



# 2022 ANNUAL REPORT

REGIONAL ENVIRONMENTAL COUNCIL



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## DEAR FRIENDS OF THE REC,

Thanks to so many wonderful people in our community, **in 2022 the Regional Environmental Council celebrated 50 years** of bringing people together to create a just food system and to build healthy, sustainable, and equitable communities in Worcester, MA and beyond.

Thousands of dedicated community members have come together over the past five decades to make a real difference in our community through their involvement in and support of the REC.

The REC was incorporated in 1972 at a time when people throughout Central Massachusetts and across the country were inspired by the emerging environmental movement. The early 1970s saw the observation of the first Earth Day, the creation of the U.S. EPA, the Clean Air Act, and the Clean Water Act. In Worcester and surrounding communities, residents were inspired to fight for clean air, clean water, and open space locally in the communities where they live, work, learn, and play. The REC was created as an all-volunteer endeavor to sustain that effort here in Central Massachusetts.

Today the REC maintains the same vision of a just and sustainable world but has grown to employ 23 staff who work together each year with dozens of organizational partners, thousands of volunteers, and many Worcester youth--the next generation of leaders. **In recent years we've continued to fight for a healthy, sustainable, and equitable environment by helping to create a just food system** and address inequities here in Central Massachusetts. Together we have achieved so much over the past 50 years. With the help of our community of supporters, we will continue to achieve so much more in the next 50 years.



A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Steve Fischer'.

Steve Fischer

*Executive Director*





Our mission is to bring people together to **create a just food system** and to build healthy, sustainable and equitable communities in Worcester, MA and beyond.

*YouthGROW • Farmers Markets • UGROW Community and School Gardens*



# THE REC TEAM

## Directors

Steve Fischer, Executive Director  
Grace Sliwoski, Director of Programs  
Tracy Andryc, Development Director  
Steven Murphy, Administrative Director

## Administration

Georgia Albanese, Administrative Assistant  
Luca Barrett, Program Evaluator  
Tamar Rubin-Calvert, Program Evaluator

## Development

Gwen Weissinger, Communications Associate  
Katie Flanagan, Development Associate

## Farmers Market Team

Ashley Carter, Farmers Market Program Coordinator  
Erika Akerson, Lead Farmers Market Manager

## Farmers Market Staff

Annabel Boateng	Anastasia Beirne-Meyer
Brian Brennan	Christine Tosti
Zev Breen	Ellanora Lerner
Duncan Drapeau	Amina Ameer
Macy Drude	Brynn Keevil
Monica Stemmermann	Katie Flanagan
Caroline Murphy	Emma LeMay
McDavid Rodriguez	Teddy Mitchell
Shanice Nelson	Max Marcotte

## UGROW Team

Noel Allen, Community Gardens Coordinator  
Eliza Lawrence, School Gardens Coordinator  
Alyssa Johnson, Commonwealth Corps  
School Gardens Volunteer Engagement Specialist

## YouthGROW Team

Stacie Brimmage, YouthGROW Coordinator  
Tom Trepanier, Farm Manager  
Valeria Niyonkuru, Farm Mentor  
Nate Lewis, Commonwealth Corps  
Youth Volunteer Engagement Specialist  
Max Macort, Youth Mentor  
Katie Flanagan, Youth Mentor  
Tamar Rubin-Calvert, Youth Mentor  
Owen Chase, Junior Staff  
Teddy Mitchell, Junior Staff  
Kimora Scott, Junior Staff  
Simone Barjolo, Junior Staff





# YOUTHGROW

*Youth Growing Organics in Worcester*

2022 marked a year of celebration and growth for the YouthGROW program. With support from Worcester Community Action Council, the United Way of Central MA, and the Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education, we were able to expand year-round employment opportunities for youth with a spring and fall employment cohort. This allowed us to **expand spring youth positions to offer 15 youth hourly paid roles in the spring, 40 youth paid staff roles over the summer, and 18 youth paid staff roles through the fall.**

The YouthGROW farm was bustling over the summer with 40 youth and 11 adult staff and interns, including 10 youth holding formal leadership roles. For the first time since the beginning of the pandemic, we resumed weekly field trips to local farms. We visited The Farm School, Dismas Farm, The Food Project, and Overlook Farm. We were also able to bring back the much loved YouthGROW Block Party to celebrate the end of our summer season with neighbors, family, friends, community partners, and YouthGROW alumni.

