



GROWING HOPE

ANNUAL REPORT 2025

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REFLECTIONS ON THE SEASON

BELOVED COMMUNITY OF GROWERS,

If 2025 was about naming the harms in our food system, 2025 was about building alternatives rooted in dignity, agency, and shared abundance.

This year, we celebrated the launch of our new Produce Stand, built with the vision and hands of youth from Brightmoor Makerspace, placed where neighbors come as they are, take what they need, and return when they can. Its accessible design makes it easier for elders, caregivers, and people of all abilities to gather fresh, local produce without red tape, reflecting our longstanding practice of solidarity over scarcity. Through this daily, open-access resource, the produce from farmers and growers stays in circulation rather than going to waste, and neighbors reclaim food on their own terms.

We also ushered in a new chapter for the Ypsilanti Farmers Market with the move downtown to 16 S. Washington Street and the expansion into a year-round market culture. Nestled at the heart of the city, the market became more than a seasonal hub; it deepened food access, strengthened economic opportunity for local growers and makers, and unlocked space for cooking demos, workshops, and cross-community engagement. This shift has made fresh, nourishing food more accessible to families walking, biking, or riding transit, and has fostered a vibrant downtown gathering place for connection, culture, and exchange.

Across gardens, kitchens, markets, and youth programs, 2025 showed us that food is never just food: it is care, culture, and collective power. Young leaders didn't just participate; they shaped strategy and space. Farmers expanded their market presence and deepened relationships with neighbors. Food access work continued to meet urgent needs without normalizing them. And the Market's year-round rhythm invited a sense of belonging in every season.

None of this happens without trust and shared commitment. To every donor, volunteer, partner, and neighbor who shows up again and again, thank you. As you explore these pages, I invite you to see not only outcomes but the people whose resilience, creativity, and care animate them.

With deep gratitude and collective hope,
Julius Buzzard



2025 HIGHLIGHTS



PRODUCE STAND & REFRIGERATED TRAILER

In 2025, we expanded dignified access to food with the launch of our new community-centered Produce Stand and the addition of a refrigerated trailer to strengthen cold storage and distribution. The stand operates on a “come as you are, take what you need” model, removing paperwork and stigma while increasing access to fresh, local produce. Additional refrigerated storage increases our capacity to aggregate, store, and redistribute food from local growers, reducing waste and strengthening our regional food network. Together, these investments made it possible to move more food, more equitably, and with greater care.

REBUILDING CHIDESTER PLACE GARDEN

Community restoration was literal this year. In partnership with residents and local collaborators, we rebuilt the Chidester Place Garden, restoring beds, infrastructure, and shared ownership of the space. The garden is once again a site of intergenerational learning, neighborhood gatherings, and fresh-food production for seniors and families. Rebuilding this space affirmed what we know: gardens are not amenities, they are community anchors.

YOUTH LEADERSHIP: BUILDING THE POND

Youth leadership took physical form in 2025 through the design and construction of a new pond on the Farm. Young people led planning, problem-solving, and hands-on implementation; learning water systems, ecology, and collective stewardship in real time. The pond strengthens biodiversity and climate resilience on the Farm while serving as a living classroom. When young people build infrastructure, they build confidence and capacity alongside it.

MARKET MOVE DOWNTOWN

We ushered in a new chapter for the Ypsilanti Farmers Market with our move to 16 S. Washington and the expansion into a year-round market presence. Centered in downtown Ypsilanti, the Market increased visibility for local growers and food entrepreneurs, expanded winter access to fresh food, and deepened its role as a civic gathering space. What was once seasonal is now sustained, strengthening farmers’ incomes, food access, and community connections year-round.

YPSI SNAP GAP

When federal SNAP benefits paused in 2025, Growing Hope launched the Ypsi SNAP Gap to ensure no neighbor went hungry. Through token-based support at the Ypsilanti Farmers Market, residents accessed fresh, local food while farmers and producers continued to sell. The program was mutual aid in action; responding quickly, centering dignity, and keeping our community fed when public systems fell short.

FARM & GARDEN

Growing Hope’s farm and gardens are where soil, community, and care intersect. In 2025, we continued to invest in spaces and experiences that grow food, connection, and knowledge across Ypsilanti.

