2017 ANNUAL REPORT
SOWING RESILIENCY

Our great city has long been a community that defines resiliency. In Detroit adversity is met with determination, strength and sometimes fight, but perhaps more importantly, with creativity, hopefulness and collaboration often resulting in residents not only surviving but also thriving.

The growing network of gardeners and farmers in our city personifies the spirit of resiliency for which Detroit is known. Day in and day out, as we work alongside fellow residents in their gardens we hear amazing stories recalling how the serenity of gardening helped them through stressful times, improved their mood, helped them lose weight and even recover from tragic loss and serious illness. For others, gardening is how they keep healthy food on the table during tough financial times. We often hear sentiments like, “I may not have a dime in my pocket but I will never be hungry”. Our community provides endless examples of how the act of growing food has proven an effective tool to face adversity, change they way our communities act and interact with one another, and contribute to making health and happiness standard qualities of life.

With storms, floods and fires raging across the Americas and a tumultuous political climate that threatens the health, security and dignity of many, 2017 was a year that reminded us what is at stake and how important it is to continue to build and nurture a connected and resilient community that cannot only withstand challenges but demand better.

We are happy to share Keep Growing Detroit’s 2017 Annual Report with our community and supporters. We hope that it illustrates how we are digging in to demand better. With the GRP network larger and stronger than ever, we began as we always do with the simple shared act of putting our hands in the soil to grow gardens that not only feed our families and community, but cultivated greater change. This year KGD worked alongside gardens and farms to win hard fought battles to secure land for agricultural production, increased the staying power of gardens and farms in neighborhoods with permanent infrastructure improvements and invested deeply in growing youth leadership to ensure this work has a bright future with many capable hands. With signs that these changes are being embraced and institutionalized, including the creation of the new Office of Sustainability, we are proud of the strides we’ve made toward our mission of achieving a food sovereign city.
GROWING THE GRP

This year we crossed a significant milestone at Keep Growing Detroit. The network of gardens in the Garden Resource Program (GRP) grew to 1,547 and 36 partners in food sovereignty, larger than it’s ever been. These gardens added to the resiliency of Detroit’s food system, with 865 families growing in backyards, 440 community groups reclaiming vacant spaces, 136 school gardens exposing youth to fresh vegetables, and 106 market focused gardens bringing fresh local food to tables across Detroit. Together, these gardens engaged approximately 23,348 Detroiters in growing food for themselves, their families and our community.

We believe there should be places to grow food in every neighborhood in the city – and there are! Our staff had the pleasure to connect with over 3,833 residents during the 82 community meetings and events we attended this year, learning about interests and ideas for growing food in Detroit’s unique neighborhoods and sharing the resources and opportunities that KGD offers in support. Working with community partners, our staff also employed boots on the ground strategies to reach new participants through 3 Good Food Blocks door-to-door campaigns. This year campaigns reached 1,850 households, connecting residents with healthy eating options and resources right in their neighborhood including local farmers’ markets, community gardens, and food pantries.

HOME GROWN RESOURCES

As the network grows, KGD works with our community to ensure that the right resources are available, by prioritizing sourcing locally or producing them ourselves whenever possible. In preparation for GRP distributions, where gardeners picked up 98,192 packs of seeds and 304,414 Detroit grown transplants, GRP members contributed 466 hours of sweat equity to writing out plant tags and packing the seeds that would eventually find their way to their own gardens. With the flavors, cultures and favorites of gardeners in mind, we distributed 97 unique varieties of seeds and plants, including 14 new varieties from salad turnips and yard long beans to long Asian eggplants and epazote. With 752 new gardens joining the GRP this season, our staff was busy with garden development activities, conducting 102 site visits and assisting residents with 250 soil tests to promote safe conditions and encourage good gardening practices as they started and expanded gardens.

