

Annual Report 2020



MillCityGrows.org

Mill City Grows Board of Directors

John Wooding
Emma Campbell
Kelly Will
Robert Boley
Jocelyn Bishop
Tara Hong
Jamie Klufts, MPH
Diego Leonardo
Elizabeth "Biz" Mallon
Yesenia Maysonet
Jack Moynihan
Vannak Theng

The MCG team would also like to thank and recognize those board members who have completed their service over the past two years. We truly appreciate your dedication to food sovereignty.

Adam Baacke	Vanna Howard
Kesiah Bascom	Bonnie Hungler
Ruben Carmona	Leslie Manirath
Darren End	Paul Schor
Clare Gunther	Craig Thomas
Cecilio Hernandez	King Torres

MCG Team Members

Solimar Berrios *Head of Office Operations*

Giuliana Cappucci *Education Manager*

Macayla Cote *Education Coordinator*

Suzanne Cromwell *Marketing & Publicity Coordinator*

Katherine Davis *Director of Development*

Maddie Grant *Urban Farm & Food Access Coordinator*

Ali Jacobs *Director of Programs*

Samantha Keegan *FoodCorps Service Member*

Kerri Keeler *Development Associate*

Dai Kim *Operations Manager*

Brian Mariano *Urban Farm & Mobile Market Manager*

Maggie Montoya *Community Education Coordinator*

Margaret Nowak *Lowell Farm to School Manager*

Vera Ok *FoodCorps Service Member*

Chaya Sophon *Community Gardens Assistant*

Lydia Sisson *Co-Founder*

Francey Slater *Co-Founder*

Nikki Tolani *Urban Farm & Mobile Market Assistant Manager*

Enrique Vargas *Gardens Manager*

Jessica Wilson *Executive Director*

A Message from the Board President and Executive Director

Dear Mill City Grows Friends and Supporters,

If we were to sum up 2020 it would be one word: resilience.

We knew 2020 would be a year of transition and change, with new leadership both on our staff and Board of Directors, a brand-new kitchen space, and plans for new gardens and farms. Within a few quick months, what began as a year of planning and optimism about the future quickly became one of uncertainty, emergency, and above all, the need to support the community. Of course, Mill City Grows leadership knew what our role should be in this pandemic year: get fresh, local food to those who needed it most.

We got to work making connections and making plans to move our city through this pandemic with as much strength and energy as we could offer. We created CSAs, food delivery systems, and grew more food than ever before. The pandemic laid bare just how important food sovereignty is to any community. It reminded us that planning for times of crisis means building strong systems in times of abundance and preparing for any eventuality. Because of your strong support of MCG's mission over the past 10 years, we were able to step in and provide the Lowell community with fresh food, access to land, and all types of education through one of the most uncertain times in our living memory.

This has been a challenging year for all our community, and we are so grateful for leaders in Lowell who have been our committed partners throughout. We deeply appreciate your support of our mission and our work, as we navigated the many obstacles and challenges that the pandemic created. We are so grateful that we could contribute to the collective effort to sustain our city and our environment through this crisis, as we continue to build resilience for a bright and hopeful future for us all.

In solidarity,



John and Jessica



Our Mission Statement

Mill City Grows (MCG) fosters food justice by improving physical health, economic independence, and environmental sustainability in Lowell through increased access to land, locally-grown food, and education.

Mill City Grows was founded in 2011 as a catalyst for food justice, ensuring that all people of Lowell have access to culturally connected food, land, and education. Our programs have grown from a single community garden to include: food, nutrition, and advocacy education for people of all ages; community and school gardens; working urban farms; mobile markets and farm shares; and above all, encouraging and supporting people to grow their own food. MCG infuses food production spaces with food education to increase food sovereignty, universal access to fresh produce, and promote environmental sustainability throughout Lowell.

Adapting Our Programs for 2020

Food Access

Our Farm and Market programs continued throughout the pandemic with social distancing guidelines in place to provide food access points in the summer and fall. During the spring and winter, we operated an online store to serve people when we couldn't hold in-person markets and created a delivery system for those who were quarantining or isolating.

