

Healthy Food Access Services- Contract #561555

Final Report, Contract Period: 12/31/2019 – 3/31/2023

Executive Summary

UC San Diego ACTRI Center for Community Health (UCSD CCH) launched its Healthy Food Access Services Contract in January 2020, awarded by the County of San Diego Health and Human Services Agency under *Live Well San Diego*. All programs, projects, services, interventions, and resources provided by the Healthy Food Access Services Contract are led by UCSD CCH's exceptionally experienced, dedicated, and diverse [Urban Food Equity](#) team.



The Urban Food Equity team improves food access by building upon neighborhood-level food assets. This work supports small neighborhood grocery markets, farms, farmers' markets, food pantries, community-based organizations and groups, and residents in building an inclusive, equitable, and economically thriving local food landscape. Multiple programs and projects under Urban Food Equity address five dimensions of food access (*availability, accessibility, affordability, accommodation, and acceptability*, [Usher, K.M., 2015](#)) that offer solutions to address systemic inequity in food access for low-income neighborhoods and communities of color throughout San Diego County.

The contract is funded by the USDA's Supplemental Nutrition and Assistance Program Education (SNAP-Ed), known as the CalFresh Healthy Living Program in California. The work of Healthy Food Access Services aims to implement and interweave healthy eating and active living policy, system, and environmental (PSE) change into settings where SNAP-Ed individuals access healthy food, particularly where they shop, including: *food pantries, farmers' markets, farm stands, community supported agriculture (CSA), and small food retailers*.

This final report covers the full contract period, December 31st, 2019 - March 31st, 2023, delivering on \$2,265,000 worth of program services and project deliverables.

Main Contract Goals:

- **Retail:** By March 31st, 2023, 17 new and unduplicated small-to medium-sized retailers will participate in the *Live Well Community Market Program* to increase access to healthy food and beverages, and active living in retail settings.
- **Farmers' Markets:** By September 30, 2022, three (3) farmers' markets will increase access and utilization of farmers' markets by accepting incentive programs such as CalFresh Food/EBT, Market Match, WIC vouchers/eWIC, and/or senior farmers' market program vouchers.
- **Food Pantries:** By March 31st, 2023, 33 food pantries in San Diego County will participate in the Nutrition Pantry Program to increase access to healthy food and beverages in charitable food distribution settings.
- **Community Settings:** By March 31st, 2023, 4 community settings will implement policy, system, and/or environmental changes (PSE).

Target Population and Geographic Scope: The CalFresh Healthy Living eligible population is SNAP participants and low-income individuals eligible to receive SNAP benefits or other means-tested Federal assistance programs, which means having a household income of less than or equal to 185% of the Federal Poverty Guidelines. Activities and services were provided in all six regions of the County of San Diego (East, Central, South, North Inland, North Coastal, and North Central).

Status of Agreement Deliverables Year 4

See previous years' reports for more deliverable tables: [Year 1](#), [Year 2](#), [Year 3](#).

Section	Pay Point Deliverable	Due Date	Status
7.1.	Tool and Material Development		
7.1.2.	Update list of healthy retail recognition/Live Well Community Market Program resources	12/15/22	Complete
7.1.3.	Update list of resources for farmers to utilize CalFresh benefits, WIC, Market Match, and other topics to support healthy food access	12/15/22	Complete
7.1.4.	Update list of resources for implementation of the Nutrition Pantry Program	12/15/22	Complete
7.2	Site Recruitment and Baseline Assessment		
7.2.1.	Develop a workplan for Year 4	12/15/22	Complete
7.2.3.1.1.	Develop a list of 6 potential retail sites for County approval	11/30/22	Complete
7.4	Site Engagement		
7.4.2.1	Implement 1 PSE at Retail Site #1	3/15/23	Complete
7.4.2.1.	Implement 2 PSEs at Retail Site #2	3/15/23	Complete
7.4.2.1.	Implement 1 PSE at Community Settings 1-4	3/15/23	Complete
7.4.2.1.	Implement 2 PSEs at Pantry Sites 1-3	3/15/23	Complete
7.4.2.4.4.	Provide one workshop for San Diego County farmers to support healthy food access...	3/15/23	Complete
7.4.2.9.	Draft one (1) success story each for Retail, Community, and Food Pantry	3/15/23	Complete
7.5	Events and Media		
7.5.3.	Develop two (2) media pieces featuring BIPOC and women growers, food retail operators, food pantry leaders, and/or community food justice advocates.	3/15/23	Complete
7.7.	Coordination and Collaboration		
7.7.7.	Complete engagement of one (1) BIPOC-led community or youth group to achieve the group's identified healthy food access and/or food equity goal.	3/15/23	Complete
7.8	Evaluation		
7.8.2.1.2.	Conduct Year 4 baseline Retail SLAQ and LWCMP Assessments	2/15/23	Complete
7.8.4.1.3.	Conduct Year 4 baseline Healthy Food Pantry Assessments	2/15/23	Complete
8	Data Collection and Reporting		
8.1.2.	Enter program activities, indirect activities, and PSE activities into PEARS quarterly	11/15/22 1/15/23 2/15/23 3/15/23	Complete
8.1.4.2.1.	Submit Final Report	3/31/23	Complete