In partnership with our community run Regional Resource Hubs, we decentralized distribution of gardening resources, providing 481 yards of compost, 1,430 feet of row cover, 946 tomato stakes, 1,220 feet of trellis netting and access to tool banks stocked with tools that support sustainable agriculture techniques, including broadforks and sod kickers. New in 2017, we added our 5th Hub at Jardin de Los Santos in Southwest Detroit with a new toolbank and informational kiosk which provides KGD materials in both Spanish and English. We also improved our Downtown Hub at Plum Street with specialized tools, such as seeders, hatfield transplanter and a tilter to help advanced growers increase their productivity.
BUILDING SOCIAL CAPITAL

Most experts agree that a marker of resilient communities is social capital, measured by how well neighbors or members within that community know and can rely on each other. During our many grower gatherings this year you could feel the power of our community grow as gardeners got to know one another, exchanged knowledge and experiences, and built a sense of camaraderie and solidarity through these interactions.

At 9 monthly workdays, 173 gardeners made new connections while getting hands-on practice with the month’s featured garden topic, which included building a rain catchment system, pruning fruit trees and planting a rain garden. At the Spring Resource Mixers, 100 gardeners mingled while learning about key garden resources and sampling food from a cultural cooking demonstration taught by a gardener in the area.

At our 4 annual citywide events, where gardeners and farmers greeted one another with hugs and salutations and enjoyed music, good food and good company, we capitalized on opportunities for our community to collectively impact greater change. This year, our citywide events were curated around the gardener-selected theme of climate resiliency. More than 400 growers gathered at the Winter Potluck, Summerfest, and KGD’s Annual Celebration to break bread and honor the folks in Detroit who are inspiring climate friendly policies and practices. Marking the 20th Annual Tour of Detroit Urban Garden and Farms this year, 49 gardens were featured with hosts proudly illustrating the roles that gardens and farms play in every neighborhood across the city. At the reception following the tour, a group of talented chefs prepared a meal that highlighted the diverse food cultures that have come to define our food system here in the city.

STARTING EARLY

This year a significant portion of KGD’s outreach efforts and garden development support was aimed at educators, organizations and families invested in the health, wellness and development of children birth to 5. Whether at home, at school or in the community where these children interact and play, KGD worked to create spaces and teachable moments for over 2,680 young Detroiters to develop healthy habits.

Thirty-five Head Start and early childhood centers joined the GRP this year to give their students the opportunity to grow. Our staff supported 11 new builds and garden expansions at these centers, working with staff to test soil, build and plant the gardens. Using our “Grow with Me” curriculum KGD shared suggested activities to engage the youth in planting, harvesting, tasting and other age-appropriate roles that reinforce and support early learning educational benchmarks. We also hosted 2 Family Fun Days at Plum Street, specifically designed to engage the 22% of GRP families that have children under 5. The tiny visitors explored the many wonders of colors, shapes, sounds and living things on the farm and we shared our tips for working with young children to encourage parents and caregivers to get creative in engaging their children with garden activities at home.
NEXT GENERATION OF LEADERS

There is a powerful network of young leaders that is emerging in the city and KGD is proud to be playing a role supporting them. In 2017, KGD doubled the size of our Summer Youth Apprenticeship to employ 15 youth ages 14-19. Hosted at the farm, the 8-week program grew Apprentices’ leadership abilities, farm skills and sense of resiliency, all of which youth will carry with them for years to come. Not only did Apprentices report feeling more relaxed and at peace by the end of the workday, they also increased their weekly fruit and vegetable consumption by an average of 3.3 servings thanks in part to a bi-weekly CSA share that they harvested and packed themselves.

Five Apprentices from 2016 stayed on with KGD to help pilot our new academic year youth leadership program. Youth met monthly to further their leadership skills and 3 were invited to become crew leaders and peer mentors for incoming 2017 summer youth Apprentices. Continuing the cycle this fall, 8 youth were selected to participate. You can expect to see these Apprentices and fellow graduates in the spotlight of Detroit’s food movement, as nominees for awards, including the Detroit Food Policy Council’s Food Power Awards, accepted as presenters for conferences, and employed in emerging food system opportunities, such as Good Food Ambassadors in local grocery stores.

