

Rooted In Community:

A Forever Home for The Food Literacy Project



YOUTH TRANSFORMING
THEIR COMMUNITIES THROUGH
FOOD, FARMING, AND THE LAND



A LETTER FROM OUR FOUNDER

Dear friends,

When the Food Literacy Project started in 2006, we had nothing but access to a vegetable farm, two lead donors, a dedicated farmer willing to share knowledge, a visionary Board, and big dreams. Today, thanks to your loyal support, we have the power to make a real difference in our community.

Since our humble start, we've built so much: a skilled and passionate team, young leaders brimming with conviction, trust-based partnerships, an evidence-based curriculum, a 19-year record of impact, and a clear vision for a bright future.

To realize this vision, we're launching the Rooted in Community Campaign. This campaign centers around establishing our Forever Home and the core of our "hub and spokes" model. Our Forever Home will become the organization's headquarters and the heart of our youth development programs. The central hub will become a cohesive urban farm campus with infrastructure, including a dedicated office and meeting space (and bathrooms with plumbing, finally!), allowing us to deepen collaboration with partners and neighbors. We'll continue expanding our work at "spoke" partner sites hosting Field-to-Fork clubs, cooking and gardening classes, and outreach events, primarily led by youth leaders employed at the central hub.

Owning land will provide young leaders with the stability to launch food justice initiatives and engage with peers, neighbors and policymakers throughout the community. It will allow us to more effectively impact lives, providing transformational experiences for young people whose leadership will create a ripple effect as they share their passion for food, farming and the land and their vision for our community.

We've purchased 5.1 acres of open, green space in a residential and commercial area of south central Jefferson County. The property has rich soil, and we are excited about its potential to transform people and our community.

The Rooted in Community campaign is an invitation. Please, join us in building this bright future. With your support, we can cultivate a space where young leaders flourish, fresh food feeds families, and our community thrives.

I can't wait to welcome you to our Forever Home!

In Partnership,
Carol "Cauliflower"

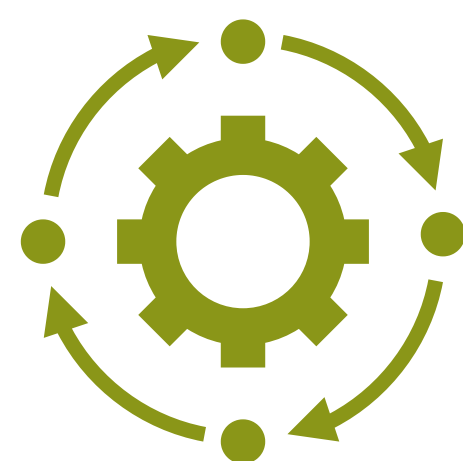


ROOTED IN COMMUNITY: A FOREVER HOME FOR THE FOOD LITERACY PROJECT



LAND

Purchase a
5-10 acre property
to establish our
Forever Home



INFRASTRUCTURE

Develop a
sustainable urban
farming operation,
an outdoor
classroom and
community space,
and multi-functional
indoor space



TRANSFORMATION

Create immediate
relief in the the food
system, enhance
educational
and youth
development
opportunities, and
engage youth in
creating long-term
systemic change

THREE - YEAR
\$6 MILLION PROJECT

ABOUT US

Since 2006, the Food Literacy Project has cultivated young people's connection with soil, air, water, sun, and the work it takes to feed our community.

We have long desired land of our own, where we can establish roots and create a lasting impact in the community.

Establishing our Forever Home will take our work into a new realm of possibilities, where we can expand our impactful, evidence-based, youth-led programming as a permanent fixture in the neighborhood where we eventually plant our roots.

The Food Literacy Project is committed to creating a healthy and equitable community where people and places thrive.