Key Achievements and Highlights

We are proud of our accomplishments, meeting all contractual deliverables on-time and notably adding \$280,000 worth of new deliverables in the Year 3 Statement of Work. Additionally, we completed a full year's worth of work in nine months in Year 1 and nearly a full year's worth of work in six months during Year 4 due to an unexpected

shortened contract extension. We adapted and overcame the challenges presented during three years of the COVID-19 public health pandemic. We're grateful and honored to have had the opportunity to meaningfully engage and support food and farm workers, business owners, community-based organization leaders, volunteers, and residents to ensure critical food resources were accessible to San Diego County residents. The following examples highlight a few of our major achievements during the contract period that have contributed to sustained and/or improved food security, healthy food access, food justice, and/or health equity throughout our county.

Year 1 (2020): Pivoting and Adapting to Support Food Access Sites as Essential Services and Resources at the Onset of the COVID-19 Pandemic



We excelled at supporting our food access sites as essential food access resources for their respective communities. Specifically, we quickly pivoted to assess the immediate needs of pantries, farms, farmers' markets, and grocery markets to help them stay open, meet new public health regulations, and best serve their customers. We gave all sites fully stocked sanitation kits with COVID-19 informational resources for their operational practices and to communicate with their customers.

At food pantries we helped operators adapt to drive-thru distributions and new specialized distributions to meet the needs of seniors and immune-compromised individuals to minimize

the risk of in-person contact while COVID-19 was rampantly spreading and vaccines were not yet on the horizon.

At small grocery markets we designed, printed, and distributed social distancing floor stickers and other critical signage to help market owners and their employees navigate new regulations and create safer shopping environments for their customers. We also outreached to our previous years' *Live Well Community Market Program (LWCMP)* participants and provided them with resources and connections to local business relief funds. Two of our previous markets located in City Heights (Center City Market from our 2019 cohort and Mid-East Market from our 2017 cohort) both secured business relief grants because we connected them with LISC San Diego and recommended them, knowing their long history and commitment to serving City Heights' diverse low-income communities of color.

When farmers' markets unexpectedly abruptly closed in the immediate months of the pandemic, we quickly outreached to farmers to help them find alternative market channels to sell their products. We helped farmers build out their farm stand displays with new signage and baskets, and most importantly, we started assisting farmers directly with applying to the USDA to accept SNAP EBT as payment at their farm stands and/or for their CSAs. We even found customers for Second Chance Youth Garden's donation-based CSA Program amongst Encanto Elementary School families and delivered CSA bags ourselves locally for three seasons. Lastly, we created the first mock-up of the [Good Food Finder](#), an online resource directory featuring San Diego County farms that operate farm stands and CSAs. We focused the Good Food Finder on supporting BIPOC and women farmers, urban farmers, and farms that accept SNAP EBT. The website was fully launched in early 2021 and soon after was made available in

Spanish.

Year 2 (2020-2021): Continued COVID-19 Adaptations and Increasing Access to Locally-Grown Fresh Produce

We continued helping our sites adapt to the conditions of the ongoing pandemic and also paired COVID-19 vaccine outreach with many of our site interventions when vaccine appointments and clinic events first became available in 2021.

At food pantries we partnered with Champions for Health and UCSD Health to bring mobile vaccine clinics to some of our participating distributions such as Sacred Heart in Ocean Beach and Wesley UMC in the East City Heights area of San Diego. In 2021, we also had our very first Gold Certified Food Pantry at OB Loaves and Fishes. We celebrated their success in becoming an exceptional food pantry and participant in the Nutrition Pantry Program, particularly during such a challenging new era of food insecurity and socioeconomic instability during the COVID-19 pandemic. Further, we helped one of our sites, Life Christian Center Chula Vista (LCCCV), better understand their clients' life circumstances and needs by designing and conducting a client survey. In March of 2021, we surveyed 192 LCCCV clients, then analyzed the data and delivered the results to pantry operators. LCCCV ultimately sourced more fresh protein options in response to our identified client needs.

At small grocery markets we helped all five of our participating markets in our Year 2 cohort set-up and pilot-test healthy snack zones in busy foot-traffic areas of each market. We developed and trained market owners/staff on our revamped "Gear Up with Good Snacks Kit", which included easy-to-understand nutrition guidelines, monitoring and restocking tips, baskets, point-of-purchase bilingual signage, and healthy snack product stickers. One market reported a 12% increase in healthy snack sales during the pilot testing phase and four of five markets chose to fully adopt and continue their Healthy Snack Zones.

Further, we assisted markets with cross-promoting healthy foods, primarily fresh produce, with SNAP EBT. We designed and printed large-format 42 x 42 bilingual outdoor posters and small-format bilingual interior sticker decals to remind shoppers they can use their SNAP EBT benefits on healthy foods.



With farms, we continued to help farmers navigate applications to accept SNAP EBT and WIC to make their farm products (via farm stands and CSAs) more accessible to low-income San Diegans. We helped three farms successfully become approved to accept SNAP EBT (Foodshed for their City Heights farm stands pop-ups before their retail hub opened), Raedel Urban Farms in South San Diego, and Community Roots Farm in Oceanside). We also assisted Foodshed and Community Roots Farm in becoming authorized to accept eWIC and WIC Farmers' Market Fruit and Vegetable Nutrition Coupons.