Detroit growers dedicated 4,145 hours in 2017 to developing new skills

HUNGRY TO LEARN

Detroiter’s of all ages are hungry to learn, as evident from the 644 individuals that completed more than 4,145 hours of education during our 38 Education Series classes that KGD hosted in 2017. Our community’s passion for continuous learning is the inspiration for our education programming, designed to share gardening knowledge, engage and inspire everyone in the Detroit food system, from growers and eaters to makers and entrepreneurs.

We were happy to introduce and support 20 community instructors to our Education Series this year, including 9 teaching with KGD for the first time in 2017. Many of our new teachers were highlighted in our 7 cooking classes, where chefs brought their skills, culture and passion to the kitchen as they shared the culinary traditions of Detroit’s Bangladeshi, Korean, and Filipino communities. An average of 20 people attended each class this season deepening their gardening knowledge in order to make the most out of the crops they were growing. Some of the newer and more unique topics this year were also the most well attended classes, including Growing Mushrooms, Worm Composting, Aquaponics and Hugelkultur. Supporting efforts to increase youth engagement, a special three-part series engaged over 40 youth and adult mentors, sharing strategies to increase youth participation and activities to use with young people in the garden. The highlight of these classes was the October cooking class featuring graduates from KGD’s Youth Apprenticeship who shared skills they honed this summer on the farm.
LEADING BY EXAMPLE

Across the city, residents are putting what they learn into practice, starting gardens, developing productive farms, and working on innovative solutions to the issues they find in their community. Through our advanced and comprehensive education programs, we are supporting growers to build their skills in the areas they are passionate about and also grow their capacity as leaders.

This year members of the Sweet on Detroit Bee Club honed the sweet skills of managing bees and harvesting Detroit-made honey while growing the network of beekeepers that can lean on each other to help build equipment, catch swarms and monitor for pests. Forty-four club members participated in monthly meetings to plan for new hives, troubleshoot hive and pest issues, extract honey, and learn from seasoned guest speakers. Club members also pitched in to train new beekeepers in the Sweet on Detroit Bee- ginner course, sharing the basics of starting and maintaining apiaries and mentoring the 19 beginner students with hands-on experience opening and maintaining hives.

During the winter months, 31 residents were selected to participate in our beloved Urban Roots program, which has been a shared experience for many leaders in Detroit’s urban agriculture community. During the 9-week course, participants took a deep dive into the comprehensive skills needed to develop lasting community gardens. We continued to make curriculum improvements to match the changing environment in the city and were happy to welcome 2 new Urban Roots graduates as instructors.

Down at the farmers’ market, Grown in Detroit entrepreneurs were not only invested in their own sales and success, but also those of their fellow growers. Eleven new growers were mentored by GID veterans who oriented them to the produce check-in process and ensured quality of the fruits and vegetables brought. The market pairs also visited one another’s farms sharing skills of productive growing, harvesting, packaging and prepping for market.

Building the network and support for small farm businesses in the city, 15 production growers participated in KGD’s Farm Train program this winter. The 3 peer-led classes and 3 working sessions focused on topics related to farm planning, setting realistic production expectations and improving market readiness skills. Experienced market growers, many of whom got their start through Grown in Detroit and have gone on to be models for successful farm businesses in the city, shared best practices and lessons learned and growers then went on to work collaboratively on their farm plans.
A PLACE TO GROW

When new visitors walk through the gates of the Plum Street Market Garden at MGM Grand for the first time, they say “Wow! I’ve been by here a hundred times, but I didn’t know all of this was happening in Downtown Detroit!” In 2017, our staff dug in to make sure the nearly 1,800 farm guests including GRP members, volunteers, chefs, CSA members and visitors from out of town, were warmly welcomed, engaged in meaningful service learning, and left more connected to our diverse community.

