Local First Arizona Foundation creates strategic programs and initiatives that build a more diverse, inclusive, and prosperous Arizona economy.

Through our initiatives, we connect Arizona’s small towns to opportunities (Rural Development Council), we improve success rates for underserved entrepreneurs so they can build self-reliance and community wealth (Fuerza Local Business Accelerator), and we support food producers to increase connectivity between Arizona’s farms and its residents (Good Food Finder).

The Foundation also works on broad economic development issues, implementing new tools and programs that highlight the state’s many assets and create sweeping changes that increase opportunities for all Arizonans. We know that Arizona’s economy succeeds when everyone has opportunities to lead healthy and productive lives.

While our programs are incredibly diverse, we invite you to look comprehensively at key challenges facing Arizona and explore with us the creative solutions we’ll need to overcome them. Our programs address these challenges in innovative ways and represent a distinct shift from the old models of economic development that have too often left much of our population behind.

This past year, we saw the results of our work improve the lives of everyday Arizonans. Read through the stories included here and learn about our broad impact in communities across the state. I think you will be inspired by the many stories of self-reliance and prosperity that we are cultivating across Arizona, with the help of people just like you.

Locally yours,

Kimber Lanning
Founder & Executive Director
Local First Arizona Foundation
NEW IN 2019

FUERZA LOCAL

Fuerza Local diversified its initiatives aimed at building a more diverse and inclusive economy with the launch of Nivel Ejecutivo. Leveraging Interise’s award-winning curriculum, the StreetWise ‘MBA’, the program is designed to scale established Latino-owned businesses for local job and wealth creation while preparing firms for contract opportunities with local government and anchor institutions. In September 2019, Nivel Ejecutivo welcomed its first cohort of Latino business owners with a minimum of three years in operation, grossing $200k-$10M in annual revenue, with at least one full-time employee other than the owner.

GOOD FOOD

Good Food Finder launched a pilot program with local food retailer Tracy Dempsey Originals to become a produce hub for the local farmer group, Sun Produce Cooperative. This program has provided fresh, seasonal produce to over 50 families across the Valley, and serves as a pilot for other businesses, as well as schools, to partner with area farms.

RURAL DEVELOPMENT

Nearly 300 rural stakeholders, leaders, and advocates convened for the 13th Annual Rural Policy Forum in the White Mountains seeking new solutions for building stronger, more resilient rural economies across Arizona. More than 65 local officials, non-profit leaders, and business owners representing all 15 counties were given platforms to discuss creative solutions to some of the most challenging issues impeding growth in rural Arizona, like business development and retention; tourism and marketing strategies; healthy community initiatives; and stewardship and sustainability practices.
THANK YOU TO OUR
2019 SPONSORS

Thank you to the following organizations, corporations and foundations that generously supported the work of Local First Arizona Foundation in 2019. We could not do this work without their partnership!

$75,000+
FREEPORT McMORAN FOUNDATION
CITY OF PHOENIX
THUNDERBIRDS CHARITIES

$50,000+
CITY OF TEMPE
USDA - RURAL DEVELOPMENT
GILA RIVER INDIAN COMMUNITY
BHP
YELP FOUNDATION

$30,000+
PAKIS FOUNDATION
FHS CARES FOUNDATION
ARIZONA OFFICE OF TOURISM
FLINN FOUNDATION

$25,000+
CITY OF MESA
PARSNS FOUNDATION
MARLEY FOUNDATION
ARIZONA COMMUNITY FOUNDATION
COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT PARTNERS

$15,000+
CITY OF AVONDALE
VALLEY OF THE SUN UNITED WAY
ARIZONA PUBLIC SERVICE
VITALYST HEALTH FOUNDATION
DESERT FINANCIAL CREDIT UNION
COMMUNITY INVESTMENT CORPORATION
HENSLEY BEVERAGE DISTRIBUTING

$10,000+
GODADDY
ARIZONA COMPLETE HEALTH
SPROUTS FOUNDATION
BAR AND RESTAURANT INSURANCE
BLUE CROSS BLUE SHIELD OF ARIZONA

$5,000+
TOWN OF GILBERT
SALT RIVER PROJECT
ONE AZ CREDIT UNION
POWERING ARIZONA’S ENTREPRENEURS

The Fuerza Local Business Accelerator is a six-month program designed to teach under-resourced micro-entrepreneurs important basics for financial literacy and business development.

Investing in under-served communities through entrepreneurship is a successful strategy that, in seven years, has seen incredible job creation and business expansion, along with increases in community participation. Creating opportunities for small business development in low-income communities helps build an Arizona where everyone has the opportunity to succeed.

