



2020 ANNUAL REPORT

# **ADVOCATES FOR URBAN AGRICULTURE**

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[www.auachicago.org](http://www.auachicago.org)  
[info@auachicago.org](mailto:info@auachicago.org)

# A MESSAGE FROM OUR EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

2020 is a year we will never forget. We have experienced the spread of the pandemic, national movements for racial justice, a historic presidential debate, and more. As a result, we've been forced to make radical shifts in our daily lives — how we live, work, educate, connect, etc.

Parallel to these major shifts in our world, AUA has experienced significant shifts of its own. In 2020, we grew our staff to five, added several new board members, re-granted over \$200,000 to Chicagoland growers, adapted existing programs to a virtual setting, established three new grower-focused programs, and co-led efforts to establish a more equitable water policy.



In the midst of all of this, our team has been a witness to the resilience of the human spirit through our work with Chicago's urban growers. Their work has continuously inspired our team to continue learning, adapting, and responding during these challenging times. As we close out the year and enter into 2021, we find ourselves at a critical inflection point, reflecting on AUA's past accomplishments and shortcomings, while reimagining our role in creating a more just and equitable food system that centers the voices of growers.

Each week, our team comes together for 'AUA University' to collectively discuss a book on our food system. Recently, our team has been reading *Braiding Sweetgrass*, a powerful novel on science and food from indigenous perspectives. Robin Wall Kimmerer, the author, says, "Action on behalf of life transforms [...] As we work to heal the earth, the earth heals us."

As we look back on 2020, we are humbled by the challenges we've experienced, energized by the lessons we've learned, and grateful for the support of the many individuals and organizations who make our work possible. Your support inspires our team to continue working with growers, local communities, and food system partners to bring about healing for each other and our earth.

**WITH GRATITUDE,  
SEAN RUANE**

# NEW STAFF



## BEA FRY

*Development Coordinator*  
*Bea@auachicago.org*

Bea hails from St. Paul, Minnesota and is a recent transplant to Chicago. They hold a B.A. in International Relations and a B.S. in Food Studies from Syracuse University. Their background includes research on violations of the Human Right to Adequate Food and Nutrition for transgender people of color. Bea is passionate about creating and maintaining a food system which is equitable for the LGBTQIA+ community and racial minorities, promoting the integration of international human rights rhetoric into the foundation of local food systems.

As AUA's Development Coordinator, Bea coordinates AUA's re-granting programs, leads fundraising initiatives, as well as supports grant writing. In their first year with AUA, Bea organized the transformation of AUA's annual Grown In Chicago Soiree into a virtual event. Through the Grown in Chicago Soiree & the virtual campaign, Bea helped AUA surpass our fundraising goal of \$10,000. Bea facilitated the first Capacity Building Grant advisory committee, a group of six Chicagoland growers and food system leaders, in re-granting \$85,000 to 11 urban farms.

Bea brings a positive, infectious energy in their dedication to accessibility and racial justice, inspiring our team to be progressively equitable in our work.



## EMILY O'KEEFFE

*Marketing & Communications Coordinator*  
*Emily@auachicago.org*

Emily is originally from the Southwest side of Chicago and has an MBA in Marketing & a BA in Environmental Policy. For the past several years, Emily has worked as an Events & Marketing Coordinator within the bar & restaurant industry of Chicago, hosting events that have contributed to nonprofit fundraising & community development, including events for urban farms and farmers markets. Emily looks forward to working with AUA to refocus her passion for environmental justice & use her experience to promote the education, advocacy & development of urban agriculture in Chicago.

In her first year with AUA, Emily significantly bolstered AUA's marketing and communications initiatives. By featuring urban farms & growers on a weekly basis, Emily amplified the work of the urban agriculture community by sharing stories about the realities of growing food in Chicago & informing the public about opportunities to get involved. Emily's event planning experience was also critical to the success of AUA's Grown in Chicago Virtual Soiree. In 2021, Emily will be more directly supporting AUA's policy work, specifically surrounding water access.

Emily's passion, work ethic, & commitment to community development motivates our team to continue learning, growing, and striving for more.