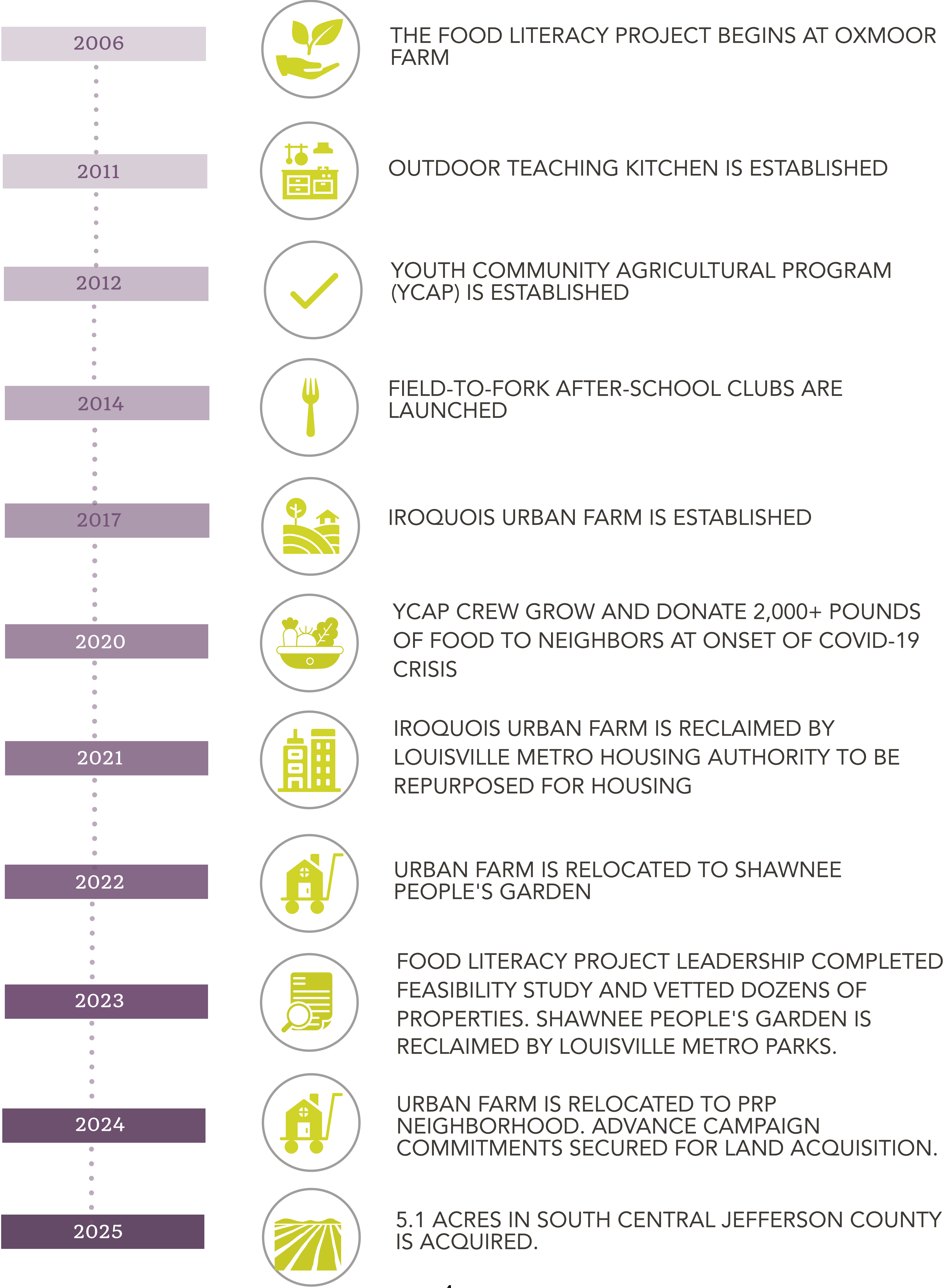
"Food justice continues to be ever-expanding because food justice doesn't just stop at food.

Food Justice is land justice, and land justice is cultural justice and cultural justice continues to get us closer to the liberation of people physically, mentally, spiritually, emotionally, socially and communally."

- Mark "Mycelium," YCAP Crew Member

THE FOOD LITERACY PROJECT

2006 - 2025 MILESTONES





WHAT GARDENING MEANS TO ME



"Gardening makes me happy!"

- Backside Learning Center
Field-to-Fork Club Member



"Gardening means... well basically like caring for an animal. You need to feed it and give it water every day and even give it attention."

