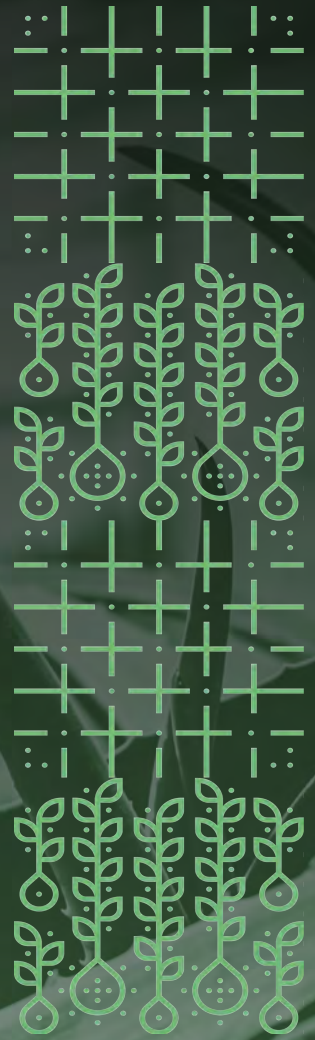




PLANT
CHICAGO



2020

Annual Report

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Executive Director's Statement



For many of us, “I can’t wait until we can go back to normal” has been a mantra of the past year. But just what “normal” are we wishing for?

Amidst the grief of the last year, many of us rediscovered joy in the simple things. Joy in getting to know our neighbors and taking walks in our neighborhood, supporting our favorite local small businesses, buying food from a farmer or growing our own food. If we had the privilege of being at home, we were able to slow down enough and take pride in cooking more homemade meals, repairing appliances, or monitor how much we are throwing away. 2020 was the year to stop being willfully blind, to take time to find what is important in our lives and how the decisions we make have an effect on the world.

The science is quite clear: if we continue to extract resources at the expense of habitats, global pandemics will become more likely. As we continue to burn non renewable resources for energy, we will increasingly warm our climate. Our economic and justice systems collectively devalue black and brown lives, and if we do nothing we are in effect supporting these systems. This is not a normal we can return to.

I hope that we can remember both the lessons and the joys of the past year to create a new normal. To continue to stay present in our communities and check in with our neighbors, support local businesses, and get outside. Taking action where we can against injustice. Buying locally and sustainably grown food, or growing it ourselves. To slow down and be intentional about reducing our overall consumption and purge the very concept of single use.

In 2020, we began to build this new “normal” in collaboration with volunteers, small businesses and our neighbors. Over \$28,000 of incentives for locally and sustainably produced food was distributed to low income households. We began accepting food scraps for composting from our neighbors, regardless of their ability to pay. We piloted the “Indoor Victory Garden” to provide space and equipment for Chicago residents to grow their own food year round. We launched the first Circular Economy Toolkit for Small Businesses and Local Economic Impact Report. And in 2021, our Circular Economy Leaders network has grown to over 30 business leaders in a wide range of industries, including farmers, restaurants, textiles, body products and more. Close to half of these businesses are BIPOC owned and two thirds women-owned.

If you have supported Plant Chicago in the past year, we thank you. The accomplishments of the past year were only possible with the support and collaborations of foundations, businesses, and individuals like you. I hope you will join us in the years to come to create a new normal.

JONATHAN PEREIRA

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "Jonathan Pereira". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a long horizontal stroke extending to the right.

Our New Home

The Firehouse offers many ways to engage the public in the local circular economy, including shared use farms, year round markets, and flexible use spaces for workshops and events. While we had to put a hold on most in-person gatherings in 2020 we stayed busy getting the building ready and installing indoor farming systems. We're looking forward to exploring the full potential of the historic building in 2021,

including new aquaponic systems, food scrap drop off, swap events, public workshops, circular economy retail, and more.

Plant Chicago's move to The Firehouse could not have been more timely to help build a new "normal". A normal where local, small businesses are celebrated and supported. A normal where every resident has access to locally and sustainably produced food and have access to space and equipment to grow their own food year round. and the ability to divert waste of all types, from food scraps to batteries. This new normal creates equitable economic opportunity to all residents of Chicago, regardless of their background. This "normal" is not about buying stuff for the sake of buying stuff. It is about taking what you need and giving what you can.



Youth Education

We began hosting school groups at The Firehouse in February and with the onset of COVID-19 we quickly shifted to virtual formats.

Our hands-on labs and workshops took many different forms in 2020, including small learning groups on Saturdays to virtual field trips and afterschool programs. With our shift to virtual we were able to engage with a global audience.

In 2020, we...

Reached 760 K-12 students with 44% of our programs offered for free.

