

Accelerating the Transition to a Sustainable Food Economy in Arizona

Globally and Locally-sustainable Food-Water-Energy
Innovation in Urban Living Labs (GLOCULL) Project Profile



The COVID-19 Pandemic and the Need for a Sustainable Food Economy in Arizona

The COVID-19 pandemic reveals major vulnerabilities in the food economy and points to the need for resilience and sustainability. The current disruptions highlight how food supply is not just a function of soil, water, and nutrients, but also a function of how food is cultivated, processed, distributed, consumed, and recycled. The pandemic has brought to the forefront urgent challenges at the local level in particular, ranging from securing local farmland to protecting local workers and ensuring reliable food supply through local distribution.

Our collaboration across the **City of Phoenix, the City of Tempe, Local First Arizona, and Arizona State University** is supporting the transition to a sustainable local food economy in Arizona. When developed with intention, such a sustainable local food economy offers resilience to disruptions and external shocks. A sustainable local food economy creates multiple wins for people, community, and planet:

-  A network of vibrant small businesses
-  Quality jobs with sufficient pay and benefits
-  Local investment opportunities
-  Greater equality in the food economy
-  Reliable food supplies
-  Healthy food offerings
-  Shorter food miles
-  Use of water-efficient technologies and renewable energy
-  Regenerative agricultural practices
-  Opportunities to sustain local traditions and knowledge

A sustainable local food economy covers food production (farms, gardens indoors), processing (bakeries, breweries, mills, preservation), distribution (storage and transportation), outlets (restaurants, markets, groceries), and waste recycling (composting and packaging recycling). While centering on businesses across these aspects, a sustainable local food economy also requires a strong network of stakeholders creating supportive policies, marketing, financing, and training.



Long-term Vision – An Accelerator for the Sustainable Food Economy in Arizona

There are plenty of examples of businesses and organizations that contribute to sustainable local food economies across the U.S. (and beyond) that we can learn from. Our coalition with the City of Phoenix, the City of Tempe, Local First Arizona, and Arizona State University—among many others—leverages such best practices to advance the sustainable local food economy in Arizona.

Our long-term vision is to create a permanent accelerator for a sustainable food economy in Arizona. Our ambition is to catalyze a broad network of practitioners, researchers, experts, and advocates to support sustainable food businesses across the state in their start-up, acceleration, and consolidation efforts.

The accelerator will assist businesses in navigating relevant food policies and regulations, developing impactful marketing campaigns, identifying financing options, and adopting sustainable business practices and models, including benefit corporations, cooperative businesses, and social enterprises. Unlike conventional business accelerators, we aim to support the sustainable food economy in its entirety. Therefore, while we do offer services to individual food businesses, we emphasize collaboration, matchmaking, and networking across food business and support organizations.

Below, we present a set of pilot projects that develop the foundation for the accelerator and demonstrate how the accelerator works in various sectors and domains of the sustainable food economy. More pilot projects will be carried out over the coming year.

Celebrating Arizona’s Indigenous Food Economy | City of Tempe

To celebrate the cultural richness and unique value of the Indigenous food economy to Arizona, the City of Tempe is creating the Foodways Yearbook. The Yearbook collates key resilience, sustainability, and cultural features of the people at the heart of the Indigenous food economy. The Yearbook presents the result of in-depth interviews of Indigenous food economy stakeholders, including:

-  Farmers reinvigorating traditional farming and foraging methods
-  Chefs reintroducing native nutrition to communities
-  Support organizations advancing local food policies
-  Other organizations, businesses, and community members responding to COVID-19

In addition to being a general educational product and resource for advocacy and promotion of unique practices across the state, the Yearbook showcases and supports the build-out of the accelerator on what a nascent Arizona sustainable food economy can learn from Indigenous leaders and communities in growing values-driven food businesses.



If you are interested in learning more about this pilot project, please contact **Dr. Braden Kay**, Braden_Kay@tempe.gov, at the City of Tempe’s Office of Sustainability, or **Samantha Zah**, Samantha@localfirstaz.com, at Local First Arizona.

