



Growing a stronger food system is in our roots.

Since 2011, Mill City Grows (MCG) has evolved from a single community garden to creating a citywide urban food system. We've strengthened access to locally-grown, culturally connected produce, especially for those using food access benefits, and deepened our partnership with pre-K through graduate educators to further food justice and environmental education for school-aged youth.

Our work is rooted in the belief that knowing how to grow and prepare your own food is key to the long term health of people and the land. Members of the Greater Lowell community joined us throughout the year to plant, harvest, share, and prepare food. Thus, with the support of our board members, partners, funders, and patrons, we continued to integrate and refine our food access, food education, and food justice advocacy offerings in 2024. We hope you will **grow, eat, and learn** with us in the year ahead!



Mill City Grows Staff (as of December 2024)

DIRECTORS

Ali Jacobs, *Co-Executive Director*
Courtney McSparron, *Co-Executive Director*
Dai Kim, *Co-Executive Director*
Enrique Vargas, *Associate Director*

ADMINISTRATION

Solimar Berrios, *Head of Office Operations*

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*

DEVELOPMENT

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

INTERNS

Kauri Joyner
David Yin

Mill City Grows Board of Directors (as of December 2024)

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



▲ MCG is proud to work alongside passionate local growers in our Merrimack Valley Growers Aid Program.

COVER PHOTO: Lowell Public School students enjoy a planting day in their school garden. Our citywide school gardens help kids explore the wonder and importance of local food systems.



Emma



Ali



Courtney

A message from our current Board Chair and Co-Executive Directors

So much good work happened at MCG in 2024. We continued to feed our community. We educated children and adults of all ages. We built strong connections between people, food, and the land. Perhaps most exciting was the opening of Pawtucket Farm Wildlife Sanctuary, a land preservation project in partnership with Lowell Parks & Conservation Trust and Mass Audubon. Formerly the site of Rolli's Christmas Tree Farm, Pawtucket Farm opened to the public in December 2024 after the completion of all-persons trails.

There is a tree at Pawtucket Farm – a straggly, very tall pitch pine that overlooks where the outdoor education center will be built. There may once have been more pitch pines on the property, but there are just a few survivors now. This pine tree is evidence of the use of fire, likely as an agricultural tool, on the land years ago. Farmers, perhaps Penacook People, may have used fire to clear the land of crops, thereby creating an excellent ecosystem for the tree. Pitch pines survive fires easily due to their thick bark (they can continue to grow, even if all their pine needles are burnt off), their ability to re-sprout quickly, and grow root systems that can reach 8-9 feet straight down.

But more than that, fire benefits the pitch pine. Pitch pines like the openness that a fire creates and have seed cones that only open and disperse in very high heat. Without a fire, there is no new growth.

Many of us feel as if we are surrounded by fire right now. The literal fires caused by carelessness and climate change, and metaphorical ones caused by threats to our most basic civil rights. But as you navigate these challenging days, try to remember this mighty tree, and let it remind you that where there is fire, there can also be an opportunity for rebirth, regrowth, and renewed strength.

Mill City Grows is here to support our community and grow alongside you.

In solidarity,

Emma, Ali, and Courtney



2024 In Review | Winter and Spring

JANUARY

City officials and initial stakeholders attend a special event announcing the transition of Rolli's Farm to Pawtucket Farm Wildlife Sanctuary.

FEBRUARY

Kids and grown-ups prepared delicious meals during Farm to Table Cooking Classes at the Shaughnessy Elementary School.

MARCH

Growers from across the city shared their knowledge and took home free seeds for their gardens at our 9th Annual Seed Swap.





PROGRAM HIGHLIGHTS

Community Gardens School Education

Our citywide gardens – so much more than soil and plants! Community gardens serve as hubs for community cohesion, with **95% of MCG gardeners reporting meaningful connections** forged within the garden space. In 2024, MCG community gardens yielded **fresh produce for over 200 gardeners and their families** and **95% of gardeners reported eating more fruits and vegetables** since joining their community garden.

In late 2024, MCG's community garden team and volunteers planned and designed our 9th community garden at Pawtucket Farm Wildlife Sanctuary (PFWS). **MCG's largest garden to date will provide 40+ garden beds** – up to 2,000 square feet of in-ground growing space that will be used communally – with a 1,400 square foot gathering area. **Our community gardens are critical for decreasing social isolation and food insecurity.** Thanks to the community-led planning process and initial construction by volunteers, Lowell residents will be growing in their garden beds at the PFWS Community Garden by 2025.

