

A Fresh Fall Start

A MESSAGE FROM CHIEF EXECUTIVE OFFICER, THOMAS REYNOLDS

It's back-to-school time in Washington state. The baking heat of summer is giving way to the crispness of fall, the turning of leaves, and shorter days. There are not that many "first-days-of-school" left for my household. My children are getting older – my eldest is in university already.



However, for many families across the state in Seattle, Yakima, Spokane, Bellingham, Bellevue and all cities and towns, big and small from East to West and South to North – going back to school is a fresh start and a new beginning.

I like to imagine Northwest Harvest right there in homes, helping to make those first days better.

We are not tying shoelaces, nor seeing kids to the bus, nor braiding hair, nor picking out outfits to wear –

but what we are doing is making food available for households that find the ingredients to make meals are unaffordable.

SODO Community Market in Seattle and Fruitvale Community Market in Yakima are offering free grocery shopping, seeing hundreds of households each day they are open. The hundreds of organizations we share food with across the state are supplying thousands of households with wonderful, healthy, essential foods for moms, dads, caregivers, elders and children.

Increasingly, we directly support school districts in their distribution of meals for kids – through backpack programs that send kids home with a weekend's worth of food or with logistics support for the provision of on-site meals like in the Yakima School District.

It is a failing of society that any household would have to endure stress and uncertainty of where a next meal will come from.

We can all do our part to realize a vision of a Washington state where equitable access to nutritious foods includes all neighbors and neighborhoods. We can do that together by growing food justice through collective action. If you are able and so motivated, please do something today – encourage your elected officials to prioritize food availability; thank your local food bank for the awesomeness of their efforts; and donate time or finances to food justice causes.

Help make this fall a wonderful new start for neighbors who are uncertain about their food situation.

Best regards,

Thomas



SEAHAWKS DAY OF SERVICE WITH COORDINATED CARE & ARTIST MOSES SUN

What happens when you have a new distribution center with a big blank wall? You invite an incredibly talented local artist, some Seahawks players, and amazing volunteers to paint a mural on it, of course! On Friday June 9th Northwest Harvest staff were joined by Seahawks Oluwegun Oluwatimi and Jonathan Sutherland and fabulous volunteers in our Auburn Distribution Center to help artist Moses Sun add color to his massive mural. Moses Sun designed the piece and selected the vibrant blues, golds, reds, and greens specifically for our warehouse space! Volunteers also assembled hygiene bags, including deodorant, toothbrushes, toothpaste, and other materials donated by our partner Coordinated Care that were shared with our unhoused neighbors across the state. We are grateful to our new friends for their service and honored to enjoy this beautiful permanent addition to our distribution center!



Aztec Imports: Getting the Right Food to the Right Places at the Right Time

"There's a lot of me in this place," says Ruben Cruz, founder and owner of Aztec Imports, one of the largest Hispanic wholesale produce businesses in Washington. Ruben looks comfortable behind a large desk covered in purchase orders, a phone that rings regularly, photos of his family, and the 2022 Inspiration Award from Food Lifeline. Ruben has been running Aztec Imports for over twelve years and has over 30 years of experience in the industry. Since Ruben is both the owner and primary buyer for the company, he is accustomed to working 80-hour weeks when necessary to ensure everything is handled with care and integrity. Though regularly working seven days a week and supporting a family might feel like a lot for the average person, Ruben is no stranger to hard work and determination.



Born in a remote and rural area of Mexico, Ruben and his family came to the US when he was only eight years old. They settled in Kerman, California (Fresno County) and when Ruben wasn't in school, he was helping his family work in the fields. While attending Fresno State University, Ruben got a job in the produce department of a grocery store and stayed there for seven years. Eventually he transitioned into the wholesale side of the industry, largely due to his experiences and the relationships he built during his time in the produce department. In 2011, he moved his family to Washington and started his own business: Aztec Imports.

"The company is a reflection of myself and my history. I don't forget where I came from," says Ruben, "I'm very emotional about what I do because it is me - I see my family in this business."

He also hopes that by providing both conventional and "specialty" produce, other people will have greater access to foods that are familiar and significant to their families.

"What other people consider a specialty item might be a staple in our community," says Ruben.

In addition to items like bananas, oranges, and tomatoes, Aztec Imports also sources chili peppers, chayote squash, cactus pear, and cherimoya.

Their warehouse is full, floor to ceiling, with bright green limes, pallets and pallets of avocados, and beautiful guavas. Ruben is constantly adjusting their offerings based on what is in season and which holidays are coming up – certain holidays and celebrations are associated with specific dishes that require particular ingredients. Having a buyer who is well versed in these cultural holidays means communities have greater access to the produce they want, when they want it.



