

Northeast LA Mercadito

2020 Report





Dear residents, friends and partners,

As the year comes to a close, we wanted to reflect with all of you our collective accomplishments, made possible because we worked together! When we started the Northeast LA Mercadito, we had been running some form of food delivery/distribution since April 2020 (read more about our [Community Response Initiative](#)). Among other things, we learned that food access was a top priority in our neighborhood and we were lucky to partner with Food Forward to bring free fresh produce to our community every week.

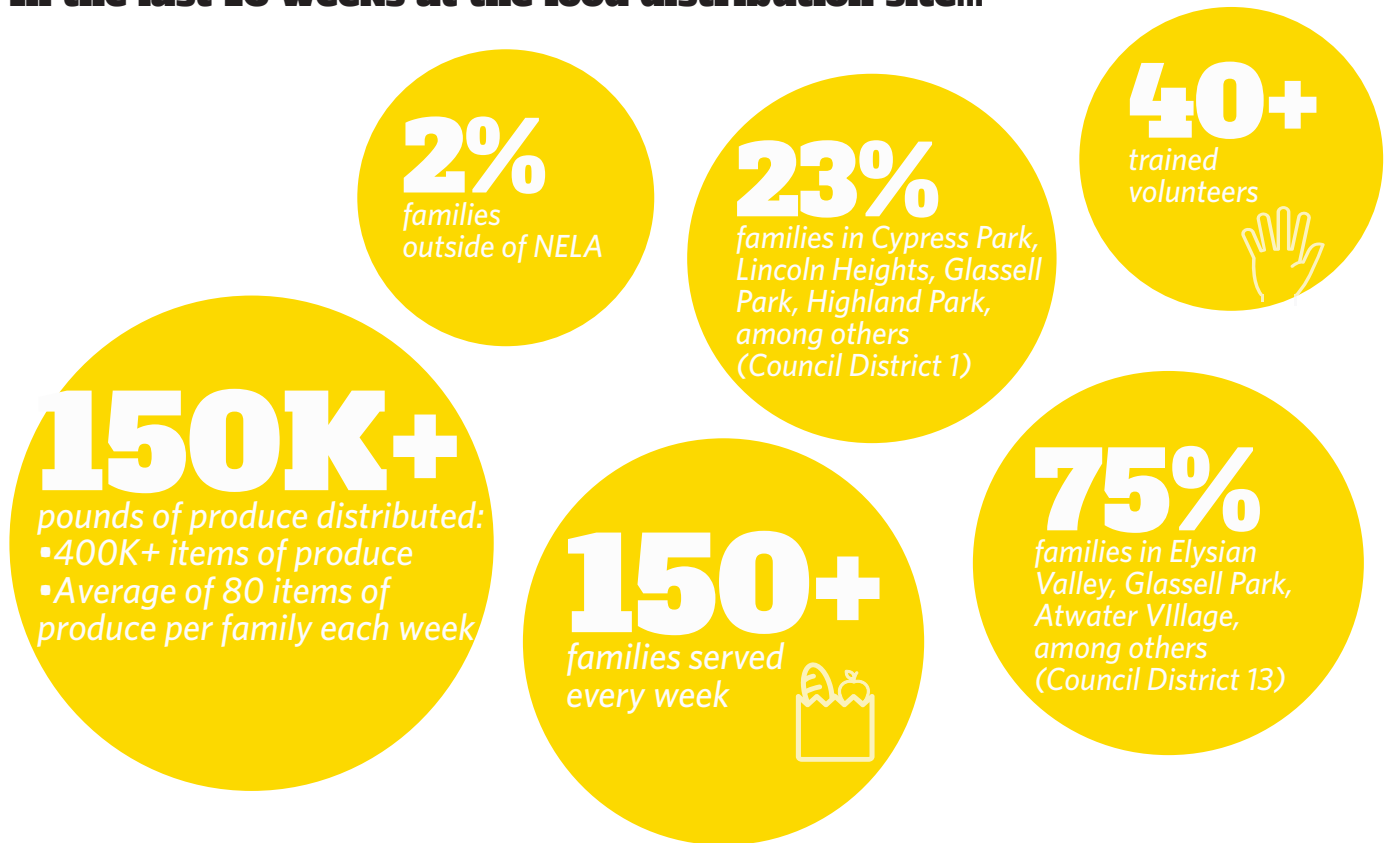
Highlights...

