



# Annual Report

— Celebrating Progress —



# STATEMENT

## Mission

To strengthen locally owned businesses, which are the lifeblood of our communities, by establishing equitable systems that level the playing field for a thriving, inclusive, and lasting Arizona economy.

## Vision

An Arizona where success knows no boundaries. It's a world where every individual, regardless of their background, discovers fertile ground to sprout, dream, and blossom.



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# WELCOME

This year was an incredible journey that has deepened our collective resolve to build a more diverse and inclusive economy in Arizona. Headlines across the country have underscored how global financial systems do not work for families like yours and mine, and that the closer money is to home, the more compassionate and accessible it is.

In order to build strong local economies that include everyone, we need more local ownership, which requires simplifying access to capital and resources. If you look deeply across Arizona, you will see that entire communities have nothing local left to buy. Their locally owned stores have been replaced by corporate entities that extract profits for distant shareholders. This is why our work growing local entrepreneurs is critical to rebuilding entire communities – ones that have been gutted by “economic revitalization” programs that have long since left them behind.

If you have been with us since the beginning, you know we've long been champions of the Buy Local movement. After 20 years our messaging has evolved, but we still lead the conversation around inclusive economies and equitable development, uplifting local business ownership and strengthening local spending. All Arizonans receive an economic boost when buying locally, as this is key to diversifying the economy. A single dollar spent locally is a vote for Arizona, and Local First is committed to providing the ultimate opportunity for every person with the grit and passion to be a small business owner.

Our approach ranges from our micro-lending programs to diversifying supply chains at Arizona's anchor institutions. We are committed to keeping dollars recirculating right here at home.

Whether or not a small business involves one “solo”-preneur or a team of 50+



employees, Local First can help make businesses better. Local First has also helped communities across rural and tribal Arizona win over \$46M in new federal, state and foundation grants, and our team has directly assisted more than 3,500 businesses. Through partnerships large and small, our reach has touched every county in the state.

Thus, while our language may have changed and our programs may have deepened, our core beliefs remain steadfast. Entrepreneurship is the key to an economy that provides opportunity for all.

This report reflects the hard work and unwavering support of our staff, volunteers, board, community partners and financial supporters. Thank you for making this work possible and further demonstrating that **change starts locally!**

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Kimber Lanning". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a large, stylized "L" at the end.