# BOARD AND ASSOCIATE BOARD

*"Bringing on a new Executive Director and undergoing a strategic planning process is challenging in the best of years and our board and staff rose to the occasion. Despite challenges, our board was able to support growth in fundraising and advocacy. And we are deeply proud to see many years of work establishing our regrants program come to fruition in a year when our community needed it most. I am grateful to be a part of such an amazing group of people and I look forward to seeing where our new vision for the future of AUA takes us in 2021."*

**LEAH LAWSON, AUA BOARD PRESIDENT**

AUA's Board of Directors is a talented and passionate group of growers, lawyers, engineers, scientists, and non profit leaders dedicated to supporting and expanding sustainable urban agriculture in the Chicagoland region.

In 2020, board members helped AUA co-lead efforts to establish a more equitable water policy, raise over \$130,000 in support of the COVID-19 Farmer Support Grant, and launch new programs. AUA's board and staff concluded 2020 by going through a strategic planning process. This process enabled our team to build stronger relationships, reflect on AUA's past work, and establish a vision and strategic plan for the future.

**In 2020, we welcomed three new board members: Akilah Martin, Paul Krysik, and Selma Sims.**



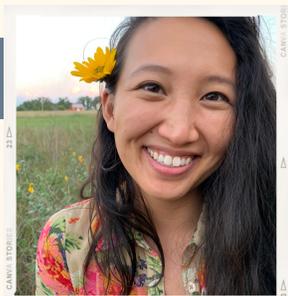
**AKILAH MARTIN**



**PAUL KRYSIK**



**SELMA SIMS**



**ALI DAY (YUEN)**

**AUA is also excited to announce Ali Day (Yuen) as the new Associate Board president!**

Ali is a collective grower, leader, & beekeeper at El Paseo Community Garden in Pilsen, and recently completed U of I Extension's Master Urban Farmer Training Program. Ali has been a member of our Associate Board since 2019, during which she has been a Ward Ambassador, participated in Food Action Sovereignty Days, outreach events and workshops, and has advocated for home growers and urban farmers to have access to the resources needed to grow food for themselves.



*Otis Fresh Market*

# GROWER TO GROWER PROGRAMS

## FARMER TO FARMER MENTORSHIP

In December, AUA launched the second cohort of the **Farmer to Farmer Mentorship Program**. This initiative matches beginning farmers with experienced farmers to share knowledge while fostering mutually beneficial relationships. This year we welcome 35 new cohort members, made up of beginning and experienced farmers and animal and bee keepers.

**35** NEW MEMBERS

**3** COUNTIES

**37** FARM/  
GARDEN SITES



## GROW WITH US : ONLINE LIVE SESSIONS

The **Grow with Us: Online Live Sessions** were launched in 2020 to help individuals improve their growing practices at home.

These monthly **live, virtual** sessions featured local urban agriculture experts providing workshops on a variety of growing practices — **Seed Saving** with Trickster Cultural Center, **Season Extension** with Windy City Harvest, **Interplanting/Crop Rotation** with Cedillo's Fresh Produce, and more.

We look forward to announcing our 2021 workshop schedule and featured growers!