Year 3 (2021-2022): Fresh Designs and Innovative Technical Assistance to Increase Access to Healthy Food

One of our most notable successes in Year 3 was our Pantry and Garden Refresh Project at Imperial Beach Neighborhood Center (IBNC) in December 2021-January 2022. We partnered with IBNC, San Diego Co-Harvest, local

artists, and Imperial Beach volunteers to refresh the basement of the pantry into an inviting community-focused space. Artists added a fresh color scheme with a welcoming mural. IBNC purchased new custom shelving that was installed to create a space that promotes client choice and dignity. New signage was added to the space's entryway and outside. New signage outside the pantry now increases visibility from the street and publicly communicates the pantry's operating hours.

IBNC had garden boxes in place outside that needed care and attention. We brokered a successful partnership between San Diego Co-Harvest, a local urban agriculture non-profit organization, and IBNC to retain San Diego Co-Harvest's services to help keep the garden productive and maintained. SD Co-Harvest also added over 100 square feet of additional gardening space and will maintain the garden at no cost to the pantry. Food harvested from the garden goes back to pantry clients. A 265-gallon rainwater collection system was installed to conserve water and improve the garden's overall sustainability. We continued to work with IBNC after the refresh project to broker a partnership with Feeding San Diego to increase and improve the variety of food IBNC receives for their clients. With increased food donations, IBNC now uses their refreshed basement area as a "Neighborhood Food Pantry" that serves the community four days a week with a client choice model. [Read more on the IBNC Refresh Project here](#) and the Mayoral Community Award we received from the City of Imperial Beach recognizing our work.



At small grocery markets, we focused our efforts on fresh produce inventory. Market owners and managers wanted to increase their fresh produce stocking, improve their displays, and introduce locally grown and ethnically diverse fruits, vegetables, and herbs. They wished to provide their shoppers, who mainly identify as Latinx, Thai, Lao, and Karen, with a wider selection of produce and ease the burden of travel to larger supermarkets to find certain produce items. We worked with market staff to identify the best locations to put their produce displays and assisted them in redesigning their displays to be more appealing to customers. Owners were given wicker baskets, tiered baskets, refrigeration bins, and price signs to improve their produce sections. We also trained them on produce handling and stocking so they can be more effective and efficient in managing their produce sections. This training increased the market's capacity to stock more varieties of fresh fruits and vegetables and addressed overstocking and spoilage. We also aggregated contact information and outlined the pros and cons of purchasing from different types of produce suppliers including small farms, wholesale distributors, and purchasing retail from larger supermarkets.

We continued our equity and engagement work with farms, partnering with and supporting 15 farms, two farmers' markets, and one mobile farmers' market truck in multiple ways. We purchased and delivered over \$100,000 worth of cold storage refrigeration equipment to 14 of our urban farm partners through a separate grant to complement our PSE work with farms and improve food access infrastructure in San Diego County more broadly. In 2022 we also published a case study entitled, [Closing Gaps & Growing Good: San Diego Urban Growers' Collaborative](#), which

discusses a five-year trajectory of our urban agriculture work, much of it funded by CalFresh Healthy Living and benefitting low-income consumers in San Diego County.

In August 2022, we collaborated with Market Link, Foodshed Small Farm Distro(Foodshed), and Community Alliance with Family Farmers (CAFF) to plan and host an in-person technical workshop for farmers to apply to accept SNAP EBT payments for their customers. Since the workshop, two urban farmers (Quantum Microgreens and Dark Dectar Cooperative), two certified farmers' markets (Linda Vista FM and North Park FM), one local fisherman (Paramount Fishing Co), and one mobile farmers' market (People's Produce FM by Project New Village) have become authorized to accept SNAP EBT payments.

In year 3, we added "community sites" as a new intervention setting, allowing us the opportunity to support the capacity of different types of community venues where SNAP-ed eligible audiences shop for or otherwise procure food. Community sites also served as a flexible modality to continue supporting pantry, retail, and farm and/or farmers' market sites beyond their initial year of engagement. Meaningful and authentic engagement with community-based organizations and the business community takes time and significant resources to realize PSE changes that can be sustained long-term. For example, we partnered with Foodshed since their founding in 2020 (and with their individual farm producer members before then), to support several goals such as their EBT and WIC authorization and our EBT Farmer Workshop. We continued to support Foodshed with refrigeration equipment from another grant, connection to pantries from our Nutrition Pantry Program to build food donation referral relationships for excess unsold farm products, and collaborated with them to inform our Strategic Public Investment in Farm Incubation Project and Report. We continued to work with Foodshed in Year 4 in 2023 to collaborate on building a community-led food education program featuring City Heights Promotoras and other community groups we jointly support.