- Hazelwood Spring
Field-to-Fork Club Member



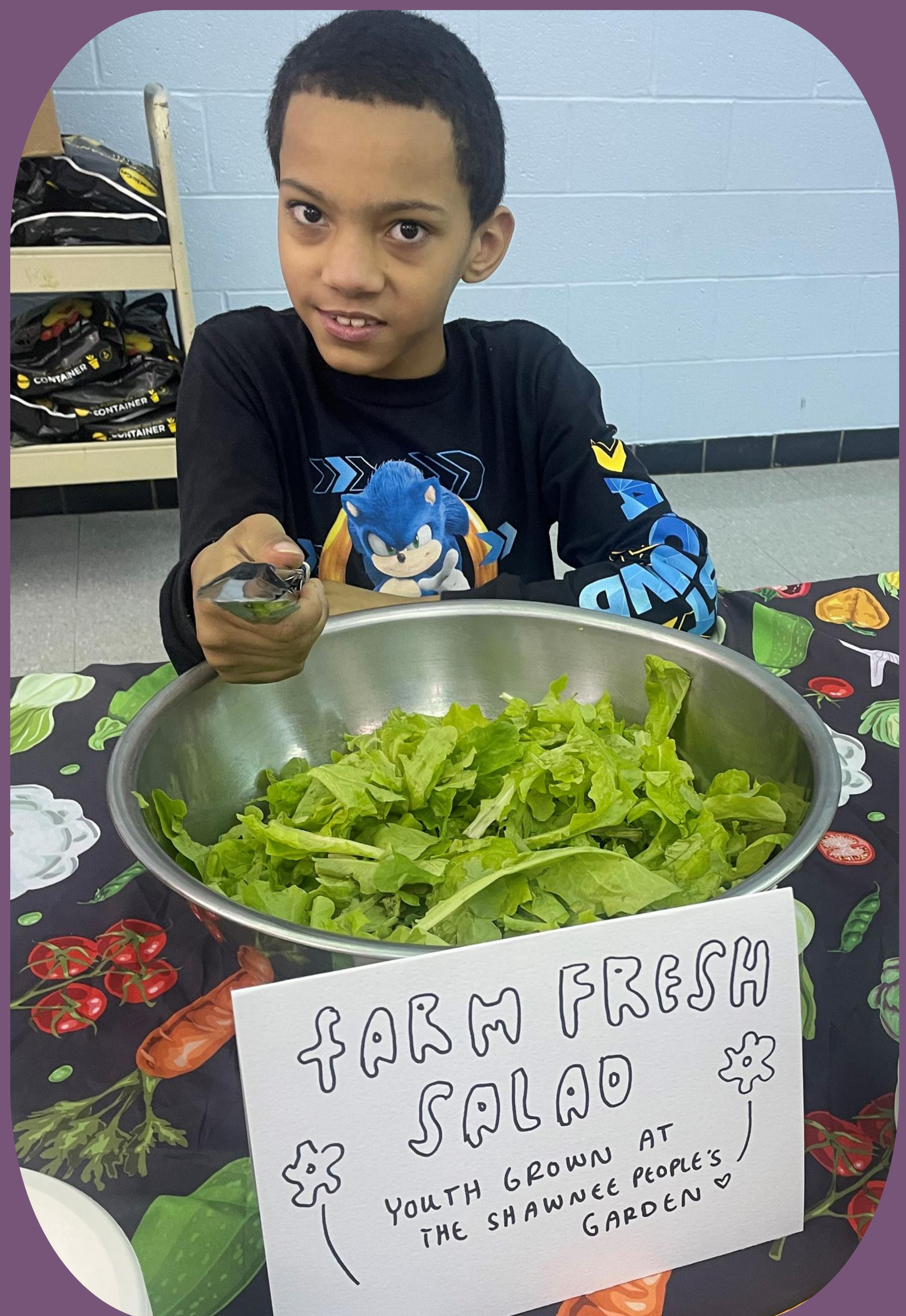
"Gardening means to me, to fuel your mind."

