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**Program  
Report**

# About Urban Growers Collective

Rooted in growing food, Urban Growers Collective cultivates nourishing environments that support health, economic development, healing, and creativity through urban agriculture.

Urban Growers Collective is a Black and women-led non-profit organization and farms in Chicago, Illinois working to build a just and equitable local food system. We aim to address the inequities and structural racism that exist in the food system and in communities of color.

Research suggests that urban agriculture can produce a range of social, health and economic outcomes for communities. We believe engaging in this work will ultimately lead to healing trauma on many levels and improving the economic vitality and overall health of the communities in Chicago.



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# Message From the Directors

As we have heard too often in 2020, we are all living in “unprecedented times.” For those involved in transitioning our current food system to one rooted in racial and social justice, we know that 2020 has shed light on problems that have plagued the food system since its inception. This year revealed the systemic instabilities within our systems, institutions, and communities, and for Urban Growers Collective, it solidified the importance of our work and clarified our role in the food system and our communities.

Through the year, Urban Growers Collective has adjusted our programming to meet the emerging needs of our communities. We held safe and nurturing spaces to support healing and spark creativity both on our farms and virtually. Our team provided culturally-affirming produce to those most vulnerable to food access challenges and Covid-19. We also supported beginning farmers to grow food and collectively advance food sovereignty.

Our important work would not be possible without your financial support. We have been amazed by how many of you came together through fundraisers managed on our behalf, new partnerships, and volunteering to further our mission to create a just food system. Urban Growers Collective will be releasing our finances and funders after our audit is completed at the end of the First Quarter of 2021. Whether you are just learning about our organization or are a long-time supporter of our work, we hope that this report inspires you to stay involved with our Collective.

Sincerely,

Laurell Sims  
Co-Founder, CEO Finance  
Urban Growers Collective

Erika Allen  
Co-Founder, CEO Operations  
Urban Growers Collective



# Our



# Farms

South Chicago Farm	Grant Park	Educare	Roosevelt Square
<p>UGC's largest farm is located in Clara Shaffer Park, a space designed to engage South Chicago residents in both food and fitness activities. This 7-acre farm is home to community garden plots, our Farmer Incubator participants' farms, and farm stands during the growing season.</p>	<p>Right in downtown Chicago, this 1/2 acre "Art on the Farm" Potage farm is a partnership with the Chicago Park District and Moore Landscapes. The edible landscape teaches our Youth Corps how to grow an abundance of crops from a variety of food cultures</p>	<p>This 1/4-acre Head-Start and Early Head-start preschool garden is located in Grand Boulevard. Each classroom has its own garden plot that is planned and planted by the children. The harvested produce is given to families with children at this Start Early Fund site.</p>	<p>UGC's 1-acre urban farm lies in the center of Chicago Housing Authority's ABLA homes. Our Youth Corps decide what to grow based on community demand and sell their produce at an on-site market each week of the growing season.</p>
Jackson Park	Altgeld Garden	Commonwealth Eddison	Schulze & Burch Bakery
<p>Located in Woodlawn, the Jackson Park garden is a place where neighbors can come together to grow good, safe food on the South Side. Over 11 community gardeners steward this land preserved by the Chicago Park District.</p>	<p>A Chicago Housing Authority project located in Altgeld Gardens, this 2-acre farm is our bee sanctuary. We grow an assortment of Illinois native flowers to provide food for the bees and other native pollinators that visit our garden.</p>	<p>This ComEd project located in Bridgeport is a productive landscape cultivated by our Youth Corps that demonstrates the integration of edible vegetables, berries, and flowers into traditional home and business landscapes. Teens create dried goods, such as teas, from this garden.</p>	<p>This site provides our Youth Program participants from Bridgeport, Back of the Yards, and Little Village with opportunities for micro-enterprise development. Teens grow a variety of produce, herbs, and edible flowers that are dried to make value-added culinary and beauty products.</p>

# Program Overview

## Job Training & Education

Urban Growers Collective builds knowledge and an awareness of healthy produce, urban agriculture, and the food system. Our Job Training & Education programming provides skills to youth and adults from the community to create a strong foundation for school, work, and life.

