WHERE WE ARE NOW

A LETTER FROM THE JUST ROOTS TEAM

2022 was a year of excitement, challenge, and growth for our team as we celebrated our 5th year as an organization!

After years of visioning, planning, and community engagement, we began the buildout of It Takes A Village Community Farm! The buildout is a multiyear process, and we made a tremendous amount of progress in the first year — building a hoop house and youth garden beds, retrofitting two shipping containers, and establishing a suite of programs and services geared to support the local community.

At the Saint James Community Farm, we deepened and enhanced our work — strengthening our existing programs, establishing new programs, such as Fresh Food Farmacy, and utilizing our farm to host a wide variety of events for our community. Some specific highlights from the year include new partnerships with public and senior housing facilities, hosting 10 farm to table dinners, and building lots of new vertical growing systems at the farm!

We ended the year feeling exhausted, but also extremely grateful for our amazing team and our greater community of supporters. Check out the rest of our annual report to learn more about 2022 and what's ahead in 2023!
NEW TEAM MEMBERS

JESS TANG
PROGRAMS MANAGER
Jess grew up in Chicago and has facilitated land-based learning for 10 years, with young scholars, college students, and adult learners. Through several years living in China and Ireland, Jess has worked in cross-cultural dialogue and relationship-building. She has deepened her experience in farming through several seasons at Detroit urban farms and the University of Michigan Campus Farm. She has learned about the gifts of seaweed from the Atlantic, fungi in Chinese mountains, and the foods and medicines of Midwestern woodlands and prairies. Jess has a BA in Environmental Science and Sociology and a MS in Environmental Justice, specializing in urban food systems. In her free time, she loves to look for wild foods, climb big ol’ rocks, create new dishes in the kitchen, and explore creativity in movement.

CINNAMON SANCHEZ
FARM OPERATIONS SPECIALIST
Chicago native, but raised in Boston, Cinnamon spent their time working as a professional chef, performing community outreach and food access organizing. They moved back to Chicago in 2020 to immerse themselves in the community working with the Chicago Food Depository. After adopting a vegan lifestyle, Cinnamon decided they wanted to grow their own food, eventually completing an urban farming apprenticeship with the Chicago Botanic Garden. Upon completion of the apprenticeship, they were introduced to Just Roots and came on staff in 2023. Cinnamon is very interested in achieving food sovereignty and striving for decolonization. They enjoy cooking for family and friends, boxing as a form of meditation, and thrifting the best vintage finds to add to their wardrobe.
JAMES ALEXANDER
BOARD MEMBER

James A. (Jim) Alexander retired from Illinois Action for Children (IAFC) after 10 years as Senior Vice President for Strategy and Execution, where he oversaw and led numerous planning and growth initiatives for the early childhood non-profit. Prior to IAFC Jim led, as Executive Director for 8 years, the Inner-City Teaching Corps (ICTC), an education non-profit committed to bringing quality education to high need schools and education organizations. Jim’s broad and deep management experience was earned as a senior executive in several institutions of higher education in Illinois. Prior to joining ICTC, Jim served as Executive Vice President at National Louis University and chief business and administrative officer at Governors State and Illinois State Universities. Jim began his career as a corporate and tax lawyer with Lord, Bissell & Brook in Chicago. Jim has long been interested in civic affairs, having been selected to the first class of Leadership Greater Chicago. Jim received both his law degree and bachelors, in political science, from Yale University.

ELIZABETH SIMPKIN
BOARD MEMBER

Elizabeth (Liz) Simpkin is a healthcare leader with more than 30 years strategy and operations experience. She is passionate about addressing inequities in healthcare and expanding access to healthy food for all. Liz most recently served as SVP of ACO Operations with Medical Home Network, working with safety net providers across Chicago to improve health outcomes for Medicaid members. Previously she served as President of an ACO in Indianapolis, Director with Navigant Health Care consulting, and led the consulting practice at Valence Health. Liz holds an M.S. in Healthcare Economics and a B.A. in International Studies. She is an avid organic gardener, vegetarian home cook, and amateur musician. Liz and her husband David Wetherbee live in Chicago.
What a year it's been at the Saint James Community Farm! We produced over 12,000 pounds of organic, culturally affirming produce, expanded our CSA to 73 families, hosted 10 farm to table dinners, facilitated 20+ workshops for the community, and piloted our Fresh Food Farmacy program, in partnership with La Rabida Children's Hospital and Common Threads. Each year, we feel more and more grateful for our team and broader community — the countless individuals, partner organizations, and businesses who support our work in so many unique and valuable ways. We especially want to thank Saint James Church & Food Pantry for their continued partnership. 2023 will be our fourth year working with our community to run the Saint James Community Farm and we have some big plans in store!

In the span of one year, It Takes A Village Community Farm went from a grass field to a working community farm! Currently, the farm includes one acre of productive, biodiverse growing space and we are excited to expand in the coming years. Some of the highlights from this year include building a 4,400 square foot hoop house and 21 youth garden beds, retrofitting two shipping containers, and connecting with the community more deeply through workshops, events, volunteering, and food access programs. What we've accomplished in one year would not be possible without the leadership and support of Grace Church and the larger Sauk Village community. We are grateful to Rev. Melody Seaton, Mayor Derrick Burgess, and other community members who have helped the farm to grow.
SUSTAINABLE FOOD ACCESS

We believe in growing organic, culturally affirming food locally, sustainably, and with community at the center.

CSA

In 2022, 85 families participated in our CSA program, and this year we are expanding the program to 105 CSA shares!