Providing Policy Guidance for Local Food Businesses | City of Phoenix

In conjunction with the 2025 Phoenix Food Action Plan, the City of Phoenix is gathering information and creating guides to city, county, and state policies and regulations relevant to local food businesses, including:



Prepared-at-home food businesses (all food for home-use), including direct sales or through farmer's markets



Prepared-food businesses (food trucks and other mobile food businesses selling ready-to-eat food), including direct sales or through farmer's markets



Community gardens (creation, operation, and connections to distribution or sale)



Restaurants, grocers, food banks, and other entities facing obstacles to food rescue



The guides, based on consultation with food businesses, are a first step toward the larger ambitions of the 2025 Phoenix Food Action Plan and the joint accelerator to evaluate, revise, and harmonize city, county, and state policies and regulations for food businesses and start-ups.



City of Phoenix

If you are interested in learning more about this pilot project, please contact **Rosanne Albright**, rosanne.albright@phoenix.gov, at the **City of Phoenix' Office of Environmental Programs**.

Supporting Sustainable Business Certification for Local Food Businesses | Arizona State University

In collaboration with Local First Arizona and the City of Tempe, Arizona State University is supporting local food businesses to adopt sustainable business models and practices, while obtaining B-Corp or green-business certification. The team provides resources and consulting services to local food businesses and is currently piloting a B-Corp certification with Huss Brewing Company in Tempe. The activities include:



Creating a baseline assessment of the business' sustainability performance



Proposing measures to improve the sustainability performance (based on best practices)



Connecting the business to pioneers and leaders in the respective measure (peer coaching)



Supporting the design and implementation of improvement measures



Assisting in the process of obtaining the certification



Auditing the business for continuous improvement



The initiative gathers relevant information about certification needs and obstacles, while developing support procedures and material for sustainable business certifications. The ambitious goal is to create the base for the accelerator to be able to support hundreds of food businesses and start-ups across the state in their efforts to adopt and be recognized for sustainable business models and practices.



If you are interested in learning more about this pilot project, please contact **Prof. Arnim Wiek**, Arnim.Wiek@asu.edu, at the **Sustainable Food Economy Lab in the School of Sustainability at Arizona State University**.

Coalition for Urban Farmland Conservation | Local First Arizona

Currently, four community farms in Maricopa County are losing their farmland and many others are at risk due to development pressure. While farmers are painfully aware of the problem, they do not have the capacity to both maintain their operations and lead the charge to secure land for sustainable agri-culture over the long-term.

Local First Arizona, in collaboration with Arizona State University, is connecting farmers, land owners, and support organizations to develop solutions for farmland preservation. Current activities include:

-  Identifying successful land preservation models nationally that could work in Arizona, including alliances of like-minded organizations, cooperative farming models, agricultural land trusts, and Slow Money investing.
-  Supporting the City of Phoenix in prioritizing and implementing land use for food production within city boundaries.
-  Working towards piloting a small farmland trust at Spaces of Opportunity, an urban community farm in South Phoenix.

Farmers and growers, land trust organizations and landowners have responded positively to this initiative to conserve farmland and these groups are eager to collaborate. Next steps include a virtual stakeholder roundtable with groups working on land conservation, a virtual roundtable elevating the importance of urban farms, immediately followed by a discussion between farmers and elected officials, strategic planning and further development of this entity, cataloging land at risk and conserving one - two parcels.



If you are interested in learning more about this pilot project, please contact [Helene Tack, helene@localfirstaz.com](mailto:helene@localfirstaz.com), at Local First Arizona.

A Call for Contributions



If you are interested in getting involved in any of the ongoing pilot projects or the further development of the accelerator, or even have a pilot project you'd like to propose for the accelerator, please reach out to Prof. Lauren Withycombe Keeler at the School for the Future of Innovation in Society, or Prof. Arnim Wiek at the School of Sustainability, at Arizona State University.

The Team

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