



2023 ANNUAL REPORT

2023-2024 Mill City Grows Team (as of 4.29.24)

DIRECTORS

Ali Jacobs, *Co-Executive Director*
Courtney McSparron, *Co-Executive Director*
Dai Kim, *Co-Executive Director*
Enrique Vargas, *Associate Director*
Jessica Wilson, *Transition Consultant*

ADMINISTRATION

Solimar Berrios, *Head of Office Operations*

DEVELOPMENT

Kerri Keeler, *Development Manager*
Suzanne Cromwell, *Marketing & Publicity Coordinator*
Rebecca Ludvino, *Institutional Giving Manager*

FARM & MARKET

Ted Hamm, *Urban Farm Manager*
Grace McKay, *Mobile Market Manager*
Kay Cardenas, *Seasonal Market Operator*
Lauren Kiesling, *Seasonal Farmhand*

COMMUNITY

Trang Dong, *Community Gardens Manager*
Chaya Sophon, *Community Gardens Assistant Manager*

EDUCATION

Daphne Ekmanis, *School Education Manager*
Savannah Marshall, *School Education Coordinator*
James Tierney, *CSA Manager*
Loubna Belamar, *CSA Delivery Driver*
David Yin, *High School Intern*
Kauri Joyner, *High School Intern*
Gianna Herbert, *High School Intern*

COLLEGE INTERNS (with MCG Program Affiliation)

Tim Cobb, *UMass Lowell - Food Is Medicine, Outreach*
Rabia Hader, *UMass Lowell - Food Is Medicine, Outreach*
Sophia Sar, *UMass Lowell - Mobile Market, Education, Outreach*
Fabrice Kamwa, *North Shore Community College - Urban Farm*
Jade Cotter, *North Shore Community College - Urban Farm, Mobile Market*
Sohana Hasan, *UMass Lowell - Development*

Mill City Grows Board of Directors

John Wooding, *President*
Emma Campbell, *Vice President*
Craig Thomas, *Treasurer*
Elizabeth Campbell, *Clerk*
Sue Andrews
Robert Boley
Amparo Hernandez-Folch
Tara Hong
Jamie Klufts
Diego Leonardo
Andrew McNaught
Jack Moynihan
Jen Myers
Vannak Theng

**Many thanks to our board member
who completed their service in 2023:**
Kelly Will



COVER PHOTO: School Education Manager, Daphne Ekmanis, carries freshly harvested garlic on MCG's Urban Farm in Lowell.

A message from our Board Chair and Co-Executive Directors



JOHN



ALI



COURTNEY



DAI

Dear Friend,

For the last 12 years, Mill City Grows worked to ensure that all Lowellians can access their food system in the way they want, whether that is growing, eating, cooking, or learning about their food. 2023 was no different.

- We maintained 8 community gardens: 86% of our community gardeners say they are eating more produce thanks to their growing space.
- We delivered farm shares to over 200 households: Over 90% of those households used food access benefits.
- We supported five after school programs in Lowell: 83% of our students said they tried a new food in our programs and 81% said they would eat that food again.
- We harvested over 20,000 pounds of Lowell-grown food, distributing it through more than 140 mobile farmers markets across the city.

The close of 2023 also saw our Executive Director, Jessica Wilson, step down. Jessica oversaw the purchase of the Pawtucket Farm Wildlife Sanctuary, the building of our commercial kitchen, and led our organization through the challenges of COVID. Her love of the organization continues now as she serves as a transitional support for our new leadership team. The start of 2024 marked the return to Mill City Grows' co-executive director model. Once again, Mill City Grows prioritized people in its decision-making process, opting for a model that emphasizes sustainability and collaboration.

We have deep gratitude for those who built this organization over the past 12 years, and we are excited to lead our team forward in 2024.

In Solidarity,

John, Ali, Courtney, and Dai

OUR SCOPE OF WORK:

Mill City Grows Food Access & Education Programs



Mill City Grows provides nourishing food and educational opportunities to residents throughout Greater Lowell, from school-aged students to career professionals. We invite you to Grow, Eat, and Learn with MCG and explore our breadth of programming.