- Northeast LA Mercadito has been running for the last 4 months!
- Neighbors helped us spread the word about the program and we've reached 600+ families.
- To reflect the diversity of our neighbors, translation and interpretation is always available in Spanish and we're working on Vietnamese, Cantonese, and Khmer.
- Decentralized food distribution supported by our local food hub leaders helped us double the amount of families served since the first week!
- Day-of program logistics and distribution are 100% volunteer led and resident supported.
- With support from Food Forward and Landmark Global, we were able to serve families during the weeks of Thanksgiving and Christmas.

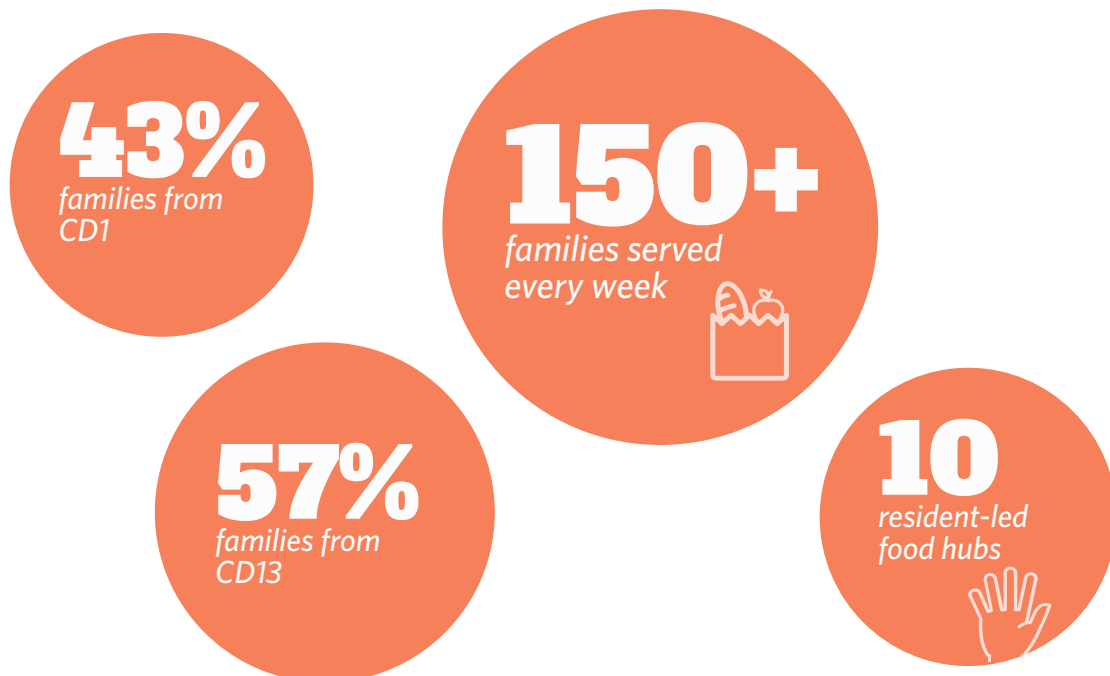


Northeast LA Mercadito: By the Numbers

In the last 16 weeks at the food distribution site...



In the last 10 weeks at the decentralized food hubs...



With Support From

Partner Organizations:

- Elysian Valley Community Garden (hub host)
- Food Forward (produce provider)
- LA Compost (waste mitigation)
- Landmark Global (trucking support)
- LA Works (volunteer coordination)
- Elysian Valley Neighborhood Watch (outreach)
- Elysian Valley Senior Group (outreach)
- Accion Comunitaria (produce distribution)
- EFRA Partners (off site amenities)
- Council District 13 (resource referrals + logistics).

