

TEAM PROFILE

Arizona Community Hub

Based in Phoenix, AZ on the traditional territory of the O'Odham and Piipaash peoples.



F2FA PROGRAM QUICK FACTS

► **F2FA PROGRAM REACH:**

Primarily the state of Arizona, but the Arizona Community Hub is exploring expansion into southern California. To date, the Hub has worked with 12 BIPOC socially disadvantaged farmers in Arizona to reach 300 families weekly and 500 seniors annually through St. Mary's Food Bank in Phoenix.

► **FUNDING SOURCES:**

- USDA Local Food Purchase Assistance Program (LFPA)
- USDA Local Food for Schools Cooperative Agreement Program (LFS)
- USDA Farmers Market Promotion Program (FMPP)
- USDA Local Food Promotion Program (LFPP)
- Private foundations

Organization has been in operation since 2019. F2FA program has been in operation since 2019.

► **WEBSITE:**

www.getlocafoodhub.com

ABOUT THE ARIZONA COMMUNITY HUB: BUILDING COMMUNITY THROUGH CONNECTION

At the heart of the mission of the Arizona Community Hub (the Hub) is the intention to support local Black, Indigenous, and other farmers of color (BIPOC), including veterans, women and beginning farmers, by purchasing and distributing their products in communities where the need for fresh food is the highest. The food is primarily distributed to underserved communities in Arizona through community partners, local schools, and the regional food bank.

A farm visit is the first step in establishing the relationship between farmers and the Hub. This provides an important opportunity to assess the needs the farmer has – particularly around food safety protocols and



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“We’re about to be extinct as BIPOC farmers. So, the Arizona Community Hub is going to be proud of the fact that we are supporting them as a priority. And, we want to welcome all local farmers who are struggling. I want to get to a place where we’re all just humans sharing space and thriving together in our community.”

**– DIONNE WASHINGTON,
CO-FOUNDER AND DIRECTOR, AZ COMMUNITY HUB**

The Hub works locally with community partners who are doing aligned work, such as the YMCA and the Boys and Girls Club. Recently, the Hub began working with state agencies such as the Departments of Health and Education, Land and Forestry, Agriculture, and Economic Security as potential buyers and supporters of local farmers whose products can be aggregated by the Hub. Currently the primary buyers include St. Mary’s Food Bank in Phoenix and institutions like local public schools via the school district.

production planning. Through the Hub, farmers receive free technical assistance. Before committing to purchasing from the farmer, the Hub assesses their capacity and then supports them to become ready to sell their products through the Hub. When a farmer is prepared to sell, the Hub identifies opportunities to offer the farmer a growers’ contract or a one time purchasing opportunity with the Hub’s affiliated buyers. The Hub will pick up the food, process it and then deliver weekly to food banks. At the same time, the Hub supports farmers to have their own direct contractual relationship with the buyer, and/or to continue to sell through the Arizona Community Hub.

Dionne Washington, a local Arizona native with a background in business administration who founded the Arizona Community Hub said the underlying value for their work is “connection through community.” She commented: “I got a call late last night from a farmer who asked: ‘Can you come to my farm? My Swiss chard is going to burn up in the field; I don’t know what to do.’ I have too many farmers and not enough money to purchase all their crops. People say there are no BIPOC farmers in AZ. There are and they grow amazing food! We just want to be the connector between that farmer and the buyers that are out there.”





WHO'S AT THE F2FA TABLE?

The Arizona Community Hub's work is ultimately about weaving farmers, buyers and eaters into a community that values supporting one another. As growers, buyers and eaters get to know each other, they develop relationships which, along with their commitment to community, is key to sustaining the work.

of a Desert Willow or Mesquite tree and connect to each other, the land, and the community.

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THE DREAM: "WE'RE JUST GETTING STARTED..."

Just two years old, the Arizona Community Hub aspires to be a place-based center with a demonstration farm that shows how food can be grown in a variety of ways, using a range of methods in different venues such as vertically, on rooftops, and indoors. The Hub will be a place where technical assistance takes place for farmers so that they get to know and support each other while learning together. Technical assistance for institutional buyers will also be available, again creating a network of buyers who support each other in their values-based procurement models.

The Hub would also be a place where anyone in the community can come to purchase locally-grown food, add value to their products, and discover job and career opportunities. It would be a place where kids can access computers and the internet and do their homework, and where seniors gather to sit in the shade



IN THEIR WORDS



KEY SUCCESSES

Established relationships with 20 farmers.

Feeding 300 families monthly or 3,600 families per year.

Secured \$200k in funding for growing contracts for farmers in 2024



KEY CHALLENGES

Identifying more selling opportunities for farmers of color.

Learning new and better ways to support farmers (technical assistance, diverse markets, etc.)

Advocacy Work: We're still learning which government officials, state agencies, and other influencers to talk to and what to say to them to make sure funding gets in the hands of the farmers.

Expanding our market reach outside of AZ, to California and Nevada, in order to increase buying opportunities and prevent farmers from having to let their crops go to waste in the fields.



WAYS OF CENTERING EQUITY

Focus on BIPOC farmers, including veterans, and facilitating direct connections between farmers and buyers.

We ask ourselves everyday: Are we being fair and rational with the dollars we have available to us?



LESSONS LEARNED

You're nothing without your community. You need at least 5-12 people in your community that will help in your mission to serve both farmers and local institutions.

Go to the institution first with a sales mentality. Find out what they need, what their intentions are, and what their budget is. Don't commit to purchase from farmers until you have a clear understanding of what the institution will procure.

The institutional buyers must be vetted and receive technical assistance, just like the farmers. It's a matchmaking process and many institutions may not even know that there are local farmers in the area that want to sell to them.

The Farm to Food Assistance Learning Lab was made possible through a 2021 USDA Local Foods Promotion Program (LFPP) grant, with supplemental support from The Rockefeller Foundation. This profile features one of ten participating teams who served as co-investigators in the Wallace Center's research on the field of Farm to Food Assistance.