### Farmers for Chicago: Youth Corps

Empowers teens to develop important career skills and change their local food system

### Farmers for Chicago: Adult Job Training

Provides adults seeking new pathways in life as returning citizens and job-seekers with hands on workforce experience in urban agriculture and productive landscaping

### Farmers for Chicago: Farmer Incubator

Supports beginning farmers through workshops and market opportunities with a focus on Black, Indigenous, and People of Color (BIPOC) individuals

### Educare

Engages head-start and early head-start preschoolers through age appropriate garden lessons

## Food Access

Urban Growers Collective increases access to healthy food through a variety of programs. By doing so, we hope that we can improve quality of life, ultimately improving community health, well-being, and economic vitality.

### Fresh Moves Mobile Market

Provides communities primarily located on Chicago's South and West Sides with access to produce, pantry staples, and personal care items from Black, Indigenous, and People of Color (BIPOC) growers and makers.

### Collective Supported Agriculture (CSA)

Offers weekly boxes of seasonal vegetables and herbs grown on UGC farms, supplemented with fruit and other produce from partner farms and Farmers for Chicago Incubator Farmers

### Farmers' Markets

Provides fresh, healthy food to communities on Chicago's South and West Sides that have historically lacked access

### Emergency Food Response

Distributes fresh produce boxes and prepared meals to meet emerging food needs.



## Community Outreach and Engagement

The communities we serve are at the core of all of our work. By engaging the communities around us, we work together to create nourishing environments for everyone. We believe that these spaces are essential to addressing trauma and inequality in our communities.

### Workshops & Trainings

Offers learning opportunities spanning a variety of topics led by industry experts to educate and engage participants both distance learning and in-person

### Community Gardens

Provides accessible plots of land for neighbors to grow food for themselves and their families while connecting with other community members

### Volunteer Opportunities & Internships

Allows individuals and groups to help their community, learn more about growing food, and connect with the land

# Farmers for Chicago: Youth Corps

Urban Growers Collective primarily held our 2020 Youth Corps programming remotely through video conferencing— only the first week of our Spring Youth Corps in March was able to gather in person before we adjusted our curriculum to Covid-19 protocols. Despite this, our Spring, Summer, and Fall Youth Corps programs continued to engage teens using a Science Technology Engineering Arts and Mathematics (STEAM) inquiry-based framework to explore the food system. Teens learned about the food production chain, sustainable farming, and college/career readiness through a combination of online and in-person lessons, workshops, and guest speakers.

## Hands-on Engagement, From Home

The goal of Urban Growers Collective's Youth Corps program is for teens to graduate with a comprehensive understanding of sustainable food system development and the ability to connect and communicate how the skills they've gained at the farm translate to any career path they may follow.

To achieve this, Urban Growers Collective made several adjustments to keep our Youth Corps engaged. In the Spring program, Urban Growers Collective modified our curriculum and piloted virtual engagements with teens for the first time. In the Summer program, Youth Corps received at-home grow kits from Urban Growers Collective. These kits included a wooden planter box to grow kale and chard, a reusable canvas pot to grow tomatoes, seeds, and soil. Our Youth Corps instructors held both large and small group sessions as well as 1-on-1 check-ins to support teens throughout the summer and their new gardens. In the Fall program, Urban Growers Collective was able to welcome teens back to three of our farms following strict Covid-19 guidelines. Teens were able to apply their lessons from the summer on a larger scale and connect with the land and one another.





## Guest Speakers and Artists

Throughout our programs, Urban Growers Collective invites guest speakers to expose teens to potential career pathways in the food system and beyond. These guests provide an opportunity for teens to get curious about their futures and to learn how the skills they are learning in the Youth Corps program are applied on a day-to-day basis.

This year, teens were especially excited to be working with a number of guest artists, including Alexandra Antoine (UGC Artist in Residence), Jerrell L. Henderson (Director, Professor & Puppeteer), Tria Smith (Guild Row), and the Move Me Soul dance company to create a Black butterfly collage that focus on food, wellness, and the connection between planting seeds and future growth.

