A program of Global to Local, the Food Innovation Network enhances the local food system, increases access to healthy foods, and supports local food businesses in the diverse communities of SeaTac/Tukwila and South King County. Global to Local is a SeaTac-based nonprofit organization whose programs embody a racial and ethnic approach to ensure all South King County communities have the opportunity to thrive.

foodinnovationnetwork.org
Pandemic Response: Meals and Produce

Even before the pandemic, more than one in 10 King County adults lacked reliable access to affordable, nutritious food—and food insecurity was even worse in South King County. Strategies to slow the spread of COVID-19 exacerbated the problem; as businesses closed, many workers lost income and the ability to buy food for their families.

We addressed food insecurity by launching a no-cost meals and produce program, distributing vouchers for groceries and prepared foods, and reaching out to cultural communities to share resources and information.

No-cost meals and produce

When lockdowns began in March, chefs who participate in our Food Business Incubator initiated an effort to feed isolated families and older adults in our community. They collected ingredients from their own pantries and from neighbors, and began preparing healthy meals that partner organizations delivered to community members in need. We expanded the program as food access needs grew, launching a community fundraising campaign and connecting with food banks, local businesses, and other groups that donated ingredients. By late spring, we received funding from the American Heart Association that allowed us to provide stipends to volunteer chefs, and the program was also supported by CARES Act funding in the fall.

Starting in July, our partners at IRC’s New Roots program provided fresh produce that we sent along with the meals. We also created and shared information about food resources in English, French, and Somali. The program continued through early 2021, providing more than 8,700 meals.

8,700+
no-cost meals provided to families and older adults

360
no-cost produce bags delivered to isolated older adults
Leticia’s story

Leticia, an immigrant from Mexico, first connected with Global to Local a few years ago after she found a flier for a Zumba class posted at her HealthPoint clinic. She joined that program, as well as a financial health class led by Monica, one of our Spanish-speaking Community Health Workers. When the pandemic started, Leticia lost her job, and her husband’s employer reduced his hours. Unemployment benefits and other government assistance weren’t an option because of their immigration status. Leticia persistently sought new work, only to face setbacks when she needed emergency appendix surgery in June, and then had to leave a new job later in the summer after a shift schedule change interfered with her ability to care for her three children.

Monica checked in with Leticia regularly throughout the year, and reached out to her when grocery vouchers became available in mid-November. The $400 Safeway vouchers came at a critical time for their family; Leticia, her husband, and two of her children became sick with COVID-19 around Thanksgiving. The vouchers were among the few supports they’ve had during the pandemic crisis, and Leticia was grateful to be stocked up on food during their stressful weeks of isolation and illness. Their health has improved, though Leticia noted a few months into her recovery that her lungs were not completely back to normal.

Food vouchers

King County selected Global to Local to manage a CARES Act-funded food vouchers program for community members who were experiencing food insecurity. Our staff reached out to Global to Local clients and other community members to invite them to apply for this low-barrier program, which required participants only to answer questions about their food security—they did not have to submit any paperwork or documents.

We began voucher distribution at our Spice Bridge food hall in November. By the end of December, we connected 369 community members with Safeway grocery vouchers, and 360 community members with Spice Bridge gift cards to purchase culturally relevant foods.

Additional community outreach

Community Food Advocates are leaders who represent the diverse multicultural communities of South King County, and they are at the heart of our community engagement work.

In 2020, 10 Advocates reached out to community members to share information about food resources and COVID-19 safety. They reached a variety of cultural communities, including Latinx, Kurdish, Congolese, Somali, Karen, and Filipino South King County residents.

360+ community members connected with Safeway grocery vouchers and Spice Bridge gift cards

$136,800 Safeway vouchers distributed

$50,250 Spice Bridge gift cards distributed

10 Community Food Advocates engaged 6+ cultural communities

Moyo Kitchen’s Zanzibari urojo soup was among the many culturally relevant foods gift card recipients could purchase.
We address racial inequity in our food system by creating a farm-to-fork distribution channel and connecting people to food. FIN operates the seasonal Tukwila Village Farmers Market with our partner, the IRC New Roots program. We sell fresh, local produce, most of which is grown by immigrants and refugees in our community.

In 2020, our market accepted SNAP benefits and participated in SNAP Market Match, a state program that doubles food benefits. We also accepted Heart Bucks, an American Heart Association initiative to improve healthy food access for older adults and other community members who were experiencing food insecurity. In partnership with Whole Foods, we distributed 65 no-cost bags of pantry staples to customers who purchased produce using SNAP benefits.