We saw the results of our collective efforts in the yields from our YouthGROW Farm. We were able to **increase overall production by 15%, including an increase of 1,000 pounds of additional tomatoes**, thanks to a new trellising system. Woo Sox Farms, which is our newest site, is a rooftop farm growing in 400, 1'x1' grow-boxes on the roof of Polar Park. Youth tended this site weekly and harvested over **600 pounds of food for donation.**

**When not farming, youth spoke up locally and at statewide forums for youth employment and food access.** YouthGROWers planned and led a youth training on developing and sharing testimony, co-convoked a legislative round table on youth employment, and collaborated with Project Bread to support the campaign for Universal School Meals.







**40**  
youth  
employed



**5,111**  
lbs of food  
grown



**4**  
field trips to  
local farms



**\$11,176**  
in YouthGROW  
produce sales



**6**  
graduating  
seniors  
accepted to  
college



"I've learned how to harvest and different types of foods like taioba and jilo. I've also learned how to make friends and how entertaining farming can be with people around. **I like playing a part in changing the world.**"

*Olivia Hughes Thomassen, 1st Year YouthGROW Participant*





# FARMERS MARKETS

With the help of dedicated staff, local farmers, community supporters, and generous sponsors, we were proud to offer uninterrupted access to local, farm fresh produce to food insecure areas of our region all year long in 2022.

**REC Community Farmers Markets operated 6 days a week for the majority of the year (June-December).** Our schedule included 15 Mobile Market stops weekly in Worcester, Webster, and Southbridge. We also coordinated and managed the Beaver Brook and University Park Standing Markets. 14 local vendors sold goods ranging from farm fresh produce to sustainably sourced coffee to locally made hot sauce.

We collaborated with community organizations including Worcester Family Partnerships, Main South CDC, The Creative Hub Worcester, Clark University, and Earn a Bike to help create family friendly market spaces. We increased our “off-season” markets to operate January-May, with a more limited schedule, recognizing the importance of year-round local food access.

While we accept all forms of payment at REC Markets, in 2022 we continued to prioritize outreach and access for community members accessing federal nutrition programs, including WIC, Senior Farmers Market Coupons, and SNAP/HIP. The Healthy Incentives Program (HIP) helps SNAP clients buy more fruits and vegetables for their household by providing rebates for purchasing local food at participating farmers markets, farm stands, and CSA's. **In 2022, 94% of all transactions made at REC markets were made using a food subsidy program, 83% of which were made using SNAP/HIP.**

Finally, in 2022, **we relaunched our online market ordering platform**, allowing customers to place fully customizable orders and pickup at a variety of weekly locations.



“I love the importance of supporting our farmers, that it’s grown, you know, in our vicinity. And it has helped me because I’m eating healthier myself! I’m inventing recipes! It’s been a blessing. **I have been motivated to get out of bed [on market days].**”

*Elsy Cruz, Farmers Market Customer*





Customers smiling with cucumbers at the University Park Market



Children at Camp Wind in the Pines participating in a Mini-Market



Valeria Niyonkuru, YouthGROW Farm Mentor and Burundi Farmer, smiling with taro



Mobile Market set up at Family Health Center of Worcester



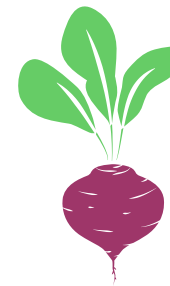
**500**

market customers per week



**23**

unique Mobile Market locations



**130,000**

lbs of produce sold through the Mobile Market



**94%**

of customers use federal nutrition programs



## Vendors at Standing Markets

- *Atrevete a probar food truck*
- *Bearfoot Farm*
- *Barnabus Forndia, World Farmers*
- *Belen Bakery*
- *Black Seed Farmers Market*
- *Bucket List Maple Syrup*
- *Coolidge Hill Farm*
- *Fay Mountain Farm*
- *Harpers Farm and Garden*
- *Joy of Beans*
- *Oakdale Farm*
- *Rocky Ridge Farm*
- *Sabrosa Venezuela food truck*
- *Valeria Niyonkuru, World Farmers*

