



**SUSTAINABLE
FOOD CENTER**

IMPACT REPORT

July 1, 2022 - December 31, 2023

A MESSAGE FROM THE CEO



OUR MISSION

Sustainable Food Center transforms the food system to nourish our health, land, and livelihood.



This year, Sustainable Food Center faced and embraced numerous challenges, wins, and opportunities, all made possible by the unwavering dedication of our staff, Board, partners, and supporting communities.

We continued our statewide expansion with fervor this year, doubling our reach and serving 34,258 Texas SNAP households and 400 nutrition education class participants. We grew our West Texas office in Lubbock and began offering The Happy Kitchen/La Cocina Alegre™ (THK/LCA™) to increase regional nutrition security. We expanded our bilingual Help Desk, offering guidance and resources to communities across Texas to double Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) and Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants, and Children (WIC) benefits, addressing the rising concern of food security in rural areas.

We continued to enhance access to nutritious produce, support Texas producers, and stimulate local economies through our Double Up Food Bucks Texas (Double Up Texas) program. We increased the number of grocery retail and farm-direct sites accepting nutrition incentives across Texas, providing individuals and families with diverse, convenient avenues to access fresh, locally grown produce. We successfully advocated for an additional \$6 million in State funding for SNAP incentive programs like Double Up Texas at the 88th Texas Legislative Session.

Aligning with new statewide initiatives like the Texas Health and Human Services' commitment to addressing non-medical drivers of health, THK/LCA™ created a Cooking with Diabetes curriculum and forged impactful partnerships to extend our classes with communities experiencing food insecurity at the forefront. We deepened our understanding of regional landscapes to ensure our programs meet on-the-ground needs while advocating for supportive federal policies.

At home in Central Texas, we celebrated the 20th Anniversary of SFC Farmers' Market Downtown and strengthened our Farm to School initiative, significantly increasing the presence of local fruits and vegetables in schools, grocery stores, and farmers' markets.

Our many accomplishments are possible because of the generous support of the individuals, communities, foundations, and businesses in our network who are dedicated to transforming the food system. With this support, we can create a just, equitable, and regenerative food system where people and the environment thrive.



With Gratitude,

Mark Bethell
Executive Director

TRANSFORMING THE FOOD SYSTEM: EXPANDING ACCESS TO LOCAL FOOD

Sustainable Food Center takes a systems-level approach to improve the way food is grown, distributed, and consumed by looking at how people, processes, and policies are connected in the food system and addressing the complex challenges and inequities that are embedded in our current food system. These inequities impact the availability and accessibility of food and influence our nutrition, health, environment, and wellbeing.

With this focus, our work centers thriving communities by expanding equitable food access through nutrition incentives and education, supporting local producers, and bolstering local and regional food economies.

SFC THEORY OF CHANGE



TRANSFORMING THE FOOD SYSTEM: EXPANDING ACCESS TO LOCAL FOOD



The expansion of our flagship nutrition incentive program, Double Up Food Bucks Texas, benefits food-insecure communities across multiple regions by doubling SNAP and WIC* nutrition benefits on fruits and vegetables in Texas and increases sales opportunities for regional producers, supporting a regional food economy.

With the focus of increasing local food production, our farmer support services ensure that small-scale farmers and ranchers continue to thrive and provide nutritious, culturally significant foods to their local communities. For example, our Farm to School program connects farmers and ranchers to schools, providing nutritious food to children who might not otherwise have access to balanced meals.

Our community engagement, education, and advocacy efforts serve as the catalyst for carrying out our mission. By bringing concerns, stories, and advocates from communities to the federal level, we are championing just and equitable policy decisions that increase food access, support local farmers, and transform the food system.

These efforts result in increased availability of nutritious food options for communities experiencing barriers to food access, while elevating the voice of communities to create community-centered, long-term food and nutrition security in Texas.