GROW

Community Gardens
School Gardens
Urban Farm
Merrimack Valley Growers Aid
Pawtucket Farm Wildlife Sanctuary

EAT

Mobile Farmers Market
CSA Farm Share
(Community Supported Agriculture)

LEARN

ROOT Community Kitchen
Community Gardens Workshops
Volunteerism

EMPOWERING OUR COMMUNITY: Merrimack Valley Growers Aid Program



Some gardeners come to Mill City Grows with an abundance of agricultural knowledge, but access to little or no growing space. MCG developed the Merrimack Valley Growers Aid program (MVGA) in 2022 to support these growers with land access, supplies, and technical assistance. Growers learn sustainable growing practices and the critical details of selling produce locally alongside MCG staff. Beyond the physical space and opportunity for engagement, participants emphasize the rapport they share with the other growers and MCG team members.

Octavian, an original MVGA participant, and experienced grower, noted that in 2023, she was “delighted by the support she received from Mill City Grows.” For Octavian, access to greenhouse space along with relationship-building with the MCG team and other growers, was the most important aspect of the program. We support growers at all levels -- whether they are experts like Octavian or beginning growers -- and help them define their goals and meet them with sustainable growing and business strategies. 🌱



“

Before this program, we were doing this work on our own. Now we have a very good group. We need people who are talking to all of us, and showing us what to do. People who don't look at your skin, or your color, but just help.

Octavian, MVGA Participant

”

SEEDING CURIOSITY: Immersive Hands-on Exploration in MCG's new Sensory Garden



"I had a garden at my home in India. I love gardens!"
- 3rd grade student

Located at Mill City Grows' 4-acre urban farm in Lowell, our new Sensory Garden is a field-trip destination with a hands-on gathering space and outdoor classroom. MCG's Education Team worked with teams of volunteers, dedicating 3 months to complete construction of the space. Kids are invited to touch, smell, taste, and feel all the greenery in the garden including chives, sage, milkweed, horseradish, bee balm, yarrow, mint, and colorful grasses. A flower meadow was seeded in the back of the garden and a young lilac tree was planted to provide scent and future shade. Cut tree trunks from the farm and painted recycled pallets line the meandering walkways, and the colorful sun cloth that hangs above the garden was the biggest one we could find! 🌿

209 students and guests visited the Sensory Garden in 2023 from:

Lowell Public Schools
Girls, Inc. of Greater Lowell
Lowell Community Charter Public School
Innovation Academy Charter School
REC Worcester



FOOD ACCESS SPOTLIGHT: CSA Farm Share Program

MCG's **Community Supported Agriculture (CSA)** initiative began in 2020 as a way to get food directly to community members with chronic health problems. In 2023, year over year participation in the program almost doubled. Also, 95% of participants received fresh produce delivered right to their doors; every week during the summer season and bi-weekly during the winter. MCG welcomed full-time CSA Manager, James Tierney, and part-time delivery driver, Loubna Belamar to the team in 2023. Their work drove the growth and success of the CSA program. As a team, these two staff members forged stronger bonds between CSA participants and the organization, laying a strong foundation for future partnerships and program sustainability. 🌱



14,347

pounds of food delivered door-to-door

214

CSA participants enrolled in the program, representing a 39% increase from 2022

90%

of CSA participants used a food access benefit



FOOD ACCESS SPOTLIGHT: Mobile Farmers Market Program



Our **Mobile Farmers Markets** bring our community together to socialize, share knowledge, and receive crucial information on how to expand their access to fresh, affordable food. In 2023, we expanded our citywide Market venues from six to eight, and increased our total sales by 44% over the previous year. 🌱

“ — Community Story Shared by James Tierney, MCG Team Member

When one of our Mobile Market shoppers paid with cash for her fresh veggies, we asked her if she had SNAP/EBT. It turned out she did!

