

# Bakers Across the Country Are Using Their Breads and Pastries to Give Back to Their Communities—Here's How

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Meet bakers from all around the United States who are sharing their oven-fresh goodies as a way to do a little good.

By Bridget Shirvell  
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Credit: Courtesy of ACQ Bakery

Before the pandemic, food photographer [Aliza Sokolow](#) went on multiple trips a year with the [Joint Distribution Committee](#), a Jewish relief organization that does social impact work in developing countries. When the pandemic hit, not only were the trips put on hold, but the Los Angeles-based photographer lost all of her work; still, Sokolow remained committed to doing something that would have a positive impact on her community. "Once it felt safe to go out a bit in April, I started [baking challah](#) and selling it to a few people and donating 50

percent of the proceeds to charities I wanted to give back to just to give myself something to do," Sokolow said. "It took off and has allowed me to give back for the last ten months. It's a privilege to give people a prize for helping me give back."

Amidst the darkness of the last ten months, a number of bakers have used bread and other baked goods to fight racism, feed frontline workers, and confront many of the other systemic challenges we are facing. In the process, they're making their little corners of the world brighter, bringing joy at a time when so many of us needed it the most.

## ADVERTISING

When he was furloughed from New York City restaurant Aska, Tyler Lee Steinbrenner converted his apartment into a small bakery. He began baking loaves for Honey's x Cafe Forsaken meal drops for frontline workers and Woodbine, an experimental community hub which started a food pantry in the early spring of 2020. "This whole project began as an initiative for mutual-aid in NYC," said Steinbrenner, who taught himself wild-leavening techniques while working and living in Thailand in 2017. His ACQ Milk Bread, a flour and rice porridge folded into an organic milk, butter, and egg yolk mixture, quickly became popular with New Yorkers.

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Committed to continuing mutual aid efforts and baking bread for New York City residents and restaurants for years to come, Steinbrenner moved his bakery ACQ Bread Co. (the ACQ stands Anti-Conquest) out of his apartment into a bakery space in Brooklyn. Individuals purchase bread directly through the website or by subscribing to one of his community-supported agriculture-like programs and he also has a wholesale business for restaurants. "I've spent my adult life as a laborer so operating a business feels like a complete privilege. In regard to this, my goal is not to profit. I hope to create an independent model which praises sustainable, organic, local, independent agriculture, and share that with people indiscriminately and with love," said Steinbrenner.

While Sokolow, Steinbrenner, and others like Mallory Cayon of FEW, which donates a pound of pasta for every item including pasta, cookie dough, and cinnamon rolls purchased to the LA Food Bank, have created new bakery models to support their communities, established bakeries such as Mah-Ze-Dahr Bakery, and Daily Driver in San Francisco have doubled down on their commitments to their communities. "Food is sustenance, and being able to provide for that is incredibly important," said Umber Ahmad, co-owner of Mah-Ze-Dahr in New York City and owner of Mah-Ze-Dahr Bakery by Knead Hospitality Design. Since it opened in Manhattan in 2016, the bakery has had a charitable component, donating a percentage of its revenue every three months to No Kid Hungry, an organization working to eradicate food insecurity in children, and regularly working with the Birthday Party Project, which creates birthday parties for children in homeless shelters. During New York's quarantine period in 2020, they baked pastries for the city's frontline workers, helping to feed thousands of

healthcare and emergency care providers despite not even being open for business. "It meant the world that we could offer even the smallest of reprieves during their crisis-filled days," said Ahmad.

Similarly, Daily Driver has donated bagels, coffee, and more to fire departments, the University of California San Francisco, and [Food Runners](#), an organization that picks up excess perishable food from local restaurants and delivers it to neighborhood food programs, since they opened. Since the beginning of the pandemic, though, they've increased UCSF donations, added donations for COVID-19 testing sites. They also plan to bring coffee and bagels to vaccination sites near them.

Back in Los Angeles, [Sokolow](#) announces the flavor of the week for This Is What I Baked (she always has plain challah and chocolate chip cookies for sale, too) on Mondays. Orders close on Wednesdays and she picks a different charity to donate the proceeds to each week. Past donations have gone to [NAMI](#), [Donor's Choose](#), which connects teachers in high-need communities with donors who want to help, [World Central Kitchen](#), and [Operation Warm](#), which donates jackets to kids in need.

While she's hoping to keep baking and donating when we get out of quarantine life, she's focusing on taking things week by week for now. "There is no shortage of other people doing great things in their communities and I am lucky enough to have created a means for me to support them," Sokolow said

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