banks play a vital role in ensuring children, families, and older adults can access essential nutrition. But as demand continues to rise, now more than ever, they cannot do this work alone. They collaborate closely with state agencies and partners that implement the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP, formerly food stamps), school meals, summer meals, SUN Bucks, and other federal nutrition programs.

SNAP is the nation's most impactful anti-hunger program. Eligible households use an electronic benefit transfer (EBT) card to purchase food at more than **4,200 retailers** statewide, investing those federal resources directly.

\$1.99	SNAP benefit per person per meal in Arizona (2025 monthly average) ⁵
\$288,326,151	infused into Arizona's economy each month through SNAP (2025 monthly average) ⁶
947,841	Arizonans participating in SNAP each month (2025 monthly average) ⁷
42%	Arizonans who participate in SNAP are children ⁸
26%	Arizonans who participate in SNAP are older adults or people living with disabilities ⁹
46%	SNAP participants in Arizona are in working families ¹⁰
80	farmers markets, mobile markets, farm stands, & grocers accept Double Up Food Bucks, which helps SNAP participants access more fruits and vegetables ¹¹

Meet Presley

Presley is an artist and trusted community member—the sort of person who gets to know his neighbors. He is also the “one” in the statistic that states “more than 1 in 8 Arizonans struggles with food insecurity.” With SNAP, he can visit farmer’s markets or grocery stores when he’s able, and order grocery deliveries with his EBT card. This means he has consistent access to healthy food he enjoys. “Within just three months, access to SNAP EBT has completely changed both my physical and mental health,” Presley says. “It allows me to make food purchases that are in line with my dietary restrictions, sensory issues, as well as purchases that make my brain and body happy—whatever that may look like day-to-day.”

— **Presley Nassise**, artist and advocate



School Meals



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.¹²

In the Fiscal Year 2026 budget, the 57th Arizona Legislature demonstrated its commitment to children across the state by continuing to invest \$3.8 million in General Fund resources to subsidize the family co-pay for Reduced Price meals, eliminating the \$0.30 for breakfast and \$0.40 for lunch that many times prevented children from being able to eat.

SUN Programs: USDA's Summer Nutrition Programs



SUN Bucks: 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 SUN Meals, ensuring even greater support during the most difficult time of the year in Arizona.

The Arizona Department of Education (ADE), in partnership with the Arizona Department of Economic Security (DES), issued SUN Bucks to **almost 650,000 eligible students in 2025**.¹³

SUN Meals: Families rely on SUN Meals, formerly known as the Summer Food Service Program or SFSP, to help replace meals kids lose access to when school is out of session. This past summer, **1,070 sites across Arizona served more than 3,358,571 meals** to kids and teens. Thanks to the new Meal-To-Go model, **non-congregate meal participation increased by more than 33 percent in Summer 2025**.¹⁴

Child Nutrition Programs: Income Eligibility Guidelines*			
Annual Household Income At or Below			
Household Size	Federal Poverty Line (FPL)	Free Meals (130%)	Reduced Price Meals (185%)
1	\$15,650	\$20,345	\$28,953
2	\$21,150	\$27,495	\$39,128
3	\$26,650	\$34,645	\$49,303
4	\$32,150	\$41,795	\$59,478
5	\$37,650	\$48,945	\$69,653
6	\$43,150	\$56,095	\$79,828
*Guidelines are effective from July 1, 2025 through June 30, 2026			

Take Action: Support AzFBN's 2026 Policy Priorities

Let Us Handle the Logistics: It's what we do best.

Increase the Coordinated Hunger Services single line item to keep pace with inflation and demand.



Arizona has a rich history of food banking: when St. Mary's Food Bank opened in 1967 in Phoenix, it was the first in the world. But nearly 60 years later, the statewide emergency food network is serving more clients than ever at a rate we do not predict will slow down. Food banks not only distribute the nutrition our neighbors rely on but also ensure emergency food boxes, donated produce, and purchased product reach all parts of the state equitably. While food banks are incredibly agile and have an unmatched response in times of crisis, much of their safe storage and distribution is made possible by their longstanding partnership with the State Legislature through the Coordinated Hunger Services line item.

Increasing Coordinated Hunger Services funding in the DES budget **from \$1,754,600 to \$3,550,000** beginning in Fiscal Year 2027 would provide food banks with reliable resources to scale operations as demand grows, supporting the transportation, safe storage, and distribution of USDA commodities and local produce from Arizona farmers and ranchers.

While food banks are most commonly known for emergency food distributions, this is only a portion of the work they do in their communities. Increasing state funding for Coordinated Hunger Services to match inflation and demand would enable food banks to better leverage privately raised dollars to strengthen their other work, including job-and-life-skills training, summer and after-school meal programs, home delivery, and more.

