Small Scale Arizona Food Producer’s Forum
Ajo, Arizona | November 15 & 16, 2016

Two-Day Regional Seminar
Summary

The Small Scale Arizona Food Producer’s Forum in Ajo provided the space for small-scale farmers and value-added producers to convene, acquire knowledge in growing and sourcing products locally, share best practices, and celebrate the productive community they’ve built.

The program highlighted indigenous Sonoran Desert crops their incorporation in local cuisine, as well as featured the Authentically Ajo Farmer’s Market Place, and a community potluck to provide a casual space for networking and bonding.

This free event brought out a great diversity of folks from across the state, including seniors from Gila River Indian Community Blackwater Senior Center, gleaners from Iskashitaa Refugee Network in Tucson, jam-makers in Ajo, and urban farmers from Agave Farms in central Phoenix. Over 100 unique attendees took part in the 2-day Forum events.

Si Johnson, a Tohono O’odham Elder, gave words to the feeling that all in attendance held when he closed by saying, “Today, I just don’t want time to pass by. I want to help.”

This event was organized as a cooperation between Local First Arizona and Ajo Center for Sustainable Agriculture, supported by the Freeport McMoran Foundation, Commission for Environmental Cooperation, and United States Department of Agriculture.

All photos by Bobby Narcho, Ajo Center for Sustainable Agriculture
Cover illustration by Kat Anderson, Ajo Center for Sustainable Agriculture
Arrival and Seating
10:05am Welcome: Kate Radosevic, Local First Arizona Foundation
10:10am Sustainability Through Value-Added Products: Cie’na Schaefli, San Xavier Co-Op Farm
11am Community Supported Agriculture – Starting & Growing Your Market: Angela Entzel, University of Arizona Cooperative Extension, Maricopa County
11:45am Adopt A Sonoran Desert Crop Program: Nina Sajovec, Ajo Center for Sustainable Agriculture
12:15pm Heritage Foods Cooking Demonstration: Chef Felicia Cocotzin Ruiz
1pm Lunch + Authentically Ajo Farmer’s Market Place
2pm Accepting Food Assistance Benefits at Farmers Markets and Direct Marketing Ventures
Kate O’Neill, Pinnacle Prevention
Cindy Gentry, Maricopa County Dept. of Public Health
Geni Acosta, Arizona Department of Health Services
3pm Knowing Your Market – Branding & Re-Branding: Sarah Grone, Beneficial Beans
3:50pm Final Q & A and Closing Remarks
4pm Authentically Ajo Farmer’s Market Place
5:30pm Celebration Potluck

Tour of the Dry-Land Field at Ajo Roping Arena
optional – carpool from Many Hands Learning Center
10am Turning Native Seeds/SEARCH
San Xavier Co-Op Farms
Ajo Center for Sustainable Agriculture
Beans. Corn, and Local Onions
Post-Harvest Handling and Seed Saving Techniques of Tepary Bean, Roasted Corn, and Wheat, Post-Harvest Handling and Seed Saving Techniques of Festival Tepary Bean, and I’itoi Onion Harvesting.

Tour of the Dry Land Field at Ajo Roping Arena
10:30am Ajo Roping Arena Field Learning Tour: Autumn Green, Field Manager, Ajo Roping Arena

Cultural Arts Group (Ajo, AZ): Tohono O’odham Squash
1pm Tour of the Dry Land Field at Ajo Roping Arena
Tour of the Dry Land Field at Ajo Roping Arena
10am Arrival and Seating
8:30am Ceremony of Respecting, Local First Arizona Foundation
10:05am Welcome: Kate Radosevic, Local First Arizona Foundation
10:10am Sustainability Through Value-Added Products: Cie’na Schaefli, San Xavier Co-Op Farm
11am Community Supported Agriculture – Starting & Growing Your Market: Angela Entzel, University of Arizona Cooperative Extension, Maricopa County
11:45am Adopt A Sonoran Desert Crop Program: Nina Sajovec, Ajo Center for Sustainable Agriculture
12pm Lunch + Authentically Ajo Farmer’s Market Place; lunch featuring Sonoran Desert crops provided by Ajo Unified School District’s Culinary Arts students, led by Christina Vega
1pm Lunch + Authentically Ajo Farmer’s Market Place
2pm Accepting Food Assistance Benefits at Farmers Markets and Direct Marketing Ventures
Kate O’Neill, Pinnacle Prevention
Cindy Gentry, Maricopa County Dept. of Public Health
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Attendance

Day 1
November 15
64 participants

Day 2
November 16
57 participants

50% of attendees are current producers

other participants included high school culinary arts students, nutritionists, farmer’s market managers, and all attendees are active eaters

Attendees hailed from rural areas and urban centers, with active representation from locally settled refugees, hispanics, and the Tohono O’odham Nation
After attending the Forum,

- feel empowered to attempt seed-saving or try a new dryland-farming technique
- are considering new processing techniques for their crops
- were shown a new way to prepare foods that can either help them sell their product, or try themselves at home
- learned how to begin accepting Food Assistance Benefits
- networked to celebrate the local food community

100% of participants

90% of producers will consider adding value-added goods to their product line
89% of producers will consider new distribution options for their products (i.e. beginning a Community Supported Agriculture share program)
78% of producers learned something new that they will implement into their marketing or branding

All reported data were determined from respondents of paper surveys administered on site at the conclusion of each day’s programming.
Nina Sajovec & Sterling Johnson of Ajo Center for Sustainable Agriculture share their experience with the Sonoran Desert Adopt a Crop Program.

Lunch prepared by Ajo Center for Sustainable Agriculture volunteers with fresh garden harvest.
Chef Felicia Cocotzin Ruiz demonstrating the preparation of her Five-Cactus Salad, because as she says, “four cactuses just aren’t enough!”

Tour of the Dryland Field at the Ajo Roping Arena, where crops like tepary beans rely only on the summer monsoon rains to come to maturity.
Sterling Johnson and Kyle Watkins of Ajo Center for Sustainable Agriculture demonstrate tepary bean thrashing techniques in the garden during the demonstration break-out sessions.

Ajo Unified School District’s Culinary Arts Students, led by Christina Vega Zubiate, prepare a delicious from-scratch lunch for the Forum attendees, featuring Magdalena Squash and other Sonoran Desert crops.