Launched Small Group Saturdays during the weekly farmers market.

Launched a monthly virtual after-school program.

Hosted 11 interns, who worked on projects ranging from mycology research to farmers market operations to local economic impact reporting.



44%
OF PROGRAMS
OFFERED FOR
FREE



"[Plant Chicago] was able to modify the activity to students with visual impairments. I think virtual learning is a great opportunity to create modifications for some activities to include students with disabilities!"

Matthew Lupulio
Perkins School for the Blind

"Plant Chicago is an excellent opportunity, for the community and specifically for the C-CAP program and our students. The engaging presentations gave our students a bird's eye view and clear understanding of the connection of aquaponics, as it relates to the urban community and sustainability. We look forward to working with Plant Chicago in the future."

Anthony McPhee, C-CAP

In 2021, we will...

Continue to offer free workshops to groups that cannot afford a fee.

Strengthen our partnerships with schools within walking distance of The Firehouse.

Install a new aquaponic system for use by all of our in-person school programs!

Continue to offer educational programming for small groups and families, such as Small Group Saturdays and virtual programs.

Prioritize providing paid youth internship opportunities for youth from Back of the Yards.

Small Business

Plant Chicago's Circular Economy Leaders Network brings together Chicago-area small businesses to cultivate local circular economies. Through a combination of workshops, knowledge sharing opportunities, and technical assistance, Plant Chicago supports our network members as they set and work toward circular economy goals.

"I just finished reviewing this incredible toolkit! Tons of good information and now I want to tell the world about it! I am happy to join this team and build my business with these practices."

Circular Economy Network Member



CIRCULAR ECONOMY

LEADERS NETWORK



In 2020

12 businesses actively participated in the CE Leaders Network over the course of 2020.

Baseline waste generation and diversion data was collected from six of the 12 participating businesses.

Network businesses generated 16.7% less waste per \$100 revenue than the average business in Back of the Yards.

Plant Chicago's Circular Economy for Small Business toolkit was published, the first of its kind.

Local Economic Impact report was published.

35.7% of every dollar spent by businesses stayed on the southwest side of Chicago

Waste diversion practices helped CE network businesses avoid **0.86 metric tons of CO₂e emissions**, the equivalent of taking a passenger vehicle off the road for **over 2,000 miles**.

In 2021

We have over **30 businesses** participating in the second cohort of the Circular Economy Leaders Network from food to fashion. Member businesses will work together to test returnable packaging models, pilot local ingredient sourcing projects, reduce waste, and more.

Plant Chicago will pilot a local circular economy retail model at our Firehouse Market, including food scrap drop-off, battery recycling, a swap table, and community events that will keep materials out of landfills and support our local economy.

100% of the products we stock in our retail space will meet our local circular economy retail criteria.

Local Food Systems

Plant Chicago's farmers market and brick and mortar the *Firehouse Market* provide sources of revenue for local farms and other small businesses in Chicagoland. Our ability to accept and match all purchases made with Illinois Link cards and Senior and WIC farmers market coupons help to make locally grown, nutritionally-dense produce more accessible to our neighbors on the southwest side.

In 2020

We distributed **over 500 Link Produce Boxes** to low-income households on the southwest side and beyond.

Over **\$28,000** worth of Link sales and Link & Senior coupon matching funds were redeemed through Plant Chicago's Farmers Market and Link Produce Box Program, supporting over 15 local farms and food producers.



"Link and senior coupon match have been very important-- senior and low-income households have been able to participate more actively in the market and we [Bee-utiful Honey] have been able to increase our sales. The match program helps us support the foundation of our business, and right now we are thinking to increase the number of beehive colonies we have, so we can provide more good quality honey at affordable prices."

Oscar Villa, Owner of Bee-utiful Honey and Candles
(2020 full-season vendor)



SYSTEMS



"This year was the first time I've ever been on food stamps and this program took a lot of the stress out of it. I've learned to cook so many vegetables that I would've never bought on my own. I've also learned to appreciate mushrooms after being disgusted by them as a kid."

Steve R, Farmers Market customer & Link Produce Box participant

In 2021, we will...

Host 24 farmers markets at Davis Square Park with over 15 vendors.

Offer **1,000 Local Food Boxes** to our neighbors on the southwest side.

Offer indoor and outdoor space to our neighbors to grow food, year round.

LOCAL FOOD



Midwest Urban Farmers Summit

In early 2020, Plant Chicago co-hosted the Midwest Urban Farmers Summit with The Urban Canopy in February, bringing together over 100 urban growers from across the Midwest. Over 200 people attended the 2-day event, joining workshops that ranged in topic from Urban Agriculture Policy, Beekeeping, Community Garden Growing, and Incorporating Indigenous Knowledge for Sustainable Agriculture.