## Vendors Supported through the Mobile Market

- *Cotyledon Farms*
- *Kettle Brook Farms*
- *the YouthGROW farm*
- *Oxford Farms*
- *Little Leaf Farms*
- *Worcester Regional Food Hub*
- *Marty's Local Distributors*
- *EAT Center Growers*
- *World Farmers*



# UGROW: COMMUNITY & SCHOOL GARDENS

*Urban Garden Resources of Worcester*

The UGROW Community and School Gardens Network continued to grow in 2022, with 71 active member gardens in the city of Worcester! With support from volunteers and community experts, our team **built 42 raised garden beds, planted 2 pollinator gardens, and hosted 73 workshops and educational programs**, covering topics like tree pruning, seed starting, composting, soil health, and food preservation. We distributed 8,919 seedlings to member gardens in 2022 and provided free soil tests and compost.

With support from the U.S. EPA, **we worked with 5 member gardens to make infrastructure improvements focused on climate resiliency and community education**. We partnered with the Worcester Native Plant Initiative to install a large scale pollinator garden at Colony Retirement Homes and to offer educational workshops on the importance of pollinators and native plants.

We supported **25 School Gardens** in our network in 2022, the majority of which are located at Worcester Public Schools. We provided on-site programming that **engaged 1,730 students** with hands-on gardening activities and classroom workshops.

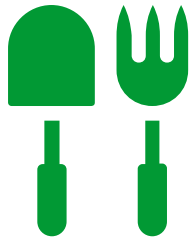
We also provided age appropriate garden tools and tool storage systems for a number of school gardens, improving teachers' ability to use the gardens as educational spaces.

We were excited to welcome **208 Worcester Public Students to field trips at the YouthGROW Urban Farm in Main South**. With support from the United Way of Central MA, we piloted our first full academic year of Farm-to-Early Childhood programming at 7 preschools, including all 4 Worcester Head Start locations.



"We are grateful to collaborate with the REC School Gardens Program. Each year the School Garden Coordinator provides our children with hands-on lessons in our raised beds and teaches our children how to plant, tend, harvest, and consume delicious fresh garden vegetables. We call our raised beds "Gardens of Gratitude." Our school gardens are an important component to our Nutrition and Healthy Lifestyle Initiatives."  
Nancy Thibault, *Rainbow Child Development Center*





**71**  
gardens in  
network



**500**  
community  
gardeners  
participating



**1,730**  
students  
impacted



**8,919**  
seedlings given  
to network  
gardens



**73**  
gardening  
workshops



Thriving garden beds planted and tended by the North High Garden Club



Workshop participants planting native perennials on Webster Square median



School Gardens Coordinator, Eliza, tending a bed of marigolds and eggplants with high schooler, Andiyooni



Students from Vernon Hill Elementary on a field trip at the YouthGROW farm, planting their own seedlings!



# EVENT HIGHLIGHTS



## ANNUAL PLANT SALE

Over 3,700 seedlings were sold at the REC Plant Sale in 2022! The \$30,000 raised allowed us to donate over 8,000 vegetable seedlings to community and school gardens across Worcester.

We were also excited to be joined by the Worcester Native Plant Initiative and Lady Fern Farm, who sold native plants and provided education at the event.

We continue to offer sliding scale payment and accept HIP/SNAP for seedling purchases as part of our comprehensive efforts to increase access to affordable local food here in Central Massachusetts!





## 32ND ANNUAL EARTH DAY CLEANUPS

In partnership with the City of Worcester Department of Public Works and Parks and with the support of National Grid and a number of area corporate and nonprofit sponsors, the 2022 Earth Day Cleanups were a huge success! Over 1,200 volunteers cleaned up 70 sites across the city. Together, we picked up 21 tons of trash!



## FARM PARTY

At this year's Farm Party we came together over live music, delicious food, and farm tours to celebrate our 50th Anniversary! We were honored to receive a key to the city of Worcester from Mayor Joe Petty and to give away a number of awards to recognize individuals who have made significant contributions to the REC's work.