“Creating opportunities for small business development in low-income communities helps build an Arizona where everyone has the opportunity to succeed.”
Participants attend weekly classes on a variety of topics including marketing, business planning, cash flow management, and many more. They also gain critically important financial literacy through participation in a lending circle, which requires them to make on-time payments every month they are in the program. These payments are reported to Experian, building a credit history for the small business owner, often for the first time.

Their savings are then matched by a scholarship made possible through the support of our donors. Each graduate is offered the opportunity to access credit at fair market rates through several partnering financial institutions in lieu of any previous credit history.

Local First Arizona Foundation launched the Fuerza Local Business Accelerator in 2013 as a direct response to the influx of predatory lenders that target low-income Latinos who often lack financial literacy and access to capital. With your support, we are able to connect this vulnerable population to resources that help them build thriving businesses and opportunity for their families.
When Diana’s mother was diagnosed with cancer, her life changed. After endless research of an incurable disease, she learned she could control one thing: the food she put in her body. That sparked Diana’s imagination for fruit shake concoctions and granola bowls that left her friends and family speechless, and her mother living four more years than expected.

Diana’s husband, Ernesto, has his own business. He worked on cars out of his home garage, but both decided to venture into a new project and wanted to do it right. For them it meant finding retail space, opening up a business account, and creating a community hub that gave back to their community.

After their friends at restaurant La Olmeca invited them to their Fuerza Local graduation, they grabbed the flyer off their register and applied the next day. They had missed the deadline. But they got a callback and hit the ground running. They are now leasing a space two doors over from La Olmeca, planning their grand opening, and have a goal of opening a Downtown Phoenix location in 2021.

“Fuerza Local opened our eyes to what it means to be a business owner. From the smallest of details, like a logo, to registering for an LLC, this is the starting point I’d recommend to everyone.”
MILESTONES & HIGHLIGHTS

IN 2019

GROSS SALES FOR GRADUATES
$6,991,360

624 TOTAL JOBS CREATED BY PAST GRADUATES

88 NEW JOBS CREATED IN 2019

453 BUSINESSES GRADUATED SINCE 2013

11% BOUGHT NEW VEHICLES

32% SECURED NEW CONTRACTS OR PURCHASED NEW EQUIPMENT

32% HIRED NEW STAFF

25% OFFER NEW OR EXPANDED PRODUCTS OR SERVICES

*Reflects improved accuracy in participant data
Food production and agriculture are major parts of our state’s economy, and keeping Arizona’s food on Arizona plates increases prosperity and health for both producers and consumers. Our food initiatives raise awareness of local food systems by enabling Arizonans to find out where and how to eat locally while strengthening Arizona’s food production by providing tools, education, and marketing for farmers, food producers and purveyors. We empower food entrepreneurs to enter the local food economy to create meaningful change within the local food system. With the support of our partners and donors, we are building economic opportunity and support for local food across the state for every stakeholder.

“WE EMPOWER food entrepreneurs to enter the local food economy to CREATE MEANINGFUL CHANGE WITHIN the local food system.”
Good Food Finder AZ is Arizona’s online directory of local foods, serving as a hub where consumers and institutional food buyers alike can discover and contact Arizona’s local food producers. This free resource connects community members to make it easier to find, buy, and eat local foods and exists to serve two purposes: help families and institutional buyers alike find and source their ingredients locally, as well as support farmers and food entrepreneurs in growing their food businesses. Additionally, Good Food Finder offers free resources for growing good food at home, and growing a local food business.

Good Food Finder For “eaters”, the ‘Good Food at Home’ navigation provides a growing online directory of over 800 food products, farms, U-Pick-It farms, Community Supported Agriculture (CSAs), and farmers markets across the state; community events calendar of local food festivals, farm days, DIY and gardening classes; how-to guides for starting a garden at home; a blog full of articles and recipes for growing and cooking seasonal vegetables; for food businesses in the startup phase of production, the ‘Grow Your Business’ navigation offers useful tools, including: how to expand your customer base, navigating food safety resources and requirements, and accessing capital to grow a farm or food business.
FOOD & FARM FORUM

A pillar of Local First Arizona Foundation’s food business support, the Arizona Food & Farm Forum is a two-day conference for farmers and local food advocates that celebrated a successful sixth year. In 2019, the event returned to the Farm at Agritopia in Gilbert and gathered 220 attendees to focus on in-field and in-office strategies. The agenda offered technical assistance to better market Arizona grown products to an ever-evolving customer base, develop business partnerships that work for the buyers and sellers, access traditional and alternative funding sources, and navigate regulations for building a robust business.

