

Progressive food bank leader of local sustainability

By Gretel Hakanson

The New Southwest – October 2010

In operation since 1976, the Tucson Community Food Bank (TCFB) is a pillar in the Tucson community. With a primary focus on food security and universal access to nutritious foods, the TCFB is also a leader in sustainability.

"The TCFB is really two nonprofits in one," says Bill Carnegie, CEO. "On the one side, we meet people's needs today by giving them food to sustain themselves or their family for the next couple of days."

Last year TCFB distributed 30 million pounds of food across Southern Arizona. TCFB assists on average 228,000 men, women and children a month across five counties. That number has doubled in the past three years and in large part because of the economy.

"The other side of the house is really where we focus on the 'teach a person to fish' concept," says Carnegie. "It's all about sustainability and building infrastructure where people can begin to help themselves through their own efforts."

That focus makes TCFB one of the most progressive food banks in the U.S. "We take a truly holistic approach when dealing with hunger," says Carnegie. "It's not just the people that we serve. We would like to see everyone eat healthier in this community than what they do."

Emergency food boxes help meet the most pressing needs. Yet it's the home gardening consultation, gardening workshops, Marana Farm, compost program, Youth Farm Project, farmers' markets, consignment sales and other innovative programs that contribute to long-term food security and access to healthy foods. (Food insecurity is defined by people not knowing exactly where their next meal can come from and/or not having access to three meals a day during a week.)

One way to be food secure is to grow your own. In partnership with the Town of Marana and Marana Parks and Recreation Department, TCFB grows food year-round at the Marana Heritage Farm. Produce grown on the 10-acre farm is sold at the Marana Farm Stand, the Community Food Bank's other Farmers' Markets and other local venues. It is also distributed through the Marana Food Bank (one of five TCFB branches) and other TCFB programs.

No chemical pesticides or fertilizers are applied to the produce. The farm uses organic techniques such as crop rotation and high-quality compost that prevent the need for chemicals.

"The coolest thing we're doing at the farm is we have a big composting program



PHOTO: James Patrick

Sara Rickard, manager of the Tucson Community Food Bank farmers markets, enjoys being able to spend time in the food bank gardens.

and we get the zoo doo," says Carnegie. Manure from the grass fed animals at the zoo is trucked to Marana and composted. The resulting nutrient-rich compost is used on the farm gardens and available to members of home gardening program. "It really makes high quality compost, which is what people need to mix into the soil to grow things," says Carnegie. "It's really a critical piece of the home gardening program."

The Marana Heritage Farm also hosts the Youth Farm Project, an educational program where young people can develop a relationship with the food they eat and learn how what they eat affects their health, community and the planet. Youth, ages 15 through 24, learn techniques in sustainable agriculture, explore their role in our current food system, and help grow food for our community. The Youth Farm Project also hosts school groups, youth groups, families and individuals who want to learn and participate in farm activities.

To take locally grown food a step further, TCFB teaches low-income qualified families how to garden in their own yards. "Our home gardening program staff go to low income people's homes, and help put in a garden," says Carnegie. "We also teach them how to harvest water off of their roof so the utility bill doesn't go up while they're growing nutritious foods for their family."

TCFB offers home gardening workshops, which are free and open to the pub-

lic. Excess produce can then be sold on consignment at the TCFB farmers' markets. Growers simply drop off their produce at the consignment table before the market opens and return the next week to pick up the cash. TCFB takes 10 percent of the proceeds, leaving 90 percent for the growers.

TCFB hosts three – soon to be four – farmers' markets in the Tucson area: Marana Farm Stand, Community Food Bank Market, Santa Cruz River Market and starting October 23, the El Pueblo Market (to be located at Irvington Road and S. 6th Ave). The fresh fruits and vegetables available at the farmers' markets are all naturally grown in Arizona without the use of chemicals or pesticides.

Sara Rickard, TCFB farmers' markets

manager, says, "The most secure food systems are the ones that are most local because there is less chance for break down in the great chain that exists from producer to consumer. The reason why farmers markets are important is because they create a direct market for farmers so they can get their produce directly to people in the community."

Farmers markets contribute to food security and TCFB aims to make them accessible to all members of the community by accepting food stamps and working with the Arizona Farmers' Market Nutrition Program vouchers. "If we're completely reliant on food coming in from elsewhere and having corporations dictate how its going to be produced and how we're going to pay for it, that does put us in a very vulnerable position," says Rickard.

TCFB also donates food to more than 300 area organizations and is working in partnership with more than 500 different entities all over Southern Arizona.

Creating food security in the community is certainly one aspect of sustainability but TCFB weaves sustainability through all of its operations. "We like to set the example for other businesses in Tucson," says Carnegie.

In addition to organic farming practices and composting, TCFB installed energy-efficient lighting throughout their facilities, incorporated comprehensive recycling programs, houses the largest commercial cistern in Southern Arizona (14,000 gallon capacity) and is embarking on a solar-covered parking project.

There are numerous ways individuals can support this community institution. Learn more about the Tucson Community Food Bank by shopping at the farmers' markets, taking a tour of the facility or visiting online, www.communityfoodbank.com.

Author: Gretel Hakanson is a local freelance writer

A Letter from the Publishers

Continued from page 2

be inspired to make similar changes in their own lives. Business owners, put some of your advertising budget with us. Our readers have supported our current and past advertisers – and at a time when over a dozen local publications folded and more continue to shrink every day. It's kind of an old and crude sounding adage, but so true: Put your money where your mouth is. Do you believe it's important to invest in a livable future here? The New Southwest is a high value vehicle with the market data to back it up. Ask to see our data.

"That's the thing about Mother Nature, she really doesn't care what economic bracket you're in."
- Whoopi Goldberg

Tucson has made many changes since our first edition. We believe our community really does care about a livable future and people and organizations are getting more active about that every day.

Tucson's individual and professional boldness has helped set more sustainable directions here – for today and well into the future.

We see our City beginning the process of communicating and working together as a healthy community to face challenges to our future, the likes of which we have never before seen in human history.

In the coming year there's much for all of us to do, individually and together as a community. We can step it up. We need to step it up.

We're proud and humbled you've allowed us to help in this vital process of informing and being your voice for a stronger future.

Our Best To You,
Mikaela Quinn and Jim Ricker
Originators and co-publishers
The New Southwest
(formerly the Tucson Green Times)

END YOUR PAIN TODAY



A year ago, we brought new instant pain relief products to Tucson – safe products without drugs or invasive protocols.

Since then, thousands of Tucsonans have gotten their lives back again, experiencing 50% to 100% pain relief in just minutes without pills or side effects, and with complete convenience and safety.

You can, too, with just one phone call to us.

**CALL TODAY
FEEL BETTER TODAY**

Try the product before you buy – ask for a free 10-minute demonstration. We'll come to you or you can join us at one of our weekly clinic meetings.

The BEST PART is that these products work! You will be amazed.

Call Jim Today & Find Out More

954-2290

Great Seasons Health Technology