# THANK YOU

to the **300 community volunteers** who supported the UGROW Network, Farmers Market, and YouthGROW program in 2022. Together with an amazing team of 18 interns from 6 area colleges and universities, these volunteers contributed **more than 3,100 hours of time and talent to our community.**



**“Any space where you can bring together like minded people and form a good sense of community and comfort is so valuable. I’ve met such cool people being here, in my experience as a volunteer, and so I just appreciate spaces where people are able to come together and build community. Especially in a city, finding that space can be really hard.”**

*Annie McElroy, Volunteer*



# FY22 FINANCIAL REPORT

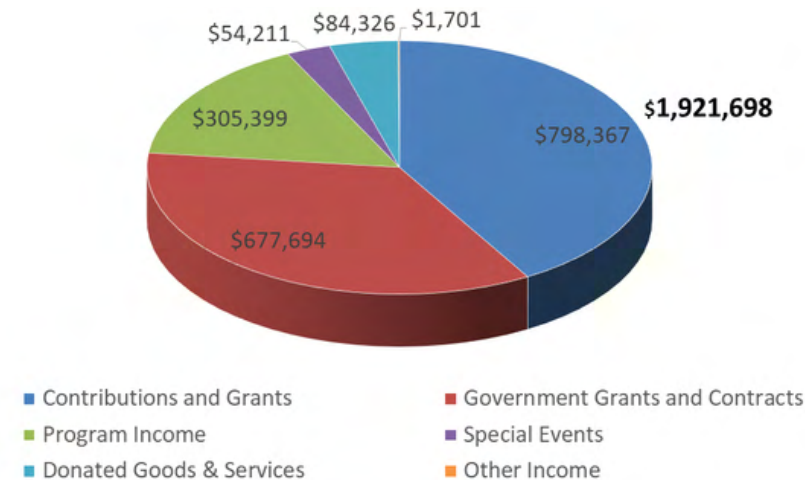
Fiscal Year 2022 (7/1/2021-6/30/2022) was another successful year. Financially, we ended the year in a very strong position. We continue to operate under the three principle guidelines of operating within a prudent range of financial stability, maintaining adequate liquidity for near-term operations, and maintaining sufficient reserves to ensure both the resilience and sustainability of the organization, while expanding our service to the community.

In FY22, Total Revenue exceeded budget and was up 20% from FY21. Although contributions were down from last year, government contracts/grants more than doubled v. FY21. Total Spending exceeded budget but, as in the previous year, was compensated for by increased revenues. The Mobile Farmers Markets were once again the key contributors to an increase in program revenue over FY21, with market margins approaching 25%.

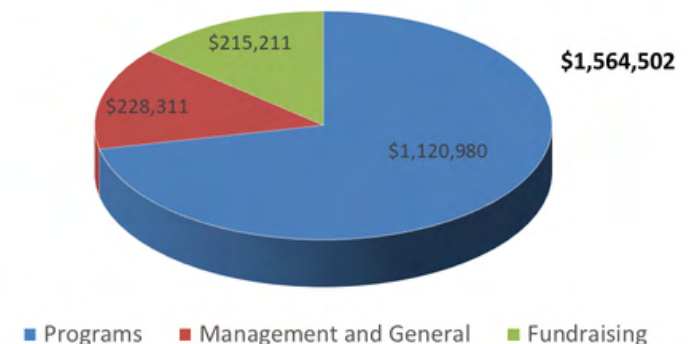
In FY22, REC program spending increased \$207,615 (23%) over the previous year. We finished the year with \$962,605 in cash and cash equivalents equating to 215 operating days (FY23 costs). REC has no long-term debt.