Kimber Lanning, CEO, Local First Arizona



# LOCAL FIRST ARIZONA 2023 FINANCIALS



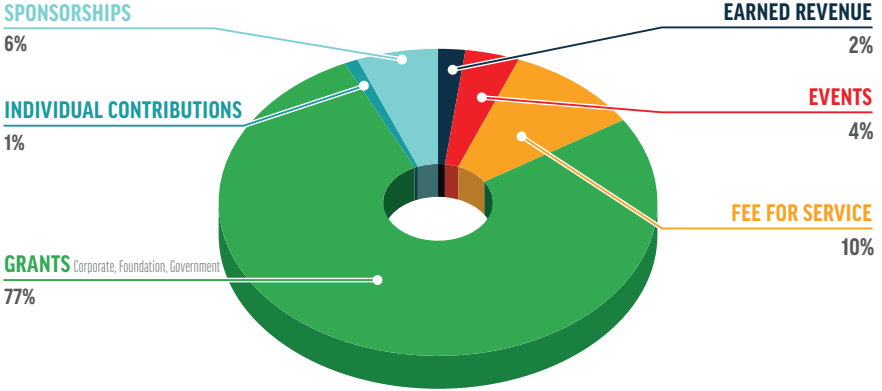
Arizona Fall Festival | 2023



Community Kitchen - Gardening | Mesa

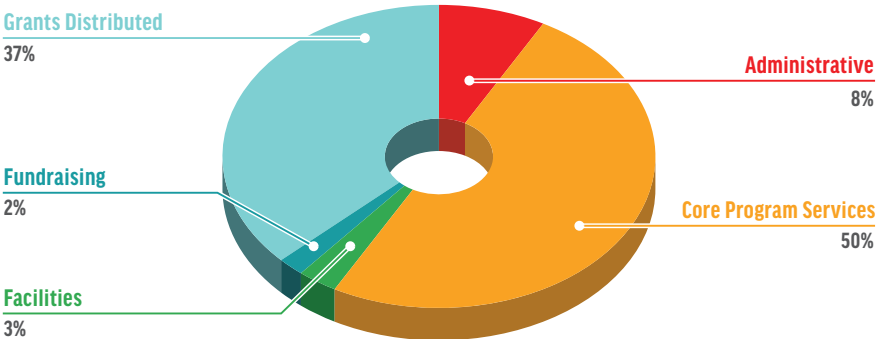
### Revenue: Financials

Local First Arizona



### Expenses: Financials

Local First Arizona



# THANK YOU 2023 SUPPORTERS

The stories, facts and figures contained in this report would not be possible without the support of our Board of Directors and Advisory Committee Members. **Thank you!**

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Sidebar

The Heath Team at Nova Home Loans

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# CELEBRATING PROGRESS

## 20 YEARS OF PUTTING LOCAL FIRST

When a group of business owners mobilized in 2003 for what would become Local First Arizona, there was no shortage of doubters.

*One out-of-state critic told The Arizona Republic newspaper, "(I'm not sure) the 'shop local' concept will work in the Valley. It works best in a community where people take pride in the diversity and character of that community."*

They could never have imagined the incredible groundswell of community pride we've seen across our great state. Everywhere we turn, we see homegrown businesses, people embracing their communities and feeling accountable for their collective success. Together, we have built a better Arizona.

**20 years later, we're the largest independent business coalition in the country, and there's no doubt we have changed the very fabric of our great state.**

To address the needs of locally owned businesses and communities across Arizona, we have leveraged the power of our business coalition to intervene at crucial times in our state's history.

## Since our inception, we have:

- Become the largest independent business coalition in the country.
- Launched nearly 1,500 entrepreneurs through business accelerators and boot camps.
- Provided personalized business assistance to more than 8,500 local business owners.
- In two years, won nearly \$46M in grants for rural and tribal communities for improving infrastructure, clean energy projects, and cultural enrichment programs.
- Grown from 1 employee to 56 (and counting...).
- Distributed nearly \$60 million in small-business relief and employee-retention aid to more than 5,000 locally owned businesses in all 15 counties during the COVID-19 pandemic.
- Helped educate Arizonans on the benefits of investing in local banks and credit unions, leading to a 520% growth in community bank deposits, which resulted in an 11% shift in the market.
- Delivered 379,769 locally sourced meals in partnership with 25 farms and agricultural businesses, 55 restaurants and 43 distribution centers to help COVID-19-impacted and food-insecure families in Phoenix.
- Shaped City of Phoenix's procurement policy to ensure more contracts are awarded to locally owned companies.
- Became the first to sign the Unity Pledge in support of equality for LGBTQ+ community members.
- Led a coalition of businesses to change state policy to require Amazon to collect sales state taxes.
- Acquired the federally designated Rural Development Council and expanded the annual Rural Policy Forum.
- Opened 4 incubator kitchens to launch food entrepreneurs, including restaurants, catering companies, food trucks and purveyors.

# 2023 BY THE Numbers

**107**  
entrepreneurs  
graduated from  
Good Food Boot Camp  
30% are Spanish preferred

The Good Food Forum & Expo

**80 Vendors**

400 Attendees, 2 Keynote Speakers, 10 Educational Sessions

**Volunteers  
served**  
**969**  
hour cumulatively

**90** businesses graduated  
from the Green Business  
Boot Camp and  
Certification.

Graduated **146** Businesses  
from Fuerza Local Acelerador de Negocios including  
**22** in rural Arizona

Grew the business  
coalition by

**300  
NEW  
MEMBERS**

**62**  
businesses are active  
in our  
Community Kitchens

**Local  
First** signature events diverted  
**58%** of waste from the  
landfill to reuse,  
compost and  
recycling



Convened  
**350**  
local leaders  
at the  
Rural Policy Forum

Delivered **100+** workshops,  
networking events, *and*  
member experiences

Engaged in  
**10,461** meaningful  
business  
interactions  
(boot camps, workshops, consulting, mixers, etc.)

