

## WHAT YOU CAN DO IN A YEAR: 2018 IN REVIEW



*It's been an exciting and transformational year at Advocates for Urban Agriculture (AUA)! In 2018, we launched a technical assistance program, refined and updated AUA resources for urban growers, collaborated with city and state legislative partners to achieve important policy successes, and strengthened our ever-growing coalition. We are thankful for the generous support of our community who make this work possible, and we look forward to a bright and bountiful 2019 season!*

**Increased Organizational Capacity:** With three full-time staff members, AUA is operating at its highest capacity yet. In summer 2018, AUA hired Viviana Gentry Fernández-Pellón as its Training Programs Manager, a new full-time position for the organization. An experienced farmer from Chicago's South Side, Viviana holds a B.A. in Environmental Studies and History from Oberlin College and has farmed throughout North and Central America. She co-founded the 501(c)3 non-profit community garden Cooperation Operation and The Chicago Mushroom Company, LLC.

For the first time in its organizational history, AUA has dedicated office space, located in the West Loop neighborhood of Chicago. AUA is now able to better serve growers by providing a centrally located, public transit-served space for grower meetings and community forums. All staff are now full time, receive health insurance and office equipment. AUA was also excited to debut its new logo and redesign its resource and opportunity-rich website to be more navigable this year.

AUA's board also expanded with the addition of civil rights attorney, Imron Bhatti, and finance attorney, Pat Muench. Finally, AUA's longtime working groups structure was streamlined into a single Associate Board of 16 members, who represent a diverse, multi-disciplinary group of food system professionals and urban agriculture practitioners.

### **Supporting Growers through Technical**

**Assistance:** AUA received major funding from the Searle Funds at The Chicago Community Trust through a Food:Land:Opportunity grant in 2018. From this funding, AUA created a third full-time position to deliver technical assistance, support growers on the ground, and manage the new *Good Practices for Growing in Chicago* program. This program has formed and tasked a peer group of beginning and experienced urban farmers, commercial buyers, and university researchers to develop standards for safe growing in Chicago. The group is organized in the following committees: Soil Safety & Sustainability, Water Safety & Sustainability, Food Safety, Business & Market Development, and Relationships & Education.



For the first time in organizational history, AUA engaged in paid food and farm consultation projects. AUA staff began by consulting for Urban Autism Solutions' Growing Solutions Farm to increase their farm production and sales. AUA then worked with Bronzeville Alliance and NeighborSpace in developing a site design and three-year action plan for their Bronzeville Neighborhood Farm. As an added value and to initiate the plan's implementation, AUA organized three Urban Field Day action events to kick off the growing season, prep their site, and build out their raised beds.

Finally, through a partnership with the Garfield Park Community Council, AUA conducted a comprehensive plan to assess the food and farm challenges and opportunities in Garfield Park and the greater West Side. The plan specifically addresses pathways and strategies for neighborhood growers and residents to utilize new and existing West Side food system investments and assets, including the recent opening of The Hatchery and the Farm on Ogden.



### **Community Engagement & Ongoing**

**Education:** Over 1,000 Chicagoans attended free, educational AUA trainings, events, and community forums in 2018. AUA staff supported growers throughout the city on both a one-on-one basis and through workshops to advise and mentor growers and farms, and connect them to further financial, equipment, and land resources.

AUA began several long-term collaborations to expand the delivery of resources and opportunities to Chicago growers. One partnership with the City of Chicago and USDA promoted funding opportunities for hoophouses to Large Lot owners and new growers. AUA led workshops on program eligibility and the application process, connected Large Lot owners to AUA's network, and co-hosted a Hoophouse 101 workshop with University of Illinois Extension.



Another multi-disciplinary collaboration AUA joined in 2018 and will expand in the coming year is supporting the soil scientists of the University of Illinois and Extension in identifying potential heavy metal contamination in food production soil, and ways to support stakeholders in identifying and managing soil contamination. This project will inform stakeholder decision-making and develop evidence-based guidelines for heavy metal contamination risk to food production in Chicago.

An exemplification of AUA leveraging its network and resources to serve the local food system is in its highest profile events. The 6th annual Urban Livestock Expo was held for the first time in Englewood at Southside Occupational Academy in February 2018. With more than 275 attendees, the free educational event provided a first touch point to sustainable agriculture for many neighborhood residents and school community members. The Expo featured bilingual, family-friendly workshops on raising urban livestock and connected attendees to information on additional learning opportunities and support networks. AUA also coordinated the Good Food Expo Commons, in partnership with Family Farmed. The Commons featured free on-site soil testing, soil remediation advice, and 32 community-led workshops on urban growing topics, raising urban livestock, composting, and culinary skills.



To support local food sovereignty, AUA organized 145 volunteers through 7 individual Urban Field Days during the growing season. This initiative provides direct support to grassroots community gardens on Chicago's south and west sides through needed people power and by uplifting the garden's work within the urban ag community.

AUA also completed a major overhaul to its signature Urban Agriculture Resource Guide, in partnership with Groupon. With newly updated and expanded sections, including food safety and navigating Chicago zoning and licensure requirements, the Resource Guide will be featured as a free online guide, distributed to local community organizations, and translated into Spanish. The release of the updated guide is expected by spring 2019, in time for the growing season.

**Advocating for Better Food & Farm Policy:** To advance AUA's advocacy efforts to support urban growers through good policy, AUA re-launched its Ward Ambassadors program with community workshops and a civic-engagement toolkit.

After hearing feedback from the urban agriculture community about problems with hydrant water access in Chicago, AUA is leading the effort to develop an equitable solution and strategy to approach City officials on this issue.

AUA also celebrated the passage of the Urban Ag Areas bill in the Illinois legislature, championed by State Representative Sonya Harper and in collaboration with many organizational partners. AUA looks forward to being part of the planning and implementation of the new bill.

*What a year it's been! We look forward to an even bigger 2019, including:*

**Expand AUA's Successful Coalition Building and Community Engagement:**

Deepen the impact of our Urban Field Days by supporting grassroots growing sites across Chicago; expand into more technical on-site training workshops; and continue to support local food sovereignty by delivering city-wide individual and group trainings.

**Expand Technical Assistance to Growers:**

Finalize the publicly accessible *Good Growing Practices for Chicago* toolkit and assessment resource; facilitate a grower-to-grower peer mentorship initiative and a grower-produced podcast; continue to support soil contamination research; and build on AUA's burgeoning consulting portfolio to deliver technical assistance and diversify organizational revenue.

**Advocate for an Improved Chicago Urban Farm Water Policy:**

Facilitate a grower-led working group to resolve the unclear City water permitting process and inconsistent water hydrant enforcement.

*We could not do all this essential work without our members, stakeholders, and supporters like you. Thank you for your commitment to a flourishing, equitable local food system!*