STATEMENT OF ACTIVITIES		
SUPPORT and REVENUE		
Contributions and Grants	\$ 798,367	41.5%
Government Grants and Contracts	\$ 677,694	35.3%
Program Income	\$ 305,399	15.9%
Special Events	\$ 54,211	1.8%
Donated Goods and Services	\$ 84,326	4.4%
Other Income	\$ 1,701	0.1%
<b>Total Support and Revenue</b>	<b>\$ 1,921,698</b>	<b>100%</b>
EXPENSES		
Programs	\$ 1,120,980	71.7%
Management and General	\$ 228,311	14.6%
Fundraising	\$ 215,211	13.8%
<b>Total Expenses</b>	<b>\$ 1,564,502</b>	<b>100%</b>
<b>Increase (Decrease) in Net Assets</b>	<b>\$ 357,196</b>	

## SUPPORT & REVENUE



## EXPENSES

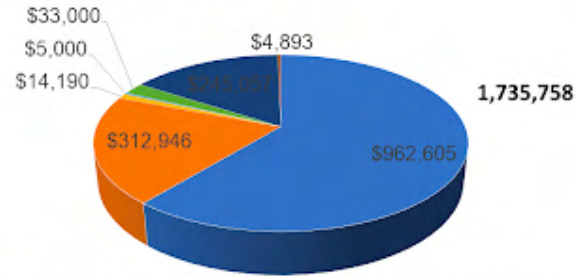




## STATEMENT OF FINANCIAL POSITION

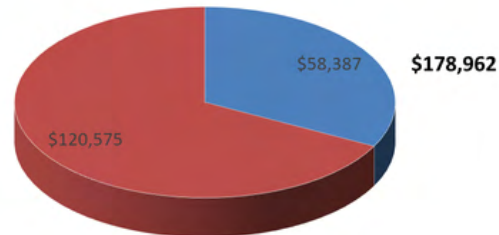
ASSETS	
CURRENT ASSETS	
Cash and Cash Equivalents	\$ 962,605
Grants and Contracts Receivable	\$ 312,946
Contributions Receivable	-
Prepaid Expenses	\$ 14,190
<b>Total Current Assets</b>	<b>\$ 1,289,741</b>
OTHER ASSETS	
Restricted Cash	\$ 5,000
LT Contribution Receivable	\$ 33,000
Property and Equipment	\$ 245,057
Investments/Security Deposit	\$ 4,893
<b>TOTAL ASSETS</b>	<b>\$ 1,577,691</b>
LIABILITIES and NET ASSETS	
CURRENT LIABILITIES	
Accounts Payable	\$ 58,387
Accrued Expenses	\$ 120,575
Deferred Revenue	-
Current Portion of Notes Payable	-
<b>Total Current Liabilities</b>	<b>\$ 178,962</b>
LONG-TERM LIABILITIES	
Long Term Debt	-
<b>TOTAL LIABILITIES</b>	<b>\$ 178,962</b>
NET ASSETS	
Unrestricted Net Assets	\$ 570,977
Board Designated Assets	\$ 153,904
Restricted Net Assets	\$ 673,848
<b>TOTAL NET ASSETS</b>	<b>\$ 1,398,729</b>
<b>TOTAL LIABILITIES &amp; NET ASSETS</b>	<b>\$ 1,577,691</b>

## ASSETS



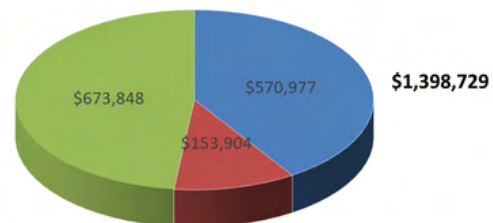
- Cash & Cash Equivalents
- Contributions Receivable
- Restricted Cash
- Property and Equipment
- Grants and Contracts Receivable
- Prepaid Expenses
- LT Contribution Receivable
- Investments/Security Deposit

## LIABILITIES



- Accounts Payable
- Accrued Expenses

## NET ASSETS



- Unrestricted Net Assets
- Board Designated Assets
- Restricted Net Assets



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We are proud to share our 2022 successes which illustrate the fruits of decades of work by so many good people.

**There is still much to be done to end hunger and to make community food security and sovereignty a reality in Central Massachusetts.** As the REC moves into its next 50 years, *together* we can create a just food system that will continue to empower people of all ages to access, grow and purchase healthy, affordable, culturally relevant, local food while making our communities and neighborhoods more resilient, more sustainable, and more beautiful.

We are grateful for the generosity of our community of supporters who have helped us achieved so much in 2022 and over the past 50 years. ***Together, we can grow even stronger over the next 50 years.***

# LET'S CONNECT!



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