In many ways, Ruben has managed to reflect an entire culinary culture in his work: he has spent years developing relationships with growers, which allows him to "find the best quality of the items people want, not just the cheapest." Developing strong relationships directly with farmers and conducting himself with integrity means Aztec Imports provides high-quality, fresh produce to communities across Washington. "Ethics is a huge part of what I do," he says, "when I'm wrong, I admit it. I try to take the time to thank the people who have helped me along the way."

Aztec Imports is staffed by 26 people, mostly Hispanic folks, and while they primarily distribute to grocery stores and retailers, food banks have also become important partners in the last two years. At the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic, Aztec Imports made a bid for the We Feed Washington grant, which is designed "to support organizations and businesses in their mission to feed hungry Washingtonians across the state with high quality, culturally responsive food." They were awarded a grant and began to do business with food banks in Washington, including Northwest Harvest.

Running a business is hard; the market can change overnight, fuel costs remain high, it is expensive to maintain equipment, and many other unforeseen challenges that arise each day. But Ruben and his team approach their work with passion and honesty and "we focus on what we're good at - we're not chasing that dollar."

Aztec Imports is a wonderful partner in the effort to provide nutritious, fresh, and culturally relevant food to our neighbors across the state. We appreciate their hard work and are grateful to work alongside them to end hunger in Washington.

EVENTS

WASHINGTON
WESTERN | CENTRAL | EASTERNMore events and up-to-the-minute details at: northwestharvest.org**SAVE THE DATE: 23RD ANNUAL HOME TEAM HARVEST – BUILDING**

COMMUNITY, ONE MEAL AT A TIME! – December 2, 10am | We are thrilled to announce that this year marks the 23rd annual Home Team Harvest – Washington's largest food drive! Throughout December, KING 5 will highlight inspiring stories from our partner's dedicated work and community activism throughout the State. Mark your calendars for December 2nd at 10 am, as we invite you to join us for the live media special and food drive on KING 5. The event will be broadcast from our SODO market and various partner locations, showcasing the power of community and the difference we can make together. Tune in to KING 5's live media special and food drive, broadcast from our SODO market and partner locations!

SAVE THE DATE: 26TH ANNUAL ROCK THE HARVEST WITH KZOK! –

October 25, 7am to 7pm | As we gear up for the 26th Annual Rock the Harvest in October, we invite you to be a part of this extraordinary event hosted by KZOK. Together, let's create another unforgettable night filled with great music, camaraderie, and the shared goal of ending hunger in Washington.

Stay tuned for further details and exciting announcements as we get closer to the date. Mark your calendars and be prepared to rock for a great cause! Your support makes a tangible difference in the lives of those in need, and we can't wait to make this year's Rock the Harvest the best one yet. Tune in to 102.5 to learn more about how to participate and win prizes by the hour!

Yielding the Fruit of Change

Fall is quickly approaching; the air becomes crisp, leaves change from green to ambers, yellows, and reds. That first chill sets in where we relish moments in solitude curled up with a book and a slice of warm apple pie.

September marks the beginning of harvest season for those delicious apples baked in pies or enjoyed one last time outside on a sunny day. And, those apples are most likely grown in Yakama. Central Washington is abundant with produce. There's asparagus, apricots, berries, and over 70% of the nation's apples are grown over the 350,000 acres of fertile land in the Yakama Valley. With such a veritable cornucopia of fruits and vegetables, how could this region be one of the most food insecure areas in Washington?

We know food insecurity isn't a lack of available supply – there is plenty of food. The question is: how can we reshape our food system so everyone has access to quality sourced food? Are you able to help with a gift to ensure these residents and Washingtonians all over the state have access to this food?

At Northwest Harvest's newly opened Fruitvale Community Market, staff members Veronica, Rey, and Annete note the rising numbers of individuals and families who are in need of food, especially fresh fruits and vegetables. Jose Torres, the market manager, adds that many of these shoppers do not have the resources to buy groceries – despite working full-time or multiple jobs.

"We see 700-800 people a day and the numbers increased during the summer. There are waves of people when they get off from work. Families, farm workers, retired people. Now we're starting to see regulars who come to the market." Francia, a newcomer to Fruitvale and recent retiree, started shopping at the market because she only receives \$60 a month to purchase groceries. Her fixed income is barely enough to cover housing, medical bills, and transportation costs, which is why she is grateful for the resources available at the Fruitvale Community Market.

