



— THE LAND —
CONNECTION

2022 **ANNUAL REPORT**

WHO WE ARE

The Land Connection envisions community-based food systems in which every farmer has the opportunity to protect our environment by growing food in a sustainable manner and every person has access to local, nutritious foods.

TLC was founded in 2001 with a focus on farmer training and land preservation. We found that many landowners wanted their land farmed in a sustainable manner, but could not meet the farmer demand due to lack of knowledge in the industry. To address this need, TLC launched a vital training program to teach regenerative agricultural practices to regional farmers which improve our air and water, protect our environment, and preserve our extraordinary farmland. Since then, we've evolved to support change across our food and farming system by working with farmers, food businesses, and consumers.



WHAT WE DO

The Land Connection works at each step of the supply chain to grow a more robust and resilient local food system, from soil to supper plate.

Farmers

- Teaching regenerative farming practices to farmers of all backgrounds and experience levels
- Creating positive environmental and ecological outcomes for farms, as well as positive economic and quality of life outcomes for farmers
- Connecting conservation-minded landowners with the next generation of Illinois farmers

Eaters

- Centering consumer choice and empowering shoppers by expanding their food budgets
- Creating more opportunity to buy locally grown and produced foods at our year-round farmers market
- Providing culturally relevant and approachable food education, regardless of culinary experience

Food businesses

- Incubating small and beginning food and farm businesses at our farmers markets
- Encouraging consumers to form a relationship with those producing their food
- Providing one-on-one business support to help navigate e-commerce, lending opportunities, health department restrictions, and more.



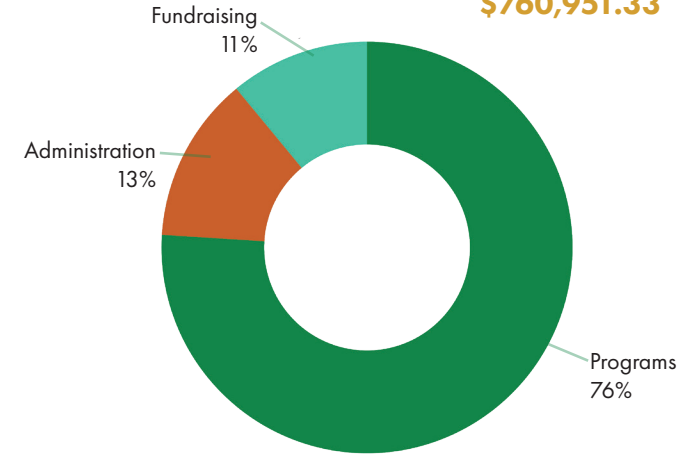
2022 FINANCIALS

The Land Connection is proud to invest in our local food and farming economy.

Supporting local businesses means investing our dollars in our communities and ensuring our neighbors have stable jobs. It also means that nearly 70% of the funds we spend on local businesses stays in our community, which creates a positive feedback loop that enables everyone to thrive.



EXPENSES \$760,951.33

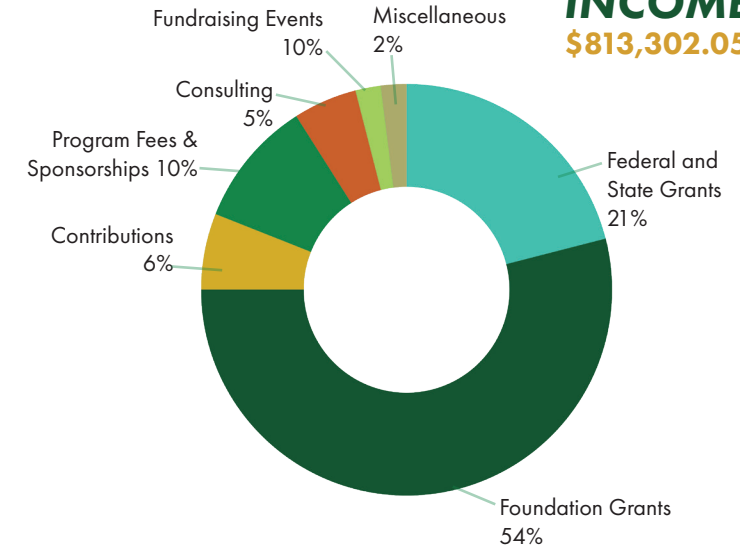


PROGRAM EXPENSE BREAKDOWN \$575,847.51



Note: Illinois FarmLink and Local Foods were new in 2022 and did not run the full year.

INCOME \$813,302.05



Funds spent directly supporting food and farm businesses: **\$127,264.24**

Payments to other small businesses and Illinois-based contractors: **\$198,875.69**

FARMER TRAINING



The Illinois landscape is dominated by chemically-intensive conventional grain operations. These operations contribute significantly to the degradation of our soil, water, and air, while contributing little to our local and regional food system.

Our farming and farmland owning populations are aging — with average ages of 58 and 69, respectively. At the same time, many beginning farmers wishing to grow or raise food in a regenerative way lack access to land, markets, and capital. They need assistance with business management and often have no farming background that would include access to a community rich with knowledge.