Since 2010, the site has evolved to become a productive community farm, growing nearly 10,000 pounds of produce for Detroit markets, developing a hub of connections and learning opportunities for growers and visitors of all levels, and contributing to building our capacity as a community to ensure we can provide for ourselves. The greatest mark of success in 2017 was the unique interaction among diverse growers and visitors during nearly 100 Open Hours sessions. While you could never be sure who would show up to the sessions held three times a week, everyone who did was guaranteed to learn something they didn’t know before - KGD staff included! Volunteers picked out transplants and learned about urban agriculture in Detroit, became familiar with many of the 120 varieties grown on the farm while harvesting and shared their own tips and tricks while weeding the fields together with new friends. GRP members made up over half of the diverse group of 600 folks, ranging from experienced to new gardeners, young to old, local to international, who contributed 2,500 hours of their time during Open Hours. Seasonally, Open Hours overlapped with 18 Learn and Earn sessions, where 300 participants helped cut, build, plant, and install resources at Plum and then received these same resources for their gardens, including 105 raised beds, 100 pounds of garlic and 960 perennials.

Plum Street was also the hub for engaging an additional 1,300 volunteers through our Dig in Detroit volunteer program. Volunteers spent 3,500 hours with our staff and community members digging in at Plum Street and at other GRP community gardens, thereby giving their time and gaining a new perspective on Detroit’s changing local food system, our natural environment, and the community that is responsible for implementing change.

SHARING WITH THOSE IN NEED

A portion of the abundant harvest from Plum Street and GRP gardens this year was shared with those in need through our Produce for Pantries program. In 2017, we expanded to include two new pantries and together the 4 sites were able to share fresh fruits and vegetables donated by gardens with more than 1,000 Detroit families that rely on emergency food. In addition to providing produce, our staff and partners from Gleaners shared tips for storing and using fresh produce with pantry staff and clients.

Through our Produce for Pantries program, KGD was also able to support Freedom House with fresh fruits and vegetables to supplement their meals. We had the pleasure of hosting two Freedom House volunteers weekly during the growing season. They helped with harvest needs during our busiest time and ignited community conversations about diverse food cultures. We also were able to share produce with the Ruth Ellis Center, who added donated carrots, cucumbers, summer squash to food bags and prepared meals for homeless youth.
CONNECTING WITH CONSUMERS

With an increased demand for local produce in the city, Grown in Detroit growers were busy this year. They brought healthy fresh produce to the community and were determined to demonstrate the capacity of local growers to be the anchor of the food sovereign city we strive to become.

With its longstanding presence at Eastern Market since 2006, the Grown in Detroit stand was full of activity this season with a growing number of loyal customers spending nearly $50,000 on our quality produce that is grown with love and integrity. Behind the table, a well-orchestrated dance took place every Tuesdays and Saturdays at Eastern Market, facilitating 46 adult growers, including 13 first time sellers, plus 42 youth selling together. Each week growers presented a beautiful table balanced with the season’s freshest and healthiest offerings all while maximizing the earning potential of each grower. This well-run process is a testament to 35 marketers who participated in the 8 seasonal GID Workgroup meetings where growers discussed selling policies, prices and procedures for the cooperative and the 4 New Market Orientation sessions which set growers up for success.

With more produce, including new varieties of eggplant, greens and heirloom tomatoes hitting the market stand, we introduced tasting activities and recipe ideas to engage customers at the table. These activities were also a point of contact to introduce and encourage customers to try the GID Community Supported Agriculture (CSA) program, which was more accessible than ever in 2017 through a monthly enrollment option for those not sure they were ready to commit to a full season of the CSA. There were over 50 CSA members that excitedly picked up their weekly shares this year at the farm and along with the fresh produce, they were introduced to seasonal recipes and the farmers who grew the food.

CHANGING MARKETS

As successful and experienced growers continue to expand their operations and ‘graduate’ out of Grown in Detroit at the farmers’ market, we create more space for rising growers and their tremendous produce through GID’s wholesale opportunities. Twenty-four participating market gardens made 2017 our best year ever – with more than $30,000 in sales, a 30% increase over last year’s sales. These numbers reflect a changing landscape that exemplifies the immense potential for market gardens in the city. To ensure that we capture this market, the season’s overarching focus was two-fold, focusing on providing consistent, quality produce for our network of partners in the local food economy, while supporting the development of a budding group of new market gardeners. We’re grateful for our network of nearly 50 Detroit-owned food businesses, restaurants, organizations, caterers, and others who support and value locally grown produce. Many regular patrons look for the ‘taste of the week’ and adapt their menus to the immediate seasonal bounty.