Food Education

Our Education Team prepared remote learning kits in the spring for elementary school students to be able to plant food and learn more about our food system at home. We also hosted virtual cooking classes and created video content to help educate Lowell residents about food while we couldn't gather in person.

Community Gardens

Throughout the pandemic, we ensured our gardeners had full access to their gardens, created safe guidelines for garden operations while social distancing, and waived all garden membership fees for 2020.

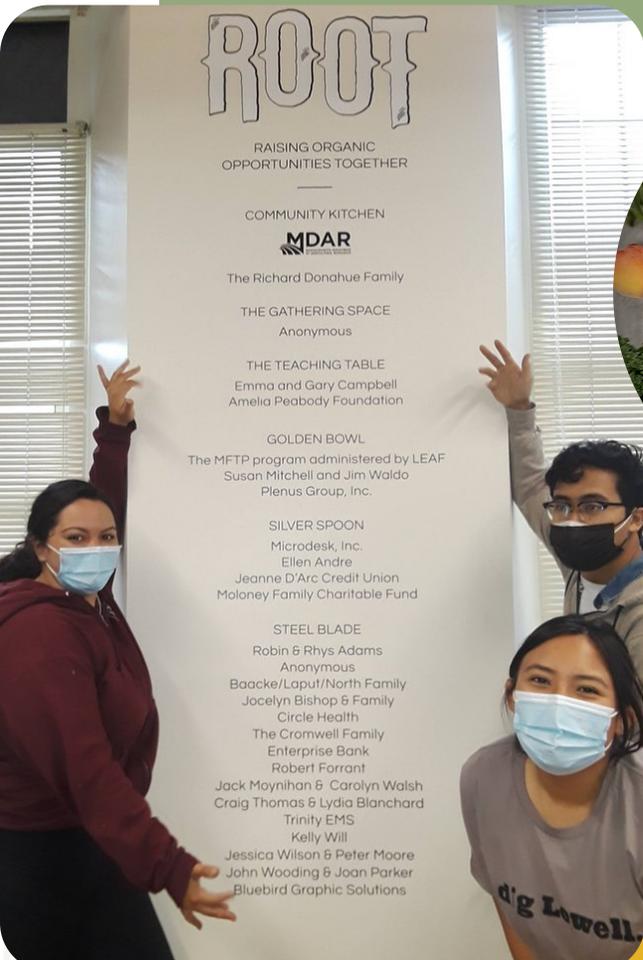


Cook, Eat, Learn! ROOT

ROOT (Raising Organic Opportunities Together) is a new community kitchen and training space, located in Mill City Grows' headquarters in downtown Lowell. We envisioned ROOT as a space for community members to gather to cook, eat, and learn together; a space dedicated to food justice and food sovereignty year round. Construction on this space was completed in April 2020.

Through the quarantine period, we have adapted our use of the space for food access and future planning: washing and packing shares for our growing CSA program, and recipe-testing for Farm to Table classes and a value-added product business plan. We are excited about the prospect of using ROOT to gather community members to cook, eat, and learn together! Specifically, we will work with guest chefs to share food ways and food culture from various ethnic communities represented in Lowell. We will begin this work in 2021.

Our ROOT Donor Wall prominently showcases the generous supporters who made this space possible.



In The ROOT Kitchen

FoodCorps Service Member, Vera, shows off a new recipe for her after school program.



Nourishing Community: Launching a CSA Program

In 2020 we responded to the COVID-19 crisis by launching our first CSA (Community Supported Agriculture) program open to the public. Beginning as a partnership with the International Institute of New England to provide free vegetables to immigrant and refugee families, the program expanded to include **80 families** receiving weekly vegetable shares from June-November, **40 shares** distributed each week through the Lowell Public Schools, and **50 families** receiving weekly shares through the winter.