2022 BY THE NUMBERS:

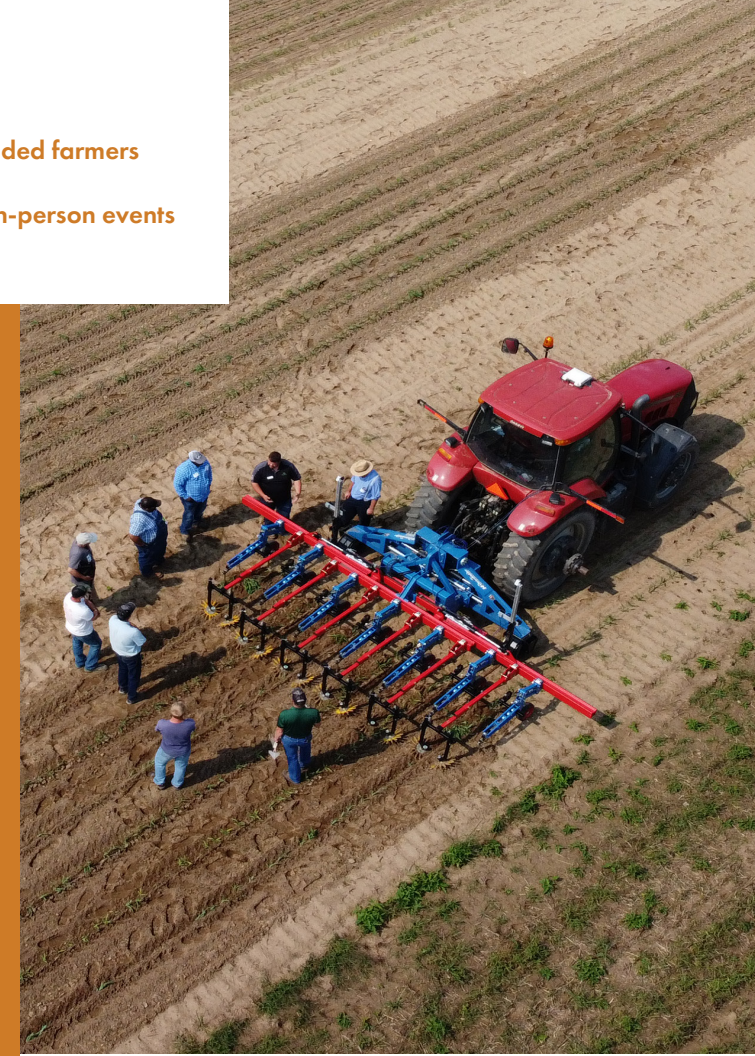
- 100+ hours of educational activities geared toward conservation-minded farmers
- 30+ workshops, field days, webinars, and conferences hosted
- 1,500+ farmers of all backgrounds and experience levels trained at in-person events
- 100,000+ farmers utilizing online and self-guided training resources

The farming crisis is real — and growing. But, together, we can usher in a brighter future for Illinois's fertile farmland and the people who tend to it.

The Land Connection's farmer training work is rooted in land stewardship and, increasingly, farm viability.

Over the last few years, we have witnessed numerous food and farming businesses close due to a lack of resources, both capital and labor. Our goal is to avoid that outcome by providing farmers the tools needed to develop a business that is sustainable both environmentally and economically.

Our farmer training program, informed and developed by farmers, is continually evolving to better empower farmers to build resilient farm businesses that transcend the mounting social and economic pressures they face.



ILLINOIS FARMLINK

With agricultural land treated as an attractive investment and development asset, it is becoming increasingly hard for farmers — especially beginning farmers — to find secure, reasonably priced farmland. It's also becoming harder for farmland owners to find farmers who will manage their land in a way that fits their values.

Most farmers never receive any formal training in finding, securing, and keeping farmland. Nor do farmland owners easily find expertise and advice on how to understand their own land's farming characteristics and how to work out a fair lease arrangement. For BIPOC, queer, and women farmers, these challenges are even more acute.



The newly-launched Illinois Farmlink program aims to bridge the gap between farmers looking for land and landowners who want to see their soil in caring hands.

Through Illinois Farmlink, farmers and farmland owners can:

- Connect efficiently by posting FREE, searchable profiles
- Receive FREE advising on the farmer/landowner search process
- Learn through useful resources and education programs

The Illinois Farmlink website is now live! Plus, we have Farmlink Navigators stationed around the state ready to help tackle your land access challenges.

Visit the new Illinois Farmlink website by scanning the QR code or visit www.illinoisfarmlink.org.



FARMERS MARKETS

The Champaign-Urbana Farmers Markets are our hub for uplifting central Illinois farmers and getting more locally grown and produced foods into the homes of our neighbors.



Outdoor market season is upon us! Learn more about where to find fresh, local food in C-U by scanning the QR code or visit www.thelandconnection.org



The Land Connection operates year-round farmers markets in Champaign-Urbana to provide a convenient space for our community to gather, learn, connect, and shop local. At these markets, we tackle issues of affordability through food assistance programs, as well as educate shoppers on how and why to be more active participants in their local food community.

