



PLANT  
CHICAGO

convening  
co-creating  
open sourcing  
co-location

# ANNUAL REPORT

2019

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# DIRECTOR'S STATEMENT

This year has been monumental for Plant Chicago. We've reflected deeply on what it means to be co-located, to convene, collaborate, and open source information. Co-location should not be limited to the boundaries of a building, but must include those businesses and people that surround you. With that in mind, we have transitioned from a singular focus on the community inside of The Plant to focus our impact with small businesses and residents across the southwest side of Chicago. In the past year, we launched our Local Circular Economy Leadership Network, released our Circular Economy Toolkit for Small Businesses, and perhaps most significantly: we've moved.

Our new location is a former firehouse which we are repurposing into a center for circular economy programming. Located just a few blocks away from our former home, The Firehouse allows us to not just continue our innovative programming in education and small business support, but also evolve and grow more in line with our mission and values. Straddling both the commercial corridor on Ashland Avenue and the residential area around Davis Square Park, we're positioned to work closer with small businesses and residents in the Back of the Yards neighborhood and southwest side of Chicago.

It's incredible to witness what has happened in just 4 months: with the collective effort of staff and volunteers, we moved entire farms (indoor and outdoor), and rebuilt the main engine hall to be able to accommodate school groups, host mission aligned summits, film screenings, and other events. Most amazingly, despite the fact that we spent the last quarter of 2019 moving and preparing to move, we still hosted thousands of youth in education programs, led 24 markets with over 40 vendors, and organized small business forums.

In the coming year, The Firehouse will be the home of the only shared indoor growing spaces for commercial use. This "indoor victory garden" will feature shared space for growing both plants and fungi, with wet labs, sinks, and space for small commercial growers as well as individuals that want to learn how to grow indoors. The retail shop will feature the food grown on site, plus products which are actively diverting materials from the landfill, and opportunities to collect materials from the neighborhood.

From battery recycling, electronics collection, and community composting opportunities, we'll be working with our small business and residential neighbors to divert materials from the landfill.

It's an exciting time for Plant Chicago. If you have supported us as a donor or volunteer, we thank you.

**JONATHAN PEREIRA**

Executive Director



# **MISSION & VISION**

**Plant Chicago's mission is to cultivate local circular economies. We envision a paradigm shift in production, consumption, and waste driven at the local level, generating equity and economic opportunity for all residents.**

## **WHAT IS A LOCAL CIRCULAR ECONOMY?**

At the local scale, it can be described as a collaborative economic practice sustained by local circulation of materials, nutrients, knowledge, and money. It's empowered by transparency, diversity, and inclusion.



# SMALL BUSINESS

Plant Chicago's small business program supports small businesses to engage in circular economy practices while improving their bottom line. Program activities include our Circular Economy Leaders Network, one-on-one support for businesses on circular economy projects, and opportunities for additional revenue and community engagement through our farmers market and partner workshop offerings.

## LOOKING AHEAD

### *Circular Economy Leaders Network*

Members of the new Circular Economy Leaders Network will collaborate with Plant Chicago and each other to set and achieve at least one circular economy goal over the course of the year. Businesses are working on projects like sourcing ingredients from local farmers, reducing landfill waste, measuring their impact on the local community, and more.

### *New Retail Space*

Plant Chicago will launch a circular economy retail space at our new location. This is an exciting opportunity for us to think about what retail could look like within a local circular economy system.

*"Being able to host workshops has widened my reach, people are starting to get to know me and the work I do. I can pay bills, especially the months I teach a workshop and always feel an energetic boost from the beautiful community, so thank you!"*

## OUTCOMES

- Worked with a variety of stakeholders to create a Circular Economy for Small Business toolkit. The toolkit helps small businesses understand, benchmark, implement, measure, and communicate circular economy initiatives within their operations.
- Recruited 14 small food businesses on Chicago's southwest side for our new Circular Economy Leaders Network.
- Hosted 18 partner workshops on topics ranging from beekeeping to vegan baking, generating over \$7,000 in additional revenue for local small businesses.