Call to action: We urge you to increase the Coordinated Hunger Services line item **from \$1,754,600 to \$3,550,000** beginning in FY-27, to ensure Arizona's communities have access to emergency food and other critical services that food banks offer to neighbors at no cost.

Meet Desiree

The USDA NextGen program supports the next generation of leaders in agriculture, nutrition, and sustainability. Through this experience, I've learned how deeply public policy shapes food access and equity. I came to my internship at AzFBN with a broad interest in sustainability, and quickly learned that food insecurity is about more than hunger; it's about access, dignity, and justice.

My family has relied on EBT, and I've seen how difficult the system can be to navigate. I've also watched friends lose benefits because of small income changes or missed paperwork. These experiences shaped my dedication to equitable food policy. No one should ever have to choose between dignity and survival.

— **Desiree Martinez Espinoza**, USDA NextGen Program, ASU Swette Center for Sustainable Food Systems, 2025 AzFBN Public Policy Intern



AzFBN Programs that Support Food Banks

Friends of the Farm: Connecting Small Growers with a Big Impact



Friends of the Farm, Arizona's farm-to-food bank program, launched in 2019 to help Arizona's small farmers, food banks, and families in need, with ongoing support from the state budget and temporary federal funding that sunsets this year. In 2025, 135 growers and producers across Arizona supplied food banks with **\$3,811,806 worth of nutritious, local food** through AzFBN's *Friends of the Farm Program*.

AzFBN Produce Program: Healthy Food & Zero Produce Waste by 2030



In the summer of 2022, AzFBN acquired its first warehouse and accelerated its efforts to support equitable distribution of produce among the statewide emergency food network. Today, the **AzFBN Produce Program** is a business solution in Rio Rico that is ending hunger across the Southwest (and beyond). In 2025, AzFBN installed new equipment for sorting produce and added staff activities to help gather more donated produce and prevent loads of produce unfit for food banks from contributing to large scale organic waste.

Produce Program staff in Rio Rico ensured that produce unsuitable for hunger relief was redirected to local farmers for livestock feed or compost, with AzFBN often providing direct delivery. At the same time, the team—skilled in sorting bulk produce and repacking high-quality items into family-friendly boxes—installed new machinery that reduces waste volume and stabilizes loads, allowing more efficient distribution and additional time to deliver byproducts to farmers. Together, these efforts move the *Produce Program* toward its goal of **becoming waste-free by 2030, reducing landfill use and lowering emergency food distribution costs statewide**.



**Sign up for our
Hunger-Free AZ newsletter!**

FOOD BANK DAY AT THE CAPITOL:

Tuesday January 27, 2026

10:00am - 2:00pm

Arizona State Capitol, Wesley Bolin Memorial Plaza
1700 W Washington St, Phoenix, AZ 85007

Shop the Farm Express mobile produce market from 12:00pm - 2:00pm!

REGISTER HERE:

https://bit.ly/AzFoodBank_DATC26

Questions? Reach out to Jessica Herbert
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Notes & References

1. Monthly data collected from AzFBN member food banks (listed on Page 2) from January–November 2025.
2. 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.
3. Feeding America. *Map the Meal Gap Study 2023*: <https://map.feedingamerica.org/county/2023/overall/arizona>.
4. See Note #1.
5. Arizona Department of Economic Security (DES), Family Assistance Administration (FAA). *Statistical Bulletins January–November 2025*. Available for download here: <https://des.az.gov/documents-center>.
6. According to Moody's Analytics, every \$1 in SNAP benefits spent generates \$1.70 in economic activity. The figure cited is an average of the monthly "total issuance" of SNAP statewide in 2025 (January–November) multiplied by 1.7.
7. DES, FAA. *Statistical Bulletins January–November 2025*.
8. *Ibid.*
9. DES, FAA. Public Records Request: *SNAP Recipients: Seniors & People Living with Disabilities*, January–November 2025.
10. Center on Budget and Policy Priorities. *A Closer Look at Who Benefits from SNAP*. Feb. 13, 2023. www.cbpp.org/research/a-closer-look-at-who-benefits-from-snap-state-by-state-fact-sheets#Arizona.
11. Double Up Arizona. *How It Works*. www.doubleupaz.org/how-it-works.
12. Martinelli, S., et al. *Literature Review: Benefits of Healthy School Meals for All*. Arizona State University (ASU) Food Policy and Environment Research Group. Dec. 2022. https://azfoodbanks.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/12/Healthy-School-Meals-for-All_ASU-Literature-Review.pdf.
13. DES, FAA. *Statistical Bulletins January–November 2025*.
14. Arizona Department of Education (ADE) Health and Nutrition Services (HNS). Public Records Request: *2025 Summer Food Service Program (SFSP) and Seamless Summer Option (SSO) Operators and 2025 SFSP and SSO Meal Counts*. October 2025.

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