Our markets primarily feature farms within 100 miles of Champaign-Urbana, as well as beginning food businesses just starting to get their footing.

Last year, we welcomed nearly 50 new vendors, including Tati's Bakery. Owner Orlando Guenni quickly won the hearts (and stomachs) of our market shoppers with his delectable Venezuelan and Latin American breads and pastries. Orlando went from working to build his brand, to consistently selling out well before the market ends.



FOOD ACCESS

Access to nutritious food is a basic human right. The Land Connection centers consumer choice, empowering SNAP shoppers by expanding their food budgets and giving them more opportunity to buy locally grown produce, meat, dairy, bread, and other staples.



The Universal Link Program provides folks with up to \$80 each week (\$20 swiped from their Link card + an additional \$60 in no-cost matching dollars) to spend on eligible items at the Champaign Farmers Market, Champaign-Urbana Winter Farmers Market, and the Urbana Market at the Square.

We're growing the Universal Link Match program to serve farmers market shoppers throughout Central Illinois this market season. Matching benefits are coming to Danville, Decatur, and other communities throughout our region. The program will also be up-and-running at select Champaign-Urbana farms, including Sola Gratia and Joyful Wren Farm, soon!

2022 BY THE NUMBERS:

- \$100,000+ in nutrition assistance dollars distributed across the Champaign-Urbana Farmers Markets
- 2,500+ transactions made through our Universal Link Match program
- 250+ people receiving extra dollars for local food each week



LOCAL FOOD EDUCATION

More food grown and produced in Illinois means little if there's not consumer demand to match.

That's why The Land Connection created a new Local Foods Program Manager position dedicated to growing demand for local foods. They are teaching folks to grow nutritious foods at home, regardless of living arrangements; incorporate local ingredients into easy, budget-friendly recipes; store and prepare seasonal bounties; and more.



2022 BY THE NUMBERS:

- 1,200+ How to Grow and Illinois Specialty Crop Card sets distributed
- 250+ people learning to cook with seasonal produce in a TLC cooking class
- 3,100+ viewers of TLC's instructional cooking videos and specialty crop highlights

Growing local investment in fresh, organic produce at any income level is a key component to growing a stable and vibrant community-based food system. Whether it's through recipe cards, cooking videos, or community presentations, our Local Foods Program focuses on making eating local easy, convenient, and culturally relevant for all consumers — regardless of their grocery budget or experience in the kitchen.



KIDS KITS

For more than two years, The Land Connection has offered free take-home Kids Kits at the last farmers market of each month, containing all the ingredients families need to prepare a small meal or snack using nutritious, local ingredients — plus, instructions to make it.

2022 BY THE NUMBERS:

- 600+ free Kids Kits distributed at Champaign-Urbana Farmers Markets
- \$3,500+ spent on ingredients from local food and farm businesses
- Countless smiles on the faces of tiny chefs



This program is more than getting nutritious food into kitchens across our community. It's about building life skills (including cooking techniques) for children and for bringing families together around the dinner table to talk, learn, and explore the possibilities of local food.

Surveys show that over 90% of families who receive a Kids Kit repeat the recipe on their own. Nearly 30% of survey respondents indicated that the kits encouraged their family to spend more of their food budget on fresh foods.

Demand for the kits continues to grow, including interest in offering the program at more farmers markets sites and in schools around central Illinois.

We have regulars who plan block parties for all the kids on their street to make their Kids Kits together. We distribute kits to grandparents who make Kids Kits a monthly must do "date" with their grandchildren. Participating families return regularly to the farmers market looking for the fresh fruits and vegetables they cooked with in their kits.



PARTNERSHIPS & COLLABORATIONS

Transforming our local food system isn't done overnight — and it isn't done alone. None of this work is possible without support and collaboration from our partners.

THANK YOU!

American Farmland Trust
Angelic Organics Learning Center
Artisan Grain Collaborative
Buy Fresh Buy Local Illinois
Champaign Center Partnership
Chicago Food Policy Action Council
City of Champaign
City of Urbana
Common Ground Food Co-op
Embarras Grazing Partnership
Experimental Station

Farm Beginnings Collaborative
Food Works
Frontera Farmer Foundation
Healthy Champaign County
IDEA Farm Network
Illinois Environmental Council
Illinois Farm Bureau
Illinois Farmers Market Association
Illinois Stewardship Alliance
Iroquois Valley Farmland REIT
Land for Good

Liberty Prairie Foundation
Local Food Forum
Midwest Grazing Exchange
Prairie Rivers Network
ReGenerate Illinois
Routes to Farm Alliance
Savanna Institute
Smile Politely
The Conservation Fund
University of Illinois Extension

This list is not exhaustive and is presented in alphabetical order.



JOIN THE MOVEMENT!

DONATE TODAY

SCAN ME



The Land Connection | 206 N Randolph St. Suite 400 | Champaign, IL 61820 | www.thelandconnection.org