"I began volunteering knowing nothing about growing greens, let alone growing using hydroponics. But with the support and guidance of Plant Chicago's staff, I not only helped to build the hydroponic system I would eventually use, but I was also harvesting food for my own cooking, and sharing with my friends and family. I'm incredibly grateful to be a part of the Plant Chicago community and look forward to seeing the Indoor Victory Garden expand to even more growers in the future!" - Dan T., IVG grower

Indoor Victory Garden

Plant Chicago's Indoor Victory Garden, beginning with our pilot in 2020, will provide both new and experienced growers alike with the space, equipment and support to further explore and develop their growing knowledge and skills. Once completed, the IVG will be able to host as many as 30 growers with distinct systems for hydroponics and microgreens. A cleanroom and wet lab will further support Chicago Social Mycology and others looking to learn and experiment with mushroom cultivation.



In 2020, we...

Began construction of the Indoor Victory Garden, starting with the wash/pack and wet lab facilities.

Started a pilot cohort of 7 growers, to better understand their unique needs.

In 2021, we will...

Expand operations to include even more growers.

Open source our learnings from the first further develop and expand the operational model for the Indoor Victory Garden.

"It's been a pleasure to grow with peers, experiment and learn from the experts at Plant Chicago. As a new microgreens grower, it has been very special to have an incubator like space and resources to practice the techniques and lay the foundation of a small business. The community at Plant Chicago has been very supportive, encouraging and informative during this process."

Prasad Gadgil of Taaza Taree LLC and IVG grower



Waste Diversion

With a change in location, we renewed our focus on tracking and analyzing our inputs and outputs. We entered into 2020 with a goal to divert 90% of our outputs from landfills. Though the year was not a normal one with regards to our programming, we were still able to achieve a 74% diversion rate. In total, including all of our construction projects (raised beds, chicken coop, storage shed) we were able to divert over 2000lbs of material from landfills. In 2021 we will offer monthly diversion events and free food scrap drop off at the Firehouse Marketplace.

**4.8 TONS
OF PUMPKINS
DIVERTED FROM
THE LANDFILL**

Pumpkin Smash

Our first collection event took place outdoors in November in accordance with COVID-19 regulations. In partnership with SCARCE and University of Illinois Extension of Cook County, we diverted 4.8 tons of pumpkins from the landfill!

