

PLAZA Mobile Market

Outcomes Harvest Summary of Results



Written By:
AZ Health Zone State Evaluation Team
June 2025

Outcomes Harvest Overview

In May 2025, the AZ Health Zone State Evaluation Team (SET) collaborated with the Garden Kitchen to understand the outcomes related to the Promoting Local Arizona Agriculture (PLAZA) Mobile Market. To identify these outcomes, we used a methodology called Outcomes Harvesting.

The goal of Outcome Harvesting was to collect information on what changed due to the PLAZA Mobile Market and by working backwards, determine whether and how the mobile market contributed to these changes. The methodology comprised of four main steps:

1. DESIGN THE HARVEST

The SET collaborated with the Garden Kitchen to develop guiding questions that the Outcomes Harvest aimed to answer.

2. REVIEW DOCUMENTATION & DRAFT OUTCOMES

The SET reviewed previous reports on the PLAZA Mobile Market created by the Garden Kitchen to draft outcomes.

3. ENGAGE INFORMANTS

The SET and the Garden Kitchen reviewed and finalized each outcome together.

4. SUBSTANTIATE

The SET held conversations with community residents who shop at the PLAZA Mobile Market and community partners to substantiate each outcome.

GUIDING QUESTIONS:

- How has the PLAZA Mobile Market supported access to affordable, locally sourced foods?
- How has the PLAZA Mobile Market affected social cohesion and networking among community members?
- What benefits have local farmers experienced through their involvement with the PLAZA Mobile Market?
- What benefits have community partners experienced through their involvement with the PLAZA Mobile Market?
- What broader community-wide or local food systems impacts have emerged due to the PLAZA Mobile Market?

Outcomes Summary

INCREASED FOOD ACCESS

Beginning in FY22, the Garden Kitchen laid the foundation for the PLAZA Mobile Market, a weekly community market that increases access to affordable, locally grown produce and staple goods in the southside of Tucson.

TRUSTED COMMUNITY HUB

The PLAZA Mobile Market has become a trusted third space in the community for social cohesion, cultural connection, and food education.

CAPACITY BUILDING FOR MARGINALIZED FARMERS

The PLAZA Mobile Market provides a low barrier selling outlet for marginalized, small farmers that supports their economic growth and farming experience for participation in the local food system.

DEEPENED COMMUNITY IMPACT BY PARTNERS

Due to the PLAZA Mobile Market, community partners increased their community reach, expanded their acceptance of nutrition assistance benefits, and gained additional funding to support their volunteers and programs.

BROADER FOOD SYSTEMS AND COMMUNITY IMPACT

The PLAZA Mobile Market filled a gap in the local food system by creating a low-barrier, small-scale market for producers. Through this work, the Garden Kitchen has become a trusted local food systems advocate and advanced knowledge-sharing across Cooperative Extension and national networks.

“Food is a connector for community nourishment, support, and empowerment. The PLAZA Market bridges community survival to community flourishing.”

~Community Resident

Substantiation Summary

To substantiate each harvested outcome, we held **eight conversations with community residents** who shop at the PLAZA Mobile Market. We also interviewed **four community partners** of the Garden Kitchen that support the PLAZA Mobile Market:

INTERNATIONAL RESCUE COMMITTEE: A refugee-serving organization whose farmers sell to the PLAZA Mobile Market.

ISKASHITAA: A refugee-serving food harvesting program who sells produce to the PLAZA Mobile Market.

TUCSON VILLAGE FARM: A youth-serving food education farm who sells produce to the PLAZA Mobile Market.

VALENCIA LIBRARY: A library in southern Tucson that hosts the PLAZA Mobile market.

Increased Food Access

8

community residents voiced PLAZA's role in **filling a gap in the community for access to fresh, affordable produce.**

"PLAZA accepts senior coupons which helps a lot. I live on social security and pension and this market really helps supplement what I have for food."

6

community residents expressed their **preference of PLAZA over other local farmers markets**, noting the long travel time, cost-prohibitive produce, and feelings of isolation at other markets.

"PLAZA feels like an equalizer. [There is] more of a divide at farmers markets where you feel like a tourist, not a shopper."

5

community residents expressed their **preference of PLAZA over the only grocery store** in the community, noting the high quality and unique produce provided at the market.

"The produce at the grocery store is low quality. Every tomato and onion I get is bad. You [also] see produce [at PLAZA] that you can't get at the store."

4

community residents shared that the market's **acceptance of nutrition assistance benefits provided critical support** for supplementing food budgets.