Our Produce Stand brought fresh, local produce directly into neighborhoods, making it easier than ever for neighbors to access nourishing food with dignity. Complementing this, our Earth Day Garden Bed Building Workshop welcomed over 50 participants, teaching hands-on skills while strengthening intergenerational connections. We also launched a new garden bed building zine, a resource for anyone interested in learning more or starting their own beds at home or in the community.

The farm became a hub for celebration and learning, too. Our monthly Pizza Parties fired up the earth oven and welcomed hundreds of community members to share meals, stories, and joy. These gatherings are more than food; they are a practice in cultivating belonging, culture, and shared care.

Behind the scenes, we invested in long-term sustainability with a new irrigation system to improve water efficiency and ensure our crops thrive even in unpredictable weather.

Across all initiatives, our work is guided by a single principle: growing food is inseparable from growing community. In 2025, we moved more produce, trained more hands, and fired up more ovens than ever; nurturing not only plants, but the people and relationships that make a sovereign food system possible.



AT A GLANCE:

5,122

pounds of produce from our farm went directly back into the community

10,000

seedlings were given to area gardeners for home and community gardens

79

new garden beds were built for our Home Vegetable Garden Program participants

25

households & 5 businesses participated in our composting program, diverting thousands of pounds of waste

300+

individuals participated in our hands-on gardening and cultivation workshops



FARMERS MARKETS

2025 was a transformative year for the Ypsilanti Farmers Market. We moved downtown to 16 S. Washington Street, creating a central, vibrant hub for community and local food. The new location and year-round schedule brought an average of 400 more patrons each week, expanding access for families, neighbors, and local growers year-round.

The Market also strengthened its role as a site of community care and sustainability. Through our community compost program, the Market became a convenient exchange location where neighbors could drop off full buckets and pick up new ones, keeping food waste out of landfills while enriching local soil. When federal SNAP benefits were paused in October, we stepped in with the Ypsi SNAP Gap, providing token-based support so residents could continue accessing fresh food without interruption.

These efforts reflect our belief that the Market is more than a place to buy and sell produce; it is a gathering space where relationships grow, education happens, and local food sovereignty is practiced daily.

"I love seeing the same producers every time I go, and seeing what is in season. There are lots of varietal produce I wouldn't normally think to purchase. I also like to grab a bite for breakfast from one of the several fantastic baked goods stands!!"

- Ypsilanti Farmers Market Patron



AT A GLANCE:

\$272,000

of local foods and goods were sold through the Ypsilanti Farmers Markets

15%

of all market sales used food assistance

87

local farmers and food producers sold their products through the Ypsilanti Farmers Markets

850

individuals on average visited the Downtown Market, and 200 visited the Indoor Winter Market each week

100

youth registered for and participated in our Power of Produce Club



YOUTH & SCHOOLS

At Growing Hope, youth leadership is at the heart of food sovereignty. In 2025, our Teen Leadership Program launched the Seed Library at the Growing Hope Center, stewarded entirely by youth. This new resource invites neighbors to take seeds, grow food, and return seeds to share, putting learning, access, and responsibility directly in young people’s hands.

Our youth also brought vision to the Children’s Garden, designing and building a new pond that enhances biodiversity and serves as a living classroom. Through these hands-on projects, teens learn not only farming and ecology, but also leadership, collaboration, and the impact of their work on the broader community. One participant highlighted how roles with Growing Hope built confidence and a sense of belonging, teaching youth that they are capable of impact, even in imperfect circumstances.

Across school gardens, workshops, and summer programs, we engaged hundreds of young people in 2025, giving them the tools, space, and mentorship to shape the local food system today while building a foundation for generational health tomorrow.

“Growing Hope awakened me to feelings of hope because I became aware that I have worth in life.”