The Youth Corps butterfly collages culminated in a final outdoor spectacle performance and building an Día de Muertos Ofrenda by a community based artist, Elvia Rodriguez Ochoa (Friends of the Parks) delivered by youth at Urban Growers Collective's South Chicago farm on October 31st. Urban Growers Collective was able to bring together teen participants from three program sites and the community to celebrate Urban Growers Collective's Youth Corps, and the hope it takes to plant seeds as we head into 2021.

**183 Teens  
Engaged**

**\$80,155  
Paid in  
Stipends**

**101 At-home  
Summer  
Grow Kits**



# Farmers for Chicago: Adult Job Training

Urban Growers Collective works with organizations to engage adults at high risk of gun violence in job training to expose them to urban agriculture and landscaping. In 2020, our partner Heartland Alliance and their Rapid Employment and Development Initiative (READI) participants worked on activating vacant lots and transforming them into community green spaces.

## **Reclaiming Community Spaces**

From January through March, READI Participants from North Lawndale and Englewood assisted with preparation of Urban Growers Collective's South Chicago, Jackson Park and Altgeld Garden sites.

READI participants from Englewood focused their work in 2020 on building out infrastructure at the UChicago Medicine Comprehensive Care, Community and Culture Program (C4P) lot on 63rd and King Drive for planting in 2021. They have remediated the site by laying down geo-textile and adding 18 inches of wood chips or gravel over the entire site. A 20-foot shipping container for storage and 8 wooden grow beds were installed to provide a multipurpose space and increase accessibility for C4P patients.

READI Participants from Austin have been focusing on maintenance at several Grounds for Peace locations. In November, bulbs were planted at all locations to prepare for spring blooms.

## **Partners and Collaborations**

Our Adult Job Training partners include: UChicago Medicine; Heartland Alliance READI-Austin and READI-Englewood.

**25 Adults Trained**  
**40 Community  
Members Engaged**  
**14 Vacant Lots Activated**



# Farmers for Chicago: Farmer Incubator

Urban Growers Collective's Farmers for Chicago Farmer Incubator program provides new and emerging farmers and ranchers with hands-on training in intensive urban agriculture production, post-harvest handling and wholesale volume, and business and marketing planning. Participants also receive long-term mentoring support to improve and develop farm operation viability and as a foundation for promoting food security in communities with limited food access.

To continue supporting incubating farmers in 2020, Urban Growers Collective held workshops and trainings virtually with some opportunities for in-person socially-distant workshops. Technical assistance continued throughout the growing season with weekly 1-on-1 mentoring sessions at the South Chicago Farm.

## **Warming our Hearts & Chilling our Greens**

Urban Growers Collective's South Chicago Farm received a major infrastructure update: 2 shipping containers converted into post-harvest handling and cold storage spaces. These containers will help farmers' workflow by providing an on-site space to wash and process produce after harvest beginning in 2021. The cold storage area allows farmers to cool produce, increasing longevity and freshness.



## **Growing Food for the Revolution**

Although many farmers' markets were suspended during the season due to Covid-19, many of our farmers found alternate ways to distribute their produce. Urban Growers Collective provided several market opportunities via our Collective Supported Agriculture Boxes, Covid-19 emergency food response, and weekly on-site farm stands. Farmers also organized with other organizations to provide produce and value added products to mutual aid groups, produce box distributions, and other emergency food response initiatives to feed our communities.

**13 BIPOC Farmers Incubating  
8 Farm Businesses Developing  
32 Workshops & Trainings**



# Educare

Educare Chicago is a high-quality Early Head Start and Head Start program in Chicago's Grand Boulevard community. Educare helps prepare children for kindergarten and a lifetime of school success. Their program offers a safe, comfortable, and fun environment that inspires a child's natural curiosity and helps them develop a lifelong love of learning.

Educare's education and family support services will give the tools needed to help children realize their full potential. Since 2013, each classroom at Educare has had its own garden plot that is planned and planted by the children. Urban Growers Collective cultivates a larger farm on site that children help plant, maintain, and harvest. The harvested produce is given to families with children at this Start Early Fund facility.

## **Back to School and Back on the Farm**

Children returned to the outdoor farm in August! As the school increased capacity, more and more children returned to our outdoor farming program. In September, children explored colors, insects, math, and science while helping to harvest for their classrooms and families.