8

community residents discussed the **convenient location of the market**, noting the ease of transportation and proximity to other community resources.

Trusted Community Hub

Staff from the Valencia Library noted that **PLAZA brings people out of their homes to a space where neighbors can connect and are exposed to new foods and preparation methods. Staff also discussed that, together, the library and PLAZA enhance the neighborhood's sense of safety.** The market also increases foot traffic into the library where residents can connect to other community resources and services.

“PLAZA is bringing people out of the neighborhood. More people are coming out and that’s increasing social connection, helping people meet others, and helping with mental health. Bringing people together has a snowball effect.”



community residents described PLAZA as an **inclusive community gathering space** to foster social connection and share cultural recipes.

“This is a place to have meaningful conversation. People are talking about family history, farming, how to plant, and how to cook. People share about how food is prepared and cooked in their cultures.”



community residents noted the food education offered PLAZA staff, emphasizing how it set the market apart from other food outlets by helping them understand how to use fresh produce.

“I had a conversation with staff about an herb called amaranth. They opened a whole new world about other herbs I can use to feed my family.”

Capacity Building for Marginalized Farmers

The International Rescue Committee highlighted how PLAZA helped address a barrier faced by farmers in their program: the lack of markets to sell their produce. They emphasized **the value of PLAZA Market as a low barrier stepping stone into the local food system—one where farmers with limited English proficiency can gain skills in:**



CROP PLANNING



ORDER FULFILLMENT



PRODUCE PROCESSING



TRANSPORTATION

Unlike larger and more complex markets in Tucson, PLAZA provides a more manageable scale for beginner farmers. Importantly, the organization also noted that **farmers can rely on PLAZA for consistent weekly sales, which supplements their income** and helps them understand the routine of market participation.

Deepened Community Impact by Partners

All community partners described several benefits of their collaboration with PLAZA:



It enabled them to **serve communities they couldn't reach alone** due to limited resources and capacity.



The partnership aligned with and **advanced their organizational missions**.



Garden Kitchen offered **a low barrier selling outlet** with manageable orders and produce pickup. This allowed partner organizations to gain a small amount of funding for their volunteers or programs.



Partners received **training and support to accept Women, Infants, and Children (WIC), Farmers Market Nutrition Program (FMNP), and Double Up Food Bucks (DUFB) benefits** and expanded their services for the community.



The partnership **boosted their visibility** in the community and local food system.

"It's not in our mission to sell at farmers markets. It doesn't really move our mission forward. But [with PLAZA Market], it's more mission aligned since our food is reaching a community that normally may not have access to [fresh produce]."

"It's been a little bit of income for us. It's just kept the produce sales and program going at a time when I probably would have scaled it back to nothing, because I just could not deal with selling at the point we were at."

Broader Food Systems and Community Impacts

Three community organizations characterized **PLAZA as "low barrier" for selling produce, a needed outlet in the food system** for both local farmers and organizations who lacked capacity and resources to sell to larger markets.

"[PLAZA] has fewer barriers to entry for folks. [The farmers] don't need to have written English skills, so they can still handle the process independently if they don't need be writing invoices or things like that.

It's also been a good opportunity for them to step into selling without starting with an order of 100 bunches, which is hard for them to handle at first. Starting with PLAZA is more manageable. It's been a great way of easing people into the process of doing estimation and making sales, from selling nothing to selling something."

Outcomes Harvest

Outcome 1: Increased Food Access


OUTCOME. Beginning in FY22, the Garden Kitchen laid the foundation for the PLAZA Mobile Market, a weekly community market that increases access to affordable, locally grown produce and staple goods in the southside of Tucson.

OUTCOME DESCRIPTION. In FY23, the Garden Kitchen piloted two versions of a mobile food hub at an affordable housing complex: a Community Supported Agriculture (CSA) model and a market model. The pilot brought together a local Community Supported Agriculture (CSA) program and Tucson Village Farm (TVF), to provide fresh produce, recipes, and on-site nutrition education. Eight residents participated each week, consistently picking up their shares and taking part in food demonstrations and lessons. Residents voiced that the market model best served their needs; therefore, the Garden Kitchen launched PLAZA in FY24. Centered in the Sunnyside neighborhood where there's limited access to locally grown and culturally familiar produce, PLAZA operates weekly at a trusted neighborhood site: the Valencia library. Each market offers reduced-cost fresh produce from small local growers and staple items, such as bread and flour, from a local bakery. PLAZA has become a reliable food access point for the Sunnyside neighborhood, where weekly purchasing from residents has increased by 60% and transaction size has increased by 70% in the past year. PLAZA also helps bridge an important gap—making it possible for individuals to access nutrition assistance benefits they may not have known about or been able to use at other food outlets.