To ensure safety during the pandemic, we enacted strict physical distancing and sanitizing protocols, and screened all staff, vendors, and customers for COVID-19 as public health regulations required. We opened the market a week later than usual to prepare for these safety measures. Despite the shorter season, our 2020 sales were more than triple our 2019 sales, thanks in large part to the Heart Bucks program. One customer called our market “small but mighty,” and many reported feeling safer shopping at the market than at grocery stores. This was especially important for the many customers who visited from the surrounding senior housing development.
Food Business Incubator

Food businesses have traditionally been a way for striving immigrants and low-income families to gain a foothold in the economy, but many South King County chefs face barriers to starting a business, including a lack of affordable commercial kitchen and restaurant spaces. Four years ago, we launched a Food Business Incubator to help South King County women of color, immigrants, and refugees launch and grow food businesses. Despite the pandemic, our Food Business Incubator expanded in 2020 to support 13 businesses whose cuisines represent the diversity of our community.

When COVID-19 forced the cancellation of gatherings and farmers markets, incubator participants lost significant income from catering and market booths. We took action to help business owners secure grants and interest-free loans to stabilize their businesses and their families. Our team also provided technical assistance to help business owners pivot to new ways of doing business, such as meal pickups, and we connected chefs with paid opportunities to teach virtual cooking classes. We waived kitchen rent from April to June, and offered a subsidy to help businesses pay for their annual public health permits. As our no-cost meals program grew, funding from the American Heart Association and the CARES Act enabled us to provide chefs with stipends—an important lifeline for Food Business Incubator participants whose businesses had suffered due to COVID-19 safety restrictions.

Even as many pandemic-related hardships closed many food businesses permanently, we launched Spice Bridge, our new commercial kitchen and food hall, in September, providing our Food Business Incubator participants a space to prepare and sell takeaway food.

Adama’s story

Adama Jammeh, an immigrant from Gambia, is a single mother raising five children. In 2019, she and her sister, Oumie Sallah, launched Afella Jollof Catering with the support of our Food Business Incubator. Business was expanding until the pandemic hit and catering orders dried up. To support Adama in this difficult time, our incubator program manager, Kerrie, helped her apply for a variety of loans and grants.

Through our partnership with Community Credit Lab, Adama received a $2,000 interest-free loan, which she used to pay off debt and invest in her business. She also qualified for a $500 grant from the Plate Fund, and a $2,300 grant from King County. These helped her buy takeout containers and other supplies that enabled the launch of Afella Jollof Catering’s retail food stall at Spice Bridge in September. FIN also helped pay for Afella Jollof Catering’s annual food business permit. The financial support helped Adama stabilize her family business, which is once again growing.

Adama Jammeh prepares Senegambian kebabs to sell at Spice Bridge.

13 businesses incubated
5 new businesses launched
47 peer network and business meetings

1,750 hours of subsidized kitchen rental. December 2020 alone surpassed the number of rental hours in all of 2019.

$11,470 stipends paid to 15 chefs who prepared no-cost meals
175 hours of one-on-one technical assistance provided to business owners
FIN opened Spice Bridge, our global food hall and commercial kitchen, in September. Spice Bridge provides space and support to help our Food Business Incubator participants launch and grow successful businesses. The 2,800-square-foot facility includes a commercial kitchen with four cook stations, four retail food stalls, and a dining area.

Eight food vendors rotate through the four stalls in the sunlit food hall, offering a new culinary experience every day. With indoor dining restricted in 2020, the initial group of women-owned businesses offered takeaway meals and made use of outdoor seating in the Tukwila Village development. Five additional businesses used the kitchen for off-site sales, such as pop-ups and packaged products.

When COVID-19 restrictions end, the kitchen will accommodate up to 20 food businesses. The food hall space will be open for indoor dining, and will host art performances, pop-ups, and other events, making it a community hub.

Spice Bridge’s opening was celebrated in both local and national media. The Seattle Times published a major feature including interviews with all eight vendors. Spice Bridge was also featured in Forbes, Zagat, Seattle Eater, Seattle Refined, KUOW, KIRO 7 News, King 5 Evening, and many other publications.

“Spice Bridge provides an affordable space for chefs to fulfill their culinary dreams of sharing the rich flavors from their home country, an experience that brings cultures together.”
—KIRO 7 News

At Spice Bridge, chef Caroline Musitu has grown Taste of Congo, the only Congolese food business in our region.

Capital campaign
We continued capital campaign fundraising efforts throughout 2020, and by the end of the year secured 90 percent of our $850,000 goal.

We are grateful to contributors who have helped make this community dream a reality. If you’re interested in learning more or supporting Spice Bridge, please contact Kara Martin: kara@foodinnovationnetwork.org.