

CUYAMA VALLEY FOOD ACTION

OCTOBER 2017 - DECEMBER 2018

@BLUESKYCENTER



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A LOOK BACK AT 2018

BLUE SKY VISIONS

GRASSROOTS FOOD ACTION PROGRAMING

February - July, 2018

As an organization with “prosperity through equitable relationships” at its core, it is essential to allow community feedback to shape the process of developing an actionable and collaborative project to increase food security in New Cuyama. From Fall 2017 - Fall 2018 Blue Sky’s AmeriCorps VISTA staff members developed and distributed a community food action survey to vet the top project opportunities determined by the Task Force. The survey gathered general opinions ranging from: affordability of food in town, the percentage of monthly food purchased locally, the percentage of monthly food received via free distribution, type of restaurant residents would most like to see in town, and ranking of food-related actionable projects derived from the Opportunity Matrix produced by the Task Force.

- 1) INVEST** in the elementary school garden initiative
- 2) ESTABLISH** Cuyama farmer’s market
- 3) OFFER** cooking and nutrition classes for community and youth
- 4) CREATE** commercial kitchen facility for community and entrepreneurial use

Drawing from our own assets & infrastructure as well as the feasibility of projects presented, utilizing \$30K in funding from Santa Barbara Foundation, Blue Sky Center invested in outfitting its mobile commercial catering trailer, and launching the Cuyama Kitchen, a space for youth and community members to experiment with entrepreneurial food ventures as well as a pathway for nutritional & culinary arts education.

Beginning in April and running through July, Blue Sky hosted a series of culinary workshops through the Cuyama Kitchen (Blue Sky’s mobile community catering trailer) to engage community members around a shared table. Using food as a vehicle to build local capacity, these programs provided a space for storytelling, celebrated cultural heritage and supported local businesses and entrepreneurs. Meanwhile, the programs also promoted healthy eating and provided insight about dryland environments. These opportunities included a sourdough bread making workshop for women in the Cuyama Valley, an intergenerational cactus planting workshop and grilled cactus community dinner, and an heirloom corn workshop centered around storytelling at the Cuyama 4th of July celebration.



OUTCOMES

2018 Programs hosted

1) TEENS LOVE COOKING

7-week cooking course, in partnership with Santa Barbara County Food Bank.

2) GRAINS ARE GOODS

Sourdough bread making for women in the Cuyama Valley. Hosted by [The Bread Companion](#).

3) LOCAL POP-UP DINNERS

Featuring local catering startups, El Mejor de Acapulco & Big Boys BBQ.

4) CACTUS AND DRYLAND COOKING

A dinner celebrating our unique dryland environment hosted by [Desert Art Lab](#).

5) HEIRLOOM CORN WORKSHOP

Hosted in partnership with [Leyna Lightman](#), Chef Michelle Lainez, and local 4-H club featuring Tortilla Making & 4-H Fundraiser.

OBSTACLES ENCOUNTERED

A goal of ours was to work with the Cuyama Joint Unified School District and have them build programming through the Cuyama Kitchen. Unfortunately, they lost their Culinary Arts educator, and faced other staff changes limiting their own capacity and room for collaboration. Even so, we pursued a different route for youth engagement via the Santa Barbara County Food Bank’s Teens Love Cooking which was well attended during its seven week period.





CUYAMA VALLEY

LEAF RESULTS: IMPACT

COMMUNITY IMPACT

First, the Cuyama Kitchen has provided an essential framework for cultivating community leaders & contributing to community assessment efforts. The focus remains on continuing public participation through creative food programming and developing collaboration across all sectors towards economic and community development strategies. We had 85 participants within our community of roughly 500, experience culturally-specific and engaging programming that reached a multigenerational audience. From dryland flora to wholesome heirloom grains, close to 80% of those who attended left more knowledgeable about these ingredients.

Second, the Cuyama Kitchen provided an opportunity for Blue Sky Center to enhance the ability and capacity of the local 4-H chapter by expanding fundraising strategies and improving career technical education opportunities in the areas of culinary arts and agriculture. This began with a partnership that paired Michelle Lainez, a LA-based chef and heirloom corn expert, with 4-H youth leaders for a week. During this time, they prepared homemade tortillas, and learned about heirloom corn. What started as an educational opportunity led to a sold-out 4-H fundraiser & successful community-wide corn workshop at our community's Fourth of July event.

Third, the Cuyama Kitchen has built the foundation for incubating food entrepreneurial ventures and cottage industries that can create both educational and economic opportunities at Blue Sky Center.