Featured members in  
**600+**  
media opportunities

Attracted **20,000** attendees to the  
**Arizona Fall Festival**, driving an estimated  
**\$450,000** in sales to vendors

**FACILITATED**  
**THE INSTALLATION OF**  
**400**  
**HYDRO-PANELS**  
**TO BRING FRESH DRINKING WATER**  
**TO INDIGENOUS COMMUNITIES**

**GRADUATED**  
**28**  
**BUSINESSES**  
from the Retail Boot Camp

OFFICE OF THE GOVERNOR  
KATIE HOBBS

## Proclamation

**WHEREAS**, locally owned businesses are essential to a strong, vibrant, sustainable and inclusive Arizona economy, as evidenced by studies showing independent businesses support nine times more jobs and invest three times more money into their communities compared to non-local businesses; and

**WHEREAS**, Local First Arizona is the largest independent business coalition in the U.S. and has enabled thousands of Arizona-based businesses to launch, grow and succeed since its founding in 2003; and

**WHEREAS**, entrepreneurship is one of the most effective ways for Arizonans to achieve racial and gender equity and build generational wealth, which is reflected in the diversity of the more than 10,000 local business owners who have received technical assistance through Local First Arizona's Puerza Local Acelerador de Negocios, We Rise Business Accelerator, AZNavigator and business support team since 2013; and

**WHEREAS**, local banks, credit unions and community development financial institutions are necessary for increasing small business access to capital and, in the last decade, Local First Arizona's "Move Your Money" campaign has contributed to Arizona community banks growing deposits by 520% and decreasing Arizonans' deposits in the country's three largest banks by nearly 13%; and

**WHEREAS**, Arizona's local farms, restaurants and food resources are more important than ever to protect from climate change, supply-chain disruption and unfair competition, which is the focus of Local First Arizona's agricultural and food programs such as the Good Food Forum + Expo, Good Food Finder, Restaurant Startup Boot Camp and Community Kitchens; and

**WHEREAS**, Arizona must adapt to a changing climate to secure our state for future generations and Local First Arizona has helped local businesses reduce their water, energy, waste and transportation usage by 20% or more, resulting in thousands of dollars saved and significant conservation of water, energy and other resources, through the Green Business Boot Camp and Green Business Certification; and

**WHEREAS**, rural communities and tribal nations in Arizona contribute tremendously to our state's economy, culture and tourism and Local First Arizona's Economic Recovery Center has garnered more than \$33 million in funding for important rural and tribal projects since 2021; and

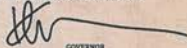
**WHEREAS**, Local First is leading the movement to build a diverse, inclusive and prosperous Arizona economy.  
**NOW, THEREFORE**, I, Katie Hobbs, Governor of the State of Arizona, do hereby proclaim November 4, 2023, as

### LOCAL FIRST ARIZONA DAY

and encourage all Arizonans to support the locally owned businesses that make our state great.



**IN WITNESS WHEREOF**, I have hereunto set my hand and caused to be affixed the Great Seal of the State of Arizona

  
GOVERNOR

**DONE** at the Capitol in Phoenix on this twenty-sixth day of October in the year Two Thousand and Twenty-Three and of the Independence of the United States of America the Two Hundred and Forty-Eighth.

**ATTEST:**

  
SECRETARY OF STATE



**Governor Hobbs  
proclaims  
“Local First Arizona Day”!**

**NOVEMBER**

**4**

**in recognition of our  
20 years of service to the state!**



# LEVELING THE PLAYING FIELD

This work takes many forms day to day. It requires a strong community understanding, systems thinking, compassion, and a desire to keep learning. There is no silver bullet to level the playing field between global corporations and locally owned businesses. That's why Local First takes a comprehensive approach that looks statewide for community-led solutions to strengthen economies for urban, rural and tribal residents.

