

AzFBN's first Community Advisory Council on Food Security

"Silence brings shame."

In a crisis, solidarity sustains us. But when a story is shared with the right people, it can also create real change for the masses — lasting change to end food insecurity, bringing survivors up to the podium.

That's the mission of AzFBN's Community Advisory Council on Food Security (CAC). After a series of four listening sessions in the spring of 2025, a comprehensive report illuminated the barriers, strengths, and opportunities that shape food access across the state.

By March 2026, nine leaders emerged from the listening sessions to serve on the Council for one year.

"What will stick with me most is watching each participant progressively find their own lane within food advocacy, connect their personal experiences to a larger sense of purpose, and figure out how their story could be a source of power in this work," said Isabel Hoggatt, AzFBN Community Programs Manager. "That evolution was genuinely moving to witness."

The Council represents both rural and urban communities. It centers people of color, Indigenous people, and LGBTQ+ people. So what do the Council's members have in common? In one way or another, they were all food insecure at some point in their lives.

Together, they will help guide AzFBN's next public policy agenda, tell their stories of lived experience as AzFBN advocates in formal venues, and go into their communities empowered to uplift more voices and build power amongst their neighbors.



"We started every session with a reminder that the people closest to the problem are also closest to the solution. That's where real change happens," said Frank Velasquez Jr. of 4 Da Hood, who facilitated the group. "We wanted Council leaders to view their lived experiences as strengths and their stories as the bridge to the solutions."

In the first months of their involvement in the Council, these leaders received trainings in storytelling, giving formal testimony, food banking 101, and public policy. Ultimately, they developed an Empowerment Curriculum that is accessible, adaptable, and reflective of their diverse experiences so that councils beyond their cohort can realize their potential as powerful advocates.

"This experience truly reminded me that we all deserve space to advocate when it comes to addressing barriers to nutritious and culturally relevant foods," said CAC leader and Tucson advocate Vida Dominique Rodriguez.

As safety nets such as the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program shrink, we need more solidarity, more shared wisdom, and more context for the numbers and misnomers. CAC leader Nyssa Verdugo put it best: "Silence brings shame." Stories like Vida's and Nyssa's can eliminate the stigma of asking for help and end hunger.



Our Members



COMMUNITY
FOOD BANK
OF SOUTHERN ARIZONA



From the smallest rural pantry to the largest regional warehouse food bank...each volunteer and employee, each link in the supply chain, each resource flyer pinned on a community message board can be the difference between hunger and having enough.

*We are proud to unite this Network.
Thank you for standing with your neighbors.*

APRIL BRADHAM AzFBN President & CEO



ADVOCACY

After the federal budget bill (H.R.1) was passed in July 2025, Arizona's legislative session was filled with policies that would worsen the hunger crisis further. AzFBN tracked a record number of bills, mostly in opposition. **Advocates ensured food banks and anti-hunger programs were prioritized through the federal government shutdown and the passing of the FY27 Arizona state budget.**

In October of 2025, AzFBN worked with the Governor's Office to drum up supportive emergency measures for Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) recipients going without due to the government shutdown. Gov. Katie Hobbs swiftly invested a total of \$2.75 million for food banks, \$600,000 for a temporary program called Food Bucks Now, and \$250,000 for AzFBN to support food banks with Tribal food distributions.

Fighting Childhood Hunger Year-Round

Continued investment in school meals and state funding for SUN Bucks for Summers 2026, 2027, and 2028. For the next two years, the state will cover the cost of reduced-price school meal copays, backed by \$4M in budget funding.



Arizona Food Banks: Investing in the Infrastructure of Hunger Relief

\$3M one-time investment for United Food Bank, which serves Arizonans in Apache, Gila, Navajo, Maricopa, and Pinal Counties.

SNAP: Strengthening AZ's Safety Net

Investments in the Arizona Department of Economic Security (the state agency that administers SNAP and other public benefits).



Double Up Food Bucks

\$4M to continue the SNAP Double Up Food Bucks program for the next two years.

In January of 2026, AzFBN held the 10th annual Food Bank Day at the Capitol with 150 attendees, including more than 30 legislators. The audience for AzFBN's advocacy email alerts, The Inside Scoop, has grown to over 1,200 people, largely due to public attention paid to the hunger crisis during the government shutdown. All of this gives the team energy to keep fighting!

On March 1st, SNAP recipients woke up to news that the income requirements for eligibility changed, revoking March benefits for thousands of Arizonans. Immediately, AzFBN leveraged years-long relationships and decades of experience to negotiate the reversal of this guideline within 10 days, reinstating benefits in full for the month. **Check out the back page to see how the many changes to SNAP in the past 12 months affect food bank lines.**

Finally, in June of 2026, Gov. Hobbs signed the Arizona state budget, which included huge wins for anti-hunger policy, detailed in the graphic to the left. **Remember: everyone is an advocate, and hunger persists year-round.**

Read more about the FY27 State Budget





FOOD BANKING

As of June 2026, Arizona food banks are serving nearly 800,000 people each month. During the government shutdown in 2025, that number grew closer to 900,000. Food banks need exponentially more food than they've stocked even since last year. AzFBN has been hustling to expand, get creative, and collaborate to find more sources of low-cost or donated food — especially nutritious fruits and vegetables, one of the most requested commodities.