- J. Smith, Teen Crew Member



AT A GLANCE:

14

teens participated in our paid Teen Leadership Program

85

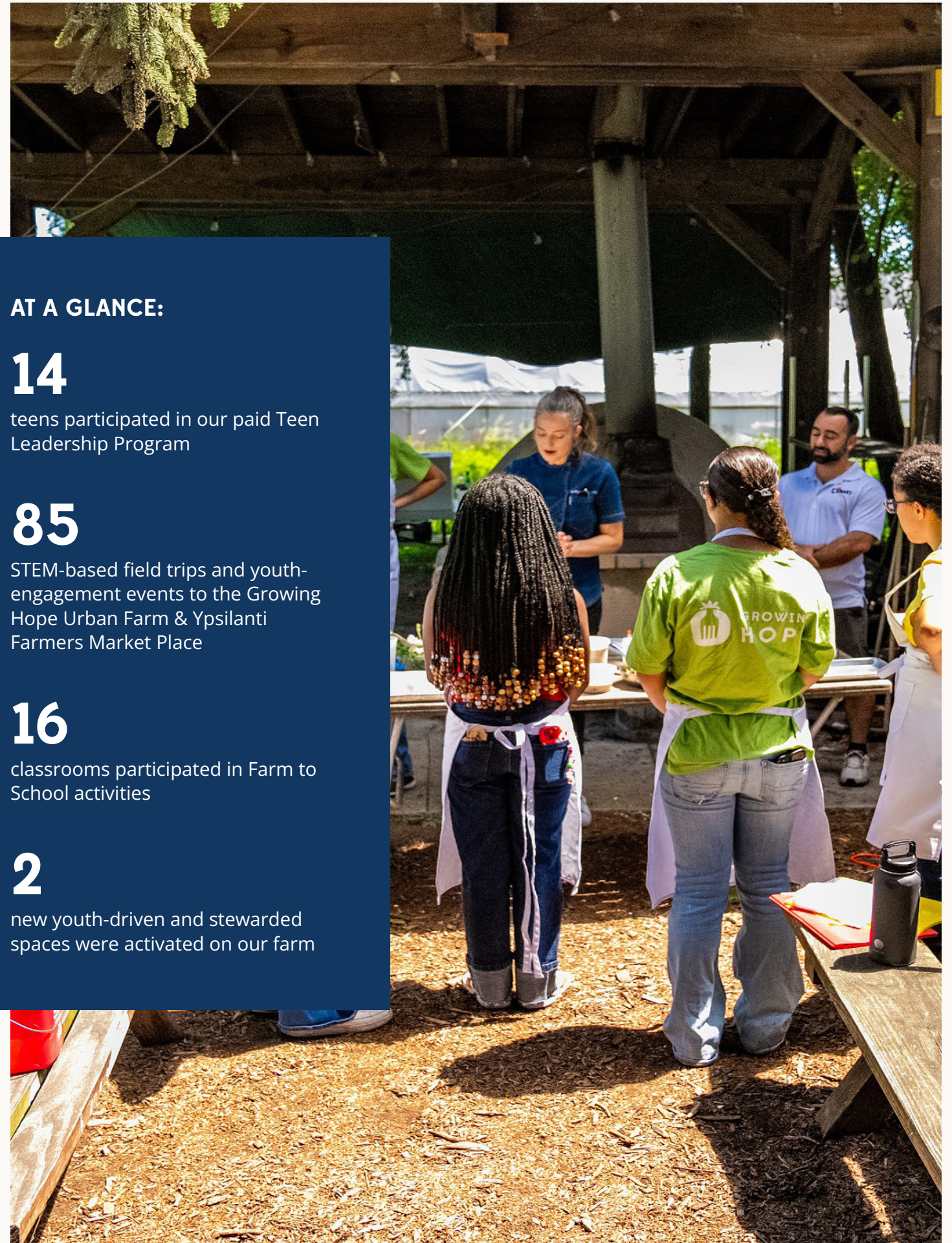
STEM-based field trips and youth-engagement events to the Growing Hope Urban Farm & Ypsilanti Farmers Market Place

16

classrooms participated in Farm to School activities

2

new youth-driven and stewarded spaces were activated on our farm



FOOD ENTREPRENEURSHIP

Growing Hope continued to be a hub for food entrepreneurship and community connection in 2025. Four graduates launched their businesses from our kitchens: EK's Cheesecakes, No Label Juice, Everybite Bakery, and Ziaca Life, moving from concept to market-ready enterprises.