We informed her that she had an extra \$60 a month to spend on her EBT card, thanks to the Healthy Incentives Program (HIP) benefit. When she heard this, she started to cry, and shared that her family had really been struggling. We refunded the cash transaction and used her HIP benefit instead. We then told her that she could get veggies delivered to her home through our CSA Farm Share Program and that they'd be no cost to her, just by using her HIP benefit.

This Mobile Market shopper was so grateful for all this information, she gave each of us a hug.



\$95,187

worth of fresh food was distributed through our Mobile Market Program in 2023.



Of this food, **\$75,503** was obtained using food access benefits such as SNAP/HIP, Farmers Market Coupons, and Flex Benefits.



500+ volunteers
2,000+ service hours
200 volunteer events



THANK YOU TO OUR VOLUNTEERS!

In 2023, we hosted over 500 volunteers who completed 2,000+ community service hours across all our programs. Mill City Grows welcomes both individuals and groups to volunteer alongside our staff, and we match skills-based volunteers with upcoming and ongoing projects that directly support our work. 🌱

Learn more and volunteer with us!
Visit MillCityGrows.org/joinus.

“
Thank you, Mill City Grows, for doing the great work. I have seen it firsthand while volunteering with your team!
”

Special thank you to our 2023 Corporate Volunteer Groups:

Assured Partners
Andover Companies
Boston Area Gleaners
Building Impact
Jeanne D'Arc Credit Union
MA Executive Office of Elder Affairs
Princeton Properties
Takeda
Toast Tab
UKG
University of Massachusetts, Lowell
Woodard & Curran

FINANCIAL STATEMENTS

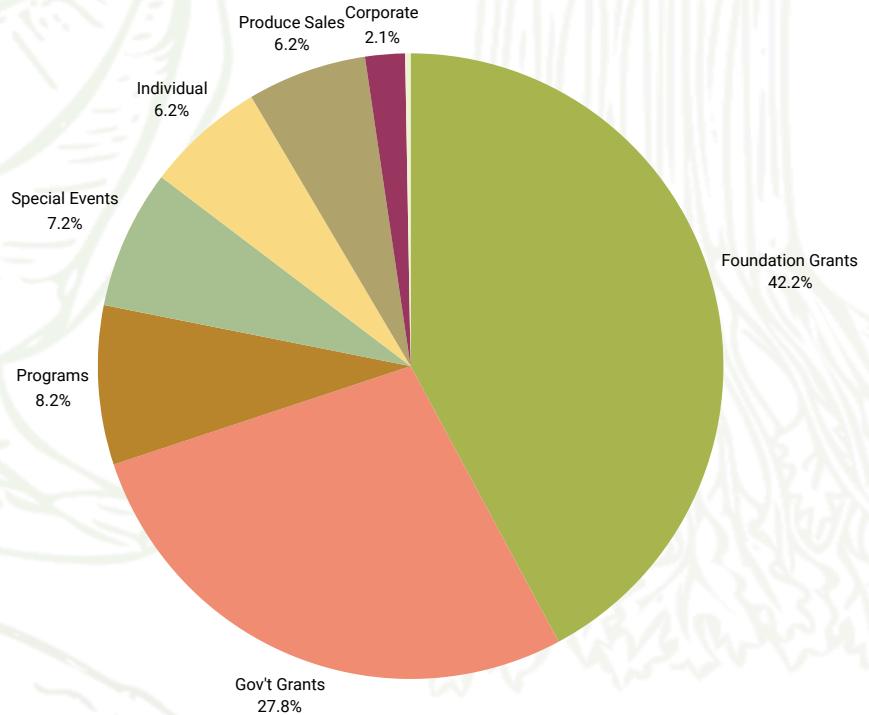
Mill City Grows is a 501(c)3 non-profit, as recognized by the IRS. The following figures are taken from audited financial statements from calendar year 2023.

Please visit MillCityGrows.org/meet-our-supporters to learn more about the organizations that sponsor and fund our work.