In the last four years, the AzFBN sourcing team has grown from one individual to four. The AzFBN Produce Program started as a commonsense business solution for produce warehouses in Rio Rico, AZ, to help supply Arizona food banks, set in motion by the Community Food Bank of Southern Arizona.

It's highly effective: instead of going to waste, excess produce is donated to AzFBN to distribute where it's needed most in bulk one-item loads or pallets of hand-packed, household-sized, colorful produce boxes. After three years and with great need, the Produce Program is now expanding its sourcing into Yuma!

Funded by Feeding America, in collaboration with Yuma Community Food Bank and the California Association of Food Banks, AzFBN will tap into a new market of produce in Southwest Arizona and beyond. Food banks have spent more money than ever before to keep up with demand by purchasing food, because donations and government allotments aren't enough.

The AzFBN Produce Program, paired with the Southwest Produce Cooperative to share food regionally and equitably, is proving to be a sustainable blueprint for collaborative produce sourcing that will serve a pivotal role in the fight to end hunger.



50,094,115 pounds of food coordinated for **19** food banks in **11** states.

461,740 produce boxes distributed to food banks across Arizona and beyond.

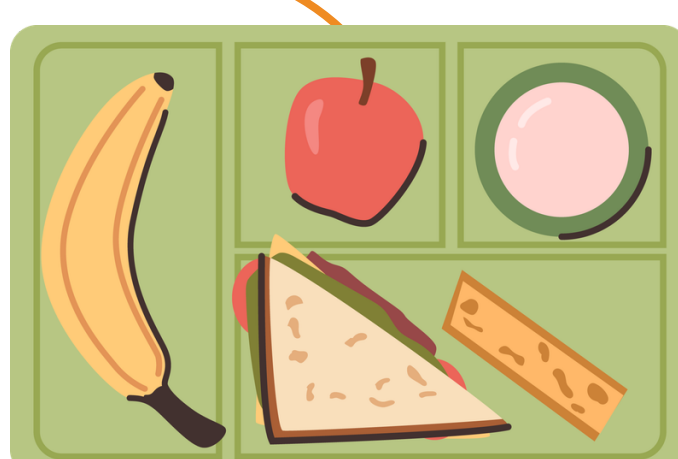
1,749,531 pounds of produce waste diverted from the landfill to farmers in Rio Rico, AZ.

111 growers and producers across Arizona supplied food banks with **\$3.49M** worth of nutritious, local food through the AzFBN Friends of the Farm Program.

3,358,571 free summer meals were served to kids in 2025



Read about the award-winning Scottsdale Unified School District!



INNOVATION



Child nutrition continues to be a major priority for the innovation team. With funding from Health First Foundation of Northern Arizona, AzFBN supported 12 schools with project funding to stock pantries, build new programs, and boost participation!

In addition, AzFBN was asked to take ownership of the statewide summer meals map, previously managed by AZ Health Zone with support from state agencies. This shift reinforces AzFBN as a one-stop shop for user-friendly information about statewide hunger-fighting resources, like summer meals. AzFBN also helped connect families to the SUN Bucks grocery benefit program to reach more than 646,000 kids.

In 2024, AzFBN collected survey and focus group data from more than 600 participants to reveal that 2SLGBTQIA+ Arizonans experience hunger at a higher rate. This year, the innovation team used this data to raise awareness for SNAP participation, which was identified as an area of opportunity to end hunger. As of June 2026, this data also resulted in a new identity-affirming food pantry in partnership with Aunt Rita's Foundation, St. Mary's Food Bank, and the Kellenberger + Tollefson Center!

To build an even stronger emergency food system, AzFBN expanded its membership structure. A new "agency" membership tier benefits organizations that are slightly smaller than the regional warehouse food banks: St. Vincent de Paul, Desert Mission Food Bank, Interfaith Community Services, and Foothills Food Bank (so far!). One of the growing offerings for Network members is Cultivate, an exclusive and specialized online training program for food bankers. This year's Network member satisfaction survey resulted in another 100% rating!



A Legacy of Fighting Hunger

In July 2025, Arizona lost an amazing anti-hunger advocate with the passing of Suzanne Pfister, the retired CEO of Vitalyst Health Foundation. Suzanne's time was far too short, but the impact she had won't soon be forgotten, especially since AzFBN was deeply touched to learn that she made a legacy gift to AzFBN and other organizations. This gift will help AzFBN continue the critical work that was so important to her during her 11 years leading Vitalyst to improve the health of Arizonans. This includes the Community Advisory Council, featured on page one of this newsletter, as Vitalyst was the project's first funder. We asked *David Martinez III, Director of Strategic Community Partnerships at Vitalyst Health Foundation*, to share some of what he witnessed during his time with Suzanne:

"Suzanne inspired Vitalyst's work to address the root causes of Arizona's biggest health disparities. That included food insecurity and the systemic barriers that prevent many Arizonans and, unfortunately, too many Arizona children, from accessing healthy local food."