In its inaugural year, Stepping Stones provided free workshops for aspiring food entrepreneurs, giving participants hands-on training, mentorship, and the tools needed to turn ideas into sustainable businesses. We also expanded the Growing Hope Shared Kitchen Network, connecting our first satellite kitchen across the region to provide more space, equipment, and support for local food makers. This network will help entrepreneurs scale sustainably while keeping production accessible to those with limited resources.

Our spaces served as a platform for community engagement, too. Organizers hosted 168 events at the Ypsilanti Farmers MarketPlace, from mutual aid distributions and cultural gatherings to health outreach and food policy conversations; demonstrating how shared resources can meet multiple community needs at once. Through kitchens, mentorship, workshops, and networked support, Growing Hope continues to cultivate local food businesses while strengthening community resilience and opportunity.

"I've felt supported and taken seriously, and I have made progress on the technical side of business matters because of the support"

- Growing Hope Incubator Kitchen Maker



AT A GLANCE:

26

local businesses utilized the Growing Hope Incubator Kitchen Services

70%

Black, Indigenous, or Person of Color owned & operated businesses

62%

Women-owned and operated businesses

4

makers graduated into their own brick-and-mortar

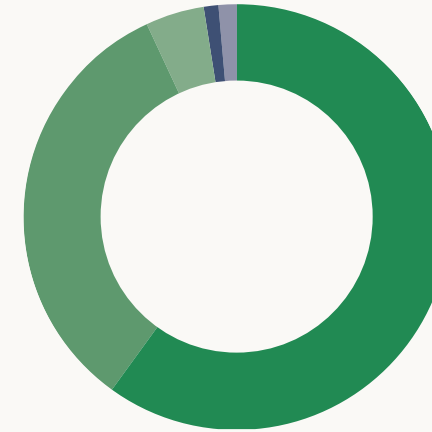
SUPPORTERS

Altruic Advisors
 Americana Foundation
 Ann Arbor Area Community Foundation
 Ann Arbor Farm & Garden
 Ann Arbor Rotary
 Ann Arbor Spark
 Ann Arbor Women for Good
 Bank of Ann Arbor
 Barr Engineering
 Barton Malow
 Blue Cross Blue Shield
 Brite Idea Tattoo
 Cedar Tree Foundation
 Center for Good Food Purchasing
 Church World Service
 Community Foundation of Southeast Michigan
 Coupa Software
 Dawn Food
 Dexter High School
 Domino's
 DTE Energy Foundation
 Eagle Associates
 Edward Jones
 ELCA World Hunger
 Elevate Energy
 Environmental Protection Agency
 Fair Food Network
 First Unitarian Universalist
 HAP
 ITC Holdings
 Jack and Jill Ypsi
 James A. & Faith Knight Foundation
 Key Bank
 Key Bank Foundation
 KLA Corporation
 Kroger

Lineage Foundation
 Meijer
 Michigan Department of Agriculture and Rural Development
 Michigan Farmers Market Association
 Michigan Fitness Foundation
 Michigan Good Food Fund
 Michigan Health Endowment Fund
 Neutral Zone
 New Profit
 Opal Apple
 Ralph C. Wilson Jr. Foundation
 Relentless Care Foundation
 SPARK
 The Healing Feast
 Thrift Shop Association of Ypsi
 Toyota
 Trinity Health Foundation
 United States Department of Agriculture
 United Way
 Unity of Ann Arbor
 University Bank
 University of Michigan
 University of Minnesota
 W.K. Kellogg Foundation
 Washtenaw County Office of Community & Economic Development
 West Side United Methodist
 Whole Foods
 Ypsilanti Community Schools
 Zingerman's

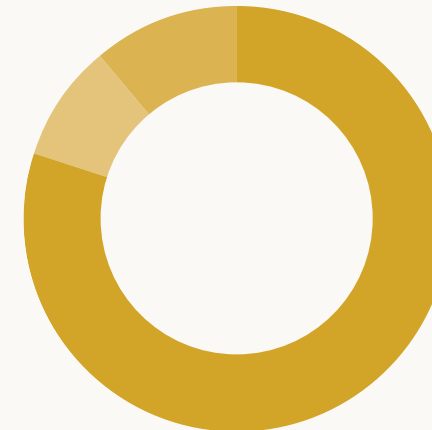
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 We additionally thank the 457 individual donors who contributed to our work in 2025.