Typically the program ends in October, but because the school was closed May-July, we extended our hours through November. The children had the opportunity to decorate miniature pumpkins, plant flower bulbs and garlic, and prepare a large harvest for the Thanksgiving holiday.

A photograph of a woman and a young child in a garden. The woman, on the right, has her hair in a bun with a purple headband and is wearing a white sleeveless top and blue jeans. She is smiling and looking down at the child. The child, on the left, is wearing a blue and white striped shirt and is reaching out with both hands towards a large green leafy plant. The background shows a wooden fence and a field of tall grass under a bright sky. The text '78+ Youth and their Families Engaged' is overlaid in the top left corner.

**78+ Youth  
and their  
Families  
Engaged**

# Fresh Moves Mobile Market

Urban Growers Collective's goal is to bring the benefits of healthy, locally-grown produce and other nutritious foods to Chicago's communities while supporting the growth of Chicago's urban farmers. Our Fresh Moves Mobile Market is a bus that has been converted into a mobile farmers' market. The "produce aisle on wheels" works toward closing the 'food access gap' by bringing produce to schools and community and health centers — places that folks already frequent — to help communities easily access nutritious produce.

During Covid-19, the Fresh Moves Mobile Market paused operations as Urban Growers Collective pivoted towards our emergency food response. Fresh Moves relaunched on November 9, 2020 on a new bus with an expanded selection. UGC-grown produce is supplemented by prepared meals and pantry staples like pasta, coffee and tea, beans, and other dried goods from local and BIPOC producers.

## Moving Towards Resiliency

The Fresh Moves Mobile Market Fresh Moves relaunch is a renewed opportunity to support healthy dietary choices by consistently increasing access to food at our partner sites, including schools, churches, and health and community centers. This collective approach creates a web of support to reverse diet-related diseases and health disparities.

Urban Growers Collective works with our site partners to provide affordable food by providing \$10 vouchers to partners to distribute to their communities. Vouchers can be used like cash for any products on the bus or can be exchanged for one pre-packed bag of produce and products Fresh Moves also accepts cash, credit or debit, Senior Farmers Market Nutritional Program Vouchers, and LINK/SNAP benefits. LINK/SNAP benefit purchases are also eligible to receive up to \$25 in matching double value vouchers to redeem at their next purchase.





# 1 New Fresh Moves Bus

## 70+ Different Produce & Products

### 15 Weekly Stops on the South and West Sides of Chicago

#### **Bringing People Together Through Food and Art**

The new Fresh Moves Mobile Market vehicle was designed by Urban Growers Collective's Artist in Residence Alexandra Antoine. Alexandra created a multi-media collage of our staff and program participants, fresh produce and pasta from our sponsor Barilla America to create a beautiful design.

To celebrate the launch of the new vehicle, Barilla US sponsored a cook-along in November to benefit Urban Growers Collective. People gathered virtually to enjoy pasta recipes by Chef Erick Williams of Virtue Restaurant and Chef Nyasha Arrington, as well as performances by DJ CAVEM and Red Clay Dance Company.



# Collective Supported Agriculture & Farm Stands

## Collective Supported Agriculture

Urban Growers Collective launched a Collective Supported Agriculture (CSA) program that provides a seasonal array of vegetables and culinary herbs grown on Urban Growers Collective farms. CSA shares gave households a 4-week subscription, allowing them to choose which months they received produce. The CSA boxes consisted of 12-15 UGC vegetables and were supplemented with fruit from Seedling Farm, vegetables grown by farmer partners, and produce from our Incubator Farmers. Shares were offered monthly for pickup at the South Chicago Farm, one of our partner locations, or for delivery for an additional fee.

**226 Total CSA Shares**

**116 Participating Households**

**904 CSA Boxes Delivered**



## Farm Stands

In addition to our Roosevelt Square Farm Stand, the South Chicago Farm Stand launched in 2020 and was held every Saturday from July 11 through October 31. The farm stands offered a variety of produce from Urban Growers Collective farms, Farmers for Chicago beginning farmers, Seedling Farms fruit, and non-local produce staples.

