Elisabeth Mari  
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As the Director of Urban Food Environments at UC San Diego’s Center for Community Health, Elle Mari is a tireless leader working toward reducing health disparities by transforming the health and wellbeing of our diverse communities.

As an urban agriculture advocate, Elle provides guidance to many local food system groups, projects, and policies in San Diego and across California. She directs the Live Well Community Market Program and due in large part to her leadership and vision, the Program prioritizes communities that serve low-income shoppers in Southeastern San Diego, Mid-City, Barrio Logan, Logan Heights, and Linda Vista. Working with local market owners, Elle provides support with: marketing and merchandizing of healthy fresh foods; store design and layout support; connection to local produce growers; promoting CalFresh Electronic Benefit Transfer (EBT) and Women, Infants and Children (WIC); produce handling and storage training; promotional events and media coverage; shopper and resident surveying; and connection with community and financial lending partners. Working with Ethiopian, Ghanaian, Mexican, and Middle Eastern market owners, some of her successes include:

**Neighborhood Revitalization**: Elle provided technical assistance to facilitate participation in the City of San Diego’s Storefront Improvement Program for three markets and two restaurants. This significantly improved business’s façades which proved significant in situating the local markets as the neighborhood anchor for healthy, positive changes.

**Local Grower to Neighborhood Market**: Elle is currently testing a local grower to neighborhood market produce procurement model in Linda Vista. She is currently advising and providing resources to partners to market the model in both El Cajon and National City.

**Market Layout & Design Support**: Elle is providing customized layout and design guidance to a cohort of markets that serves a diverse, low-income shopper base, located in the priority areas of Southeastern San Diego and Mid-City San Diego. These markets are receiving design materials, produce equipment, and technical assistance to support a revamped market layout focused on new and improved healthier inventory. Elle has continued to innovate and bring new ideas to our most vulnerable and food insecure communities. She has led the effort to connect many of the small to medium-sized markets to local financing and grant opportunities, as well as rebate programs for marketing improvements to help their businesses flourish. She is also developing a Healthy Community Market designation program that aims to create a model where health is the business model. This designation will not only improve the bottom line for our small businesses, but will offer residents the right to access fresh, affordable, and healthy food. This designation program is being adopted statewide under the California Department of Public Health.

In addition, Elle led a Southern California Training and Resource Center across San Diego, Imperial, San Bernardino, Riverside and Inyo counties. She built capacity and conducted 25 trainings and webinars for other public health professionals, community residents, and young adults on a variety of health equity-related topics focused on improving the livelihoods and health outcomes of California’s low-income families, ethnic communities, and low-resource neighborhoods. She brought in expertise and partnerships from a variety of individuals and organizations across the country that work on cultural competency, food justice, and health equity. Elle is also the Co-chair for the San Diego Food System Alliance and she helped with forming the countywide urban agriculture working group, championing AB551 UAIZ and more importantly, connecting community growing and food justice groups with each other and providing a platform to be heard by policymakers. AB551 aims to increase land access for urban agriculture through the use of vacant, privately owned land. Through this, she had the opportunity to advise and consult with students on campus that worked on mapping land opportunities in the City and talking to residents and stakeholders about urban agriculture.

Elle’s talent for collaboration, her commitment to food justice, and her framework of health equity and social justice make her a powerful advocate and partner to our diverse communities and neighborhoods make her an ideal candidate to receive the UCSD Exemplary Staff Employee of the Year Award. She has made a significant impact to reduce health disparities through her hard work in the community, and continues to strive for changes that will build a healthier food environment for all San Diego residents.