Additionally, the Food & Farm Forum hosted open forums to tackle systematic challenges to strengthening our local food system to:

- Increase Farm to School procurement for cafeterias statewide;
- Identify policy recommendations for the City of Phoenix 2025 Food Action Plan; and,
- Cultivate strong and honest relationships between local food buyers and suppliers

GOOD FOOD EXPO

In 2019, Local First Arizona Foundation and Good Food Finder celebrated the 10th Annual Arizona Good Food Expo (formerly Farmer + Chef Connection) by hosting the largest and most successful event to date: 75 local food and beverage artisans were on display and over 300 attendees from across the state walked the aisles. This showcase of local goods available for wholesale transaction proved itself as the event for Arizona’s food industry to meet, build new partnerships, and discover Arizona’s finest food and beverages.
“Chefs have a special opportunity and responsibility to showcase what local farmers are doing and the diversity of Arizona produce,” said James Beard Award Winner Charleen Badman, owner and chef at FnB Scottsdale.

COMMUNITY KITCHEN
The Community Kitchen is a 2,500 square foot fully equipped industrial kitchen that serves as a collaborative space available to food entrepreneurs who are looking to start or grow their business. We passionately believe that by removing barriers we enable entrepreneurs to grow their businesses and the local food economy.

Our community kitchen is possible through partnership with the residents of El Rancho del Sol apartments and the property owners, Community Development Partners. Together we have blended food, community, and entrepreneurship to advance a healthy and engaged local food community that includes kids cooking classes, ServSafe certification, gardening, and food business incubation. We believe that through food, we cultivate inclusive and creative communities for generations to come.
Lucas Gonzales | Salsa Bites
Community Kitchen Member

Lucas balances a career in mental health with his passion for traditional Mexican food in his family-run food truck, Salsa Bites. Local First Arizona’s Community Kitchen is helping this entrepreneur and his family succeed in business.

Tim Colby | The Farm at Agritopia
Arizona Food & Farm Forum Attendee

For next generation farmer Tim Colby, the Arizona Food & Farm Forum proved to be a pivotal resource for his business, a commercial farm growing USDA certified organic produce for surrounding restaurants and the community. The Farm at Agritopia features row crops, an orchard of stone fruit and citrus, and even dates and olives. With tremendous volunteer power, the farm has become an anchor point for the community and hosts a weekly farmers market.

“This event connected me to some of the most kind and generous people in our farming community, as a beginner farmer, HAVING CONNECTIONS WITH EXPERIENCED FARMERS has helped me jump ahead on the learning curve and given me resources to tap into that I would otherwise be left searching for on my own.”
Through the Community Kitchen’s kid’s cooking classes, the youngest residents of El Rancho del Sol are exposed to new cooking techniques and ideas. The after-school program teaches young chefs how to grow and prepare easy, healthy meals using simple, fresh ingredients with instruction from skilled chefs and food experts like business owner and Local First Arizona member Lisa Toon of Carolina’s Chocolates.

“**It is so much fun to make a new food for the first time!**”
OUR ROLE IN LOCAL FOOD SYSTEMS

DIRECT EDUCATION TO
600+ LOCAL FOOD BUSINESSES

COMMUNITY KITCHEN ENTREPRENEURS
FOOD & FARM FORUM
GOOD FOOD EXPO

7
REGIONAL FOOD SYSTEM
COALITIONS SUPPORTED
(INCLUDING STATE OF ARIZONA)

7 MONTHS OF EL RANCHO
DEL SOL CHOICE FOOD PANTRY

14 DISTRIBUTIONS

7000 LBS
FOOD TO HUNGRY FAMILIES

35 PARTNER ORGANIZATIONS DEVELOPING COMMUNITY-DRIVEN
SOLUTIONS FOR FOOD INSECURITY THAT SUPPORT FOOD PRODUCERS

27 SMALL FOOD ENTREPRENEURS INCUBATED

14 GROWING STARTUPS
13 NEW LLC’S

11 CREATING NEW JOBS
Localists are a dedicated group of people, like you, who believe in transforming Arizona’s economy and building community along the way. When you join as a Localist you know that your support sustains our mission of building opportunity in Arizona year-round. And whether it’s a tour of a farmer’s harvest, a Fuerza Local graduate’s grand opening, or a group kayak down the Verde River, Localists will grow the local love, and have fun doing it!

