

Santa Cruz National Heritage designation a boon to economy

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[SPECIAL TO THE ARIZONA DAILY STAR](#)

Tucson, Arizona | Published: 12.01.2008

A growing number of farmers, ranchers and chefs in our community are working together to bring place-based heritage foods from our borderlands region back to our tables for feasts such as Thanksgiving.

With an agricultural history dating back 4,000 years, longer than most regions in North America, the Santa Cruz Valley is not only rich in agricultural heritage but also well-poised to further promote locally produced foods. From pungent chiles to brilliant prickly pear fruit, and from savory tepary beans to range-fed beef and roasted pecans, our desert foodshed offers delicacies hardly found in this abundance in other parts of the continent. The Southwest borderlands is among the top five foodsheds on the continent with regard to its diversity of place-based heritage foods.

The Santa Cruz Valley Heritage Alliance and Southwest Center, along with many local businesses and organizations, are advancing this local foods movement with various heritage education and promotion projects to connect the community with our agricultural heritage and traditional foodways. We call our joint initiative "Flavors Without Borders."

One of our shared goals — to designate the Santa Cruz Valley as a National Heritage Area — may be among the most concerted efforts Southern Arizona has ever seen to help stimulate our rural economy. A National Heritage Area designation is an act of Congress that celebrates and promotes the cultural, historic and natural resources of the Santa Cruz Valley.

The National Heritage Area will support the promotion of local foods, crafts, and traditions while also providing a significant boost to heritage, agri- and culinary tourism.

Given our current tenuous economic climate, Southern Arizona deserves this boost to economic development. Revenue streams will be significantly strengthened should the proposed landscape become a National Heritage Area.

The area is perhaps our best opportunity for advancing cultural food traditions. It will elevate the national and international awareness of our unique desert foods. From matching federal funds, to increased tourism, to community-wide educational programs, the National Heritage Area designation will put Santa Cruz Valley on the map as a place to taste a unique sense of place.

We encourage you to contact our senators to support the proposed national heritage area designation.

From dining at local restaurants that feature local foods, to buying produce at farmers markets or shopping at groceries that feature local foods, supporting Santa Cruz Valley producers is good for the economy, good for the environment and good for our health.

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