The farm stands provided another market opportunity for Farmers for Chicago beginning farmers while also allowing community members to utilize their Senior Farmers Market Nutritional Program Vouchers, and LINK/SNAP benefits. Similarly to the Fresh Moves Mobile Market, our Farm Stand matched LINK/SNAP benefit purchases up to \$25 in double value vouchers.

# 17 Farm Stand Saturdays



# Emergency Food Response

Urban Growers Collective works with our partners to coordinate a community-based emergency food response that distributes both fresh produce boxes and prepared meals. Produce boxes are distributed and designed to feed a family of 4 for a week. Boxes contain an assortment of culturally-affirming produce that is consumable raw or cooked, as well as a recipe card for suggested healthy and tasty meals. ChiFresh Kitchens, Cooperative Visionarias, and Majani supplied prepared meals provide food to those who are not able to prepare food due to housing status, culinary skill, or time constraints.

## Building a Community-Based Response

To get food out to our communities, Urban Growers Collective initially started with outreach to our Fresh Moves Mobile Market site partners. These organizations include health centers, schools, senior centers, and other social service agencies.

Our partners collected information from the people they serve to identify individuals and households most at need. Many of the people identified fall into demographics that are particularly vulnerable to Covid-19, including individuals who have disabilities, are medically fragile, are experiencing homelessness or who are unstably housed, are homebound, are undocumented, have had contact with the justice system, and are domestic violence survivors. These partnerships increase the overall resiliency of our food system, and by building working relationships, we can adapt quickly to address future emergencies.

## Partnerships and Collaborations

Urban Growers Collective partnered with the Chicago Food Policy Action Council to develop a squad to address the immediate needs of our community and support transitions towards resilience. Partnered with ChiFresh Kitchen, Cooperativa Visionarias, and Majani— all Black, Indigenous or People of Color (BIPOC) operated food businesses — to provide the culturally appropriate, nutritious meals to feed individuals and families in need. Midwest Foods, a woman-owned, family-run produce distributor supplemented our farm produce with additional wholesale produce to round out the produce box selections. Urban Growers Collective also worked with Gourmet Gorilla to coordinate recipients for their USDA Farmers to Families Food Box Program award.

**35+ Community Partners**

**18,939+ Produce Boxes  
Distributed**

**19,230+ Produce Boxes  
Coordinated**

**19,632+ Prepared Meals  
Distributed**

**1,150,000+ Pounds of Food  
Distributed**



# Workshops & Trainings

Urban Growers Collective provides workshops and trainings available to community members interested in learning more about urban agriculture and the food system. Trainings and workshops were held virtually with some in-person opportunities available for a small group of participants following Covid-19 safety guidelines.

## Topics and Guest Facilitators

Urban Growers Collective staff lead workshops on a variety of topics, including farm business planning, mushroom cultivation, and bed preparation. To provide a larger variety of topics to our community, we partner with farmers in our Farmers for Chicago Incubator Program, local organizations, and local, national, and international growers. Urban Growers Collective's partnership with the University of Illinois Extension and the Chicago Food Policy Action Council provided additional workshops covering topics ranging from integrated pest management, cover crops, and food safety training.

Other guest facilitators led workshops on spiritual herbalism, creating home apothecaries, food as medicine, using food to strengthen immune systems, and African beekeeping methods.



## **Addressing Financial Barriers**

Urban Growers Collective wants to ensure that finances are not a barrier to those who are interested in participating in the workshops and trainings. To address this, Urban Growers Collective implemented a pay-what-you-can model for registrants. At registration, participants could pay the standard event price or contribute an additional donation on top of their registration fee to cover the cost of those who were not able to afford it. These costs were given as scholarships to participants with demonstrated financial need to cover the entire workshop cost.

**32 Workshops & Trainings**

**634 Participants**

**445 Scholarships Awarded**

# Community Garden Plots

Urban Growers Collective opened its Community Garden plots at the South Chicago and Jackson Park Farms during the Summer in accordance with Covid-19 guidelines from the Chicago Park District. Community Gardeners had the opportunity to cultivate up to three 10' by 10' plots on our two farms.

Urban Growers Collective asks for \$25 for each garden plot to cover the cost of tools and compost. However, Urban Growers Collective offered plots free of charge for those that have demonstrated financial need.





