Urban Growers Collective

Rooted in Growing Food, we cultivate nourishing environments which support health, economic development, healing and creativity through urban agriculture.

The Drinking Gourd

The inspiration for our logo is the legacy of the Drinking Gourd. “Follow the Drinkin’ Gourd” was a song used by conductors of the Underground Railroad to guide slaves to freedom using the Big Dipper, or in African culture the imagery of the drinking gourd. Using the north star as the guide, enslaved peoples found their way to freedom. Our vision is through activism and growing food, we give the tools to foster individual growth and opportunities for freedom.

Primary Areas of Focus

- Urban Agriculture Production
- Youth Mentoring and Education
- Adult Education and Workforce Development
- Farmer Incubation
- Human and Environmental Resilience

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Primary Objectives and Related Outcomes for the Urban Growers Collective

Primary Goal: Deepen training and engagement of young people and hard-to-employ adults, who are struggling to improve their quality of life through urban agriculture. In 2018, our goal is to be in full-production with the current built infrastructure, to complete additional hoop houses (greenhouses) for year-round growing, as well as establishing perennial bed zones and ecological buffers.

Objective 1: Support for staffing and materials that are needed for year-round food production.

Outcome 1a: Seedling production and education greenhouse produces farm seedlings for all 7-farm sites; Incubator Farmer participants have space to establish spring crops; and seedlings are sold to gardeners and other farmers.

Outcome 1b: UGC increases its local food production by 10% as a result of support. Results reflected in the increase of food production and sales.

Objective 2: Establish the compost and vermicompost operations at the South Chicago Farm.

Outcome 2a: Partnerships are finalized and begun with the Chicago Park District and Loyola University to support the expansion of the compost inputs with equipment shares, as well as delivery of herbaceous wastes to the South Chicago Farm.

Outcome 2b: Master compost classes are hosted at South Chicago Farm for the general public.

Outcome 2c: Sufficient compost is produced for farm projects and gardens.

Outcome 2d: Records and measurement of waste diverted and compost produced on site.

The Farmers for Chicago Job-Readiness Program is composed of three distinct projects areas: teen education, farmer incubation, and transitional job trainings. Established in 2004, our Youth Corps curriculum is rooted in hands-on, experiential learning rooted in sustainable urban agriculture, ecology and local community food system development with a S.T.E.A.M. framework that reflects the interdisciplinary nature of the complex food system and serves 300 Chicago teens annually. The CHI-READI Transitional Job Training Partnership for adult men with limited employment options and experience is done in partnership with Heartland Alliance to support 18-months of intensive job training in agricultural technologies and environmental resiliency. Finally, our Farmer Incubation program provides long-term technical training, business consulting and land tenure for individuals hoping to start a small farm enterprise.
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Youth Mentoring and Education

**Objective 3:** Provide training and support to 200-300 Youth Corps Growers to be successful in school and their emotional and self-care development (self-reported)

- **Outcome 3a:** Youth express direct connection between increased stability and well-being due to UGC education.

- **Outcome 3b:** Ten young adults are mentored year-round in preparation for summer programming. Measurement: Saturday program established by young adults.

- **Outcome 3c:** UGC Program has resources for supplies to initiate youth project ideas and entrepreneurial pilots.

Farmer Incubation

**Objective 4:** Farmers for Chicago supports 7 growers for the 2018 season at the South Chicago and Altgeld Farm sites.

- **Outcome 4a:** Farmers meet their annual production and sales goals and objectives.

- **Outcome 4b:** Farmers cooperate on a CSA or Farm Stand offering to support the South Chicago community.

- **Outcome 4c:** Farmers are provided with monthly workshops that enrich and expand their skills and support their economic development.

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**Adult Job-Training**

**Objective 5:** Chicago READI (workforce program in collaboration with Heartland Alliance) is provided with a workforce-training placement.

**Outcome 5a:** UGC is able to build urban farm infrastructures in exchange for training crews.

**Outcome 5b:** UGC meets its mission to impact equity and provide pathways to freedom through the employment training experience and skill-building of formerly incarcerated or under-employed African American men.

**Outcome 5c:** Trained workforce that can be employed in future endeavors by employers in Chicago.

**Strategic Planning**

**Objective 6:** Urban Growers Collective will develop a robust and aspirational strategic plan in the first quarter of 2018 that will be revised and receive board approved in 2018.

**Outcome 6a:** UGC will build on the visions and dreams of its staff, community partners and advisors within a framework that can be understood and achieved by staff, board of directors, volunteers and funders.

**Outcome 6b:** Continue to build a strong development program and evaluation protocols that provide meaningful data on the social and economic impacts of the Urban Growers Collective endeavors.