With food costs persisting at record levels, more people are finding themselves needing to access food banks and food pantries.

Josefine Gonzales, Volunteer Program Manager at Northwest Harvest, is noticing firsthand how it is impacting operations at the community markets and food banks across the state.

"People who used to volunteer are now the ones standing in lines – they find themselves needing the extra help. We are collectively working together with our food bank partners to see how we can address the need for volunteers in order to serve their community."

Despite low numbers of volunteers, operations continue strongly at our markets in SODO and Fruitvale, thanks to our agile staff and those in the community who find ways to pitch in. Reshaping our food system to include everyone – from people like Francia, farm workers in Yakama Valley, to working families all over the state - takes will and determination.

Across the state, as we enjoy the fruitful yields of the Yakama Valley, what can each of us do to ensure that everyone has access to this bounty? Please consider making a gift today to and reshape food systems to ensure everyone has access to quality sourced food. Together, we can bear the fruit of change.

What is Community Fundraising?

Community Fundraising is an easy and fun way to raise funds from your network. In about 2 minutes, you can create a dedicated online fundraiser and send the link to collect donations and share with friends, family, and colleagues. You'll be able to see when gifts are made, and you can watch them add up and meet or exceed the goal you set for your campaign!

The best part is that you don't have to handle any money and the donations go right to Northwest Harvest. It's super simple to use and great for events like office parties, wine tasting, bake sales – any way you would like to FUNdraise!

For more information, reach out to Jeff at jeffp@northwestharvest.org or 206-923-7480

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Interested in learning more about working for Northwest Harvest? Check out our job openings at northwestharvest.org/careers.

TAKING ADVANTAGE OF THE QUALIFIED CHARITABLE DISTRIBUTION

Famously stated, necessity is the mother of invention. The COVID epidemic created any number of "necessity" adaptations to our everyday lives. At Northwest Harvest, we were challenged to institute many changes to ensure we met the needs of Washingtonians facing food hardships.

One of the biggest new areas of donor giving came out of that time. The Qualified Charitable Distribution (QCD) from donors who had reached 70 1/2 years of age and had a Traditional IRA Account increased from a pre-Covid level of 19 gifts a year to over 350 QCD gifts during the height of Covid. QCD gifts continue to bring in essential support for our work.

Each individual who qualifies can gift up to \$100,000 a year if their IRA account is substantial. If they've reached 73, which is the current year in which Required Minimum Distributions must begin, their charitable donations can reduce the amount of Required Minimum Distribution they will be required to take as taxable income. We've developed a helpful document that provides a great background on how to use the QCD benefit.

If you would like to receive a copy of this document, please send an email to annek@northwestharvest.org. All QCD gifts must be submitted by December 1st.

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Corporate Spotlight : Microsoft

Cultivating a strong community of supporters is critical to the work of food justice. Organizations that share values for furthering equity and fostering opportunity are essential to dismantling barriers and building access to nutritious food for all. Northwest Harvest's over 20-year partnership with Microsoft is a testament to a shared vision of growth and investment in the community.

In October, Microsoft has their annual Giving Campaign—a tradition since 1983—to support their employees' passion for this very vision of growth. During October, employees are encouraged to support organizations in their community with gifts of time or funds which is then matched by Microsoft.

These gifts make a significant impact in supporting local organizations and nonprofits like Northwest Harvest to further a Washington without hunger. Northwest Harvest is grateful for the passion Microsoft upholds in addressing racial injustice and inequity while providing widespread access to education and professional development. Making communities better for everyone reminds us that by working together, we can create a world that is more compassionate, equitable, and just for all.

If you are a Microsoft employee and interested in workplace giving opportunities with Northwest Harvest, please contact Jeff Peterson, Annual Fund Manager at jeffp@northwestharvest.org.

PERENNIALS

The strongest of plants persist through many growing seasons, blooming or bearing fruit time and time again. Just like these plants, Northwest Harvest grows opportunity through dedicated supporters called Perennials - our essential group of recurring givers.

Recurring gifts allow our supporters to make smaller gifts throughout the year. This steady growth sets us up for a lasting future.

You can choose the frequency of your gift: weekly, monthly, quarterly. Once you start your gift, you can make changes to it anytime, such as increasing or decreasing the gift amount, pausing a month, or changing the date your gift is processed.

Perennials are important to our work; we'd love to have you join us!



To start your gift, scan this code or reach out to Jeff at jeffp@northwestharvest.org or 206-923-7480.

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