Year 4 (2022-2023): Growing, Sustaining, and Celebrating Best Practices in Community Food Justice

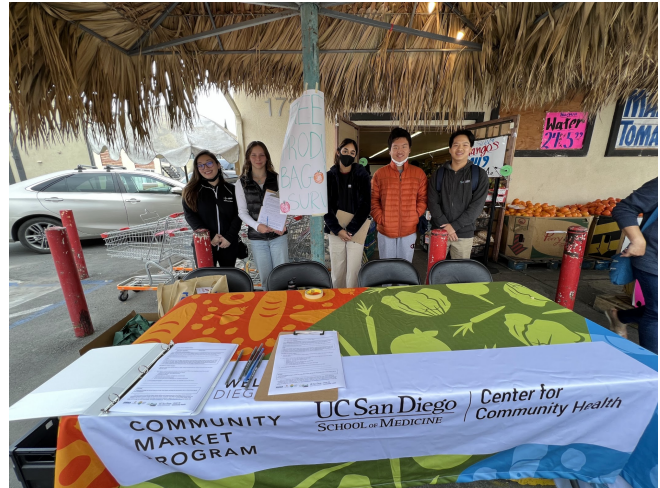
Magnolia Project 1:1 enrolled in our Nutrition Pantry Program in 2021 and two years later we celebrated their Gold Certification with the opening of their [new client-choice food pantry in Imperial Beach](#) in March 2023. Clients can self-select nutritious, culturally appropriate foods they prefer for their households with no waiting in line and the pantry offers appointments, which allows for a dignity-focused shopping experience. Magnolia particularly excels at offering their clients dietary and cultural accommodations. We trained Magnolia staff and volunteers on our "Dietary Guide for Food Pantries" and other Nutrition Pantry Program curriculum resources such as, "Dietary Food Preferences" and "Tips for Clients with Limited Housing". Magnolia offers an "International Shelf" featuring an assortment of Hispanic, Asian, Middle Eastern, and Kosher products to serve its diverse audience in Imperial Beach.

We also helped Magnolia reinforce and advance their nutrition education messages by designing and printing custom signage promoting their 8-week healthy cooking program, funded by our [Advancing Health Literacy Program](#). These classes have been incredibly popular in the community and have helped foster a greater understanding of the benefits of healthy eating.



Lastly, we helped Magnolia create a system and environment that always honors and recognizes their hardworking volunteers. We designed a volunteer appreciation area and offered [Volunteer Appreciation Tips](#) to help them sustain the parts of their pantry operations that are largely volunteer-dependent.

A notable achievement in Year 4 was leveraging our community partnerships and internal capacity and expertise to help California Produce in National City work towards their long-term business goals. California Produce is a family-owned produce market that enrolled in our *Live Well Community Market Program* in late 2022. The area of National City this market is located in does not have many healthy, ready-to-eat food options available. The market owners, Humberto and Juan, sell natural smoothies, juices, and acai bowls in their deli section and want to improve their menu to include more options for customers. They specifically want to introduce more fresh, affordable, healthy, and ready-to-eat meals. Since they serve a large, diverse population, we encouraged the market owners to conduct market research by getting customer input to inform their business decisions and investment on deli menu changes.



We worked with Humberto and Juan to create a short intercept survey to assess shoppers' food preferences and priorities. We then developed and hosted a data collection and analysis training workshop for 10 UC San Diego Youth Advisory Council (YAC) members to conduct the market research for California Produce. First, we trained YAC members on how to collect community input via an intercept survey and perform data analyses to write a recommendations report for the market owners. Then, we helped YAC members practice their newly acquired skills and conduct the surveys at California Produce. The members created a [fun reel on their Instagram account](#) to share their surveying experiences. The members then analyzed the survey data and wrote a recommendations report to inform the deli menu changes. The [recommendations report](#) helped the market owners identify their shoppers' top four food preferences and based on our findings, the owners are in the process of adding more healthy smoothie options to their menu. Moving forward, they intend to implement other recommendations, including adding sandwiches, wraps, and breakfast items to their menu. They also plan to build out a sandwich-making station inside the deli to help them prepare food orders more efficiently. The entire process of working with YAC to support California Produce was extremely successful and allowed both parties to achieve their shared goals of addressing food insecurity and nutrition in their communities. [Read more about the project here.](#)

On Feb 10th, 2023, we debuted our new (very) short film entitled, [Fighting for Food Justice: San Diego Community Heroes](#). The idea for this film came about when we wanted a creative way to document and share the capacity building work we do, and more so, to have an opportunity to tell the stories of some of the impressive partners we work with on



*So our job is really to lift up
those community food justice heroes,*

improving access to good food in San Diego County. In the summer of 2022, we hired the local film production firm, Hynt Films, and began scouting partner site locations, preparing our film participants, and gearing up for the rather surprising amount of work that goes into producing a 6-minute film.

By the fall of 2022, we finished post production and had a beautiful product to share with the world. We decided the best way to honor our partners and all the hard work everyone put into the film was to host a fun night of celebration for a proper debut. Together, with our community partner POC Fungi Community (POCFC), we hosted a Community Food Justice Heroes Night at Foodshed in City Heights. Mario and Patricia Ceballos of POCFC led an informative and nourishing cooking demo featuring huitlacoche, and then showed the group's new short film, Flor de Maiz.



