



COMMUNITY
FOOD BANK
OF SOUTHERN ARIZONA

CELEBRATING 50 YEARS OF IMPACT

NOURISHING NEWS

IN THIS ISSUE: GROWING, GATHERING, & GAME ON FOR GOOD.

AUGUST 2026

Hands-on Learning Takes Root



This summer, more than 50 educators from across Southern Arizona gathered at Desert View High School for our **Farm-to-School Summit**, marking the first summit hosted by the Community Food Bank's (CFB) Farm-to-Child program in several years.

Teachers traveled from Tucson, Nogales, Marana, Vail, Saint David, and even Flagstaff, representing dozens of schools throughout the region. Many of these schools receive Title I funding, where access to green spaces, fresh food, and practical science education can make a lasting difference for students.

The summit was a hands-on professional development experience. Participants rotated through four interactive learning stations across the campus, including an indoor growing lab, a school garden featuring self-watering containers, a composting demonstration, and an outdoor classroom where Desert View students shared their experiences caring for the school's chickens, tortoise habitat, and garden spaces.

"Our goal that day was simple," said Brandon Merchant, CFB Garden Education Coordinator. **"If we want more teachers to feel confident bringing garden-based learning into their classrooms, the best place to learn is in a working school garden. You don't need a huge budget or years of experience to get started. Sometimes all it takes is one raised bed, a handful of students, and someone willing to plant the first seed."**

Funded in part through an Arizona Department of Education grant, the summit provided each participant with a \$100 stipend, four hours of professional development credit, and a resource binder filled with lesson plans and information about CFB programs including Las Milpitas Community Farm, Nuestra Tierra Learning Garden, and the SOMBRA native mesquite restoration initiative.

One of the day's highlights was watching Desert View students become the teachers. Students who have participated in CFB's Sowing Remedies and Farm-to-Child programs led portions of the outdoor classroom, demonstrating the knowledge and confidence they have gained through years of caring for the school's gardens and animals.

The Farm-to-Child program supports school gardens and garden-based education across five counties in Southern Arizona. Organizers hope this summit marks the beginning of a renewed tradition of bringing educators together to share practical skills and inspire more schools to grow successful garden programs.

NATALIE'S NOTES



Hello Friends and Neighbors,

As I celebrate my first full year at the Community Food Bank of Southern Arizona, and my first full summer in this very, very dry heat (coming from New Orleans, the lack of humidity has been a welcome reprieve), I'm struck by just how much we've accomplished in such a short time.

It's been an honor to help celebrate the Food Bank's 50 Years of Impact while reflecting on the incredible legacy of the organization I now proudly call home. Over the past year, I've seen firsthand our continued efforts to expand our reach into additional rural communities and grow our mobile food distributions, ensuring that more neighbors have access to the nutritious food they need.

I'm also inspired by the incredible support our community has shown for our Child Nutrition Programs, especially during the summer months when many local children lose access to the school meals they rely on. Together, we're helping ensure kids continue to receive the nutrition they need to learn, grow, and thrive.

And finally, one of the highlights of the year was experiencing my first annual all-staff retreat, a special day when our entire organization comes together to reflect on our shared accomplishments, discuss our strategic priorities, and look ahead to the future. We enjoyed a spirited game of Food Bank Jeopardy and left the day with **a renewed sense of connection, purpose, and alignment with our mission.**

Natalie Jayroe, Chief Executive Officer
Community Food Bank of Southern Arizona

Don't Stop Believin'... in Kids

This SummerStockUp was a chart-topper, Southern Arizona!

On Tuesday, July 14th, we turned up the good vibes and rallied our community to help us feed local kids. Thanks to all of you, we didn't just reach our original one-day goal of raising \$50,000 for our Child Nutrition Programs... you turned the volume all the way up to an incredible **\$102,455**, including a generous \$25,000 matching gift from an anonymous donor!

Our mascot this year, Dairy Bowie, called it: *we can be heroes, just for one day.* But even better, **your generosity proves you're hunger heroes every day.**

Because of you, our Summer Nutrition Kits, School Pantries, and other Child Nutrition Programs will be tuned up for an amazing year, and we think the impact is going to be off the charts!





In June, our Advocacy team hosted our very first **Elevating Voices Southern Arizona Power Summit**, bringing together Feeding America's Neighbor Advocacy Team along with over 40 neighbors, partner agencies, and volunteers from across our five-county service area.

Throughout the two-day summit, participants built skills in policy, storytelling, leadership, and relationship building through interactive sessions designed to strengthen their voices as advocates.

