

# Annual Report

## Pima County Food Alliance

### 12/31/2013

#### Background and Mission

The Pima County Food Alliance (PCFA) is an organization that works to improve our community's health and local economy by supporting farms, healthy food, and positive changes in local food policy. As a recognized food policy council, we have dozens of organizations, farms, and other institutions involved in our work. Just a few examples are Pima Community College, the Community Food Bank, Native Seeds/SEARCH, Baja Arizona Sustainable Agriculture, Iskashitaa Refugee Network, Community Gardens of Tucson, Pima County Cooperative Extension, Climate Change Committee, and various colleges and departments at the University of Arizona, most notably the College of Public Health and Policy, and the Southwest Center.

In the fall of 2010, much work was being done to address the underlying causes of obesity under the project title "Communities Putting Prevention To Work" (CPPW). This project was a result of a grant awarded by the Center For Disease Control, and it was administered through the Pima County Health Department from early 2010 to early 2012.

The grant's objective was to reduce the growing epidemic of diet related diseases and illness through strategies that encouraged positive and preventative behaviors amongst families and communities. From the several non-profits, faith-based organizations, and educational institutions involved, teams were developed with specialties in specific areas such as healthy food access and production, the built environment, education, health and policy. The task at hand was immense given the scope and ambitious schedule of the grant requirements.

To some it became increasingly clear that long-term healing of our local food shed, the state of which has been a result of agricultural policies already several decades old, would not be realized unless the work being done could be carried forward beyond the expiration of the grant in 2012. At the time representatives within the food access/production team which was made up of members within the Community Food Resource Center (a department embedded within the Community Food Bank), and the policy team led by the University of Arizona's College of Public Health and Policy, were already discussing the root causes of poor nutrition in low-income communities where market forces prevented the establishment of healthy food options.

Meanwhile, much work had already occurred by many Southern Arizona based individuals and groups who had been working on desert-appropriate small scale food production systems. These groups were also thinking critically about the resilience of Southern Arizona in terms of its available energy, resources, and transportation systems. Thankfully, many within the food access/production team were already connected to these local experts, many of whom were not aware of each other's work.

Three points of confluence became apparent:

- 1) Multiple organizations and individuals were working independently towards the same goals on similar food related or sustainability related projects.
- 2) Food policy, one of the major root causes of food related illness and disease was not being addressed in an intentional way by these organizations and local experts.
- 3) And, a means to affect the policies that determine our food choices did not exist for those most affected by them. Those most affected include farmers, ranchers, gardeners, chefs, school garden teachers and eaters who want more access to locally grown foods.



After some discussion and planning amongst the original founders, two meetings were held in which community opinion and comment was sought out to determine whether the idea of forming a food policy council to fill these gaps was worthwhile. Thankfully, the answer was a resounding “yes” and we set about to structure a food policy council from input collected from many stakeholders in the community over the rest of 2011 and into 2012.

A Leadership Council (effectively a governing board) was established through an application process, and through funding approved by the Pima County Department of Health a green light was given to hire the expertise needed to help guide a series of visioning sessions that resulted in prioritization of many actions and a general direction for PCFA in the 2-5 year range.

### **Changes to PCFA in 2013**

During 2013, we took a break from holding regular monthly general membership meetings to instead focus our energies on larger events and opportunities for co-sponsoring and facilitating events in partnership with other local food-related organizations. We plan to revisit the topic in early 2014 to discuss whether this strategy will continue and how the general membership can be effectively engaged going forward.

### **Activities and Accomplishments**

#### Completed Projects:

Organized “A Place At The Table” Movie Showing as the opening to the Community Food Bank’s “Closing The Hunger Gap” national conference of food banks. We were awarded a national grant to make the showing possible.

Successfully advocated for the Arizona Department of Health Services to institute reasonable policies encouraging rather than hindering school gardening. As a direct result, compost and rainwater are now allowable for growing food in school gardens.