Photo by Ingrid Bonne

# EATING FOR 8 BILLION

The event brought together local chefs and innovative growers/food producers for delicious meals and reflections on what it means to eat and make food in a world filled with almost 8 billion people! Meals courtesy of:

- Chef Abra Berens (Granor Farms, James Beard nominee), Energy Labs; a meal that focused on the opportunities of “alternative” proteins, including the mycelial based protein being made from Energy Labs.
- Chef Kuan (French Kitchen, Yappah) , Adam Pollack (Closed Loop Farms); we explored the cultural tensions that arise when discussing eating meat. The meal featured both vegan tracks and a “nose to tail” meal made from “offal” from animals.



Photo by Ingrid Bonne

## CLOSED LOOP FORUM

Our second annual Closed Loop Forum, brought together people from all backgrounds and perspectives for discussion around the circular economy – what it is and different ways communities and businesses are implementing and benefiting from it.

- Over 100 attendees
- Garry Cooper, Founder of Rheaply, gave a keynote
- 12 diverse breakout sessions throughout the day gave participants a chance dive deeper into circular economy practices
- Plant Chicago created a list of local circular economy action items based on what we learned during the forum and sent the list to forum participants. We also collected comment cards from attendees to let the City of Chicago know what actions they could take to cultivate a local circular economy in Chicago



## HARVEST DINNER

We awarded small businesses that are working to create local paradigm shifts in production, consumption, and waste at our annual Harvest Dinner, including:

- Closed Loop Farms and Just Ice for their collaborations to divert materials from landfills
- Ste. Martaen for going 100% compostable and making vegan food that is planet-friendly
- Chefs Abra Berens of Granor Farm, Iliana Regan of Elizabeth Restaurant & Milkweed Inn, Eric Mansavage of Farmhouse Chicago, Won Kim of Kimski, and Laviyah Ayanna and Nahum
- St Martin of Ste Martaen.



Photo by Ingrid Bonne

# MARKETS

Plant Chicago's farmers market started in 2015 with a goal to create a safe space for community members to gather, and to provide fresh, locally grown. Our farmers market accepts Link/EBT and matches Link purchases dollar for dollar up to \$25 to support our farmers and ensure produce gets into the hands of those who need it most.

## PROGRAM HIGHLIGHTS

**71%** POC OWNED

**76 PERCENT  
WOMEN-OWNED**

**\$1,760** worth of groceries distributed in LINK/EBT program

**3,521** VISITORS



Photo by Leah Kuhn



Photo by Leah Kuhn



"Plant Chicago is a great place to be in, great people to work with and surely a great place to grow a healthier community... our partnership with Plant Chicago has allowed Chicago Commons to not only bring clean locally sourced produce but also to expand [our] network of resources. Not only do [our communities] learn about new small business, but they also learn about ways to improve their day to day lives through food, gardening, homemade products for the whole family ... I look forward to our continued collaborations as we work together to grow a healthier community"

Andrea Guzmán - Family Hub Manager at Chicago Commons Paulo Freire Center

## MORE HIGHLIGHTS

In 2019, Plant Chicago was a lead organizer of the Chicago Farmers Market Collective, a group that aims to encourage collaboration between all of the markets in the city of Chicago.

At each market, we represented a partnered non-profit: Forest Preserves of Cook County, Citizens Climate Lobby, Shedd Aquarium, Chicago Tool Library, Community Glue, Citizens Utility Board, MWRD, and more!

## LOOKING AHEAD

- Plant Chicago will work with the Chicago Farmers Market Collective to create a common application to simplify the application process for vendors
- Pilot "Grab Bag" program at our summer farmers market to increase participation in Link Match
- In the summer, our farmers market will move to Davis Square Park. Unlike last year, the summer market will be every week!