**WIC benefits are only doubled at SFC Farmers' Markets*

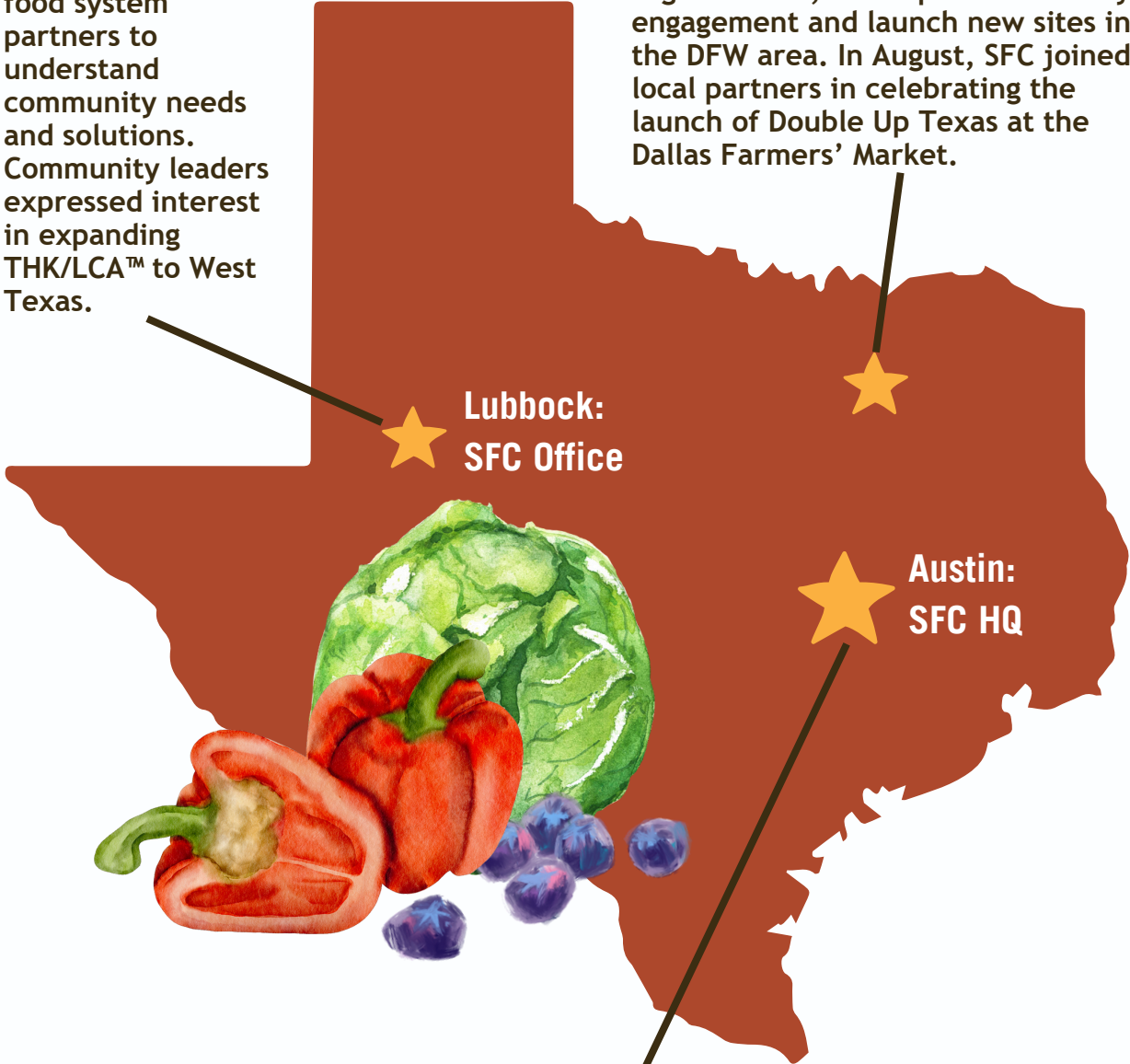
ON THE ROAD: ADVOCATING FOR REGIONAL FOOD SYSTEMS

Lubbock | Apr. 2023:

SFC hosted a convening of local food system partners to understand community needs and solutions. Community leaders expressed interest in expanding THK/LCA™ to West Texas.

Dallas | Jul. 2023:

SFC supported North Texas Healthy Communities, a part of Texas Health Resources and Double Up Texas regional lead, to deepen community engagement and launch new sites in the DFW area. In August, SFC joined local partners in celebrating the launch of Double Up Texas at the Dallas Farmers' Market.