FINANCIALS



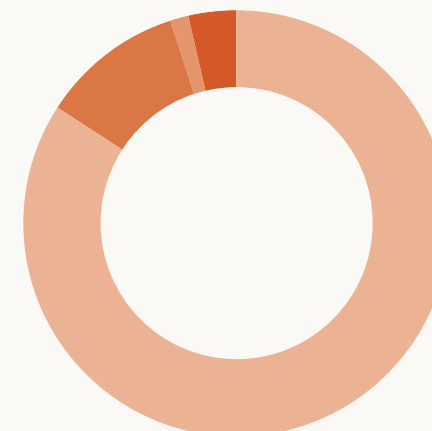
REVENUE

TOTAL:	\$1,258,800
● Grants	60.2%
● Contributions	33%
● Program Revenue	4.5%
● Special Events	.9%
● In-Kind	0.3%
● Other	1.1%



EXPENSES

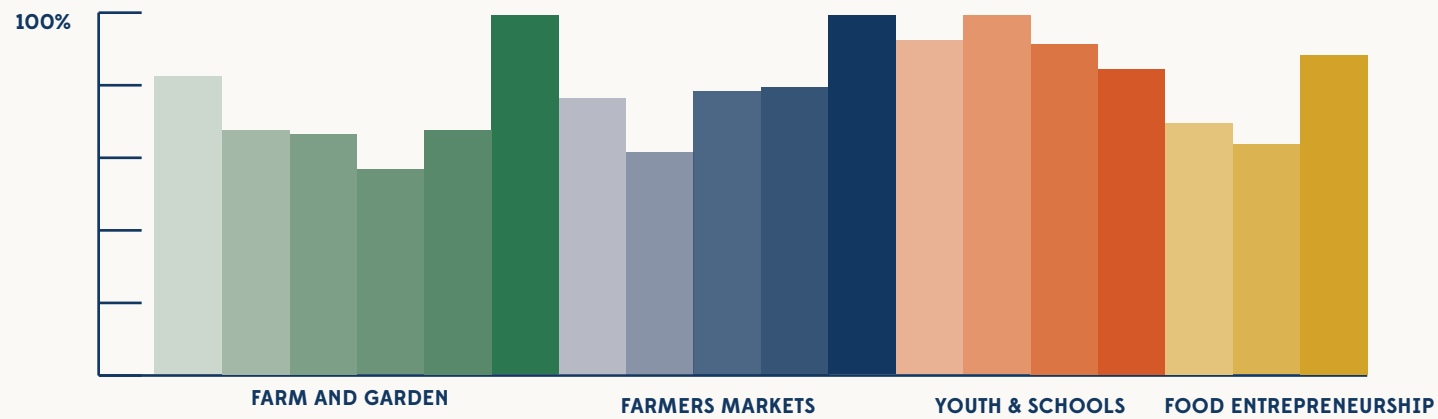
TOTAL:	\$1,088,272
● Programming	80%
● Admin	9%
● Fundraising & Comms	11%



DONATIONS

● \$1-\$100	84.4%
● \$101-\$500	10.6%
● \$501-\$1,000	1.6%
● \$1,001+	3.4%

2025 IMPACT



FARM AND GARDEN

- 83% reported having increased access to nutritious and/or culturally appropriate foods
- 68% are able to save money on their grocery bill
- 67% have more confidence in their ability to grow and/or prepare nutritious foods
- 57% consumed more fruits and vegetables
- 68% of participants reported that they shared excess produce with their community
- 100% feel more connected to their community

FARMERS MARKETS

- 77% of vendors report an increase in sales, new product development, and have developed new skills for operating their business
- 62% of shoppers report that the Ypsilanti Farmers Markets increase their household's ability to access affordable, healthy food
- 79% of businesses are BIPOC or women-owned
- 80% of vendors feel a stronger connection to the Ypsilanti Community
- \$679 "Veggie Bucks" were spent on fresh fruits and vegetables by Ypsilanti youth
- \$12,000 "Ypsi SNAP Gap" dollars were recirculated when SNAP was left unfunded