OUTCOME CONTRIBUTION. From the start, the Garden Kitchen centered community engagement as the heart of the mobile market planning process. In FY22, the Garden Kitchen coordinated focus groups with 49 SNAP-eligible individuals to better understand the strengths and opportunities around food access in their community. They also connected with food systems leaders across Tucson, AZ Health Zone food system staff across Arizona, and mobile market leaders across the nation to understand the current strengths and gaps in the local food system and best practices for mobile markets. The team then coordinated the pilot, selected a community-trusted site for the market informed by Census tract data, and built relationships with community partners and farmers. Lastly, the Garden Kitchen navigated complex challenges around accepting nutrition assistance benefits as a mobile market. This included applying for a SNAP retail license, coordinating between the state sponsor and University to offer DUFb and FMNP, and problem-solving technical and administrative hurdles. These efforts were essential to making PLAZA an affordable and welcoming space for all.

1,200 
sales since the launch
of PLAZA

2,800 
pounds of local
produce have been
distributed.

41% 
of sales were from
SNAP, DUFb, and
FMNP, totaling over
\$X in redemptions.



OUTCOME SIGNIFICANCE:

By bringing local food directly into the Sunnyside neighborhood and supporting benefit use, PLAZA is responsive to resident-voiced challenges of shopping at other farmers markets or their closest grocery store: transportation and the availability, quality, and affordability of fresh produce. Through this environmental change, residents now have consistent access to locally grown and culturally familiar food in a trusted neighborhood space.

Outcome 2: Trusted Community Hub

OUTCOME. The PLAZA Mobile Market has become a trusted third space in the community for social cohesion, cultural connection, and food education.

OUTCOME DESCRIPTION. Since its launch in FY24, community residents who shop at PLAZA have fostered meaningful connections with each other and Garden Kitchen staff. The market sparks conversations about childhood meal traditions and cooking methods, creating space for residents to share personal experiences around heritage crops and cultural recipes. Community residents are also often introduced to new foods, where Garden Kitchen staff provide guidance on how to prepare unfamiliar herbs and produce.

OUTCOME CONTRIBUTION. The Garden Kitchen designed PLAZA to be an inclusive and culturally responsive space, where food serves as a catalyst for dialogue and relationship building. The market also responds to a community-identified motivational factor for shopping at a mobile market: the desire for safety and connectedness. In addition, when community members express interest in getting more involved, the Garden Kitchen provides opportunities for them to do so, including volunteer roles. In some cases, this engagement has led to professional development support and job referrals. Overall, the market's consistent presence has helped transform a visit into a vibrant experience that strengthens the social fabric of the community.

OUTCOME SIGNIFICANCE:

PLAZA is seen as a “third space” in the community, a place beyond home or work where residents can connect with Garden Kitchen staff and other neighbors. By intertwining connection and food access, PLAZA contributes to a whole-person approach towards community wellness, supporting not just nutritional needs, but also mental, cultural, and social well-being.

To express her gratitude for the PLAZA Market as space for community connection, a resident wrote the following poem:

The Last Champions

When the world around is mad, kindness a rare jewel -
a gentleness to soothe the frenzy of survival
Look to those with a light in their eyes
softness in their touch and love in their voice.

They remind us who we are, all that we can be
when we are no-one.

When there is you and there is me
these fade, fade into meaninglessness
brought back into the nature of our being.

We are love. We are one. We are each other.