JENSEN LORENZEN

Food Action Consultant

Jensen Lorenzen was raised on the Central Coast of California. An avid outdoorsman, he grew up hunting, fishing, backpacking, and traveling. An intimate respect for nature has always been a driving force in Jensen's life. As a chef, Jensen has become close friends with farmers, ranchers, foragers, cheese makers, vintners and brewers. Working as a part of the local food community has given him a close connection with locally harvested and seasonal foods. He believes that cuisine should be a reflection of a region, as such, sustainably harvested ingredients and thoughtfully sourced products are the heartbeat of all of his menus.

NEW CUYAMA

CUYAMA KITCHEN

BUSINESS PLANNING & COTTAGE INDUSTRY DEVELOPMENT

May - December 2018

Utilizing \$10,000 out of the \$30,000 received from Santa Barbara Foundation, Blue Sky invested in thinking beyond grassroots programming to align with a vision of creating a sustainable economy powered through food and community resiliency strategies. To support food programming & 2nd phase visioning for Cuyama Valley Food Action Investments, Blue Sky Center hired consultant, Jensen Lorenzen, to create a business plan for Cuyama Kitchen, assist in building local culinary partnerships, and develop a model for potential impact investments around food and agriculture initiatives in the Cuyama Valley.

OUTCOMES

Cuyama Kitchen Rental Agreement

As an earned revenue stream for Blue Sky Center, the Cuyama Kitchen can be rented out along with its full set of catering supplies for an affordable rate to complement Blue Sky Center's hospitality venture, Explore Cuyama, as well as, support farm-to-table pop up events that highlight the premium products that are homegrown in the Cuyama Valley.

Culinary Arts Overview

Programs that build upon culinary arts skills and nutritional education can be taught at no cost through the Cuyama Kitchen. Blue Sky Center staff will provide resources such as: funding, volunteer coordination, marketing, and curriculum support.

Past programming includes Teens Love Cooking. This is a Santa Barbara Foodbank program that lasts 7 weeks, is volunteer based and aimed at teens to promote building healthy cooking and culinary skills. At the end of the seven weeks the teen cooks planned a Family Fiesta. They presented the dishes they'd learn how to cook during the program and showcased their new skills to friends and family.



VENTURES

La Cocina Cuyama's Microgrant Pilot Program fosters small food-related business ventures generated by and for Cuyama Valley residents. This program supports a grantee in bringing their business idea to the street through access to Blue Sky Center funding and resources. The program's focus is on producing either a single event or a series of events out of La Cocina Cuyama/Cuyama Kitchen, a mobile food unit owned by Blue Sky Center and available to community members.

FEASIBILITY STUDY

Food Ventures

Throughout the summer of 2018, Blue Sky LEAF consultant, Jensen Lorenzen ran a series of product recipe feasibility reports that could build upon the impact of the Cuyama Kitchen. In particular, we first considered a Cuyama Tortilla Co. as well as a salsa manufacturing facility, before landing on what is now our 2019 venture, Cuyama Cider Co. Throughout this process our team identified specific challenges to salsa and tortilla manufacturing including: significant barriers to scalability, market saturation, lack of local champions or identified local recipes, producer not known or product not grown efficiently or effectively in the Cuyama Valley, products did not speak to "time and place", possibility for branded product to encounter cultural appropriation / lack of Latinx leadership involved in project. These obstacles identified gaps in Blue Sky's operations and added input into issues to address that led to an entire strategic plan for our organization.

FOOD ACTION

CONTINUED IMPACT



FOOD ACTION SURVEY

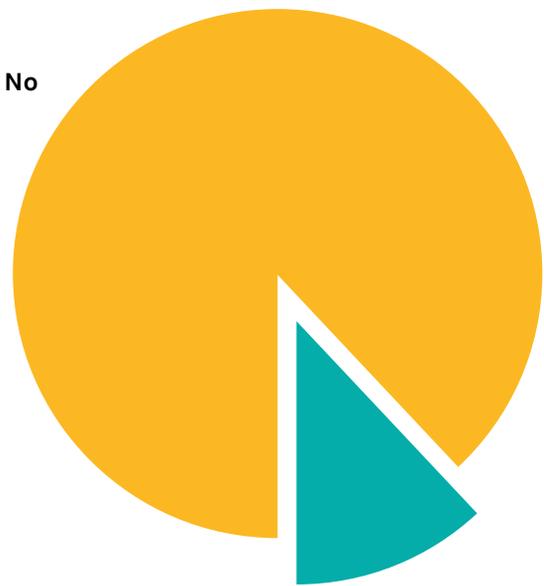
Community Partnerships

In our efforts to continue impacting Cuyama's food systems in the Valley we have hosted events and offered technical assistance for producers, consumers, and food businesses. In March 2018, Blue Sky Center hosted an inaugural Small Farmers and Ranchers Gathering. This dinner was a success in terms of being a place for old and new acquaintances to connect, and the attendees showed interest in taking part in future events.