YOUTH AND SCHOOLS

- 100% gained information about how food impacts health
- 93% include fresh fruits or vegetables in their meals or snacks
- 100% have confidence in their ability to cook for themselves or others
- 92% are confident in their ability to plan and maintain a vegetable garden
- 85% feel like they regularly have an impact on their community

FOOD ENTREPRENEURSHIP

- 70% of makers report having developed new products
- 64% of makers report an increase in revenue
- 89% of makers reported that they developed a larger customer base

2026 GOALS



DEVELOP OUR INTERNAL CAPACITY

- Implement annual opportunities to celebrate volunteers
- Mandate one to two, one-week staff sabbaticals
- Explore and implement new staff and board structures
- Refine our process for onboarding new staff, board, and volunteers
- Finalize and execute a reserve & investment policy
- Diversify revenue by growing individual donors, recurring gifts, and earned income strategies
- Research, plan, and implement a sustainability campaign that includes legacy giving



ACTIVATE VIBRANT SPACES & PROGRAMS

- Utilize kitchen spaces for cooking classes
- Install signage for self-guided farm exploration
- Expand the website as a resource hub with workshop recordings
- Document and share Growing Hope processes for community access
- Adapt the farmhouse for increased community use
- Build an accelerator kitchen to further support food entrepreneurs
- Invest in Ypsilanti Farmers Markets as inclusive, safe, and vibrant spaces



CULTIVATE COOPERATIVE COMMUNITY PARTNERSHIPS

- Equip board members to be effective ambassadors
- Organize restorative justice circles
- Prioritize partnerships with Black growers and Black-led organizations
- Engage participants in program management and leadership
- Evaluate programs to identify successes and areas for improvement
- Use workshops to facilitate open conversations about Growing Hope and the local food system*
- Develop a template and FAQ for tabling at events

TEAM

STAFF

Claire Austin
Cass Berry
Esha Biswas
Deante Bland
Julius Buzzard
Josiah Foster
Carolyn Gehrke
Christopher Hallett
Ayanfe Jamison
Anna Miklosek
Jennifer Pritchett
Dayna Popkey



2025 STAFF



2025 TEEN EMPLOYEES

TEEN EMPLOYEES

Yasmine Anbari
Samuel Calhoun-Carroll
Madelynn Carroll
Chimaobi Chukwudi
Jaylah Cotton
Nick Garay
Eli Harris
Tuula Martinez
Roslynn Robinson
Azaria Siegert
Josephine Smith
Sienna Troy

INTERNS

Zara Vasi Abston
Zel Addams
Noon Bannaga
Anabela Gomes
Emma Hardy
Allison Jiang
Fatima Khan
Monae Palmer
Kennedi Werdlow
Grace Wertanen
Kaitlyn Wilson
Jordan Wright

BOARD OF DIRECTORS

Julius Buzzard (Executive Director)
Trishé Duckworth
Matt Hamilton
Ayanfe Jamison (Staff Representative)
Harley Sherman (Treasurer)
Alison Shores
Ferial Rewoldt
Tess Rian (Chair)
Stefanie Stauffer Ph.D.
Kelsey Watson (Secretary)

VOLUNTEER OF THE YEAR

Matthew Bacon

Our volunteers carry our community with a kind of grounded generosity that can't be measured but can absolutely be felt. Among these dedicated volunteers, we're honored to recognize Matthew Bacon as our Volunteer of the Year. Matthew came to southeast Michigan without long-standing ties, yet quickly became one of the anchors of our market season. His presence was consistent, thoughtful, and rooted in genuine care for the mission. In his own words:

"I chose to volunteer with Growing Hope at the Ypsilanti Farmers Market because Growing Hope's mission greatly appealed to me, and I wanted to support the cause. What stood out to me and drew me in was the mission's emphasis on access to nourishing food and community empowerment. I enjoyed learning about the ways the mission is carried out through the urban farm, incubator kitchen, and community outreach. I loved seeing it come full circle, bringing people together at the farmers market and other community events. As a newcomer to Southeast Michigan with no prior connections to the area, volunteering at the market has been a great way to meet and connect with people in the community. Thank you to Growing Hope for the opportunity to get involved this summer and fall, and I look forward to continuing to do so in the future!"





**GROWING HOPE
URBAN FARM**

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MARKETPLACE**

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