Together with our friends at FoodLab Detroit, 2017 was our fourth (and most successful!) season of the ‘Detroit Grown and Made’ campaign. This year we partnered on workshops, Farm Field Days, U-Pick opportunities, and one-on-one product development support for FoodLab member businesses. Established and emerging food-trepreneurs continue to innovate and create value-added products using GID produce, helping growers reliably scale up their production of certain crops. New items like Tomato Chutney (Beaubien Fine Foods), Anise Hyssop herbal tea blend (Eli Tea), and GID Juice (Go Smoothies) are gracing market tables and storefronts across the region, with more and more products in development all the time.
WATER & INFRASTRUCTURE

As the speed of redevelopment picks up in our city, growers are under increasing pressure to make sure that their gardens and farms aren’t just seen as temporary uses of the land, but as the critical and permanent neighborhood assets that they are. In 2017, KGD focused on supporting gardens and farms with key building projects and green infrastructure improvements that not only grow their capacity and productivity, but also help these community gardens and farms to develop their roots and increase their staying power.

There are a lot more growers harvesting vegetables year round in Detroit with the help of their passive solar greenhouses. In 2017, KGD helped growers build 7 new structures, adding approximately 23,000 square feet of year-round growingspace to Detroit’s food system. This fall, KGD also developed a prototype for collecting water from hoophouses for irrigation. Ideal for water capture, a 30 foot by 72 foot hoophouse can capture up to 1,300 gallons of water with just one inch of rain.

Affordable access to water is a barrier for many gardens and farms. To help mitigate the stress of water access, KGD finalized a construction manual for the Irrigation Station, a free standing water collection structure that is both cost effective and easy to build. In addition to coordinating 2 new builds at community garden, we shared the manual both online and at events that focused on water conservation.

In addition to the need for water for their own garden, growers recognize the need to take steps to protect and improve water quality in our region – especially in an environment of heavier rain events due to climate change. This year, KGD directed five rain garden installations and assisted with resources and native plants at 15 more in a partnership with the Sierra Club and Friends of the Rouge. In support of these projects our staff grew 3,800 native transplants. We also collaborated this summer with several prominent landscape architects to create Beautiful Borders designs, which include easy to install and manage perennial beds that increase curb appeal and attract beneficial pollinators. The first 2 Beautiful Borders were installed in October and we look forward to supporting more curb appeal projects next year. These rain gardens and curb appeal projects are a small but vital step in reducing the surface water that overflows our combined sewer and water treatment plants during storms, polluting our rivers and lakes.
PLANNING FOR THE FUTURE

On 5,000 acres or just over 25% of the vacant land that exists in Detroit today, residents could grow the majority of the fruits and vegetables that our community consumes while ensuring the Detroiter’s benefit from the health, economic, and environmental benefits proven to be associated with urban agriculture. Achieving this vision requires building the public and political will to set aside places to grow food in every neighborhood in Detroit. To help things along, in 2017 KGD actively engaged with policymakers to advocate for this vision and other policy priorities for the community we serve. We also participated in numerous coalitions dedicated to key issues including land access and land sale reforms, openspace planning, green stormwater management drainage credits, and the sustainability voters’ guide.

Our staff also provided direct support to 225 growers, helping them navigate the process of securing land for farming in Detroit. This included assisting growers with property searches, connecting them to existing city programs to buy and lease land, and walking them through the city’s change of use process so their property receives the full protections and benefits of the Detroit Urban Agriculture Ordinance. These efforts bore fruit this year with 16 growers reporting gaining land security and an additional 67 growers indicating that they had identified tangible next steps in their pursuit toward land ownership.

GARDEN RESOURCE PROGRAM PARTICIPATION IN 2017
WE KEEP GROWING

In Detroit, urban gardeners and farmers are changing the way we eat, live, and connect to one another and in the process are cultivating a food sovereign city. Keep Growing Detroit is honored to help collect, preserve, and share these stories with our extraordinary community. Please enjoy!