**11 Jackson Park Gardeners**  
**15 South Chicago Gardeners**  
**3,500 Square Feet Cultivated**



# Volunteers & Internships

## Volunteers

Urban Growers Collective was pleased to welcome volunteers to our farms in accordance with Covid-19 safety protocols. Volunteers got their hands dirty and assisted with a variety of farm work, including weeding, watering, harvesting, planting, and even building a hoop house. This year, the program saw a massive influx of new volunteers. To accommodate volunteers who wanted to assist with farm work on a regular basis, Urban Growers Collective developed a recurring volunteer schedule.

## Internships

Urban Growers Collective continues to provide hands-on internships for young professionals interested in learning more about urban agriculture and the food system. Interns work alongside UGC staff learning tangible skills and play a key role in our day-to-day operations. In 2020, Urban Growers Collective was excited to work with four interns on cultivating our farms, working with our Youth Corps program, and assisting with our food access programming.



A geodesic dome structure, possibly a greenhouse or a community center, is the central focus of the image. It is surrounded by lush greenery and yellow flowers in the foreground. The background shows a large, dark, circular shadow cast on a light-colored surface, suggesting the dome is in a bright, open area. The overall scene is bright and vibrant, with a mix of natural and man-made elements.

**833 Total Volunteers**  
**68 Recurring Volunteers**  
**2,600+ Hours Logged**  
**4 Interns Engaged**

# Green Era Renewable Energy & Urban Farm Campus

The Green Era Renewable Energy and Urban Farming Campus is a developing renewable energy facility in the Auburn Gresham Community. The project will be built on a contaminated brownfield site in an area of Auburn Gresham that has been vacant for decades, addressing the urgent need for environmental cleanup, local food production, and economic development. The 9-acre campus will house a 2-acre anaerobic digester and a 7-acre urban farm campus.

The campus is a project in partnership with Urban Growers Collective, Green Era NFP, Green Era Sustainability, and the Greater Auburn Gresham Development Corporation, who were collectively awarded the inaugural 2020 Chicago Prize by the Pritzker-Traubert Foundation.

## Renewable Energy and Nutrient-rich Soil

Using anaerobic digestion, the campus will divert inedible food waste from landfills. Anaerobic digestion is a natural biological process that breaks down organic matter into biogas and nutrient-rich compost. The biogas can be converted into high quality Renewable Natural Gas (RNG), a clean, renewable base load supply of energy. This provides communities and businesses with a green and local supply of gas to enhance system flexibility and meet growing energy needs, all without building new pipelines. Anaerobic digestion can divert food waste, mitigate climate change, and provide employment opportunities in a growing industry.



## 2021 Plans and Next Steps

The anaerobic digester will begin operations in Spring 2022, with the campus to open to the public soon after. Until then, Urban Growers Collective is working with its partners and community stakeholders in a community design charrette process. This process will ensure that community stakeholders are able to participate in the development of the campus. From the charrettes, a final community building design, draft budget for the building, and construction guidance will be developed.



# Get Involved

## What can you do in 2021?

Thank you for all of your support in 2020. Without you, much of our work would not be possible. Here are some ways you can stay involved:

### **Donate**

Support our work by making a contribution on our website, [www.urbangrowerscollective.org](http://www.urbangrowerscollective.org)

### **Volunteer**

One-time, recurring, and group volunteer sessions available

### **Tour Our Farms**

Schedule individual or group tours by contacting [info@urbangrowerscollective.org](mailto:info@urbangrowerscollective.org)

### **Attend a Workshop**

Learn more about a variety of topics from composting to herbalism and using food as medicine

### **Purchase Our Products**

Visit the Fresh Moves Mobile Market, Farm Stand, or Collective Supported Agriculture for fresh produce and value-added products

### **Reserve a Plot**

Grow your own garden in our community gardens, located at our Jackson Park and South Chicago Farms

### **Follow Us on Social Media**

Connect with us on Facebook and Instagram @urbangrowerscollective and on Twitter @ugrowcollective

### **Share Our Work**

Boost our reach by sharing our work with people you know who are passionate about what we do