## **OUR WORK IS GROUNDED IN FIVE PRIORITY AREAS:**

1. **Increase local ownership**
2. **Improve access to capital and financial power**
3. **Retain wealth, resources and talent in rural and tribal communities**
4. **Build the local food economy and promote climate-smart diets**
5. **Reduce the environmental impacts of small businesses**

While there is still work to be done, we invite you to celebrate the progress we made in these priority areas in 2023.

# INCREASING LOCAL OWNERSHIP

## **Developing entrepreneurs and small businesses at every stage and in every sector**

Our business support programs cover essential skills to compete, collaborate and succeed. There is no shortage of demands on today's entrepreneurs. Whether it's identifying vendor and wholesale opportunities, diversifying revenue streams, securing permits, optimizing procedures, staffing or navigating commercial real estate agreements, Local First is there for Arizona's small businesses.

### **Phoenix Coqui reaches new heights with Local First's advanced Spanish business program, Nivel Ejecutivo**

The idea for Phoenix Coqui was born in Puerto Rico, but the restaurant's foundation of success was built in Local First's Spanish-language Business Accelerator, Fuerza Local.

*"When we started with Fuerza Local, that was the first time we realized what the business was going to be," Alexis Carbajal said. He and Co-Owner Juan Ayala took the advice of their instructors and went to work on their website and social media to promote their food truck, as they saved money to open a brick-and-mortar location. "Everything we were learning in each class, whether it was finance or marketing, we were applying step by step," Carbajal said.*



Fuerza Local - Nivel Ejecutivo | Phoenix Coqui

The business owners graduated from Fuerza Local, then went on to enroll in Nivel Ejecutivo, a training program for more advanced business management. Their central Phoenix restaurant opened in 2022, and sales have tripled, Carbajal said.

“The most important thing was developing our ideas into something concrete,” Carbajal said. “Something that we could apply to our day-to-day, to get a little closer to that bigger goal.”



## **Delivering Support One Business at a Time**

Through strategic partnerships with the City of Glendale, City of Mesa, Maricopa County and the AZ Navigator program, Local First has provided one-on-one consulting to 2,900 business owners and utilized a network of 31 subject matter experts to help locally owned businesses strengthen and grow.

## **Introducing: The Retail Boot Camp**

New in 2023, Local First launched the six-week Retail Boot Camp, providing a comprehensive understanding of the retail industry and building blocks to reduce costs, streamline operations and increase profitability. Regardless of how many years a local owner has been in business, it aims to help business owners to step back and assess the scalability and resiliency of their business.

## **Celebrating Entrepreneurship from Tucson to Flagstaff**

With the addition of new staff in communities like Tucson, the Verde Valley and Flagstaff, Local First's reach continues to expand.

# Our Northern and Southern Arizona Initiatives

Included:



Hosting Green Business Certifications and Boot Camps with the Tucson City of Gastronomy for Spanish and English-speaking restaurant owners.



Launching "The Hustle Hour" event series in collaboration with the University of Arizona FORGE, which creates a new outlet for Black young professionals interested in business ownership in Tucson



Starting a retail incubator at Proper Shops in Tucson by securing short-term, special-rate leases that allow early-stage businesses to test their products.



Producing a Small Wonders Map featuring 28 businesses in Flagstaff to serve as a resource for residents and visitors to find the best local businesses in the area.



Launching a new Fuerza Local Business Accelerator in Globe-Miami with Eastern Arizona College and continuing the training program in rural areas such as Sedona and Cottonwood.



Celebrating Local First's 20th anniversary with over 400 business owners at Tucson Tamale, Flagstaff-based Kickstand Kafe and the Phoenix Art Museum.