Jessica Herbert of the Arizona Food Bank Network opened the summit with **Anti-Hunger Advocacy in Times of Change**, providing a critical overview of SNAP, the current political landscape, and exploring the idea that **"hunger is a policy choice."**

Next, Mika Galilee-Belfer, immigration attorney, and Gabriela Perez, CFB Advocacy Coordinator, led **Community Leadership in Action: Finding Your Path in Advocacy**, encouraging participants to discover how their unique strengths and experiences can drive meaningful change in urban environments. Suzanne Kammerman, Neighbor Advisory Council Member, and Carlos Valles of the Sahuarita Food Bank presented **Voices That Move Policy: Tools for Local Engagement**, sharing practical strategies for effective advocacy in rural communities.

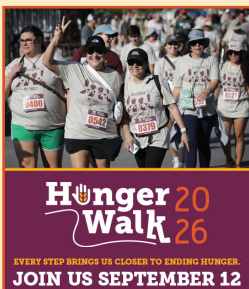
Claudio Rodriguez, CFB Deputy Chief of Community Development, guided attendees through **Power Mapping: Power, People, and Policy**, helping participants better understand the people and systems that shape food policy.

Day two began with the **Building Community and Sustaining Hope** panel, moderated by Grace Saavedra, CFB Las Milpitas Plot Coordinator. Panelists Francisca Cruz, Neighbor Advisory Council Member; Aaron Cardona, CFB Board Member and farmer; and Liane Hernandez of The OpEd Project shared insights on mobilizing communities, sustaining advocacy efforts, and building a shared sense of purpose.

The summit concluded with **Sharpen Your Story: Amplify Your Impact**, led by Frank Velasquez of 4 Da Hood. As he reminded participants, **"Your most powerful tool is your story, your values, your experiences, your voice."** Through an engaging and interactive session, attendees reconnected with their authentic stories and gained the confidence, courage, and skills to share them in ways that inspire action and create lasting impact.



UPCOMING EVENTS



Join us on **Saturday, September 12th** for a fun-filled, feel-good walk with friends, families, and fellow hunger-fighters. Whether you're strolling through Tucson's Kino Sports Complex (with a special tour through our Country Club warehouse and Nuestra Tierra Garden!), making your way through the scenic paths of Historic Canoa Ranch in Green Valley (where we invite all of our Amado, Nogales, and other I-19 corridor neighbors to join us), or setting your own pace as a Virtual Walker, every step brings us closer to ending hunger!

So lace up, link arms, and let's walk the talk: communityfoodbank.org/hungerwalk



Our Compliments to the Chefs

We recently celebrated the graduation of Class 43 from our Culinary Training Program at Caridad Community Kitchen! Over the course of 11 weeks, our budding chefs spent more than 2,200 hours in the kitchen sharpening their knife skills, mastering advanced cooking techniques, and building the job and life skills needed for successful culinary careers.

They also learned to shuck oysters, build the perfect cheese board, make fresh pasta from scratch, and even tackled the art of puff pastry. And along the way they somehow managed to find time to help out with our senior meals and community meals... with an amazing **43,900 meals prepared in total!**

As their instructor, Chef Ismael, shared: **“This has been a truly incredible class. This group represents second chances, career transitions, perseverance, and the belief that people can continue to grow regardless of where they started.”**

Caridad Community Kitchen offers a FREE culinary training program for individuals who are unemployed, have low incomes, or face other barriers to employment. Learn more at communityfoodbank.org/caridad-community-kitchen-culinary-training.

Stacking Up to Solve Hunger

Canstruction 2026 brought together local architects, engineers, and designers to create incredible “Cansculptures” using canned food and other non-perishable items. This year’s theme was Fun and Games, and all three teams definitely came to play, **bringing in 12,723 lbs. of food and over \$4,500 in donations.**

Twisting to Solve Hunger: BWS Architects, Lloyd Construction, and Zona Technical Engineering teamed up to tackle hunger one can (or cube) at a time. Their impressive design earned **Best Use of Labels and Most Cans.**

Wreck-It Ralph: Wrecking Hunger: Onyx Creative used cans of chicken and vegetables to build a playful tribute that helped “wreck” hunger one can at a time. Their entry received awards for **Structural Ingenuity** and **Best Meal.**

Spin to Win Against Hunger: Tucson Electric Power’s game-show-inspired creation put meals, not cash prizes, on the wheel. Their design earned **Best Original Design** and the coveted **People’s Choice Award.**



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The Community Food Bank receives most of its funding from people like you. Supportive public funding includes: City of Tucson, Pima County, USDA, Community Development Block Grants and Community Service Block Grants/Pima County and City of Tucson; Arizona Department of Economic Security/Social Services Block Grant and Arizona Department of Health Services. Community Food Bank programs provide services to eligible participants without regard to race, color, creed, religion, handicap, age, national origin, sexual orientation, political beliefs or gender.



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