Austin | Mar. 2023:

SFC joined Brownsville Wellness Coalition, Desert Spoon Food Hub, and Farmshare Austin at the Texas State Capitol to advocate for State funding for SNAP incentive programs like Double Up Texas. The campaign successfully secured a \$6 million State appropriation, furthering investment in food access programs.

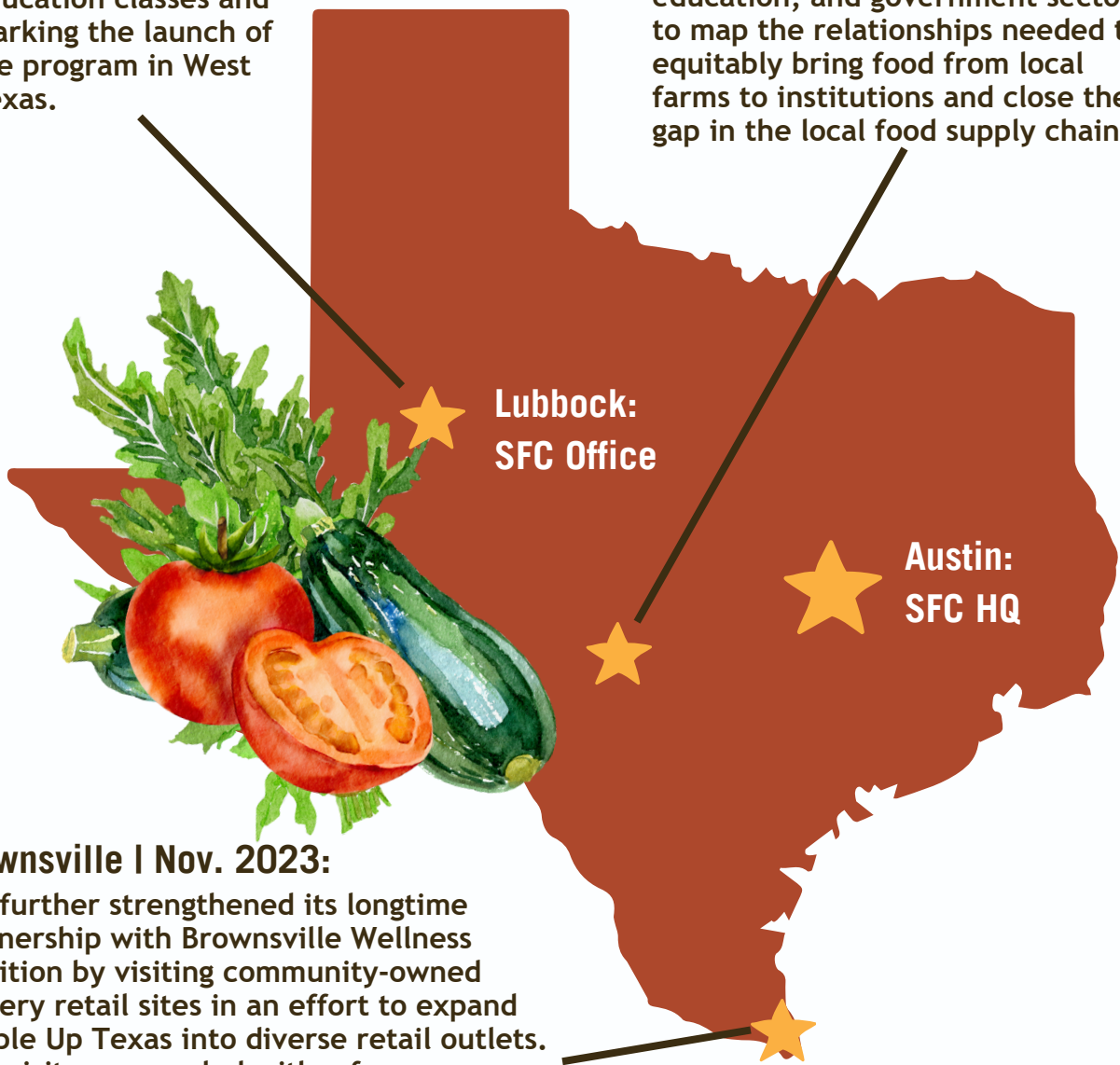
ON THE ROAD: ADVOCATING FOR REGIONAL FOOD SYSTEMS

Lubbock | Sept. 2023:

SFC hosted its first THK/LCA™ facilitator training in Lubbock, training 21 community members to lead cooking and nutrition education classes and marking the launch of the program in West Texas.