# REGRANTING



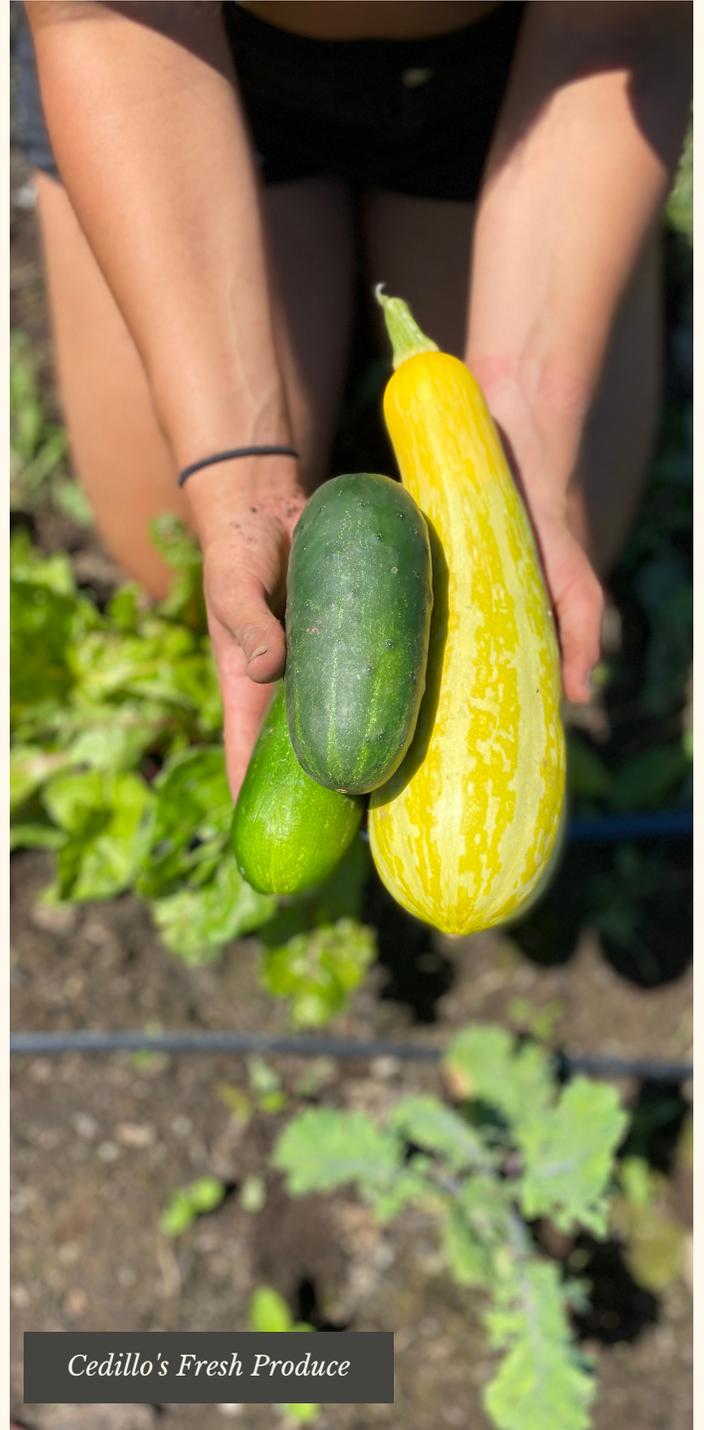
78

GRANTS  
AWARDED



+\$200k

GRANT FUNDS  
AWARDED



*Cedillo's Fresh Produce*

## COVID-19 RESPONSE

Following the emergence of the COVID-19 pandemic, AUA, in partnership with **Food:Land:Opportunity** and **Slow Food Chicago**, launched two rounds of a Farmer Support Grant to provide growers with emergency support for their operations. Between the two rounds, AUA distributed **\$124,000 through 67 grants to Chicagoland farms and gardens.**

## CAPACITY BUILDING GRANT

In August, AUA launched its first Capacity Building grant. This grant was designed to support growers in scaling up their operations and increasing their capacity. With an advisory committee of 6 amazing growers, organizers, and community members, AUA granted **\$85,000 to 11 Chicagoland farm businesses.**



Mint Creek Farm

# GOOD PRACTICES FOR GROWING IN CHICAGO

Our Good Practices for Growing in Chicago program provides growers with a guide to business and good growing practices, as well as the training and mentorship necessary to achieve them. We believe that creating access to professional development for growers will result in farm operations that are:

- (1) Financially viable
- (2) Producing safe, quality products,
- (3) Prepared for new opportunities,
- (4) Responsive to the communities around them

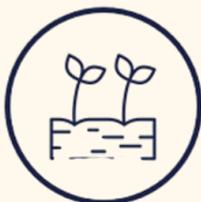
## ONLINE SELF ASSESSMENT TOOL

In 2020, we launched our **Good Practices for Growing in Chicago Self Assessment Tool** to help growers assess and improve their businesses in six core categories: business and market development, soil safety, water safety, food safety, farmer safety & social impacts.

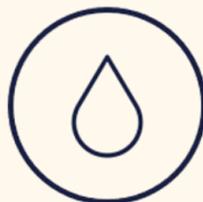
The tool will be available in Spring of 2021.