Designed and photographed a Southern Arizona version of the USDA’s MyPlate to showcase what is possible using locally grown and wild harvested native and traditional foods.

Published article in September 2013 issue of Edible Baja Arizona magazine detailing Native MyPlate Project, along with Policy Editorial on USDA, school food, and child food insecurity.

Successfully advocated for inclusion of an Urban Agriculture section within the City of Tucson’s general plan known as Plan Tucson in 2013.

Took a lead role in petition against closure of Manzo Elementary School and its agroecology program, helping keep the school open.

Co-sponsored a comment forming event at the Food Conspiracy Coop’s administration office regarding the Food and Drug Administration’s Food Safety Modernization Act. FDA has announced it will be significantly reviewing some of the policies we—and many other small farmers around the country—were most concerned about.

Partnered with Rincon Unified Congregational Church as our fiscal agent to allow tax deductible contributions and grants going forward.



Participated in Colorado River Day press conference with Phoenix Mayor Gibbs to address the importance of water resources and quality to agriculture in Arizona.

Assisted City of Tucson and Clarion Associates with sustainable zoning code recommendations for Urban Agriculture in 2011.

In collaboration with the Community Food Bank, organized the “Leap What You Sow Conference” that brought together over 100 food activists and farmers from all over Southern Arizona and surrounding states to discuss ways we could work more effectively together on local food access and market issues.

#### On-going Projects:

Gathered Stakeholder Organizations to discuss integration of work, Memorial of Recognition, and the STAR Sustainable Cities commitment to sustainable food access for presentation to City of Tucson Mayor and Council.

We continue to maintain an active role in the [City of Tucson’s Sustainable Code Integration Project](#) where issues relating to water and urban agriculture are concerned.

Actively support continuing work to negotiate removal of sewer fees on water bills to all community gardens that do not use a sewer connection.

Support and collaboration with Southern Arizona Young Farmer’s Coalition (SAYFC) – the Arizona branch of the National Young Farmer’s Coalition.

Began cursory study of the state of our water resources in Arizona as it relates to modern and urban agriculture and commerce, published in a series of blog posts on our website.

Engaging with Right To Know Arizona initiative organizers on an educational basis.

Ongoing discussion with City of Tucson regarding an “Eat 5, Buy 5” campaign to bolster local food production through increased local foods purchasing.

#### **Where is PCFA Headed?**

We are now completing a third year of activity as a food policy council, and a third round of applications will soon be reviewed for incoming Leadership Council members that will replace those whose terms are ending.

Since early 2012, PCFA has operated without administrative funding on an all-volunteer basis.

Periodically, we discuss the advantages and disadvantages of registering as some form of political action committee or a non-profit organization. Partnering with potential fiscal sponsors for the purpose of soliciting grant funding and member donations has also been on the table. However, the concern has generally been whether the mission of PCFA would be compromised, in that, direct policy work might be limited due to rules that govern a non-profit’s ability to directly influence legislation or endorsement of political campaigns.

With trusted community leaders we continued to discuss the possibility of pursuing a recognized legal organizational designation that would allow us to more effectively engage with others who are accustomed to dealing with traditional non-profit organizations, and perhaps increase PCFA activity by being able to appoint a full or part-time director if funding became available.



Ultimately, in 2013 we were able to achieve the goal we had set out for ourselves more than a year before: to find a fiscal sponsor that would allow us to pursue/solicit tax deductible funds and/or contributions without compromising our mission. We're very thankful to Rincon Congregational United Church of Christ for their generous offer to act as that fiscal sponsor; we've taken steps in this direction and look forward to working with them in 2014.

Above all else PCFA wants to encourage and facilitate critical conversation and activities that intentionally define and guide how we want to eat in our region. This is especially true as policies and economic shifts create new challenges affecting our ability to do so in an equitable way. Historically, food and agriculture have been the foundational pillars of a community's local economy, and the most direct path to understanding a region's culture and values which must be protected.



**Pima County Food Alliance**