Growing Together: MCG's Volunteer Program

Volunteers were crucial to our operations in 2020, and we created opportunities for them to serve the community in many new ways. We engaged volunteers remotely to help assemble school gardening kits to send home with our elementary students. We began weekly volunteer days at our farm and garden sites, and partnered with local and national service organizations like **Boston Area Gleaners** and **The Mission Continues** to safely maintain our growing spaces.

Farewell & Gratitude to Mill City Grows' Co-Founders



In 2020, our Co-Founders Francey Slater and Lydia Sisson made the decision to step away from their staff roles at Mill City Grows. After 8.5 years bringing their dreams to reality, it was so hard to say goodbye to these two dynamic women, and strong leaders. Both brought enormous talent and experience to MCG's mission: Francey as an educator and community builder, and Lydia as a farmer and small business owner. They didn't just found our organization, they built a local food system that was shaped by community voices.

As their final year came to a close, Francey and Lydia included this sentiment in their farewell message:

"The truth is that what Mill City Grows has become is far beyond the vision and imagination of two people. Mill City Grows belongs to thousands of Lowell residents and community members ... We know that Lowell is ready, deserving, and hungry for locally-grown fresh food, beautiful green spaces, and community gatherings that emphasize that we are more alike than we are different."

Francey and Lydia built a strong foundation for MCG's future. It was their planning and forethought that made it possible for us to pivot and thrive through 2020. We thank them so much for their vision, courage, and hard work!



A Virtual World: 2020 Online Events

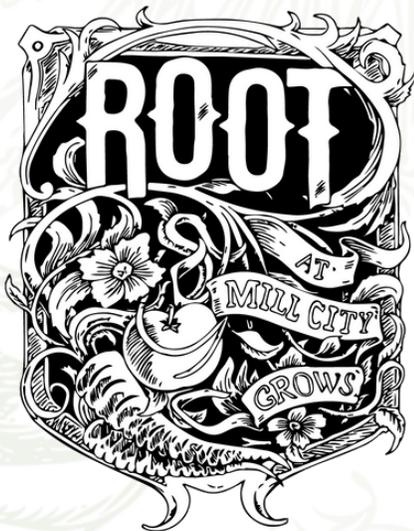
FARM TO COMMUNITY

Our Annual Summer Fundraiser featuring Cooking & Cocktail Demos, Guest Speakers, and a Silent Auction

Thursday, June 12

Watch a recording of the full event on YouTube

[WATCH NOW >](#)



HARVEST FESTIVAL

Featuring Live Virtual Farm & Garden Tours, Cooking Demos, plus a Grand Opening Tour of ROOT Kitchen

September 14 - 25

Watch all our Harvest Festival virtual events on our Facebook Channel

[WATCH NOW >](#)

Thank you to our 2020 Annual Event Sponsors!

**Nancy L. Donahue
Bank of America
Microdesk
Blue Cross Blue Shield of MA
Jeanne D'Arc Credit Union**

**Aberthaw Construction
Align Credit Union
Circle Health
Enterprise Bank
Plenus Group, Inc.**

365 Days of Impact

GROW

45,821 pounds of food was grown across all urban farms and gardens, *our biggest annual harvest to date!* **129** volunteers donated **1,292** hours to help us achieve this milestone.

198 families utilized community gardens to grow their own food -- more than **50%** identify as low-income.



EAT

\$100,500 worth of produce was distributed through Mobile Market, CSA Farm Share, and School Food Programs. Of this food, **\$66,000 (or 65%) was completely free to residents** through donations or benefit programs like SNAP/HIP or Farmers' Market Coupons.



LEARN

14,434 students had access to a school garden to complement remote learning.

14 of the 37 Harvest of the Month taste tests during the 2019-2020 school year were implemented during emergency and summer feeding sites.

15 virtual programs -- including videos, cooking classes, and after school programs -- were presented. **24 community members** completed our online Garden Leadership Program.



Education Team Members prepare School Garden Grab and Go produce bags at MCG's ROOT Community Space.