Our School Education Team was thrilled to continue their partnership with the Lowell High School Culinary Arts Program for the 2024 school year. Every two weeks, our Ed Team delivered a CSA (Community Supported Agriculture) Farm Share with fresh produce to Lowell High School's campus restaurant for culinary students to incorporate into the menu. Students tested recipes using these ingredients, planned menu items, and throughout the growing season as the produce changed, they honed their skills by learning new techniques for food preparation. They even prepared a delicious scratch lunch for our Mill City Grows team at our ROOT Community Kitchen! **Their visits to the Rist Urban Agriculture Farm on UML's East Campus gave them more insight into year-round food production. These farm visits brought the students closer to our local food system,** and inspired the idea to build garden beds behind the farm, specifically for the Culinary Arts Program to grow and harvest their own food.

Lowell High School Culinary Arts students
at MCG's ROOT Community Kitchen.



2024 In Review | Spring and Summer

APRIL

The greenhouse expansion at the UMass Lowell Rist Urban Agriculture Farm was completed, doubling our year-round growing space.



MAY

Lowell-grown herbs, flowers, fruits, and veggies took center stage at our Annual Spring Plant Sale which benefits MCG's Food Access & Education Programs.



JUNE

The Pawtucket Farm Wildlife Sanctuary Community Garden Design Committee held its first meeting to discuss the layout of MCG's 9th community garden.





PROGRAM HIGHLIGHTS

Food Is Medicine | MCG Supper Club After-school Mobile Farmers Markets



Eleni shows off her delectable Greek soup toppings at MCG's Supper Club. ▲



▲ Students were delighted to shop for their fresh produce at our after-school Farmers Markets!

In its fourth year, MCG's Food Is Medicine (FIM) program connected 337 low-income residents – many of whom are managing a chronic health condition – with two options for receiving fresh produce at no cost to them: a biweekly Farm Share delivery, or, monthly gift cards to be used at MCG Mobile Markets.

Half of all participants utilized our FIM program via the Healthy Incentives Program (HIP), a food access benefit managed by the MA Department of Transitional Assistance, while the other half utilized the MassHealth WellSense program. When HIP funding was cut at the end of 2024, our FIM Team worked with food access partners to ensure clients continued to receive their fresh produce. These drastic cuts to HIP occurred simultaneously with an overhaul of the MassHealth WellSense Program.

During this very challenging time, MCG's Food Is Medicine Team led the way among other statewide organizations by providing real health benefits and helping shape the healthcare practice.

In July, MCG launched monthly Supper Clubs at our ROOT Community Space by welcoming culinary enthusiasts to prepare a multi-course meal for 20 attendees. Guests were treated to Cambodian, Brazilian, and French dishes as well as personal stories that inspired the menu. Details were shared about Cambodian herbs and vegetables, poetry was recited in Portuguese, and traditional Brazilian bracelets were tied onto the wrist of every attendee! In addition to providing a safe space for meaningful socialization, these public events celebrated the rich, cultural diversity within our community.

Shaughnessy and Lincoln Elementary Schools hosted the MCG Mobile Farmers Market during school dismissal, where participating students used shopping lists and totes to bring home 10 lbs. of produce each. In 2024, MCG distributed 988 lbs. of produce at no cost to families through these exciting after-school events. The markets also gave caregivers and educators a chance to purchase produce with SNAP/HIP benefits, supporting MCG's mission to expand food access.



2024 In Review | Summer and Fall

JULY

With grant support from Project Bread, MCG launched its free, public Supper Club series held at our ROOT Community Space in Lowell.



AUGUST

The Massachusetts Department of Agricultural Resources included MCG in their statewide tours to celebrate the first-ever Urban Agriculture Week.



SEPTEMBER

Amidst rainy skies, our 2nd Harvest Day at the Farm Celebration was held at our Big Urban Farm in Pawtucketville.



Learn

PROGRAM HIGHLIGHTS

Gardener Education Community Food Partnership

As an organization, we value the opportunities to unite our diverse community, strengthen socialization, and share lifelong experiences. MCG Community Team Manager, Trang Dong, expanded gardener education offerings in 2024 to include a variety of public workshops led by community experts as well as MCG gardeners. This free Community Gardens Workshop series – with classes on *Square Foot Gardening & Soil Health*, *Canning & Food Preservation*, *Composting*, *Planting 101*, and *Natural Dyes* – was held at our ROOT Community Space, community gardens, and Pollard Memorial Library. **In addition to group learning in a classroom setting, we provided opportunities to engage in local, statewide, and federal advocacy in support of food equity and healthy food access for all.**

Gardener education workshop attendees enjoy a class on "Natural Dyes."