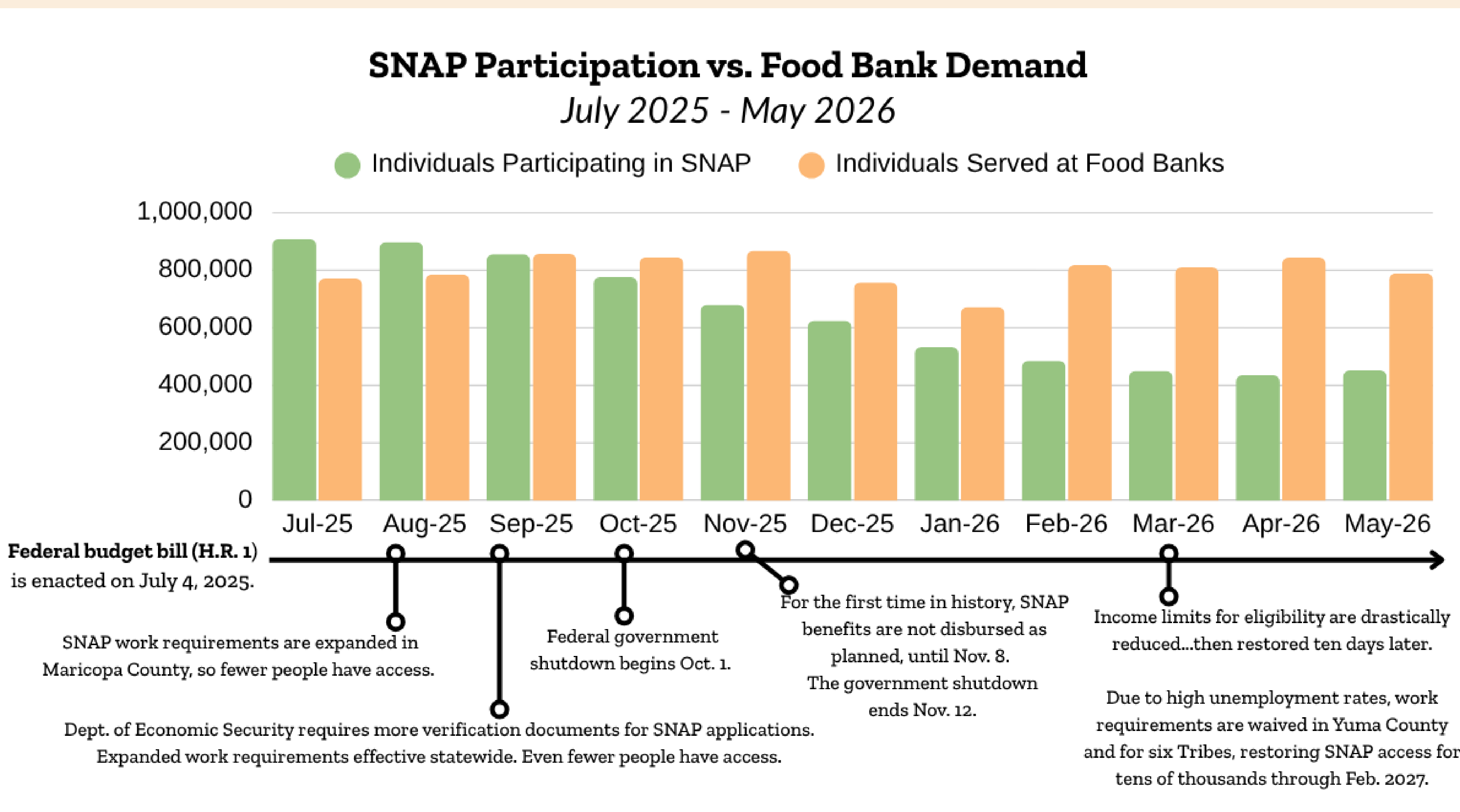
Under Suzanne's leadership, Vitalyst created the Maricopa County Food System Coalition and supported efforts that led to the Phoenix Food Action Plan. During her tenure, Vitalyst also supported work to preserve local farmland and boost advocacy for access to fresh fruits and vegetables through SNAP, or the food stamp program.

Suzanne was born and raised in Arizona and loved serving in many capacities that improved our communities. She was a tremendous mentor to me, and we're glad that her support of Arizona's food banks can continue through this generous gift to the Network."

Thank you, Suzanne.



Food banks will fill the growing gap...



*but we can't do it
without you.*

**VOTE
DONATE
VOLUNTEER
ADVOCATE**

*for a
#HungerFreeAZ*