- Hazelwood Spring
Field-to-Fork Club Member



"This is so meaningful, thank you for what you all do, these are such important skills to have in your back pocket."

- Parent from Jacob Elementary
Field-to-Fork Club Community Meal



INVEST IN PLACE - \$800,000

The Food Literacy Project has purchased a 5.1-acre plot of farmable land. The urban farm “hub” will be home to the youth farm, community plots, teaching kitchen, office space, and community meeting spaces. Our property is:



- Located in south central Louisville, a few blocks from Southern High School, and within 3 miles of 7 additional JCPs schools
- Accessible and visible -- walkable and close to neighbors, partners, and the bus line
- Contaminant-free
- Receiving 8+ hours of direct sun
- Accessible to water and utilities, including an existing house to meet some immediate infrastructure needs
- Ready to receive capital improvements

THE CHALLENGES WITH LEASING



The Food Literacy Project is one of four established urban farming operations in south Louisville that faced eviction from leased land in recent years as landowners have prioritized other uses for the land



Relocating a farming operation disrupts programs



Short-term leases interfere with developing long-term relationships with neighbors



Urban growing space is limited and in high demand



Leasing stalls investment in infrastructure that is needed for long-term sustainability



Tenant status limits expansion of youth programming

INVEST IN INFRASTRUCTURE

\$2 MILLION

On-site infrastructure will be developed to sustain and expand programming. This includes a sustainable urban farming operation, an outdoor classroom and community space, and multi-functional indoor space. These improvements increase program capacity and opportunity to engage community stakeholders to generate social change.



SUSTAINABLE URBAN FARMING OPERATION

- 2-3 acres in mixed vegetable production
- Community garden plots
- Washing station and packing shed
- High tunnel/propagation house
- Cold storage



OUTDOOR CLASSROOM & COMMUNITY SPACE

- Teaching kitchen
- Discovery/nature-play area for children
- Pollinator garden, sensory garden, rain garden
- Outdoor pavilion/gathering space
- Picnic tables, paths, benches
- Parking area and bike racks



MULTI- FUNCTIONAL INDOOR SPACE

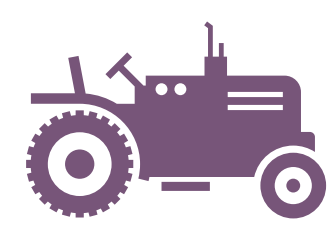
- Community-oriented meeting/event space
- Offices for staff
- Bathrooms
- Resource Library
- Commercial kitchen
- Retail space/social enterprise
- Sustainable/regenerative design

INVEST IN TRANSFORMATION

\$3.2 MILLION

ESTIMATED TOTAL PROGRAM AND OPERATING COSTS OVER DURATION OF CAMPAIGN AND EARLY OCCUPANCY, INCLUDING INCREMENTAL EXPANSION

Programming at our Forever Home will engage youth and families in south, west, and central Louisville who have been disconnected from fresh and healthy food. Through their experiences with the Food Literacy Project, youth leaders and their families will acquire stronger pathways to healthy living and creating social change. An investment in the Forever Home will generate new opportunities to expand our evidence-based, youth-driven programming to create greater impact in the lives of youth, their families, and the community.



Expand youth employment, learning, and leadership development opportunities through YCAP



Distribute more local produce to neighbors



Grow youth and family knowledge and skills to grow and prepare vegetables



Increase the number of families who consume fresh produce daily, cook and eat meals together



Create a stronger more sustainable organization able to create social change



Improve ability to establish long-term relationships due to permanent location



Engage more youth in the local food system, becoming compassionate leaders and invested citizens



Cultivate a resilient, healthy, and equitable community food system



Increase youth-adult partnerships and learning opportunities



Improve community health outcomes



"With enough backyard gardens, we can provide enough food to one another so we don't have to rely on a system that isn't doing anything for us ...

Even if you put a bucket [of dirt] on the front porch, plant something in it.

[Backyard gardening] gives people options other than just being stuck."

YCAP Crew Member



"Programs and jobs like these in our area are beneficial to Black mental health."

YCAP Crew Member



"I joined to get some money in my pocket.