San Antonio | Oct. 2023:

SFC and Kitchen Synch Strategies convened Texas food system leaders from the nonprofit, higher education, and government sectors to map the relationships needed to equitably bring food from local farms to institutions and close the gap in the local food supply chain.



Lubbock:
SFC Office

Austin:
SFC HQ

Brownsville | Nov. 2023:

SFC further strengthened its longtime partnership with Brownsville Wellness Coalition by visiting community-owned grocery retail sites in an effort to expand Double Up Texas into diverse retail outlets. This visit was coupled with a farmer listening session to understand concerns and priorities for farmers in the region.

EXPANDING FOOD ACCESS THROUGH COMMUNITY OUTREACH & EDUCATION

54

Double Up Texas sites statewide - up 15%

34,258

Texas SNAP households used Double Up Texas - up 57%

507

producers and businesses increased sales with Double Up Texas

\$788,744

circulated in local economies

\$2.7M

grant investments in food access

This was a big year for expanding access to nutritious, locally grown food.

The number of sites accepting Double Up Texas grew by nearly 15%. The program is now offered at 54 diverse farm direct and grocery retail locations. With more access points, more households were able to utilize Double Up Texas benefits to conveniently access nutritious produce – in fact, we saw a 57% increase in households doubling up on fruits and vegetables this year.

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"As a low-income mother of five, [Double Up Texas] makes the farmers' markets accessible to us. It inspires [my children] to want to learn how to grow their own [food] and opens their minds to trying new healthy foods."

-Jessie H.,
Double Up Texas Client



Last spring's federal decrease in monthly SNAP benefits underscored the importance of our unwavering commitment to increasing food access for families. One way we do that is through offering the Farmers' Market Nutrition Program (FMNP) at 15 farmers' markets in Central and West Texas. In West Texas, we saw a 66% increase in FMNP benefits redemption, meaning more pregnant and new mothers were able to provide their family with the essential nutritious food needed for their health and wellbeing. In Central Texas, thanks to the support of Travis County, we were able to expand the program to six new mobile and farmers' market sites and provide a dollar-for-dollar match on FMNP benefits for participating families.

Our resilience is rooted in collaboration and has been instrumental in broadening the reach of our food access programs to improve accessibility to nutritious, locally grown fruits and vegetables, creating more business for Texas farmers, and boosting local economies.

AMPLIFYING COMMUNITY VOICES IN SUPPORT OF FOOD ACCESS

At the 88th Texas Legislative Session, we successfully led a community-driven campaign advocating for state funding for SNAP incentive programs, like Double Up Texas. Members of our community who participate in the SNAP program shared personal stories, Texas farmers wrote letters, and many partners voiced support at the Texas State Capitol. As a result of our campaign, the State of Texas appropriated \$6 million to fund dollar-to-dollar SNAP matching programs to increase communities' purchasing power for fresh fruits and vegetables, driving support for local and regional food systems.

To extend the reach of Double Up Texas, we expanded our bilingual Help Desk to receive calls statewide. Our bilingual Help Desk guides clients on how and where to double their SNAP and WIC benefits.



By expanding statewide, we were able to expand the reach of Double Up Texas, and field input from callers to inform program expansion efforts. Employing a human-centered and trauma-informed approach, the Help Desk connected with more than 1,600 individuals and families this year.

— “

“Since the pandemic, our economic situation changed, and I began to look for resources and learn about WIC from other mothers. I like the Help Desk line because I have called to ask for market hours, programs information, and what I like is that they always call me back.”