Afterwards, we showed our film and invited our film participants, Fruitería Nayarit, Pixca Farm, and I Am My Brother's Keeper, to share their experiences with the audience. In addition to our heroes of honor and their guests, over 50 people attended. We were overwhelmed with a great deal of thoughtful positive feedback at the night's conclusion and plan to host another event to show the film again and uplift the stories of community food justice heroes in San Diego County.

Examples of Leveraging Across Intervention Settings to Address PSE Changes



Sometimes the best thing we can do for our partners is to help uplift their stories so they can sustain the incredible work they've already achieved. In 2022 we organized leaders across our intervention settings to conduct interviews, site visits, and film a short documentary entitled, [*Fighting for Food Justice, San Diego Community Heroes*](#). We're very proud of the film and will continue using it to showcase best practices and to better contextualize what working on healthy food access means (*or could mean*) in San Diego County and beyond. Our individual sites featured are now also using the film to promote their efforts to customers, funders, and other potential supporters to grow and sustain their work.

Examples of Coordination Activities with Community Partners



In 2022-2023 (Years 3-4 of the contract) we completed a new deliverable to support a BIPOC-led community group in achieving its food equity goal. POC Fungi Community (POCFC) is a community-led, self-organized (no non-profit sponsorship or affiliations) in San Diego County that identifies itself as a community resource and knowledge sharing hub that aims to increase access to fungi and representation for marginalized communities. Specifically, they believe, “community-based learning and going outdoors together in a respectful manner and honoring the land we’re on is of utmost importance.” Further, POCFC is a non-hierarchical inclusive group, welcoming of everyone and supportive of mutual aid opportunities amongst its community. They aim to, “support healing and promote resilience within ourselves, families, and communities.” The group was founded by local San Diego parent and naturalist, Mario Ceballos (he/they), who is an Indigenous person of Yaqui ancestry. Mario has a deep interest and passion for exploring educational opportunities in the natural world through an inclusive, ecological, and medicinal lens for his children and community. Further, Mario led the development of a meaningful community that centers the experiences, history, and perspectives of Black, Indigenous, Afro-Indigenous, and people of color in mycology

and outdoor spaces. The group comprises an intersectional community of local farmers of color, young adults from multiethnic and queer community identified individuals, families with young children, and people from diverse socioeconomic backgrounds. They also have a [website](#) and robust social media presence, with nearly 13,000 followers on [Instagram](#). POCFC's media engagement strategies and online interactions also reach communities far beyond San Diego County.

In 2022, we supported POCFC to build their capacity to develop and offer community food education on huitlacoche, an Indigenous Mexican fungi that grows naturally on corn. [Read more about our 2022 work with POCFC](#). In 2023, we continued to provide capacity building services to POCFC to both grow their huitlacoche efforts and further develop their overall educational programming on mycology, nature, and Indigenous foods. With our financial support and technical assistance, POCFC has conducted more free community cooking demonstrations with our partner sites and organized and led guided foraging nature walks for the public. For example, POCFC led winter fungi-focused nature walks in January and February 2022, organizing families from all over San Diego County and taking them to experience lush and flourishing, after-the-rain forests in East San Diego County. Participants were taught how to walk respectfully in nature— not to disturb thriving ecosystems, and provided an introduction on how to identify mushrooms that are appropriate for foraging, cooking, and eating. Children also had the opportunity to look at mushrooms under POCFC's new portable field study microscope.



POCFC led a cooking demonstration featuring huitlacoche and fresh local produce from our farm partner, Foodshed, at our Community Food Justice Heroes event in February 2022. POCFC members, Mario and Patricia Ceballos, showed an audience of over 50 participants how to prepare and make huitlacoche tacos with a side of seasonal slaw salad. We also provided POCFC with the audience and space to show the film, [Flor de Maiz](#), they produced last year with our financial support. Mario then led participants through a discussion on reclaiming and increasing access to Indigenous healthy foods, like huitlacoche, and a lively commentary on preserving and/or reintroducing Indigenous foodways like foraging and traditional ways of knowing, such as storytelling, to communicate the value of locally grown foods.



In addition to the financial award we provided POCFC to support their educators' time, we also leveraged our relationships with other partners to secure future educational programming opportunities for them. POCFC will

continue partnering with Foodshed to conduct another cooking demonstration in their upcoming new community-led cooking series starting in March 2023. Further, we've arranged for POCFC to work with our partner, Sherman Heights Community Center, to collaborate on their afterschool Jovenes Program that serves Kindergarten-5th graders from Sherman Heights Elementary School. We've also introduced POCFC to the culinary arts and garden science educators at the Monarch School in Barrio Logan. Monarch is a public school that serves unhoused children. Nearly 300 students attend Monarch each day and are provided a holistic education designed to meet their academic, social, emotional, and life skill needs. Monarch is a trauma-informed and strength-based community where students can persevere through the trauma of homelessness that has affected them and their success in education. Monarch educators met with POCFC in March 2023 and intend to scope out the potential for a co-teaching program on fungi and Indigenous foods for students in their classrooms.

Lastly, POCFC intends to continue showing their Flor de Maiz film in community settings to spark interest and cultivate conversation on fungi and Indigenous foodways. We're honored to collaborate with POCFC and support their mission to be a fungi-focused community resource and knowledge sharing platform for Black, Indigenous, people of color, and the queer community. We will continue promoting POCFC's work beyond our CalFresh Healthy Living Program funded work and engage with them through CCH's other funding sources and programs.