Revenue

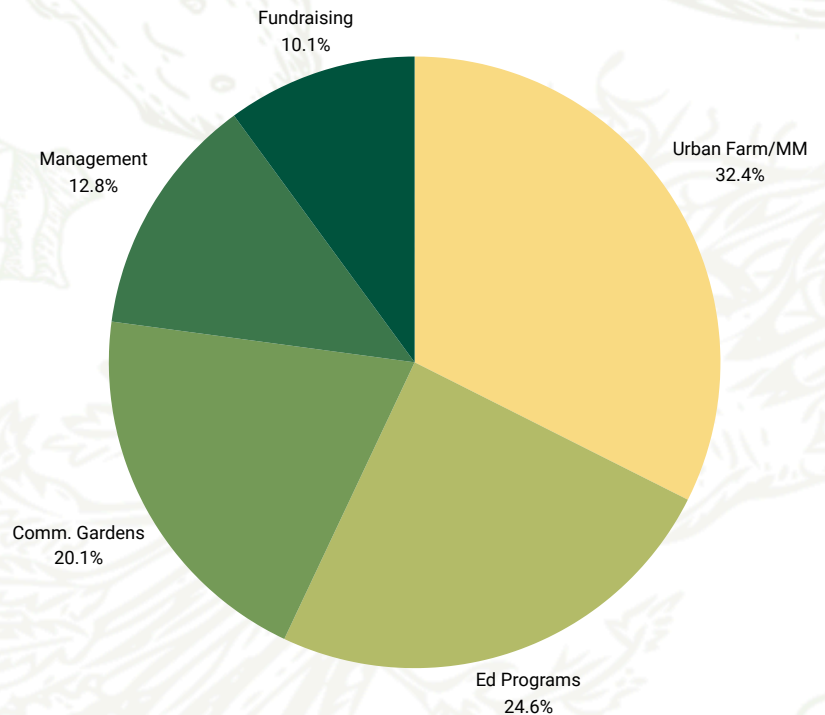
Foundation Grants	\$767,345
Government Grants	\$493,941
Program Revenue	\$148,322
Special Events	\$120,604
Individual Contributions	\$117,286
Produce Sales	\$109,546
Corporate Contributions	\$41,401
In-kind/Misc	\$5,095
<i>Release from Reserve*</i>	\$53,823
Total Revenue	\$1,803,540

**Not reflected in Total Revenue or pie chart.*



Expenses

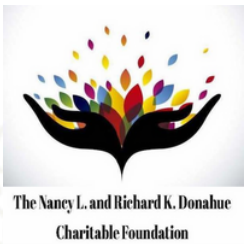
Urban Farm / Mobile Market	\$536,511
Education Programs	\$406,025
Community Gardens	\$342,249
Management & General	\$212,943
Fundraising	\$159,504
Total Expenses	\$1,657,232





WITH GRATITUDE TO OUR 2023 ANNUAL SPONSORS
Thank you for your partnership, support, and dedication to our community!

Golden Sun | \$25,000



Cummings
Foundation

BANK OF AMERICA 

Fertile Ground | \$5,000



SYMETRI
ADDNODE GROUP



PRINCETON
PROPERTIES

Green Sprout | \$2,500

Eastern Bank

Enterprise Bank

Lowell General Hospital

Verizon

Workers Credit Union

Garden Friend | \$1,000

Griffin Greenhouse Supplies

Nobis Group

OUR MISSION AND VISION

Mill City Grows' **mission** is to improve physical health, economic independence, and environmental sustainability in Lowell through increased access to land, locally grown food, and education.

Our **vision** is a community that understands how to grow and prepare fresh food to support the long-term health of people and the land. Equitable access to land, knowledge, and fresh, culturally connected food is necessary for positive health outcomes, sustainable food policies, and access to life-giving food for our entire community.

Annual Plant Sale



Harvest Day Celebration at the Farm



Harvest Moon Dinner





MillCityGrows.org

Growing for Lowell Since 2011

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978-455-2620
info@millcitygrows.org



Nourish our roots year-round! Visit MillCityGrows.org/donate.

Please consider supporting Mill City Grows as a **Perennial Partner Monthly Sustaining donor**. Your consistent, reliable contribution is crucial to our year-round operations and enables us to respond to the urgent needs of our community. **Thank you.**