Find out more at localfirstazfoundation.org/donate
RURAL DEVELOPMENT

GROWING ARIZONA’S SMALL TOWN ECONOMIES

As the state’s Rural Development Council (AZRDC), Local First Arizona Foundation partners with businesses, community leaders and organizations to help build a rural Arizona economy that is sustainable, resilient, and celebratory of diverse cultures. Local First Arizona Foundation and AZRDC develop innovative programs that are improving Arizona’s future by driving resources into under-served communities utilizing strategies that enable them to grow economic opportunity, retain youth, create jobs, and increase revenue through tourism. These four strategies empower cities and towns to grow resources they need to build opportunities for those that choose every day to make #RuralAZ their home.

RURAL POLICY FORUM

The Rural Policy Forum connects rural economic development professionals, nonprofits, community leaders, business owners, and other rural stakeholders who are interested in sustaining rural communities. Our goal is to hear strategies from national experts as well as learn about success stories from around Arizona that will give our rural leaders the tools, resources and relationships they need to face current challenges.
RURALAZ.COM | COMMUNITY PROFILES

With a goal to redirect 10% of current vacation spending ($6.5B annually) into Arizona’s rural communities, Local First Arizona Foundation developed online profiles of 11 Rural AZ towns that showcase a diverse array of arts and culture, history and heritage, outdoor sports and recreations, food and drink, and even small business entrepreneurial opportunities. The profiles are available for use in resident and business recruitment, connection to place, and tourism.

BUILDING OPPORTUNITY THROUGH CAPACITY

Local First Arizona Foundation works to build resilient communities in rural areas through its innovative programs, providing tools and resources to local organizations and entrepreneurs. Shifting economic support to focus on community development has proven to be a highly successful strategy to create new job opportunities and rebuild communities.

WEEKENDZONA

WeekendZona aims to redirect the 6.5 billion dollars Arizonans spend on average each year vacationing out of state back into our unique and diverse small towns through curated weekend getaways. WeekendZona encourages exploration of our vast state, investing in the revitalization of these local economies, facilitating job creation, and generating Arizona state pride.
In 1953, San Manuel, AZ was built as a company town to serve the then-new San Manuel copper mine, mill and smelter complex. When copper prices fell in the late 1990s, the owner of the mine shuttered both operations, causing more than 2,500 people to lose their jobs. As an unincorporated community, San Manuel has struggled to:

- Provide a centralized resource for programs commonly provided by a municipal entity
- Manage community properties and minimize illegal dumping
- Establish a plan for business retention/recruitment or community development that would help stabilize the local economy

In 2019, a series of Community Town Halls were convened in San Manuel to discuss ideas aimed at realizing a vibrant, sustainable community able to retain and attract a new generation of long-term residents and families. Three strategic goals were identified including:

- Development of centralized non-profit organization to ensure that community services and programs are accessible to San Manuel Residents
- Address waste and beautification challenge in San Manuel and increase access to healthy food
- Identify programming and resources that will provide opportunities for the community to engage with one another and build pride and connection within San Manuel

“This process brought so much more to the community than just infrastructure. The healing that resulted through facilitated communication between myself and my neighbors has brought me even closer to the place that I call home.” - Anonymous, Community Member
KINGMAN AND CAMP VERDE LAUNCH SCIENCE HAPPENS HERE

For eight weeks, 3rd-5th grade classrooms across the Kingman and Camp Verde school districts participated in Science Happens Here, a scavenger hunt card game with a Grand Prize opportunity to conduct an experiment with professional scientists.

To play, students and their families were asked to collect Science Happens Here trading cards from local businesses in the community. Each card explained a Scientific, Engineering, Technological, or Mathematical (STEM) process used within that independent business to showcase the breadth of science-related activities happening outside the classroom on a daily basis. The collectable cards then allowed students to unlock household experiments on the Science Happens Here website (www.sciencehappenshereaz.com), earning them a point for their classroom.

Kingman students conducted a record-setting 455 experiments across their district while Ms. Mezulis’ class in Camp Verde conducted 73 experiments on their own!
BY THE NUMBERS

95% DISCOVERED IMPACTFUL RESOURCES TO SHARE IN THEIR COMMUNITY

90% MADE NEW CONNECTIONS FOR FUTURE COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT

RURAL POLICY FORUM

$32,700 ECONOMIC IMPACT IN EAGAR/SPRINGERVILLE

COMMUNITY PROFILES

11 COMPLETED PROFILES

700 PROFILE VISITS IN 30 DAYS

SCIENCE HAPPENS HERE

820 STEM EXPERIMENTS CONDUCTED

75 CLASSROOMS PARTICIPATED

11 SCHOOLS PARTICIPATED
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