TOMMIE BENDER

I was born in Montgomery, Alabama, and at that time, I think just about everyone had a garden there. They had berries growing around the fences there, and they always had greens. That’s how I got into gardening. After I got married, here in Detroit, I had a little garden in my own backyard. In later years, when the house next door was torn down, I acquired the lot and had larger garden there.

When my husband became ill, I was away from gardening for many, many years. After he passed away, when I thought I was going to really get back into it, my daughter became ill. She passed away in March of this past year. It is sad because you don’t expect to bury your children. Yeah, so I’m finally recovering from that because it took a lot out of me at first. And I’m adjusting as she had been sick for such a long time, and I had to have take care of her too. That’s one reason why I didn’t garden too much at that time.

When my daughter, Cheryl, passed, I started to garden in what had been her backyard—across the street on Rutherford, where I still live. Judy was the one who got me involved, at one of the community meetings I started with her a year or so after my husband and daughter died. I made friends with all the people that I gardened with because I didn’t know them before I moved where I am now. There are seven of us now, and we usually work one day a week, when the weather permits. We have a garden in two of our members’ backyards.

I’m involved with gardening is because it supplements my income (and that’s one of the reasons why I got into gardening the first place) plus I like a lot of vegetables. I eat a lot more vegetables because I have them right there, and I raise them, and I know how they’re raised. Gardening also gives you opportunity to think about what you’re going to do for the day, and life problems and whatever is going on around me. You learn so much from talking to other people in the garden. Yeah, it relaxes me. It made me a lot more pleasant.

We have more than we can consume ourselves, so we gather the stuff from our communal efforts as well as our own backyards. We take our excess to the Eastern Market. We make a few cents out of it. My friends, I think everybody in the group that we’re in, they love it.

It seems to me Keep Growing Detroit has grown quite a bit. I get part of my plants from them, they usually give a quite a variety. If it’s something that they don’t give, then I start my own.

Gardening is growing in Detroit. It seems like there are more people getting involved. I know there are more people coming to the little meetings that they have. I just hope that more people get involved in gardening—especially the ones who have children. I imagine they would benefit from KGD because you learn a lot and they pass on a lot of material that would really help. It would help them financially because you invest in one packet of seeds and you’re growing greens or beans or whatever to feed the family. You save a lot of money. I just hope that more people will start to garden here in the City of Detroit.
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DWIGHT THOMAS

Gardening has been something that has been in my family, and in my blood for as long as I can remember. Right now I have got two gardens, I’ve got my fruit trees in the back, and my bees. Between my bees, my fruit trees and my gardens, I’ve got a full time job but it is something that I enjoy doing. Actually it’s one of the healthiest things you can think of because we don’t use any pesticides, chemicals or herbicides. My daughter told me, once, “Dad, I am having trouble going to the grocery store. Daddy the food just didn’t taste good.” So the food that you grow doesn’t taste like anything you can get out of the grocery store. And just imagine that a lot of people don’t get the experience walking out of your side door and cutting a head of cabbage and recognizing how different food tastes.

I always grow enough to eat. I grow enough to put away. And I grow enough to give away. So my senior citizens get love baskets throughout the growing season depending on what’s in season. And I will tell anybody, I may not have a dime in my pocket but I will never be hungry. And that’s because I’ve got enough sense and enough love and enough wherewithal to grow my own food and when you grow it organically, it’s not a lot of money you have to spend.

I call gardening mental health time. My mood is very laidback now. I don’t get excited, I don’t get upset, I don’t get stressed. Gardening is also physical health time. In November 1982 I got hit by a power line that knocked me straight into hell, I was partially paralyzed for 6 years.

The doctors told me I’d never walk without a limp and I would never be able to use my right hand. They told me that that’s all we can do for you. I said well I know what to do. I will go back to gardening, which is something that will work my body and work my hand, and I have dug that garden across the street with my hands.