Business & Market Development



Soil Safety



Water Safety



Food Safety



Farmer Safety & Labor Practices



Relationships & Education



Earl's Garden, Mae's Kitchen

# COMMUNITY EVENTS



*By participating in events & volunteer opportunities focused on food sovereignty, you have supported the right of people to define their own food & agricultural practices. Thank you!*



•40 GROWING OPERATIONS

## FOOD SOVEREIGNTY ACTIONS DAYS

Our [Food Sovereignty Action Days](#) brought more than 60 volunteers to help at 4 local growing operations by providing hands-on labor support. This program works to forge new relationships across the city between community-based growing projects & volunteers.



•50 VOLUNTEERS

## WINDY CITY COOP TOUR

The 2020 [Windy City Coop Tour](#) promoted urban livestock across Chicago by featuring 22 operations showcasing backyard poultry, eco-yards, & urban livestock operations. By welcoming visitors to experience backyard livestock in an urban setting, we are demonstrating how we can all be part of the movement towards sustainable yards.



•450 ATTENDEES

## URBAN LIVESTOCK EXPO

With 14 speakers, 20 workshops, 3 farm tours, and a variety of resource vendors, AUA's 2020 [Urban Livestock Expo](#) successfully demonstrated how urban livestock is an important component of urban agriculture to over 300 guests.

# WATER POLICY

**IN 2020, THE DEPARTMENT OF WATER MANAGEMENT (DWM) MADE CHANGES TO THE HYDRANT PERMIT POLICY THAT SIGNIFICANTLY IMPACTED WATER ACCESS FOR GROWERS.**



*Art by @sunshine.saqimax*

While hydrant access is not a long term solution for water, hydrants provide beginning and land insecure growers with seasonal & affordable water. After the Department of Water Management made changes to the hydrant policy, we heard from growers all over the City who were significantly challenged by this issue. In response, we supplied over **\$30,000 in water access equipment to growers**, created a **petition to garner public support** for a more equitable water access policy, and provided **technical assistance to growers** working to navigate the new policy.

During this time, we also brought food system partners together to discuss these challenges & create a shared platform for advocacy. Through our collective advocacy efforts, an updated permit policy was adopted in the summer of 2020. The new policy establishes a lower rate for access to hydrants, reduced certification requirements, and aligned the City's zoning and water policies.

*While the updated policy created positive changes to the permitting process, it does not address all of the barriers challenging growers. We continue to work in coalition with City leaders, food system partners, & growers to improve the hydrant permit program in preparation for the 2021 growing season. Follow us on social media or email [info@auachicago.org](mailto:info@auachicago.org) to get involved.*

## **THE GROWING REALITY OF LOSING WATER ACCESS:**

"It has been a struggle to keep water available for our gardens. Many of our families have been carting in their own water in empty milk jugs, on their wagons, or by hand. As the summer goes on, and the heat elevates, the task of keeping our beds hydrated is becoming an insurmountable challenge. I fear that people won't be able to maintain this level of effort, and it could be the end of our garden. It is going to deter future participation."

**MCKINLEY PARK COMMUNITY GARDEN**

# PARTNERSHIPS & COLLABORATIONS

Despite the physical limitations created by the pandemic, 2020 has been a year of significant connection and collaboration for our team. Thank you to our partnerships & collaborations who made this work possible.

## PROGRAMMING PARTNERSHIPS

**Food Sovereignty Action Days:** Earl's Garden Mae's Kitchen, Big Green, Gary Comer Youth Center, Shavon L. Dean Memorial Garden, and St. Sabina's Learning Gardens.

**Virtual Workshops:** Farm Commons, Windy City Harvest, Contemporary Farmer, We Sow We Grow, Trickster Cultural Center, and Cedillo's Fresh Produce.

**Annual Soiree:** Pilsen Arts & Community Center, Amor Y Sofritio, Englewood Community Kitchen, Full Circle Fungi, Gardeners, Iyabo Farms, University of Illinois Chicago, EL Paseo Community Garden

**Fall Gatherings:** Grow Greater Englewood, Chicago Lawyers Committee for Civil Rights, Little Village Environmental Justice Organization, Patchwork Farms, Chicago Grows Food, Your Bountiful Harvest Family Farm, Illinois Environmental Council and Office of Community Engagement, Neighborspace, and UI Health.