Our equity and engagement activities with farms are deeply embedded in community collaboration, particularly with other agriculture service providers. For example, we partnered with Foodshed Small Farm Distro, Market Link, and the Community Alliance with Family Farmers (CAFF) for our EBT Farmer Workshop in August of 2022. We also made sure the San Diego Food System Alliance (SDFS), UC Cooperative Extension Farm Advisor, County Agriculture, Weights, and Measures Department, and the San Diego Farm Bureau helped outreach and promote the workshop to farmers in their respective networks. Further, we're continuing to partner with CAFF at the state-level, and SDFS and the Resource Conservation District at the county-level, to develop a statewide urban agriculture policy and program agenda. This work involves jointly hosting training opportunities, farmer gatherings, feedback sessions, and aggregating resources and technical services to efficiently serve urban farmers in the region. We also worked with Foodshed and SDFS to co-host a feedback session for farmers and agriculture stakeholders at the [San Diego Food System Alliance's Annual Gathering on Sept 29th, 2022](#), to further develop our analysis on strategic public investment for a farm incubator program in San Diego County.

Examples of Best Practices to Integrate Nutrition Education with PSE Change

Several of our locally-developed resources and best practices that support multiple aspects of nutrition education have been disseminated and adopted statewide by other CalFresh Healthy Living Program implementers. For example, we developed and offered pantry sites a ["Safe Food Extension Dates"](#) educational poster in 2022 for quick reference to understand the meaning of different labels such as "Sell by Date," "Best By/Use By," and "Expiration Date". The poster also identifies the shelf life of many products that are often wasted due to confusing labeling. This resource was well-received by our Nutrition Pantry Program participants

and adopted and shared by food distributions beyond our service area of San Diego County. Leah's Pantry adopted our "Safe Food Extension Dates" poster as an official Nutrition Pantry Program resource under the "Inventory and Waste Reduction Focus Area" of the curriculum. They've also translated it in multiple languages. Thus far we've seen the poster available in: Spanish, Chinese, Russian, and Korean. We also know the poster is now used by Nutrition Pantry Program implementers at sites in Santa Clara County, San Bernardino County, and Humboldt County.

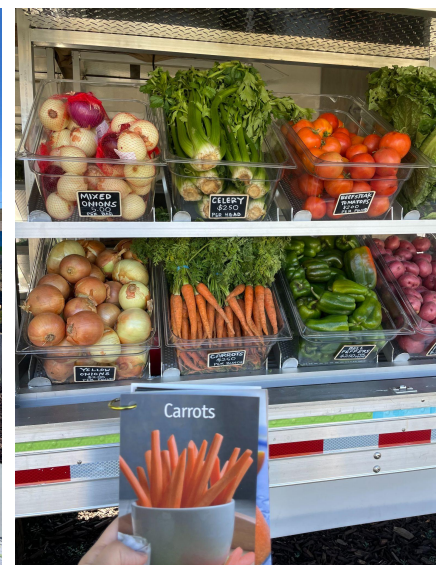
We developed the "[Dietary Guide for Food Pantries](#)" in 2021. This guide provides detailed information on vegetarian, vegan, gluten-free, Kosher, Halal, Diabetic, Hypertension, and High Cholesterol diets, describing the foods to be promoted, avoided, and distributed sparingly. It also highlights symbols and phrases to look for. It includes photo examples of common foods found in pantries and where to find dietary information. This helps pantry staff and volunteers easily identify and sort specific foods according to client dietary restrictions/preferences. Our Dietary Guide for Pantries has been added to the Nutrition Pantry Program Resource Library for Implementers in the "Dietary and Cultural Accommodations Focus Area" and available to practitioners around the country.

Nutrition education was also well-embedded in the PSE work we completed with markets participating in our LWCMP. In 2021 we revamped our Healthy Snacks Training to repackage it into a "Gear Up with Good Snacks Kit" for market owners to more easily implement healthy snack zones near their cash registers. The kit includes easy-to-understand nutrition guidelines for market owners to identify a healthy snack to place in the new zone, monitoring and restocking tips, baskets, point-of-purchase bilingual signage, and healthy snack product stickers.



Lastly, while supporting farmers with SNAP EBT and WIC access, we also helped them promote healthy in-season recipes shoppers could make at home by providing farmers with recipe cards from EatFresh.org that complemented the produce they grew and sold.

We also conducted onsite mini nutrition education sessions with customers of PNV's People's Produce Mobile Farmers' Market to help them learn about the benefits of local in-season fruits and vegetables that were



available for purchase on the truck. We then referred customers to our [Eat CA online resource](#) for more information on how to select, store, and prepare seasonal California-grown fruits and vegetables. The website is available in English, Spanish, and Arabic and also offers additional resources on public programs that can help food insecure households buy or otherwise procure fruits and vegetables.