Produce:

- At least 6 different types of fresh fruits and vegetables every week.
- So far, we have distributed 26+ varieties of produce: apples, asparagus, avocados, bananas, bell peppers, brussels sprouts, cabbage, cauliflower, celery, cucumbers, eggplant, grapefruit, grapes, jicama, lettuce, limes, melons, onions, oranges, potatoes, spinach, squash, strawberries, sweet peas, tomatoes, watermelon, *and much more!*

Additional donations from:

- Bub and Grandma's - bread
- Farm LA - lima bean kits
- SUAY LA - additional produce
- Friends of the LA River - reusable bags
- AltaFoodcraft - coffee and tea
- *Plus the guavas, thai limes and cookies that our neighbors bring for volunteers!*

Funding Partners:

- CIT Bank
- LISC LA





How It Works

From the beginning, we wanted to build out a local food program that was led by residents and volunteers, in an environment that was safe and dignified.

- **Name It! |** Our Engagement Lead, Liliana Sanchez, pitched a few ideas of names for the program that keep the food distribution concept broad. That is how we ended up with the name Northeast LA Mercadito.
- **Find A Site |** We reached out to Cyndi Hubach who runs the Elysian Valley Community Garden which also serves as a contact-free drop-off site for LA Compost. We discussed schedules and logistics, learning from how LA Compost was running their own program. Their experience and expertise with food were invaluable.
- **Recruiting Volunteers |** We connected with local community leaders like Ceci Dominguez who runs the Elysian Valley Senior Group, local nonprofit LA Works, and volunteers from our previous initiative

to get 12 people on site every week, working in two to three separate shifts to be able to maintain social distance guidelines.

- **Getting the Word Out |** We struggled to find the “right” way to do outreach, especially given the constraints from COVID-19. We developed a mass text system and posted flyers on community boards. Our neighbor David De La Torre announced the program on the Elysian Valley Neighborhood Watch newsletter and at the local church. Overall, word of mouth was the most effective, with over 70% of residents telling us they have referred a friend or family member.
- **On Site Logistics |** We wanted resident’s experience of the program to be welcoming and tailored to their needs which is why we decided the layout would be an open air market with residents choosing the type and quantity of produce they want. Our partner, Landmark Global, brings six pallets of food to our site every week, volunteers sort through produce to compost, and residents and food hub leaders come by in a three-hour period to pick up produce.

Creating An Iterative Program

Once our main logistics were figured out, we spent a lot of time listening to residents and volunteers to make adjustments to fit their needs. Some of the things that have shifted along the way:

- Knowing online registration would not be accessible to everyone, we also offer a 2-hr call-in registration on Wednesdays.
- Volunteers make about 12 contact-free deliveries every week to seniors and/or families who have been exposed to COVID-19 and are quarantining.
- Seniors and people who need special accommodations are encouraged to come early before any of the registered families pick up.



Learning from Community

At the beginning of the pandemic, we were not food experts but we didn't have to figure it out alone. We reached out to folks involved in similar mutual aid efforts and found a lot of support.

One Northeast LA grassroots organization, Accion Comunitaria, has been especially successful in distributing food through a weekly volunteer-led operation which is headed by Teresa Roman. Teresa agreed to be our first food hub leader, picking up enough produce to distribute to 60 families every week which has allowed her to expand their operations.

Teresa is also inspiring other community members who want to support their neighbors to start their own hyperlocal volunteer-led distributions in Highland Park, Glassell Park and El Sereno.



Photo provided by Alex Solis.



What's Next

In the new year, we hope to support the transition of the Northeast Mercadito into a program that is community led and owned, enabling our small team at LA Más to focus on the following issues that we have heard from our community:

- **People's employment is at risk, but their bills are still due:** As families struggle with furloughs and layoffs, some have turned to the informal economy as their sources of income.
- **Residents are preparing for mass evictions:** Leaders like Teresa Roman, have been partnering with the local Tenants Union to inform their neighbors about their rights and advocate for them in times of crisis.
- **Food access will continue to be a priority:** Our food hub leaders are already reaching more people in many different ways. Some are making signs with their neighbors, one is setting up in front of a



local church, others are delivering. We will continue to support their efforts and try to connect residents to additional resources.

- **Building trusting relationships:** We continue to listen to stories of the barriers that residents are experiencing to secure employment, stay housed or ensure that their children can engage in learning. These are difficult conversations but we need to make time and create space for them.

We thank all the community members who have trusted us in this process. Our community is strong but we will need additional support and investment, especially now as covid-19 cases continue to surge and we continue to hear that food, rent relief and employment opportunities are top priorities.



LA MÁS