After I joined, I started caring about people just that quick. I learn more here than I do in school, and I appreciate that.

Learning about gardening has given us purpose we can utilize later on in life."

YCAP Crew Member



OUR PROGRAMS

The Food Literacy Project's programs leverage youth leadership and cross-sector partnerships to propel policy, systems, and environmental change, inviting youth, community members and partners to embrace their agency to drive change within their families, organizations, and institutions – informing the systems and policies that shape their everyday lives.

Viewing youth, their families and neighbors as community assets, capable contributors, and powerful agents of change, the Food Literacy Project strives to position them as drivers of community and food system transformation.

Our programs promote holistic wellbeing in several ways:

- Addressing immediate need for healthful food by increasing the supply of fresh produce to neighbors
- Young people learning to grow and cook with fresh food, creating short- and long-term change within families and the community
- Through leadership and civic engagement, young people take an active role in shaping a more just and sustainable food system



"I have dreams of owning my own land and growing my own food...

I want to get away from the dollar bill. If we have everything we need, the dollar bill has no meaning. That's freedom for me. It's reclaiming my power and doing something that fills my spirit. Carpentry does that for me too, and I see a great future in it.

It's a wonderful thing to think about."

YCAP Crew Member

OUR PROGRAMS

FOOD ACCESS

Youth Community Agriculture Program (YCAP) employs youth (ages 16-21) to take an active role in their food system while earning an income. YCAP youth take leadership in meeting their neighbors' most immediate food needs - planting, cultivating, harvesting, and distributing thousands of pounds of fresh vegetables every year to feed families in our community.

The fresh produce grown by YCAP is shared through an on-site farm stand, farmers' markets, food pantries, and Field-to-Fork after-school clubs.

In 2024, the YCAP crew increased the supply of fresh food to their neighbors by harvesting over 40 different varieties and 3,025 lbs of fresh produce.

LIFE SKILLS & LEADERSHIP

Field-to-Fork (F2F) experiences inspire and engage younger students and their families in growing, cooking, and eating fresh fruits and vegetables through hands-on discovery. Students receive fresh produce to use in their recipes in addition to pantry items donated by community partners.

YCAP youth and F2F participants host community meals and events on the farm and in their schools to share their skills and knowledge with friends, family, and neighbors.

By learning how to grow and prepare fresh fruits and vegetables, students and their families can increase the amount and variety of fruits and vegetables they consume.



"You're learning to care for things others don't put as a priority for you ... I've learned how to cut vegetables and how to prepare food and care for the soil. It's taught me patience. This opportunity has been very meaningful for our community."

YCAP Crew Member

OUR IMPACT

REIMAGINING

Through YCAP employment, farming, and leadership opportunities, youth develop critical life and career skills such as teamwork, communication, and community engagement. Youth are rewarded with a true sense of responsibility and achievement that comes from planting, cultivating, harvesting, cooking, eating, and distributing food that they grew.

Educational experiences help youth to deepen their understanding of cooking and nutrition, agriculture, and food justice. Youth learn by discovery through field studies—including grocery store comparisons, visits to urban farms and gardens, and workshops with fellow food systems leaders.

They gain awareness of the reality of food apartheid – the disconnection of people from fresh food due to systemic injustice.

Most importantly, YCAP members learn to connect their hands-in-the-dirt work with justice movements and their ability to activate systemic change. They find inspiration in knowing that humans created this reality and we can also dismantle it. As youth empower themselves with new knowledge and skills, they become key drivers in advancing a vision for a healthy and equitable community.

Youth actively lead systems-change efforts through civic engagement and support outreach to neighbors through community presentations, canvassing, blog posts, and social media “take-overs.”



"I didn't know I was sick and tired until I saw I had other options.
I've been here about 3 seasons.
Since spring, I've been really lost before this space... I didn't really have a goal in life or a passion.
I got here, and I don't feel lost anymore."

- T'Von "Tiller" YCAP Crew Member



"I started gardening a year and a half ago, it helped me come out of my shell, I was outside and stuff, but I didn't know about gardening. And being outside here really gave me...helped me become more responsible, helped me think about things differently, see things in life differently. I want other youth in the community to feel that too. I know most of the time all they feel is grief, like they're trapped, that's how I felt. I want them to be able to change their lives too."