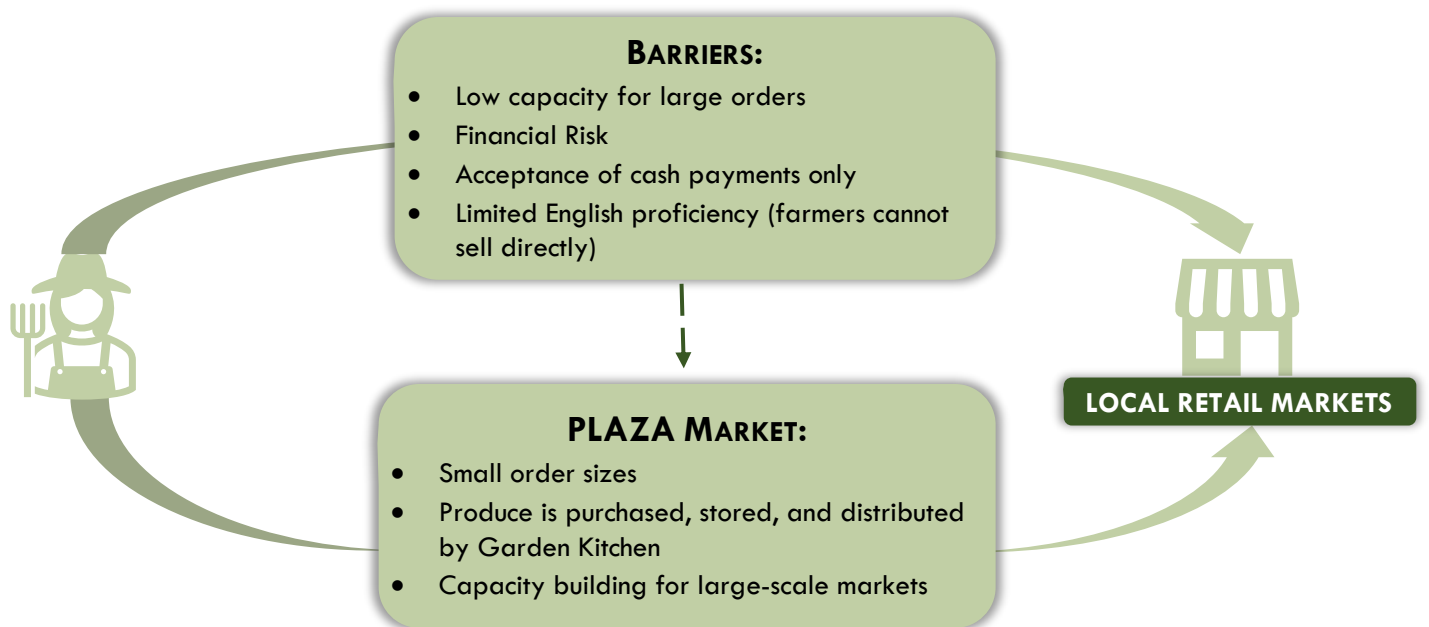
Outcome 3: Capacity Building for Marginalized Farmers

OUTCOME. The PLAZA Mobile Market provides a selling outlet for marginalized, small farmers that supports their economic growth and farming experience for participation in the local food system.

OUTCOME DESCRIPTION. Through PLAZA, small farmers from local refugee resettlement programs have a low barrier market to sell their produce. This farm-to-market model creates a tangible pathway in the local food system for farmers to receive fair market prices for their produce while gaining experience to sell to larger markets. Through the PLAZA partnership, farmers are building skills in crop planning, order fulfillment, and processing. These are crucial skills that are necessary for broader participation in the local food system. Importantly, farmers develop their own minimum sales requirements for PLAZA, an important step for equitable practices when selling to other purchasers.

OUTCOME CONTRIBUTION. In FY22, the Garden Kitchen coordinated interviews with ten small farmers throughout the county to better understand how a mobile produce market could support them and better understand their needs as growers. The Garden Kitchen also connected with food systems leaders across Tucson and found that small farmers face multiple challenges to enter the larger, more complex local retail environment.

The Garden Kitchen developed trusting partnerships with two refugee resettlement programs to source from marginalized farmers, using PLAZA as a stepping stone for them to gain experience before transitioning into larger markets. They also offer technical assistance on crop planning and produce processing to help farmers build experience for large-scale selling. Importantly, by purchasing produce at farmer-negotiated prices, the Garden Kitchen fosters an equitable supply chain where farmers are ensured fair wages for their produce.



OUTCOME SIGNIFICANCE:

The PLAZA Market centers farmers who have historically faced systemic barriers to food retail participation, such as limited language proficiency, capacity, and access to capital. UA Pima's model helps bridge an identified gap: it provides small farmers with a scalable, low-barrier pathway to deepen their role in the local food system while being paid fair wages.

Outcome 4: Deepened Community Impact by Partners

OUTCOME. Due to the PLAZA Market, community partners increased their community reach, expanded their acceptance of nutrition assistance benefits, gained additional funding to support their volunteers and programs, and strengthened their role in the food system.

OUTCOME DESCRIPTION. The Garden Kitchen strengthened its partnerships with four community organizations: Tucson Village Farm (TVF), Iskashitaa, the International Rescue Committee (IRC), and the Valencia Library, to support PLAZA. These partnerships were intentionally fostered based on shared missions to expand their reach of fresh produce to underserved communities. Through these reciprocal collaborations:

- The Garden Kitchen supported TVF in becoming a DUFEB site. Valencia Library staff also received training on how to enroll individuals in nutrition assistance benefits.
- Partner organizations gain a small funding source to support their volunteers and programs by selling to a manageable, low barrier market.
- Partner organizations gain visibility within the community and the local food system.