School Garden Grab and Go

In 2020, Lowell Public School (LPS) students remained mostly remote, and the MCG team wanted to make sure Lowell's school gardens were still playing an important role in students' lives. **Through a partnership with Lowell Public Schools Food & Nutrition Services, Lowell Farm to School, and Mill City Grows, school gardens were turned into microfarms.** The harvests from these gardens were distributed as "grab and go" farm shares each week through the LPS meals program. Staff and volunteers grew **more than 1,100 pounds** of food, which was supplemented with another **4,800 pounds** from MCG's Urban Farms. This food was enjoyed by more than **300 families** throughout Lowell, and the program was such a success that it will continue in 2021.

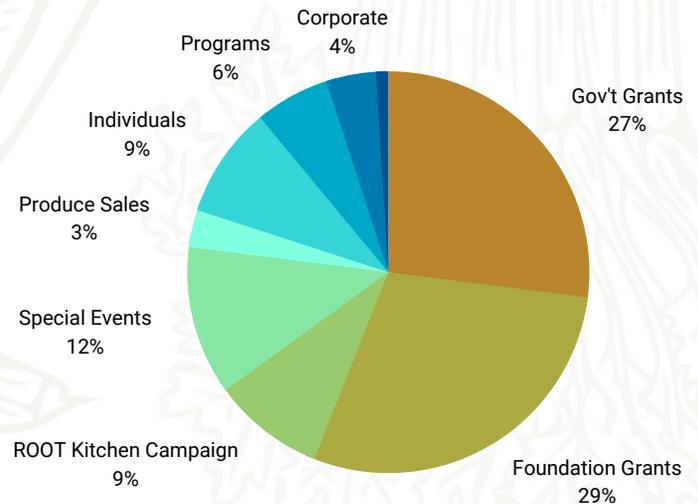


Financial Statements

Mill City Grows is a 501(c)3 non-profit, as recognized by the IRS. The following figures are taken from audited financial statements from calendar year 2020.

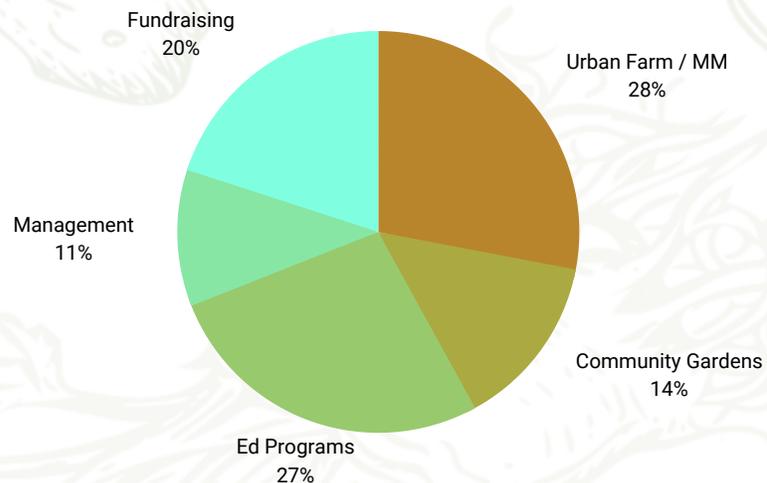
Revenue

Government Grants	\$327,490
Foundation Grants	\$368,043
ROOT Kitchen Campaign	\$106,841
Special Events	\$148,690
Produce Sales	\$38,742
Individual Contributions	\$111,275
Program Revenue	\$67,648
Corporate Contributions	\$48,681
In-kind/Misc	\$8,692
Total Revenue	\$1,226,102



Expenses

Urban Farm / Mobile Market	\$328,450
Community Gardens	\$160,432
Education Programs	\$317,241
Management & General	\$126,292
Fundraising	\$244,339
Total Expenses	\$1,176,754





Volunteers from OffBeet Compost help tend our Big Urban Farm.

Food Sovereignty is at the heart of Food Justice.

Join our healthy food movement, invest in our community, and support Lowell's thriving food system!

Grow, Eat, Learn, Donate at MillCityGrows.org

Program partners from
Lowell Public Schools Food
and Nutrition Services tour
our Big Urban Farm.



Nourishing Lowell families since 2011

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