- Tank "Tangerine" YCAP Crew Member

HOW WE DO IT

We are committed to building a future that values people over capital, and we recognize the power of food to unite us across differences. Through the rigorous work of farming, youth grow not just vegetables but confidence, leadership, and community. The result is young people who are thriving, engaged, and leveraging their power to cultivate health, justice and prosperity through a community food system.

Rather than a traditional "problem prevention" framework, programming is rooted in Social Justice Youth Development – a healing, justice-oriented approach focused on addressing root causes of social, political, and economic inequities. Through this lens, young people directly impacted by systemic barriers can name and shape solutions to inequity.

While youth are not responsible for the food system inequities in Louisville that have existed for years, they can and should be part of reimagining the systems that generations before them created and perpetuate.



We believe in the power of young people and have seen firsthand the real and lasting impact they create. Our work engages youth and families in south, west, and central Louisville, where many residents face significant barriers to reaching their full potential, including a system in which fresh, healthful food is more of a privilege than a right. The Food Literacy Project works in relationship with neighbors and organizations that have long been pursuing a healthier, brighter future in which everyone in our community can thrive.

Our programs are inclusive of immigrant and refugee neighbors, supported by bilingual staff, use of interpretation and translation services, and strong partnerships with immigrant-serving schools and organizations.

We recruit for YCAP crew positions in partnership with JCPS high schools and community agencies in south, west, and central Louisville. While other nutrition programs exist in Jefferson County, no others are focused primarily on the specific needs of young people and families in these neighborhoods.


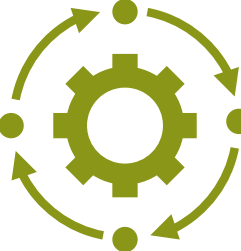




"All we're given is athletic opportunities... and not everybody is athletic."

YCAP Crew Member

FOREVER HOME

INVEST IN PLACE. INVEST IN INFRASTRUCTURE.
INVEST IN IMPACT

INVESTMENTS		APPROXIMATE COST	
	PLACE	Secured a permanent location, by purchasing 5.1 acres of tillable land	\$800,000
	INFRASTRUCTURE	Build out our Forever Home with the infrastructure to support and sustain the Food Literacy Project	\$2 M
	IMPACT	Create immediate relief in the the food system, enhance educational and youth development opportunities, and engage youth in creating long-term systemic change	\$3.2 M
	TOTAL	Total expenses for 3-year Forever Home project, including land purchase, building expenses, and all programmatic and operating costs	\$6 M



FOOD LITERACY PROJECT

CORE VALUES



ROOTS

Grounded and purposeful, connected with people and dedicated to sustainably addressing community needs



ABUNDANCE

Leverage our community's diverse assets to achieve personal and social change



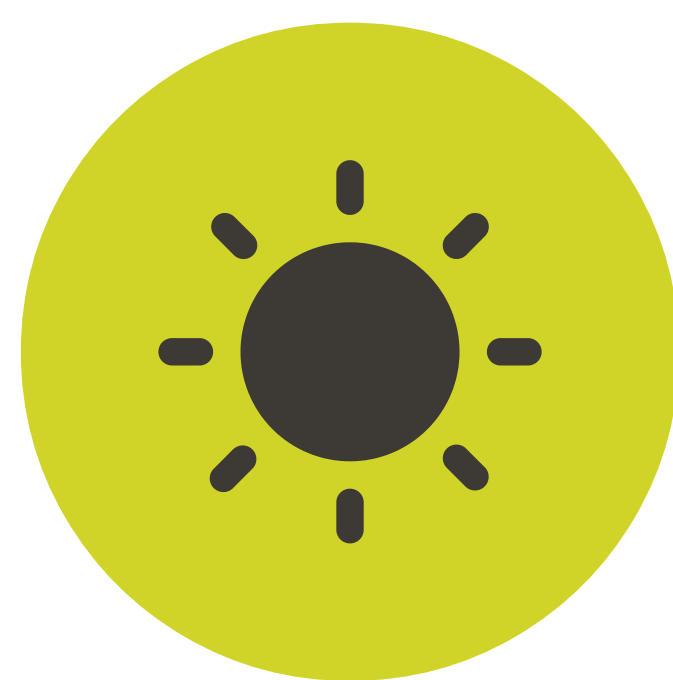
CULTIVATION

Bring great care to our work and relationships. Nourish growth in our community, and in turn, are nourished ourselves