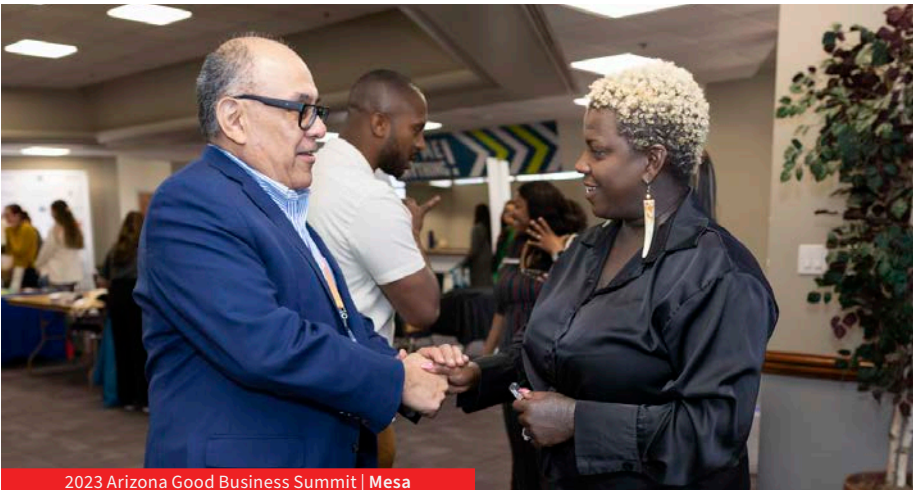




# IMPROVING ACCESS TO CAPITAL & FINANCIAL POWER

## **Building equity through inclusive lending and fundraising opportunities**

Access to capital is critical to the success of small businesses. Local First ensures entrepreneurs have a fighting chance at accessing affordable loans to launch, grow and prepare their small businesses for the future. For instance, in Graham, Greenlee and Cochise counties, there are no local lenders that support most types of business expansion. Now Local First offers those small business loans of up to \$25,000 at 7% interest with support from the Freeport-McMoRan Foundation.



## Green Business Micro-Loans

Green Business Micro-Loans provide the financial runway for small businesses to “go green.” After a simple application, boot camp graduates in six Arizona counties can afford to pay for sustainability improvements at low interest.

In Maricopa and Yavapai counties, the newly launched Green Loan Fund, made possible by Growth Partners Arizona and Vitalyst Health Foundation, provides loans to eligible local businesses up to \$10,000 at 3% interest. Businesses pay the loan back entirely with savings generated by their sustainability projects so that their cash flow is uninterrupted.

In Pima County, the Green Community Fund, created in partnership with Community Investment Corporation, provides up to \$15,000 at 0-5% interest.

### These micro-loans will provide the following financial support:

Loan amounts of:  
**\$2,500 - \$25,000**

Low Interest Rate:  
**3%**

Loan Term:  
**Up To 3 YEARS**



## We Rise Demo Day Pitch Competition

Studies show that Black entrepreneurs start businesses with about \$35,000 in capital compared to \$107,000 for white entrepreneurs and that Black applicants have a harder time obtaining loans than white applicants. Shockingly, only 4% of Black-owned businesses survive the startup stage.

That’s why in 2023 Local First hosted the first We Rise Demo Day pitch competition. Six We Rise graduates were selected to compete in front of a live audience for \$17,500 in seed money courtesy of Growth Partners Arizona, a certified community development financial institution.



We Rise Demo Day | 2023



Rural Policy Forum | Miami/Globe



Tucson, Arizona



Arizona Fall Fest 2023 | Green Team



Fuerza Local Graduation | **Greater Phoenix**



Local First Arizona Member Appreciation | **Phoenix**



Business Mixer - Blackrock Brewers | **Tucson**



Dining for Dreams | **Fundraiser**



Community Kitchen | **Mesa**

# RETAINING WEALTH & TALENT IN RURAL & TRIBAL COMMUNITIES

## Changing the narrative from scarcity to abundance

As the state's federally designated Rural Development Council, Local First coordinates federal agencies, community organizations, tribal nations and rural municipalities across the state to build opportunities for those who choose to make rural Arizona their home.