I turned this whole street into Eden garden, that’s the name of my garden. All these vacant lots, I go up the street and turn every lot into a garden. It has garnered me a lot of respect from my neighbors. People drive by saying you sure have a nice garden and it makes you feel even better about what you are doing.

I understand very clearly we got enough vacant land in Detroit right now to feed ourselves for miles. One block at a time. So, if every block had a community garden or two, or three, no one in this block should go hungry. If we got a community garden or two or three on every block, what problems would we have with fresh food distribution?

"I may not have a dime in my pocket but I will never be hungry."

Garden Resource Program members report saving an average of $1,000 on groceries each year.
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MARTHA PRESSLEY

Last year I had a bout with cancer. I couldn’t even bend my back. But I brought cancer under remission by eating fresh vegetables out of my garden. I ate kale, brussels sprouts, dandelion leaf; I just packed them all together in my blender, turned it on and put my fruit in, and drank it every day. And you know, when I went to my doctor, he said, ‘Your tumors are still shrinking and you’re not even taking the chemo anymore.’ It just blew his mind.

I’m feeling better now; my health is excellent. I can bend over and touch my toes, I can do things that I hadn’t been able to do even before going on the chemo.

You know, the greatest thing about this whole thing is I didn’t have to spend a dime on vegetables the whole winter because I packaged up all my kale and fresh vegetables from the garden. Gardening is a great way of saving your money. Saving those $20-30 dollars a week I didn’t have to worry and think, can I afford to buy that bunch of kale? The staple things that I use, I had them in the freezer.

What keeps me gardening is the health benefits and the connection with nature— I cannot tell you how great I feel when I am in the midst of that garden. Sometimes I go into the community garden and I stand in the middle of it and just feel the spiritual connection. It is so uplifting, it is so enlightening. It makes me feel close to God.

I’ve this dream to have a beautiful flower garden across the street in front of my house. I want to see a flower garden in front of my house before I leave the planet. Even though we are an old neighborhood and old neighborhoods have just really gone down, there are people who live in those houses that maybe cannot afford to get certain things done.

That’s where Keep Growing Detroit comes in. They have been able to give me seeds; I can go to them and get tools if something breaks; they are there to assist me if I have any questions. The one thing is it’s been kind of hard to get people out in the community garden because our community is kind of empty. I’m on Helen Street; I enjoy living here; there are not a lot of houses, I just feel like I am out on Belle Isle. I believe beauty can be wherever. So what if we don’t have a lot of houses? We got more space.

"What keeps me gardening is the health benefits and the connection with nature."

GRP members eat 2.5 more servings of fruits and vegetables each day than non-gardeners in the same zip code.
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RUFINO VARGAS

Working with the land, it’s not easy—I do everything by hand. I love my peppers and corn. The first thing is economy. In the summer I don’t buy tomatoes or peppers. I grow my own; I have my own flavor in my food. I grow my own garlic and onions. I had a lot of hot peppers because we eat food very hot in Mexico.

I fill my kitchen. I feed three families with my gardens. I sell to my friends. If I need some money to buy some tools, I sell my produce and I make money. Last year I made $1,000 dollars from selling my produce. I save a lot — for three or four months from the store I buy only the meat. I have garlic, onions, tomato, lettuce, peppers, herbs. Michigan is a good place to grow. Since I started my garden my sugar levels went down. I lost weight. I think I lost ten lbs. I improved my mood.

I find my own person, my spirit working in the garden. Kids, they learn how to respect my garden. They see how I work. They learn how to work because they help me. They take home eggplant. They are learning to respect another. After my garden I saw a lot of people start doing gardens. I have a lot of flowers. One guy came and said, ‘I want some flowers for my wife but I don’t have any money.’ I give him.

I don’t make too much money but if I make extra money I can pay someone to help me. Some people ask me for job but I can’t pay the regular rate but I can give them vegetables. Market gardening every Saturday, for me, it’s extra money. I make 70 dollars a week most times but one week it was $140.