Photo by Leah Kuhn

# EDUCATION

Closed Loop Labs are hands-on workshops that engage K-12 students from the Chicago region with circular economy principles and make connections between economic and ecological systems.

## PROGRAM HIGHLIGHTS

**3,600 YOUTH SERVED  
THROUGHOUT**  
one-hundred-and-fifty programs

**27% FREE** of programs were offered  
TO BACK OF THE YARDS SCHOOLS



"Students had a wonderful experience at the aquaponics workshop. Even while in transition to the new facility, our facilitators led exemplary tour and lab investigation. I would recommend Plant Chicago to all chemistry and biology high school educators!" - Emma Koropp, University of Chicago Charter School - Woodlawn Campus



## LOOKING AHEAD

With our recent move, our education team is excited to be closer to some of our partner schools, making it even easier for community groups to participate in our programming. Through a small grant from kidsgardening.org, Plant Chicago will start building out an outdoor pollinator garden. Weather permitting, the garden will be visited by nearly all of our school programs, providing an excellent natural space for students to explore during our native pollinator Closed Loop Lab. The education team is also excited about the new build out of our aquaponic systems, which will display different system designs and be easy for students to explore.



# RESEARCH

*Early stage entrepreneurs and hobbyists need resources, knowledge, and networks to be successful. Our research program focuses on open-sourcing information and leveraging shared knowledge, resources, and infrastructure to provide support to early stage entrepreneurs, hobbyists, and academic researchers.*

## MYCOLOGY

Chicago Social Mycology met every month in 2019. Attendance is concentrated around a core group of a dozen enthusiastic individuals, with growing to 65 people. The group completed a 5 month long internal education program and began assisting the education staff with the creation of mycology-focused closed loop labs. Makeup of the group is primarily hobbyist enthusiasts, with a handful of early stage commercial operations.

## LOOKING AHEAD

As part of the development of the Firehouse, in 2020 we will establish a dedicated mycology clean room and associated growing space. We will begin offering at least one mycology-focused Closed Loop Lab, as well as a mycology-centered general public workshop.

The Firehouse presents a tremendous opportunity for Plant Chicago to help support established and early stage growers. Our plans are to offer a wash/pack room and research wet lab, as well as dedicated growing space and equipment. Refrigerator, freezer and dry storage space are planned to allow for various methods of crop storage and preservation. Alongside this increase in material support for growers and entrepreneurs, we will be adding to our roster of hobbyist groups, with a focus on topics that interest our neighbors in Back of the Yards.

Photo by Leah Kuhn

# SUPPORT

*With the support from our volunteers, interns, and donors, Plant Chicago is able to provide low-cost programming for schools, launch research projects, and sponsor local small businesses.*

# VOLUNTEER

## PROGRAM HIGHLIGHTS

- Hosted 2 major work days for regular volunteers, each with at least 25 people in attendance
- Hosted 13 volunteer groups, some school, some corporate, some non profit
- Sustained an active Auxiliary Board comprised of 15 young professionals
- 150 Active volunteers
- 2,048 total volunteer hours



## LOOKING AHEAD

Plant Chicago's volunteer program is evolving from informal open hours every Saturday, to more focused monthly work days. We are excited to have targeted work days to get more accomplished and make the most out of our volunteers' time and efforts.



## INTERN PROJECTS

Moira Mulhern - Supported Plant Chicago's waste diversion programs through creating a guide for the waste station and designing interactive ways for people understand waste streams (decomposition activity)

Eliana Torrero - Supported Plant Chicago's onsite and offsite markets through outreach and research

Eva Durance - Worked with Arize Kombucha and Kombuchade to experiment with using SCOBYS as a vegan alternative to leather. Created a wallet as an example of how the 'textile' could be used

AK Miller and Tyler Bogartz-Brown - Explored the relationship between mycorrhizal fungi and leafy productivity

Lia O'Bryan - Served as Plant Chicago's Operation Associate for summer 2019. Supported staff through answering emails, phone calls, and field trip requests. Facilitated Circular Economy Workshops, maintained indoor and outdoor growing spaces, and provided general support during farmers markets.

