



CASE STUDY Saticoy Food Hub

It started with food.
It's become so much
more than that.

Nestled in the heart of an unincorporated community to the east of Ventura, California, the Saticoy Food Hub stands as a beacon of hope in a food desert. Despite being surrounded by vast fields of agriculture, the town of Saticoy has been designated by the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) as a low-income, low-access (LILA) census-tract, meaning that the area has a poverty rate of 20% or more, and a significant portion of the population lives more than a mile from the nearest supermarket. More than 80% of its households with children rely on SNAP/EBT benefits, and its families struggle to access fresh, healthy, and affordable food.

The Food Hub has been working in Saticoy and its neighboring communities since 2022. Their programming and services combat food apartheid for the unhoused, undocumented, kitchenless, senior, low-income, and BIPOC community members, as well as multi-family and multi-generational households. Their flagship program, the Community Fridge,



Food Access Coordinator Kim Aguilar with a dried onion flower, ready for seed harvesting



Founding Board Member Daniel Chavez stands proudly outside the Food Hub's front door at 1297 Los Angeles Avenue in Old Town Saticoy



Co-Founder and Executive Director Sierra Doehr showing the original donated household appliance that started the Saticoy Community Fridge program

“Knowing that any extra produce from my farm goes straight into the Community Fridge gives me peace of mind. Nothing is wasted, and I can see the difference it makes when families come by for fresh fruits and vegetables. It’s simple, but it’s powerful.”

SATICOY DEPOT URBAN FARM

provides free food produced and donated by community members, local farmers, and businesses to the people of Saticoy. Staff and volunteers at the Food Hub work hard to ensure that a steady supply of fresh, allergy-friendly, and culturally-relevant foods are available in the Fridge. This includes diverse types of produce, tropical fruits, and herbs and spices such as chilis, epazote, and cilantro that reflect the tastes and heritage of Saticoy’s population. The Community Fridge’s location in the center of Old Town ensures that it is walking distance from anywhere in the community, and only half a block from the town’s only bus stop.

“The Community Fridge has been a blessing. Fresh food is expensive, and having this resource that I can walk to from my home helps me stretch my money.”

SATICOY COMMUNITY FRIDGE USER

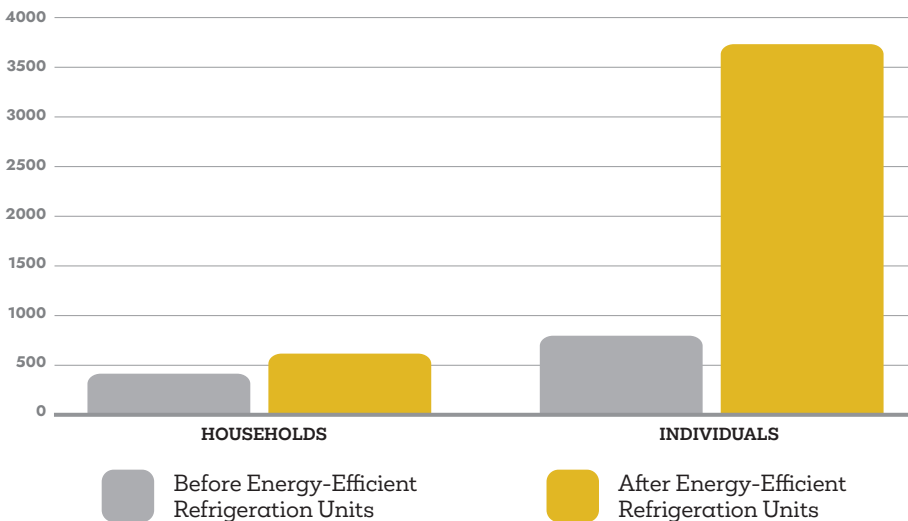
This fridge user’s story is not unique. Many of Saticoy’s residents lack the resources to access fresh food on their own. The Fridge has tried to fill this gap, offering not only food but also a sense of community and interconnectedness between its

members. But the Fridge itself lacked capacity, and was not cost- or energy-efficient enough to scale up to meet the community’s needs.