My goal for this year is to grow more than $10,000 in produce. When I reach this goal I want to get $20,000. I want to buy more lots from the city. My main customers are the Mexicans because I grow a lot of hot peppers. I grow ethic produce like papalo. I find the market; they find me.

"My sugar levels went down. I lost weight. I improved my mood."

Grown in Detroit growers earn $950 of supplemental income on average annually.
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MARIA JONES-FOSTER

I've been at Davison School for 18 years now. About ten years ago I started a garden with another teacher there. It started off as a tree farm many years ago. Then around 2005 another teacher and I installed a few raised beds and began gardening with her class. Unfortunately that teacher was sent to another school. So, about three years ago, I got a group of kids together—fourth and fifth graders—and started the school garden club.

The kids like it a lot and are always anxious to start in the spring. They are dedicated. They like using the equipment, the supplies, they like seeing things grow. Unfortunately every once in a while there is some vandalism in the garden but that’s a lesson to be learned too. They like eating the stuff out of the garden. I tried to make them aware of all the little bugs and the things that we need that are in the garden naturally. We look at the trees and at the birds and talk about how the seeds are food for the birds.

We’ve done art in the garden by making signs with the kids. We decorated the beds with them. They are really positive.

We have special needs kids at our school, hearing impaired and learning disabled so I try to make sure kids from those classes are involved also. This year we expanded because I wanted the garden club to be active more during the school year rather than just March to June so we changed the name to Earth Saver’s Garden Club and we made a video about recycling.

I had a student that was in the garden club in fourth and fifth grade. The fourth graders take the place of the fifth graders when they move up to the middle school and the practice had been that middle schoolers did not participate. But this one young lady said, "We should have sixth graders, sixth graders should be allowed to be in the garden club. If we were in the garden club this year we should be able to do it next year." So I said "Well, I’m telling you what the principal told me but if you want to be in it when you get in sixth grade, you have to go ask the principal.” So she did. And the principal said yes, she would approve middle schoolers participating in garden club. They get so involved in it that they want to continue and I think that’s a good thing.

Keep Growing Detroit has many opportunities for learning. The classes they have are really helpful. I haven’t been able to volunteer as much as I have in the past but I just enjoy being around the people and being around the plants and being in the green houses and being in the sun. It’s just really nice.

I garden because I like being outside. I like watching things grow; it’s a way to be productive, and eat healthier knowing where the food came from. I do eat more fruits and vegetables than I used to. When I get outside it always makes me feel better. I went to the school one morning to water the garden. I put the sprinklers on and I just stood there watching and adjusting and watching. And then somebody said, “Why are you standing there and watching that thing?” Because to me it’s pretty and calming.

It’s some kind of miracle that makes what comes up from these teeny little seeds grow to be what they are. It’s not just the gardening; I enjoy the birds and the trees, and even the weeds. It gives you more to be thankful for, you know there is more out there, another dimension.
2016 FINANCIAL REPORT

2016 REVENUE
$795,361

11% of GRP Members Donate to KGD

- 1% Events & Tours
- 2% Individual Contributions
- 5% Produce Sales
- 10% Program Revenue
- 82% Grants

2016 EXPENSES
$622,314

- 90% Direct Programming
- 7% Management
- 3% Fundraising
ABOUT US

OUR MISSION
Keep Growing Detroit exists to promote a food sovereign city where the majority of fruits and vegetables consumed by Detroiter are grown by residents within the city’s limits. Our strategic approach to achieving our mission includes work that fosters relationships to food, grows the knowledge of food and farming, builds leadership skills and capacity within Detroit’s urban agriculture community, and changes the value of food while developing community assets.

SPECIAL THANKS
Keep Growing Detroit would like to take this opportunity to say "Thank You!" to the members of the We Keep Growing Storytelling Committee including Luke Mattson, Tracey Patterson, Reggie Gaddis, Angela Lugo-Thomas, and our partners from Michigan State University, Dr. Katherine Alaimo, Alyssa Beavers, Mary Connolly, Mary Mitchell, Veronica Edgar, and Lauren Varvatos. We’d also like to thank all of the gardeners and farmers that shared their stories with us.

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