## LOOKING AHEAD

In summer 2020 we are looking forward to hosting up to 4 Circular Economy Project Interns who will support small food businesses in our network to benchmark, implement, and measure circular economy practices within their operations.

We will host 1-2 interns from Back of the Yards through the Career and Technical Education (CTE) program through CPS this summer. We also anticipate hosting 2-3 interns to support our nutrition programs at our weekly summer farmers market.

## INTERNSHIPS

### PROGRAM HIGHLIGHTS

An internship with Plant Chicago is a unique experience. In addition to working closely with our staff and other businesses, our interns also complete a closed-loop project of their own design.





## LOOKING BACK

In November, Plant Chicago moved out of the facility known as "The Plant"

For over 8 years, Plant Chicago served as a critical support structure for "The Plant". By the end of 2019, it was clear that the ecosystem of businesses there was stable enough that a nonprofit was no longer needed.

"The Plant" is now entirely a community of small, for profit businesses. If you supported Plant Chicago throughout this time, either through volunteering your time or donating money, we thank you! You supported a wildly unique community and its success would not have been possible without you.

## FROM 2011-2019...

Plant Chicago collaborated with

- 10 academic researchers
- 12 small businesses
- 20 interns

to conduct research projects on the economic and environmental potential of "waste."

**15,000+**  
people visited our  
year-round farmers markets

**60,000+**  
people joined us for tours  
and workshops

**\$500,000+**  
dollars of economic  
benefits were brought to  
the community of co-  
located small businesses

# FINANCIALS

Foundations  
45%

Total revenue  
\$365,063

Misc  
2%  
Retail  
3%

Rent / Utilities  
10%

Accounting/Audit  
7%

Foundations  
3%

Supplies  
3%

COGS + Sales Tax  
3%

Consulting  
2%

Special Events  
2%

Misc  
2%

Personnel  
64%

Total Expenses  
\$350,579

## REVENUE

Plant Chicago continues to progress with the support of local and national foundations, government grants, corporate sponsors, and individual donors. Earned income comes from program fees such as workshops. With your help, we look forward to growing our impact in our new location at The Firehouse.

\*Revenue received for the 2019 fiscal year without donor restrictions.

## EXPENSES

Personnel is the largest expense for the organization, representing the long term tenure of talented staff. In 2019, PC was a utility+rent-paying tenant of The Plant.

\$0.77 of every dollar supports direct program costs.

Expenses not listed in chart:  
**Management Expenses** 2%  
**Program Expenses** 2%

# THANKS TO OUR 2019 SPONSORS, FUNDERS + SMALL BUSINESSES

The list below are those foundations and businesses that have supported Plant Chicago through grants, sponsorships, in-kind services, or product donations for events.

## FOUNDATIONS + GOVERNMENT

Albert Pick Foundation  
Anonymous  
Cynthia and George Mitchell Foundation  
Dart Foundation  
Gems Academy  
Martha Struthers Farley and Donald C. Farley,  
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Coleman Foundation  
Conagra Brands Foundation  
Earthshare  
First Midwest Bank  
Oatly  
Patagonia  
West Monroe Partners

## PRODUCT SPONSORS

Apologue Liqueurs, Arize Kombucha, Beyond Meat, Bike a Bee, Butterdough, Cedillo's Fresh Market, Closed Loop Farms, Four Letter Word, Great American Cheese, Just Ice, Kombuchade, No Denial Foods, Pixie Dust Salts, Sacred Serves, Tea Squares, Virtue Cider, Whiner Beer, Yappah



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THANKS TO ALL  
THE INDIVIDUALS  
WHO DONATED  
IN 2019!