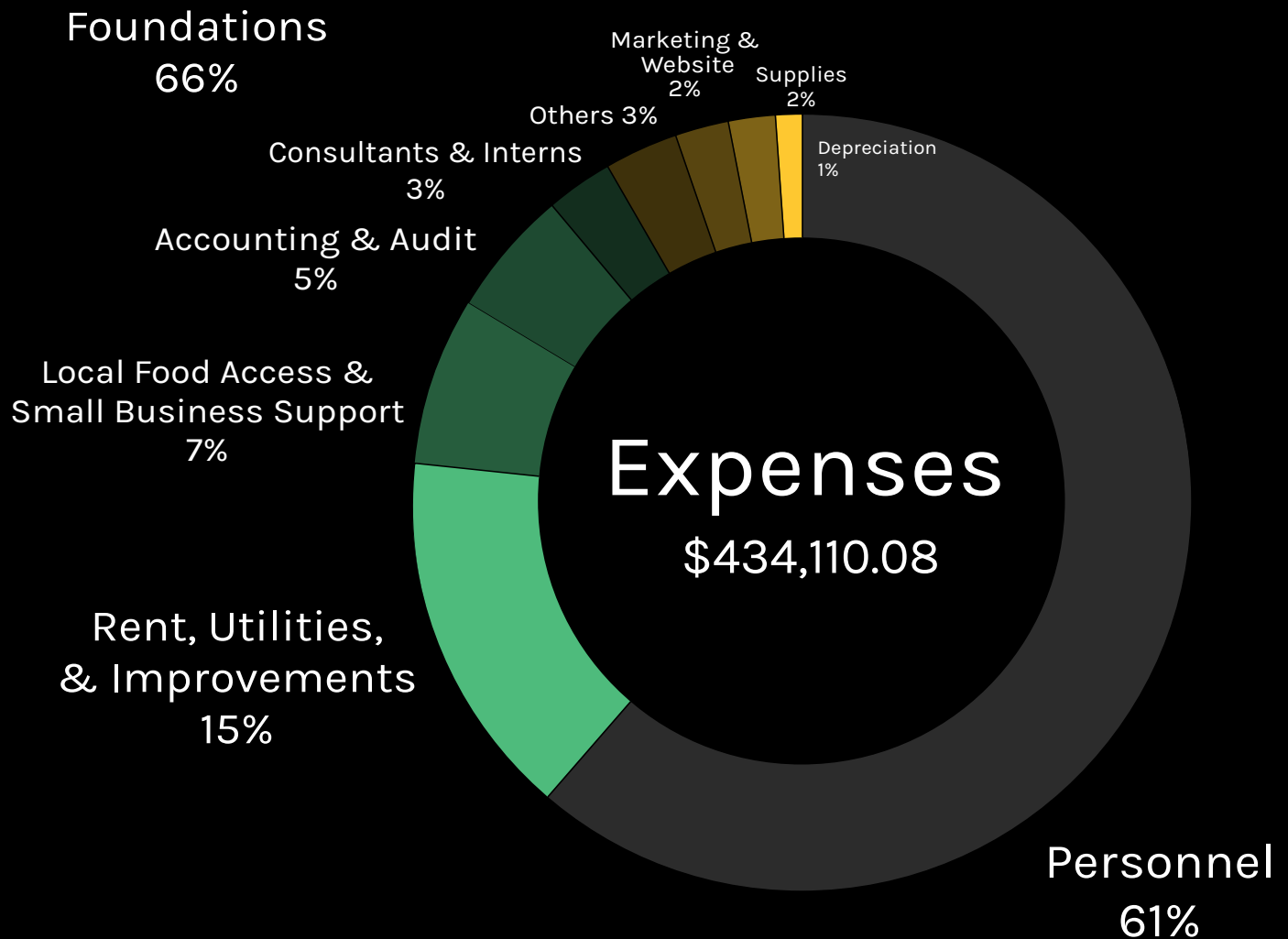
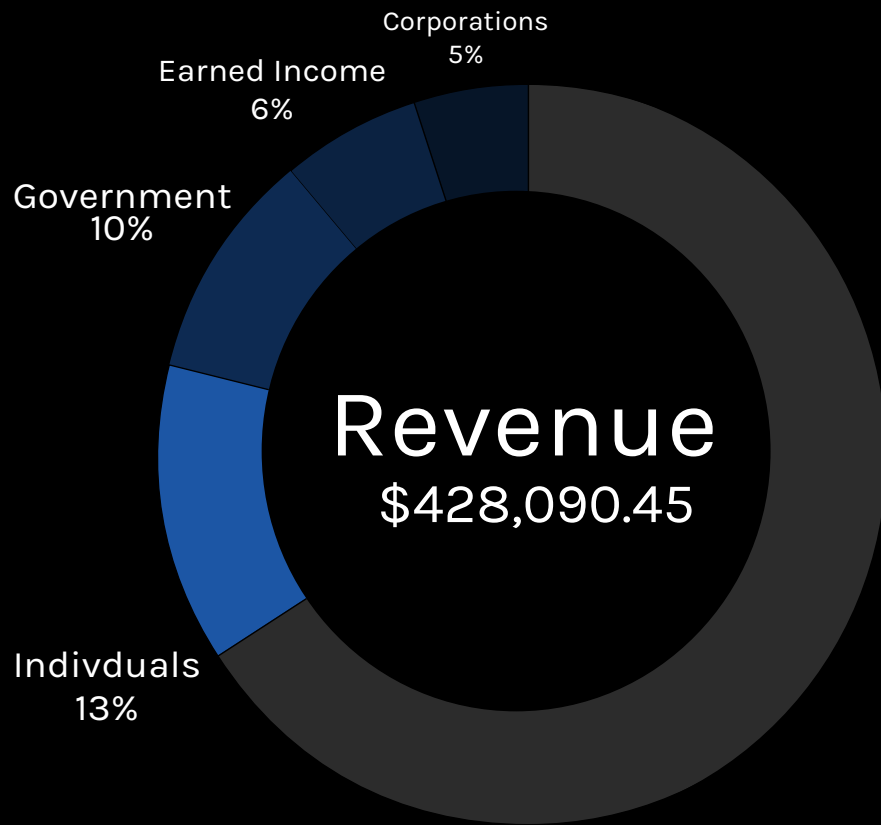


Financials

Like many other small businesses and nonprofits, 2020 was a challenging year. Thanks to the support of so many generous individuals, businesses, and foundations we made it through.

82% of our expenses went directly to programs, in line with previous years.

With your help, we look forward to growing our impact in our new location at The Firehouse.



Thank you to our 2020 funders, sponsors, & supporters

Foundation + Corporate Sponsors

\$20,000 +

Albert Pick Jr. Fund
Anonymous
Chicago Regional Food Systems Fund
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