OUTCOME CONTRIBUTION. The Garden Kitchen cultivated and sustained partnerships with TVF, Iskashitaa, the International Rescue Committee, and the Valencia Library, while continuously checking in with each partner to ensure their needs are met. Through operation of PLAZA, the Garden Kitchen created a food access strategy that aligned with partner missions, offered logistical support, and provided a consistent, low-barrier market for partners to sell to.

In addition, Garden Kitchen staff supported TVF's enrollment as a DUFEB site by serving as a liaison with the program's state sponsor, assisting with paperwork, coordinating a site visit to finalize the process, and continuing to offer technical assistance as needed. They have also trained Valencia Library staff on enrolling individuals in nutrition assistance programs, strengthening both staff capacity and access to food assistance in the community.

OUTCOME SIGNIFICANCE:

By fostering partnerships with mission-aligned organizations, the Garden Kitchen not only expanded their reach of fresh produce but also built partner capacity for nutrition assistance programs. The low barrier design of the market provided a reliable outlet for organizations to manageably sell produce, gain funding, and enhance their visibility throughout the community. Collectively, this reinforces a more connected and resilient local food system.

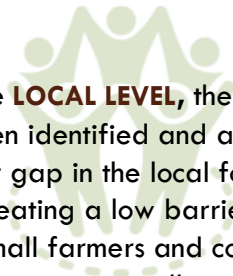
“We really wanted to partner with [Garden Kitchen] because they can reach a population of people that we can't reach. It's nice for us to be able to sell there and get our vegetables to other places other than our community right around us. We love providing veggies to them and love how easy [Garden Kitchen] makes it for us. It's very tedious to harvest herbs on a large scale, so [they] are great at working with us on that.”

Outcome 5: Broader Food Systems and Community Impact

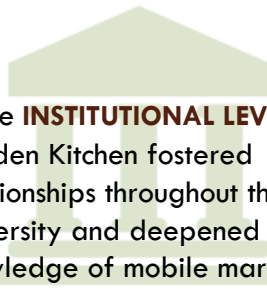
OUTCOME. The PLAZA Mobile Market filled a gap in the local food system by creating a low barrier, small-scale market for producers. Through this work, the Garden Kitchen has become a trusted local food systems advocate and advanced knowledge-sharing across Cooperative Extension and national networks.

OUTCOME DESCRIPTION. PLAZA has emerged as a reliable market for small farmers and community partners to sell their produce. In the process of addressing this need, the Garden Kitchen has built strong partnerships throughout the local food system, strengthened university-wide relationships, advanced expertise for Cooperative Extension supported mobile markets, and have provided technical assistance to organizations working to start mobile markets across the country.

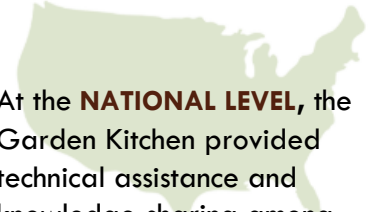
OUTCOME CONTRIBUTION. In the planning stages of PLAZA, the Garden Kitchen focused on formative research to help expand their understanding of mobile markets. Through the pilot and eventual operation of PLAZA, the Garden Kitchen became an expert for food systems advocacy and mobile market knowledge-sharing at multiple levels:



At the **LOCAL LEVEL**, the Garden Kitchen identified and addressed a major gap in the local food system by creating a low barrier market for small farmers and community organizations to sell surplus produce. In doing so, the Garden Kitchen established relationships with partners across the food system—becoming a reputable food systems advocate and a trusted knowledge source for the local food policy council.



At the **INSTITUTIONAL LEVEL**, the Garden Kitchen fostered relationships throughout the University and deepened their knowledge of mobile markets. This laid the groundwork for the development of a Cooperation Extension Mobile Market Manual.



At the **NATIONAL LEVEL**, the Garden Kitchen provided technical assistance and knowledge-sharing among Cooperative Extension and mobile market professionals looking to build out mobile markets in their communities.

OUTCOME SIGNIFICANCE:

PLAZA has addressed a critical gap in the local food system in creating a small-scale market for producers and facilitating food access in a community with limited access to fresh food. The Garden Kitchen has emerged as a trusted partner in the food system and has strengthened Cooperative Extension's capacity to support mobile markets and advance community-driven approaches to food access nationally.