We have also assisted one of our local farms, Juniper Hills, applying for a federal grant and provided branding services to expand their food products offered to our community. We have also continued our surveys and have found people are seeking ways to acquire fresh, affordable produce. From our results of the 2018 survey, 75% of Cuyama residents ranked a farmer's market as their top option of something they'd like to see in their community, an even greater percentage of residents do not have access to affordable food in town. We are continuing our work to have conversations around food and listening to people's suggestions and top needs.

Do you have access to healthy and affordable food in New Cuyama?

87% No



13% Yes

LOOKING AHEAD 2019 & BEYOND



FROM KITCHEN TO COTTAGE INDUSTRY

Ideation & Investment Strategy

Utilizing the Cuyama Kitchen as the catalyst in connecting producers to buyers and processors to distributors through community investment, network capacity building, and Cuyama Valley product branding and distribution, ultimately, Blue Sky aims to build a more resilient foundation for a thriving rural economy that can contribute to a diverse regional foodshed.

We see an opportunity to invest in enterprises that add value to the agricultural industries in the Cuyama Valley that do not unnecessarily contribute to the increasingly critically overdrafted water basin. This means investing in Cuyama Valley branded products that exemplify farming practices that are climate-specific, contribute to our local food & job infrastructure, and showcase the abundance of the Cuyama Valley. Namely, Blue Sky is launching its first profit-sharing venture in 2019 with regional cider maker, The Apiary. Cuyama Cider Co. is a small-batch cider and sparkling mead production and distribution company that will be based in New Cuyama. Cuyama is a small and isolated community. Because of this, employment and educational opportunities in the trade-oriented form of “learn by doing” are limited. Cuyama Cider Co. will affect change by creating jobs that are scalable and valuable in an emerging market, adding revenue to Blue Sky Center - leading an innovative pathway to self-sufficiency, and ultimately providing an inspiring case study for replicable rural business incubation programs that can greatly impact our distinctive Central Coast foodshed.

STRATEGIC PLAN

In 2019, Blue Sky releases our very first strategic plan to strengthen the Cuyama Valley communities through supporting entrepreneurs and building our economic and creative resources. This plan lays out a verified framework to measure the economic value of our partners. In it we strive to answer these questions:

VALUES-DRIVEN

Does the project management and team reflect the diversity of communities served, and do their organizational values align with ours?

TRIPLE-BOTTOM LINE

Can the operation showcase verifiable environmental, social, economic impact?

STRENGTHENING EXISTING ECONOMIC SECTORS

Will operation close production loops, provide access to distribution channels, build pathways for local producers?

EDUCATION & TRAINING

Is there educational curriculum in place? (Train the trainer models, apprenticeships, & replicable systems)

CUYAMA VALLEY CENTRIC

Does it strengthen what makes Cuyama Valley unique? Abundant?

THANK YOU TO ALL OF OUR FOOD ACTION PARTNERS IN 2018



We greatly appreciate the resources and camaraderie we have received through our partners and allies in 2018 and are looking for support to help us validate and redefine rural economic value in 2019.

FOOD ACTION PARTNERS

Santa Barbara County Food Bank
Chef Michelle Lainez
Leyna Lightman
Jensen Lorenzen
Legacy Works Group
Desert ArtLAB
Julia Georgallis with The Bread Companion
Robbie Jaffee from Condor's Hope
Tehachapi Grain Project

Community Environmental Council
Chef Clark Staub
Chef Molly Quigley

ORGANIZATIONS & ASSOCIATIONS

Santa Barbara Foundation
Community Environmental Council
Santa Barbara County Food Action Plan
Santa Barbara County Foodbank
New Cuyama's 4-H Chapter

SUPPORT FOOD ACTION IN THE CUYAMA VALLEY

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*INTERESTED IN MORE INFORMATION REGARDING
FOOD ACTION IN THE CUYAMA VALLEY?*

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INTERESTED IN MAKING A TAX-DEDUCTIBLE DONATION?

Jack Forinash, Executive Director
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INTERESTED IN PARTNERING WITH BLUE SKY?

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