After building their own capacity as leaders of a local grassroots food policy network, the Community Food Partnership (CFP) hosted two Community Food Forums in 2024. Lowell residents, policymakers, and human service organizations gathered in May to co-create a local food policy agenda by and for the CFP. Their priorities: **making food more affordable, increasing access to culturally connected produce, and improving institutional food.** For the second forum, the CFP planned to build power around food resources for the unhoused. However, when the Massachusetts Department of Transitional Assistance announced significant reductions to the Healthy Incentives Program (HIP) in October, the CFP pivoted quickly to respond. CFP members and forum attendees organized advocacy efforts to push for both immediate and long-term restoration of HIP funding. **Mill City Grows is proud to be an active supporter of the Community Food Partnership.**



Leaders of the Community Food Partnership went into action to support HIP funding.

OCTOBER

MCG welcomed Chef Kelcy Scolnick for their first live cooking demonstration at our ROOT Community Space.



NOVEMBER

Mill City Grows rallied at the Massachusetts State House to strengthen legislative support for the Healthy Incentives Program (HIP).



DECEMBER

Pawtucket Farm Wildlife Sanctuary opens to the public! Project partners hosted public tours of the accessible trails that run throughout the property.



2024 In Review | Fall and Winter

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 2024.

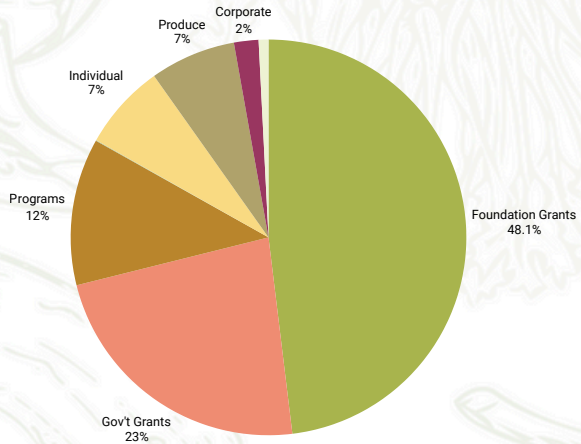
Please visit [MillCityGrows.org/meet-our-supporters](https://millcitygrows.org/meet-our-supporters) to learn more about the businesses and organizations that sponsor and fund our work.



► Joyful students got hands in the soil on planting day at the Morey Elementary School garden!

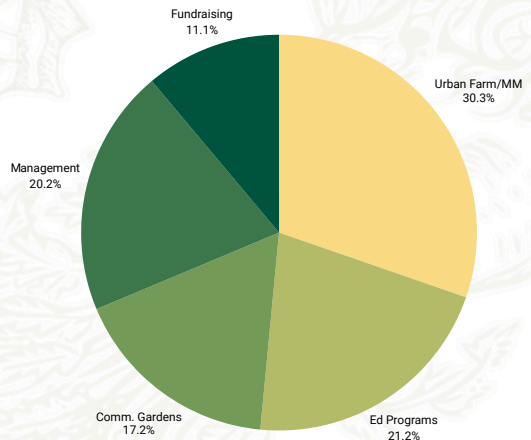
REVENUE

Foundation Grants	\$992,181
Government Grants	\$477,816
Program Revenue	\$241,064
Special Events	\$1,000
Individual Contributions	\$148,267
Produce Sales	\$134,788
Corporate Contributions	\$41,596
In-kind/Misc	\$15,882
Total Revenue	\$2,052,594



EXPENSES

Urban Farm / Mobile Market	\$514,916
Education Programs	\$357,043
Community Gardens	\$287,213
Management & General	\$341,362
Fundraising	\$185,042
Total Expenses	\$1,685,576





THANK YOU, MCG VOLUNTEERS!

In 2024, we hosted a total of 599 volunteers who completed 2,290 community service hours across 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.

Special thanks to our 2024 Corporate Volunteers

**These corporate volunteer groups completed
a total of 1,242 hours of service!**

Cambridge Isotope Laboratories
Fred C. Church Insurance Company
Heritage Properties
Jeanne D'Arc Credit Union
KS Partners, LLC
Massachusetts Executive Office of Elder Affairs
National Grid
Princeton Properties
The Starbucks Foundation
Ultimate Kronos Group (UKG)
UMass Lowell's Asian American Center for Excellence and Engagement
Waste Management
Woodard & Curran Foundation



Young volunteers from the Cambodian Mutual Assistance Association at our Big Urban Farm.



Support our work!

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