DISCOVERY

Embrace the joy of learning by doing



ENERGY

Bold and inspired by our community



JUSTICE

Pursue fairness and equity



"The realization of feeling negative energy dealing with life and people leaving your body, finding peace of mind possible from simply harvesting radishes, then looking up and noticing how pretty the trees be in the fall."

- YCAP Crew Member



LEV'S FABLE: A STORY OF GROWTH

Once there was a young person with a passion for nature whose name was Lev. One day, Lev's neighbor mentioned that they worked at a vegetable farm after school. Lev had been thinking about getting a job and their love for the outdoors made vegetable farming sound interesting. The work was rigorous yet rewarding. After sitting at school all day, they got to move around, feel the wind, and touch the soil. Their work had purpose, community orientation, and visible results – things they felt were missing from other work they had done. Lev enjoyed learning how vegetable plants grow while working alongside other **young people** towards a common goal. They even got to share their new love of **growing** and **cooking** vegetables with other people in their community – including younger children who were also on journeys of farm-based exploration.

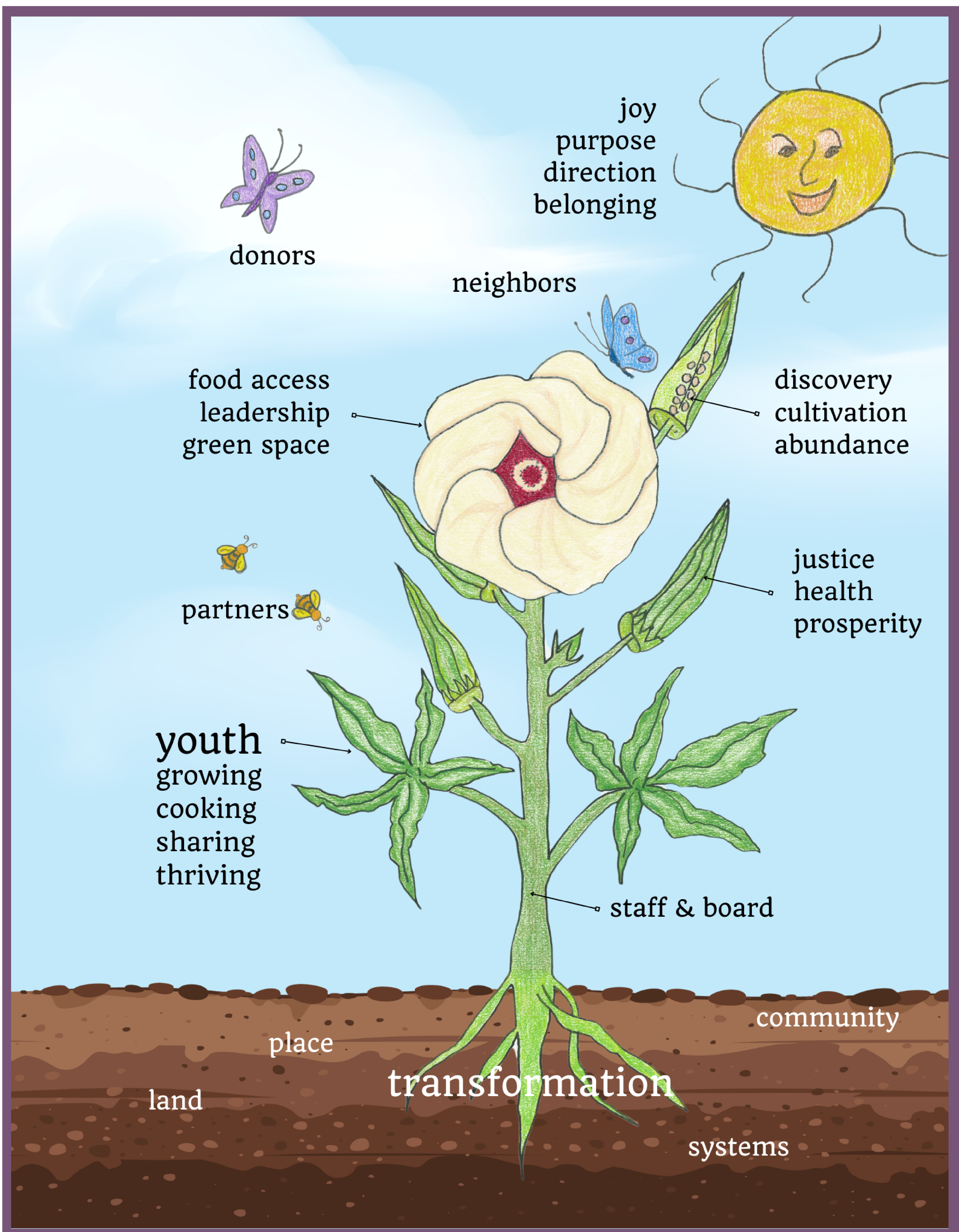
Soon, Lev felt they were not just nourishing their passion for being in nature, but also joining hands with their peers to **transform** their community through food, farming, and the land. Like a plant's leaves harnessing the energy of the sun, Lev was driving the growth of a movement, thanks to the **joy** they found in their work and the **staff** and **board** supporting them steadily like a stem holds up a plant.