Our CSA offers over 40 different fruits and vegetables, along with a variety of value added products from local food businesses. Our CSA is highly customizable, enabling families to shape their experience based on share size, frequency of share, volunteer status, income level, and produce preferences.

"I love the changing variety through the seasons and look forward to each new taste!" — 2022 CSA Member

To learn more about our CSA or become a member, click here.

FOOD DISTRIBUTION

In 2022, we partnered with 14 different organizations (food pantries, mutual aid organizations, schools, health clinics, and public and senior housing facilities) to donate 6,200 pounds (45%) of the fresh produce grown at our farms.

One major highlight for our team was collaborating with the Saint James Food Pantry to provide food boxes to homebound seniors in Bronzeville and neighboring communities.

Our other food distribution partners include: Grace United Church of Christ, Emmanuel Church, Gifts from God Ministry, Chicagoland Food Sovereignty Coalition, La Rabida Children’s Hospital, UI Health, Rush Medical College, IIT, VanderCook College, Illinois College of Optometry, Legends South Housing, Oakley Square Apartments, and Embrace Living Community.

FARM STAND

Both of our farms offer the opportunity to purchase food on a weekly basis through on-site farm stands. Each farm stand offers all of our seasonally available fruits, vegetables, and herbs at an affordable cost.

They are open from 9AM to 12PM on Saturdays. Below are the start dates for 2023!

Saint James Community Farm: Saturday, June 3rd
It Takes A Village Community Farm: Saturday, June 10th
EDUCATION

We facilitate programs that equip participants with the skills and resources to sustainably grow food, integrate more nutritious foods into their diet, and lead healthier and more fulfilling lives.

FRESH FOOD FARMACY

We piloted our Fresh Food Farmacy program in 2022, in partnership with La Rabida Children’s Hospital and Common Threads.

Through the program, we partner with local health providers to expand access to healthy, culturally affirming food for the patients they serve. We pair that food access with a variety of educational resources, including cooking demonstrations, recipe guides, nutrition content, and more.

The program enables families to develop a deeper understanding of the direct connection between diet, nutrition, and health outcomes. In 2022, 143 families participated in the program and we are excited to expand our reach in 2023!

VOLUNTEERING

In 2022, volunteers contributed a combined total of 2,500 hours! We are so grateful to our volunteer community for supporting our work in so many critical ways — from planting, to harvesting, to helping out at events. The work we do would not be possible without them.

"I love volunteering! Everyone is always very friendly and welcoming."

"Volunteering at the farm is one of the highlights of my week. I can’t wait for Spring!"

"What led me to start volunteering was wanting to be able to provide healthy, local, sustainable food in communities that are underserved."

Volunteer hours for 2023 are Wednesdays, Fridays, and Saturdays anytime 9am-12pm. Sign up here!

WORKSHOPS

We partnered with 5 organizations to facilitate over 22 workshops in 2022, covering topics such as sustainable gardening, composting, healthy nutrition, cooking, art therapy, yoga, and more!

Our partnering organizations in 2022 included: Healthy Soil Compost, Common Threads, UI Health, Yoga with Brenda, and the School of the Art Institute of Chicago.
COMMUNITY BUILDING

We believe community green spaces are powerful vehicles for cultivating deeper connections with the land and each other.

FARM KICK OFF’S

Each year, we see more and more local community members visiting the farms during our annual farm kick off events! Health providers, school leaders, local pastors, and neighbors from down the street come to learn more about the farms and different opportunities to get involved.

At each event, we provide tours of the farm, free seedlings, tastings of spring crops, scavenger hunts, and other fun hands-on activities. We are excited to host these events again in 2023!

Saint James Community Farm: Saturday, June 3
It Takes A Village Community Farm: Saturday, June 10

FARM TO TABLE DINNERS

We hosted 12 farm to table dinners in 2022, partnering with 7 different chefs to provide a one of a kind dinner experience for 175 people!

Each Farm To Table Dinner is hosted on a Saturday evening at one of our two farm locations. All of the proceeds support our mission to develop and expand access to local, sustainably grown food.

"I was blown away by the entire experience. I can’t wait to attend another dinner next year!"

Click here to learn more or secure your spot for a 2023 Farm To Table Dinner today!

PARTNERSHIPS

In 2022, we collaborated with partner organizations to host a variety of events at the farm, including meetings, lunches, health and wellness classes, and leadership development.

One of many highlights from this year was hosting groups from I Am A Gentleman (IAAG)! The young men from IAAG visited the farm in the spring and helped prepare beds for the upcoming growing season. They returned in the fall and participated in a workshop that included nutrition education, a cooking demonstration, and some tasty food! The young men enjoyed getting their hands dirty in the Spring and coming back in the Fall to taste the crops that resulted from their hard work.
In 2023, Just Roots is embarking on a new chapter as an organization. We have spent the first five years building a team, two farms, a variety of programs and services, and many new and beautiful relationships with our community.

This next chapter of our work will be about deepening and enhancing our impact by strengthening our organizational culture, programs and services, and relationships within the community.

In 2023, we are excited to:

- More consistently integrate our mission, vision, and values into everything we do.
- Improve our team and organizational capacity by adding new staff and board members.
- Improve our farm operations and foster a more enriching experience for every person who visits our farms.
- Strengthen our educational and food access programs by enhancing our curriculum, collaborating with new partners, and expanding the variety of programs and services we offer.
- Strengthen existing relationships within our community, while also building new ones.

Whether you’re a volunteer, CSA member, customer, program participant, donor, or general supporter, please know that we are grateful for you and the many ways you support our efforts.

We hope to see you out at one of our community farms in 2023!

Onward and Upward!
The Just Roots Team