So In 2023, the Saticoy Food Hub applied for and received a Healthy Refrigeration Grant Program grant from the California Department of Food and Agriculture (CDFA) to purchase energy-efficient refrigeration and freezer units for its Community Fridge program. The staff of the Food Hub researched available refrigeration units themselves, compared their findings against the models listed on the CDFA website, and ultimately made their decision based on storage capacity, energy efficiency, unit durability, and speed of shipping. Food Hub staff obtained cost estimates from several retail and online sources, and they eventually decided to purchase the units from Webstaurantstore.com. By using the world’s largest online restaurant supply company with an extensive inventory and established shipping infrastructure, the Food Hub was able to find the exact models they wanted in stock, and saved significantly on delivery costs.

Using the \$13,581.39 grant, the Saticoy Food Hub purchased a two-door glass front refrigerator (True GDM-35-HC-LD), and a two-door glass front freezer

Households & Individuals Served



(True GDM-35F-HC~TSL01). Both new units use R290 hydrocarbon refrigerant, which has zero ozone depletion potential (ODP) and low 0.02 global warming potential (GWP).

With the installation of these new energy-efficient units, the Fridge has been able to **double its refrigeration capacity and add freezer capacity while only increasing overall energy usage in the Food Hub office by 10%**. It has extended the freshness and peak quality of donated fresh produce, reduced the amount of spoilage and waste, all while helping to fight climate change and streamline operations at the Food Hub.

Before the new units arrived, the Food Hub had been doing as much as it could to meet the community's needs with limited resources. The Community Fridge program started with a donated household refrigerator in the yard of a community member (now a Saticoy Food Hub board member). In its first year, the Fridge served around 300 individuals per month. But the increased demand for healthy food was clear. As of August 2025, with the new fridge and freezer units installed, **the Fridge now serves nearly 4,000 individuals across 618 households per month.**

SUPPORTING LOCAL FOOD LEADERS THROUGH HEALTHY REFRIGERATION GRANT

The Santa Barbara County Food Action Network (SBCFAN) was proud to be technical assistants on the California Department of Food and Agriculture's Healthy Refrigeration Grant Program. We helped applicants get their proposals ready, navigate the online application system, and make the most of CDFAs resources.

We lent a hand to Saticoy Food Hub staff and grant writers to tell their story, shine a light on their incredible community work, and connect them with new partners all across the state.

In the end, of the five organizations we supported, three were awarded grants—a win we're thrilled to celebrate alongside our partners.





Sierra Doehr displaying the seed library in the Food Hub office.



The new energy-efficient refrigeration and freezer units at work

In addition to the Fridge, the Food Hub is continuously working to create programming and services that directly combat food apartheid. These efforts are designed to reach Saticoy's most vulnerable populations—the unhoused, undocumented, senior citizens, and those living in multi-generational households.

Saticoy Sowers is a backyard growing program that combines farming with cultural traditions. The teaching garden helps people learn by doing, with a focus on composting, cultural relevance, and language access. The program also supports community science and helps neighbors reconnect with the land and their heritage.

The **Saticoy Farmers Market** was created to fight food insecurity and support local farmers and food makers. Since it started in July 2024, the market has given residents access to fresh, affordable, and culturally meaningful foods. It also helps small food businesses get started by offering training and support. Over time, the market has become a community hub—building connections, encouraging sustainability, and strengthening local resilience.

The Food Hub also maintains a **hydroponic tower garden** and a **seed and seedling library** in their offices. Harvests from the tower provide the Fridge with an ongoing supply of lettuces, vegetables, and herbs. Community members are encouraged to take seeds or starts from the library to plant in their own gardens, and to share seeds from their harvests as well.

The success of the Food Hub's ongoing work highlights the power of community-driven solutions. It is a reminder that with the right support, communities like Saticoy can overcome even the most entrenched challenges of food insecurity and food apartheid. For the people of Saticoy, the Food Hub is not just a place to get food—it's a place where community, resilience, and sustainability come together for a better, more nourished future. The Food Hub is better equipped than ever to continue expanding its impact, reaching even more people in need while ensuring the sustainability of its efforts.

As the Food Hub's Executive Director, Sierra Doehr, put it, "This grant has allowed us to turn our vision into reality. We've been able to serve more people, provide a greater variety of healthy foods, and ensure that our community continues to thrive, despite the challenges. This is just the beginning for us." 🍌



The Santa Barbara County
Food Action Network
133 E De La Guerra St, #268
Santa Barbara, CA 93101

sbcfan.org