### Competing with Confidence

Local First's Arizona Economic Resource Center helps qualifying nonprofits and rural and tribal communities to compete for grants at no cost.



Rural Policy Forum 2023 | Miami/Globe

## Friends of Tonto National Forest:

*“At this stage in our existence, we don’t have funds to hire grant writers, so when we found the Arizona Economic Resource Center, we were thrilled to be able to have professional help and perspective on some grants that we felt we could compete for.*

*We’re excited to say that we received our grant, and it was the largest amount we’ve ever won! The funds will be used to remove invasive fountain grass and buffelgrass that have exploded in the Superstition and Utery Mountains. These grasses provide fuel to carry wildfires over large areas, causing fires to burn hotter and longer. Reducing fodder for fire in the Sonoran Desert keeps communities safe and helps preserve a healthy ecosystem for native plants and animals.”*

**Since launching in 2021, the Arizona Economic Resource Center has secured nearly \$46 million in grants for nonprofits and communities across every county in the state.**

The largest single grant so far was won this year by the Cocopah Tribe, who will use \$5 million from the U.S. Department of Energy to install a 15-acre solar farm to power the casino, hotel and convention center, allowing the tribe to achieve greater energy independence and cost savings.



## Meeting Employer Needs

As Arizona experiences one of the lowest unemployment rates ever, employers have struggled to find workers, especially in rural areas.

Hospitals and healthcare companies in Gila, Navajo and Apache counties say it is difficult to compete with Phoenix metro employers for top talent. Tourism and construction companies in northern Arizona are struggling to fill jobs even when they require few or no qualifications.

Local First is now partnering with nearly two dozen organizations to put \$9.5 million in government funding to use in Mohave, Coconino, Yavapai, Apache and Navajo counties to overcome these challenges.

The Northern Arizona Good Jobs Network will enhance and align job training to meet the needs of employers while providing workers with the skills to secure high-quality jobs with good pay, benefits and growth opportunities in high-demand industries.



# BUILDING THE LOCAL FOOD ECONOMY AND PRIORITIZING CLIMATE-SMART DIETS

**Recipes for success: Climate-smart agribusiness, food entrepreneurship and localized distribution channels**

---



## Local First's Community Kitchens expand to Maryvale and Eastlake

With the addition of each community kitchen in our network, we provide an opportunity for entrepreneurs to start or grow their businesses and build wealth for their families and communities.

In 2023, Local First opened two new community kitchens. The Maryvale location, at 35th Avenue and Thomas Road, offers the Good Food Boot Camp to Spanish-preferred entrepreneurs. The kitchen is home to 14 businesses that are all woman-owned, six of which are Spanish preferred, and eight of which are POC-owned.

The Eastlake location, at Jefferson & 12th streets, opened in partnership with First Institutional Baptist Church. The kitchen is housed in a unique building designed and built by Rushia Fellows, Arizona's first registered African American architect. The site is large enough to incubate 20 businesses and includes a large patio and parking lot to host food trucks – making this space unique in our network of Community Kitchens.

## Unearthing a Market for Climate-Smart Agriculture

The University of Arizona has teamed up with the University of Maryland and three Arizona nonprofits – Local First Arizona, Tucson City of Gastronomy and the Arizona-Sonora Desert Museum – to form the Arizona Partnership for Climate-Smart Food Crops.

The three-year project, funded by over \$4.7 million from the U.S. Department of Agriculture, will help farmers reduce water consumption and carbon emissions by transitioning to regenerative, organic conservation practices and climate-smart crop varieties. The Organic Trade Association will connect buyers from across the country to purchase the climate-smart foods produced by the farmers. Local First will play a critical role in supporting the marketing and development of grocery-style products to create demand for drought-resistant crops.