Unanticipated and/or Additional Accomplishments



We're proud of the tailored, unique, and creative work we accomplished across intervention settings throughout the contract period. Specifically, we've greatly improved the local visibility and community awareness of food pantries, farm stands, and small grocery markets by designing and customizing beautiful promotional collaterals and environmental assets for our sites. We made banners, tablecloths, and multiple types of signage to meet the needs of our partners in promoting healthy food access. The majority of our sites had no design expertise or budget available to publicly communicate their hours, services, healthy food offerings, and food assistance benefits accepted (e.g., SNAP EBT and WIC). Our sites were very appreciative of our creative capabilities to help them build their name and/or brand in their respective communities so they could reach more clients/customers. We also worked with a local refugee assistance community-based organization to translate signs in a less common language—Karen, to meet the needs of the Karen ethnic group living locally in City Heights and shopping at our LWCMP market site, Aya Mini Market.

In early 2022, our Community Food Project Manager, Lakisha McZeal, was awarded the Mayoral Community Award from the City of Imperial Beach for her exceptional leadership and management of our [Pantry and Garden Refresh Project at Imperial Beach Neighborhood Center](#).

At the end of 2022, our Urban Food Equity Director, Elle Mari, was awarded the Fannie Lou Hamer Food Equity Award. Project New Village recognizes the work of local leaders and contributors who are changing the food landscape in Southeastern San Diego. The



award pays tribute to the legacy of Ms. Fannie Lou Hamer and her early fight for food equity and social justice in the 1960s and 70s.

In 2023, our Community Food Project Coordinator, Nghi Dang, was recognized with a stipend from Olivewood Gardens and Learning Center in National City for her contributions to their High School Leadership Program. Nghi led students through a workshop to learn about food justice, and specifically how to identify solutions to community-level food inequity problems in National City. [Read more about Nghi's work with Olivewood here.](#)

Challenges

We continued to navigate pandemic-related challenges as COVID-19 cases throughout the county cycled through periods of spikes, followed by a return to safer in-person working conditions. This continued to make planning group-oriented place-based interventions challenging to ensure everyone's health and safety, particularly during years 1-3 of the contract period (2020-2022). Similarly, our site partners and the general public seemed exhausted by Zoom meetings and the disconnected impersonal nature of communicating online. As a team, we continued working remotely and in-person at sites on a weekly basis to provide technical assistance and resources to site partners for program activities and interventions that could not be well managed and/or implemented remotely. By late 2022 and early 2023, we began hosting in-person meetings, training opportunities, and community events with more frequency to meet the needs and expectations of site partners and our SNAP-ed eligible target audience.

Beyond pandemic-specific challenges, our other challenges primarily involved shortened contract periods and required intervention site reach numbers. For example, in Year 1 (2020), we completed a full year's worth of work in nine months, including recruiting and leading PSE changes at 16 new unduplicated sites across San Diego County. We started Year 1 only two months before the onset of the pandemic. In Year 4, we completed a full year's worth of work in six months due to an unexpected contract extension change.

The nature of meaningful PSE work in healthy food access settings is always relationship-based and requires a great deal of ongoing communication and nurturing. We wouldn't have been able to meet our deliverable requirements without our outstanding and dedicated Urban Food Equity staff members and CCH's overall long history of expertise and partnerships in community food access in San Diego County. We were also fortunate to have the support and leadership of our department at UCSD, the Altman Clinical and Translational Research Institute, to help us execute, manage, and deliver all contract goals on time.

Lessons Learned

We learned a great deal about pivoting, adaptability, leveraging resources and capacity, and meaningful community engagement during a complicated and fraught period of time from 2020-2023. We, just as our academic institution, site partners, and community members, were deeply impacted on all sides by the COVID-19 public health pandemic and a social uprising demanding acknowledgement and action to address the systems of oppression, racism, and inequity that exist in our society at multiple levels.

Comprehensively in three and half years of the contract period, we gleaned several new best practices and lessons learned across our intervention settings. More specifically, at food pantries we developed recruitment criteria based on trusted partner referrals, the site's staffing capacity, and interest and intention in promoting healthy foods and client-centered practices to ensure we could serve pantries that were at an appropriate stage of readiness. This allowed us to better select sites with potential for high impact, while balancing our own internal deliverable

deadlines.

At small grocery markets we updated, improved, and repackaged resources into tangible “learn and do” kits to best assist our market owners in applying purchasing, promotion, placement, and product strategies to sell more healthy food. For example, we created a “Gear Up with Good Snacks Kit” and a “Healthy Food x EBT Kit” for ready-to-implement interventions after delivering over-the-counter informal training sessions for market owners.

Lastly, to best serve our local food producers in San Diego County (and thereby creating more opportunities to access healthy foods for SNAP-Ed eligible populations), we completely overhauled our farmers’ market focus to instead engage directly with local farmers. Ultimately, this strategy was more efficient and impactful in a number of ways because we were able to help multiple farmers, fisherman, and a mobile farmers’ market become authorized to accept SNAP EBT and promote their farm products on our Good Food Finder, rather than assist only one farmers’ market operator per year. Strategy-wise, it’s also important to note that most certified farmers’ markets in San Diego County are *not* located in low-income SNAP-Ed eligible communities. Many farmers’ markets were already authorized to accept SNAP EBT and had Market Match benefits to offer their shoppers prior to 2020 and onward.