Lev came to the farm each day energized and ready to earn a paycheck while working in open **green space** learning about the natural world, helping neighbors access **healthy food**, and developing **leadership** skills. The elements that attracted Lev to the work drew in donors, partners and neighbors who cared about these things as well, like a flower attracts pollinators to an okra plant.

And each day, their work got closer and closer to the vision they and their peers held: a healthy and equitable community where people and places thrive. Lev felt part of something greater than themselves; they knew they were not just getting paid to farm but were part of a movement for social change. Lev and their peers were standing in their power, cultivating **health, justice, and prosperity** through a community food system – sowing seeds of **discovery** and **abundance** in the process.

Lev and the crew had many supporters who pollinated their work along the way. **Donors** contributed the time, money, connections, and skills that sustained their efforts and made their work possible. The Staff and Board made sure the policies, practices and resources were in place to create a safe and rewarding experience. **Neighbors** showed up to lend a hand on the farm, and community **partners** shared their experiences.

Lev was engaged with their community in ways that fulfilled their **purpose** for being outside in the natural world, during a time in their life when they were searching for **direction** and **belonging**. They were rooted in their passion, the land, and their community in a deeply fulfilling way. Lev and their peers embodied the okra plants they were growing – from the roots to the seeds, each part of the system worked interdependently to activate real change.



This metaphor is adapted from a concept developed by Angelique "Asparagus" Perez. The illustration is by Luckett "Lettuce" Davidson. 2024

LEADERSHIP

BOARD OF DIRECTORS

Kurt Mason, President
USDA Natural Resource Conservation Service – Retired

Annie Anderson, Secretary
Camp Taylor Elementary – Mental Health Practitioner

Sam Overbee, Treasurer
Old National Bank – Commercial Banking Relationship Manager

Nikki Boyd, Past President
March of Dimes – Director, Maternal and Infant Health Initiatives

Martha Geier, Past President
Louisville Free Public Library – Retired

Bob Dixon
Seneca High School – Cyber Engineering Teacher

Michelle Elisburg, MD
Family Health Centers Iroquois – Pediatrician

Maggie Epperson
Louisville Metro Department of Health and Wellness – WIC Nutrition Services Educator
YCAP Alum

Mindy Arndt
Health & Wellness Educator

Ginger Wallace
United States Air Force – Retired

Chef Jeff Dailey
Ashbourne Farms – Executive Chef

STAFF LEADERSHIP

Alix Davidson, Executive Director
Carol Gundersen, Senior Director of Strategy & Partnerships





CONTACT INFORMATION



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