—Amelia R., Double Up Texas Client

” —

\$6M

in new SNAP
incentive investments

4

community partner
listening sessions
held throughout
Texas



1,613

calls answered by
Help Desk - up 48%

7

Texas regions
contacted Help
Desk

NOURISHING HEALTH: FREE COOKING AND NUTRITION CLASSES FOR TEXANS

\$2.75M

grant investments
in THK/LCA™

90%

of THK/LCA™
participants ate
more fruits &
veggies

30

cooking &
nutrition classes
offered - up 53%

4,800

meal equivalents
distributed
- up 44%

403

cooking & nutrition
class participants
- up 52%

The Happy Kitchen/La Cocina Alegre™ (THK/LCA™), our longest-running program for 25 years, grew to new regions, offering more free, bilingual cooking and nutrition classes throughout Texas. This involved building the necessary infrastructure to expand to West Texas and recruiting 21 new peer facilitators - a crucial component of our community-based approach - bringing our total peer facilitation team to 72 people. In October, THK/LCA™ hosted its first two West Texas class series, serving a total of 66 participants.

As part of our commitment to serving communities' real-time needs, THK/LCA™ also developed targeted cooking and nutrition curriculum to support the management of chronic conditions through diet. In partnership with the Humana Foundation, we created a Cooking with Diabetes curriculum to be implemented in the coming year.



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“About 6 months ago, I was diagnosed with high blood pressure and fatty liver disease. Being connected with [The Happy Kitchen/La Cocina Alegre™] has helped me make better choices not only for myself, but my family. I have learned many recipes which before this, I would have never tried but now I am more adventurous with trying new healthier foods.”

– THK / LCA™ Client

CULTIVATING COMMUNITY: CELEBRATING 20 YEARS OF SUPPORTING FARMERS

SFC Farmers' Market Downtown marked its 20th anniversary as a vibrant communal space for over half a million Austinites to connect, engage, and support local producers and businesses. To celebrate, we collaborated with a local artist to redesign our market truck with representative images of culture and values, further solidifying the market's commitment to community.

— “ —
“I really appreciate the effort to make this a family friendly space.”
— SFC Farmers' Market Customer
— ” —



With support from the Downtown Austin Alliance, the City of Austin Office of Sustainability, and other partners, the Texas State Garage N agreed to lease their parking to us on Saturday mornings for a flat rate, allowing us to provide free parking and a more equitable farmers' market.

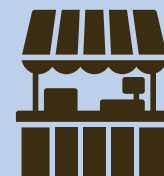
Building a just and equitable food system means supporting small-scale farmers. With soaring land, labor, and operational costs, land ownership has become increasingly unattainable. In response, we secured funding to help preserve local farmland and foster generational sustainability. This initiative included a succession planning pilot with one Central Texas farmer to maintain their agricultural land. We identified affordable farmland options for this farmer and three others, ensuring the continuity of farming practices and further reinforcing the economic viability of our local agricultural community.

388

small farm and business workers employed in the local food system

\$2.1M

total vendor sales at SFC Farmers' Markets



20

years of operating farmers' markets

4

farmers connected to SFC Land Access Pilot Program

BUILDING THE VALUE OF REGIONAL INSTITUTIONAL PURCHASING

123

participants
attended Farm to
School events

18

farmers received
wholesale
marketing technical
assistance



28

school systems
across Texas
brought local food
to their cafeterias

32.7%

average farm
revenue increase
by Market
Matchmaking
participants

Connecting regional producers and food buyers is one way we ensure fresh, locally produced foods are accessible for everyone. This is particularly important when it comes to large populations who might not have access to fresh food, like schools. Our Farm to School program provides technical assistance to local producers to prepare them for wholesale opportunities, leading to a significant increase in local fruits and vegetables provided in schools, as well as grocery stores and direct markets.

This year we concluded piloting the Farm to Institution Metrics Framework, a tool that informs successful data sharing practices between producers and small, rural school systems. With a deeper understanding of local food sourcing and purchasing, we increased the quantity and variety of fruits and vegetables purchased by and served in schools. One partner even served locally raised proteins for the first time in school cafeterias.

To further support our farmers during the changing weather patterns of extreme drought and freezes, we developed a case study on [Whole Farm Revenue Protection](#), illustrating the need for crop insurance for small, diversified farms in Texas.



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“It’s incredibly important for our school systems to start incorporating whole, local foods. It involves our community. Getting local food in front of our students introduces them to fruits and vegetables they might not have seen before and develops healthy habits for their futures. It’s the future of school food.”

– Todd H., Farm to School Learning Collaborative Member

THANK YOU TO OUR SPONSORS FOR YOUR ONGOING SUPPORT

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