# REDUCING ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACTS

A circular economy approach to reducing environmental impact

## A Critical Need for Safe Drinking Water

Nearly half of all tribal homes and 30% of colonia residents in Arizona lack access to reliable water sources, clean drinking water or basic sanitation, studies show.

A partnership between Local First Arizona and SOURCE Global is delivering cutting-edge hydropanels at no cost to homeowners, saving families as much as

\$840 per year by reducing or eliminating the need to purchase bottled water by the truckload.

With state funding, more than 3,400 people across remote Arizona will be equipped with off-grid renewable systems to secure access to safe, clean drinking water in their homes for the first time. In addition, residents are receiving training to maintain and repair these hydropanels, creating local jobs.



## Saving Money While Saving the Earth

Verde Valley saw its first businesses graduate from the newly expanded Green Business Boot Camp. Family-owned Pines Inn & Suites was in the inaugural cohort, paving the way for an expansion of sustainability practices in the hospitality industry. Key projects include high-tech thermostats to decrease energy use, sourcing coffee from a local roaster to cut down on transportation pollution and refillable shampoo and soap containers to cut waste. Owner Anna May Cory estimates annual savings of \$6,000 or more.



## Composting To Create a Circular Economy in Tempe

Arizona has the highest rate of food waste in the U.S., one study showed. In Tempe, at least 25% of trash taken to its landfill is organic waste.

Tempe restaurants Cocina Chiwas and Chen's Noodle House are breaking this trend by turning the scraps from diners' plates into compost for local farmers. The program, designed by Local First Arizona, the composting company R. City and the City of Tempe, create a circular economy in which waste is regenerated, in this case, to grow fruits and vegetables that restaurants then purchase. The cycle starts over, closing the loop.

In one month, Cocina Chiwas diverted nearly 1.5 tons of food scraps, generating 900 pounds of compost. The energy savings are equivalent to removing from the atmosphere the emissions of about six gas tanks from an average car, and also reducing methane, a greenhouse gas 25 times more destructive than carbon dioxide.

# SHIFTING THE SPOTLIGHT

## ARIZONA'S VOICE FOR SMALL BUSINESSES

Uplifting the voices of Arizona entrepreneurs and communities is fundamental to creating a vibrant, inclusive and sustainable Arizona economy. By sharing powerful stories that capture the impact of Local First's everyday work, we are changing the narrative surrounding local business for thousands of readers and viewers.

In 2023, Local First gained more coverage than it had any year in its history, attracting more than 1,200 media mentions, ranging from as large as CBS's national Super Bowl coverage to smaller outlets like Gila Valley Central.

*Here are a few highlights from media coverage:*



Local First is not only an organization that helps you to grow your business, it's also like a family. They welcomed me with open arms.

I'm so grateful to be part of Local First,

said Eunice Herrera of Elisa's Mini Pancakes.



We Rise is a great program,

said Laveen clothing retailer Leslie Jean Ross. It gives me a perfect landscape of where I am and where I'm going to go.



Local First was instrumental in helping Cocina Chiwas set up composting,

said restaurant manager Adrian Galindo



Tony Grenat, owner of Cactus Jack Lemonade in Tucson, said Local First's local events helped his sales: "That's the best thing about these markets: Everyone here is local; everyone is creating something on their own."



# FUNDING THE MISSION

## LOCALISM COMES IN EVERY SHAPE AND FORM

Here are a few ways the community showed up generously:

Localists – donors who contribute \$20 or more monthly – reached a total of \$11,000.

Arizona Financial Credit Union started offering new bank accounts to anyone who gives at least \$15 to Local First.

Tax-savvy donors took advantage of \$7,200 in Qualified Charitable Tax Credit gifts that supported Local First.

The purchase of Keep Arizona Beautiful license plates generated over \$61,000 to support community cleanups, recycling events and beautification projects.

Volunteers donated 969 hours of their time.

Arizona-based Wist Office Products compensated Local First nearly \$10,000 from purchases made through Source AZ.



**JOIN  
THE  
MOVEMENT**





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