Evaluation Outcomes

All required evaluation, data collection, and reporting deliverables were collected, completed, and submitted on-time throughout the contract period. All site-level assessments and PEARS data was inputted and submitted, updated, and cleaned when requested by the county and/or state. Annual reports for Year 1-3 can be found here: [Year 1](#), [Year 2](#), [Year 3](#). Success stories featuring best practices from each intervention setting can be found here: [Year 1](#), [Year 2](#), [Year 3](#), [Year 4](#).

Sustainability Plan

In Year 4 we continued serving “community settings” as an opportunity to deeply collaborate with existing intervention sites and long-time partners to accomplish longer-term healthy food access goals. For example, we have partnered with Project New Village (PNV) since 2016, serving as a long-time advisor for the development of their Good Food District vision and the People’s Produce Mobile Farmers’ Market. We’ve worked alongside PNV pursuing food justice and community development goals in Southeastern San Diego, and supporting their capacity with CalFresh Healthy Living Program funds and other grant funds provided by CCH. We’ve long been a trusted advisor on PNV’s urban agriculture initiatives and served an integral role in the development, launch, and operational growth of their People’s Produce Mobile Farmers’ Market serving Greater Southeastern San Diego. Our [Advancing Health Literacy Program](#) at CCH also helped fund community-hired jobs and purchasing incentives for the mobile farmers’ market, totaling almost \$200,000. We also directly assisted PNV in acquiring a new SNAP EBT retailer authorization as a mobile route, which is a more complicated application with multiple steps prior to final approval.

The nature of our work positions us as capacity builders so our model of service is to identify site level and/or organizational/level needs, then provide the resources, technical assistance, and training that will allow a site to make and sustain changes on their own terms. Beyond our CalFresh Healthy Living Program funds, we continue to identify other public and private funding sources that allow us to further grow and offer capacity building services.

Recommended Next Steps

If we do not obtain funding to implement CalFresh Healthy Living Program services locally in San Diego County, we intend to refine our best practices and resources developed over the years to submit them to the USDA SNAP-Ed Connection website so they can be disseminated and adopted nationally. We also intend to further develop our success stories submitted during the contract period into more detailed case studies. We hope these case studies will better highlight our achievements and will easily translate and disseminate our expertise to other community health practitioners who wish to adopt our strategies in healthy food access policy, systems, and environmental changes.

At a site level, we'll continue to provide technical assistance to a few of our site partners with other sources of funding from CCH to ensure they can fully sustain their PSE changes. For example, we'll continue to support our community-based partner, POC Fungi Community, as they develop their mycology, outdoor, and Indigenous foodways educational programming to be delivered in community-based settings.

Acknowledgements

The work completed in this contract was the result of a hardworking dynamic team and their dedication to improving healthy food access conditions in San Diego County. We'd like to especially highlight and express gratitude for our two teammates who joined CCH in 2020 in entry-level positions and have since become go-to experts in charitable food systems and healthy retail.

[Lakisha McZeal](#) was hired in October 2020 in a part-time Project Specialist role supporting recruitment and interventions at food pantries. Since that time, she has been promoted to a full-time career-level Community Food Project Manager and leads all aspects of our Nutrition Pantry Program. Lakisha has quickly become a leader in the field of emergency food distribution. She has developed critical new resources and training materials for the Nutrition Pantry Program that have been disseminated nationwide by Nutrition Pantry Program founder, Leah's Pantry. [Nghì Dang](#) was hired in November 2020 in a part-time Project Specialist role supporting recruitment and interventions at small grocery stores. Since that time, Nghì has been promoted to Community Food Project Coordinator and leads our *Live Well Community Market Program*. Nghì has become an expert in healthy retail strategies and working with the small business community in San Diego County, all while studying public health as a full-time student at UC San Diego. Nghì will graduate with her MPH in June of 2023.

We'd also like to acknowledge the leadership of our Project Director, [Elle Mari](#). Elle has been with CCH since 2014 and has been instrumental in developing our Urban Food Equity work that is grounded in a community asset-based framework to promote food justice. Elle has led the strategy work for this contract, ensured all deliverables have been met on-time or early, and led all of our initiatives involving agriculture and justice-oriented foodways. We'd like to acknowledge the ongoing support, guidance, contract and fiscal oversight from our Executive Director, [Blanca Meléndrez](#), and our Fund Manager, Haoyue Xu. Together they've ensured we've always had access to the necessary resources and capacity to achieve the numerous accomplishments illustrated in this report.

Finally, we thank our contract officers at the County of San Diego Health and Human Services Agency, Kate Mahoney and Naomi Billups, for their hard work in helping us execute, manage, and successfully deliver high-quality CalFresh Healthy Living Program services to improve healthy food access conditions for San Diego County's low-income communities.



CalFresh Healthy Living is a program of *Live Well San Diego: Healthy Works* and is implemented by UC San Diego ACTRI Center for Community Health. Funded by USDA SNAP, an equal opportunity provider and employer. This work supports *Live Well San Diego*, the County's vision for a region that is Building Better Health, Living Safely, and Thriving. For more information, visit www.LiveWellSD.org. Visit www.CalFreshHealthyLiving.org for healthy tips.