## WATER POLICY COLLABORATIONS

**CHICAGO LAWYERS COMMITTEE FOR CIVIL RIGHTS**

**LOYOLA UNIVERSITY INSTITUTE OF ENVIRONMENTAL STUDIES**

**NEIGHBORSPACE**

**CHICAGO FOOD POLICY ACTION COUNCIL**

Other partners we've worked with include: Chicago Community Gardeners Association, Windy City Harvest, Urban Growers Collective, Blacks In Green, Grow Greater Englewood, and the Metropolitan Water Reclamation District of Greater Chicago. Check out our water access petition for a list of other partners who have supported our advocacy efforts.

**WE THANK YOU  
FOR YOUR CONTINUED SUPPORT IN  
OUR PROGRAMS**

# FUNDRAISING

**IN 2020, AUA FUNDRAISED OVER \$120,000 TO SUPPORT FARMER-FIRST PROGRAMMING.**

## GROWN IN CHICAGO SOIRÉE

Although we could not welcome our community to the soiree in person this year, we had the opportunity to coordinate a virtual [AUA Soirée](#) that brought together nearly 100 people and celebrated the urban agriculture community through several workshops hosted by growers, chefs, artists & more.

## GROWN IN CHICAGO VIDEO

Premiering the same night as our annual Soiree, the [Grown in Chicago Video](#) is a feature of just a few of the growers who AUA is proud to support. Highlighting 12 growing operations from all corners of Chicago, the Grown in Chicago Video demonstrates the dreams, drive, and passions growers have for local food, as well as the programs AUA facilitates to make sure all these dreams are actualized.

## SPRING CAMPAIGN

When the pandemic hit, AUA mobilized by hosting a fundraising campaign to support an emergency relief fund for Chicagoland growers. With an initial goal of raising \$20,000, we far surpassed our own expectations when we raised a total of \$114,000 which we used to distribute 67 micro-grants in the spring and summer.



**100+ ATTENDEES  
AT THE VIRTUAL SOIREE**



**RAISED OVER  
\$120,000 IN 2020**

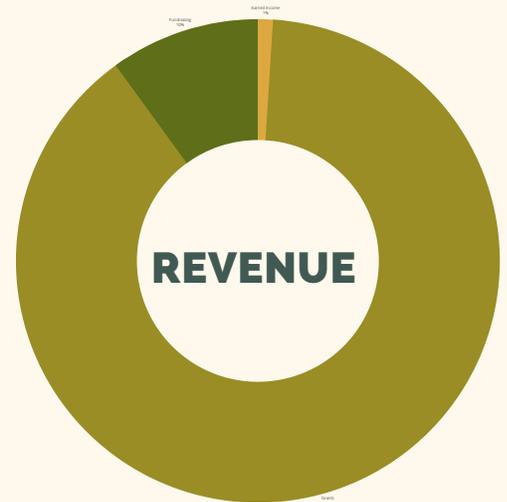
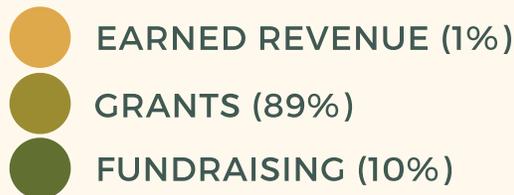


**FEATURED 12  
GROWING OPERATIONS**

# 2020 FINANCES

## FUNDERS

Food:Land:Opportunity Lumpkin Family Foundation The Food & Farm Communication Fund  
Walter S. Mander Foundation JR Albert Foundation. Patagonia  
Chlditarod Chicago Region Food System Fund Groupon



## CORPORATE SPONSORS

Apologue Liqueurs Byline Bank Option Realty Group  
Loyola's Institute of Environmental Sustainability



*Windy City Harvest North  
Lawndale Youth Farm*

# THANK YOU

*Thank you for supporting us in 2020! We look forward to continuing our work in 2021.*