



2025 - 2026 Annual Report

Prepared by
Jennifer Schmidt

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President's Message

from Wendy Aeschlimann



Board of Directors

Wendy Aeschlimann
President, *Executive Director (Interim)*

Jennifer Schmidt
Vice President

Maureen O'Brien
Treasurer

Sarah Engle
Secretary

Michael Stashwick
Board Member

Ross Greenspan
Board Member

Dear friends, partners, and supporters,

As we reflect on the past year, we are filled with gratitude for the people who make our mission possible. Your generosity and partnership allowed us to respond to community needs, strengthen programs, and create meaningful change for the individuals and families we serve.

Despite rising costs, climate impacts, and a 25% funding decline, our board, staff, and partners remained committed to advancing our mission of education, hands-on experience, and awareness of sustainably grown food. We sustained three full-time, year-round farming and education roles, plus two full-time seasonal and one part-time seasonal farming positions—an uncommon and essential investment in urban farmers.

This year, we deepened advocacy in North Chicago and Northern Cook County Shore communities, engaged about 1,000 school-aged children, and welcomed over 500 students to our 2.5-acre farm. Our Climate Cafés with the Skokie Public Library encouraged residents to recycle, compost, start seeds, and discuss climate optimism. We continued our fourth year with The Douglas Center and directly engaged more than 3,350 community members. We increased farm production to 24,000 pounds of sustainably grown produce, doubled donations to local food pantries, and expanded Grow Your Green Thumb with a new intermediate level.

To address financial challenges, our board hosted three fundraising events—including two farm dinners and Raise the Barn!—bringing over 200 people together and laying groundwork for future growth.

This annual report is more than a record of activities; it is a story of shared commitment. Through service, advocacy, education, and everyday acts of support, our community helped move our mission forward.

Wendy Aeschlimann

Mission & Values

To provide education, example, and hands-on experience to members of the community to expand the awareness, importance, and availability of food grown sustainably.

At our roots, The Talking Farm is driven by:



Community

The Talking Farm was established to serve the community by transforming vacant land into productive urban farm space. It aims to provide fresh produce to local residents and engage them in agricultural activities, fostering a sense of community involvement and connection to the land.



Sustainability

The organization is committed to sustainable farming practices that promote environmental health. By utilizing organic methods and focusing on soil regeneration, The Talking Farm aims to create a model of urban agriculture that supports biodiversity and reduces ecological impact.



Education

Education is a core focus for The Talking Farm, which offers programs and workshops for people of all ages. These educational initiatives are designed to teach participants about sustainable farming techniques, healthy eating, and the importance of local food systems, empowering them with knowledge and skills.



Social Justice

The Talking Farm addresses social justice by striving to make fresh, healthy food accessible to underserved communities. Through partnerships and community outreach, it works to ensure that all individuals, regardless of socioeconomic status, can benefit from the nutritional and educational resources it provides.

Our Programs

Howard Street Farm

The Howard Street Farm is our main operating site where we grow fresh, hyper-local food using innovative and sustainable practices while educating our community about the environment, agriculture, biodiversity, permaculture, horticulture, gardening, and social justice and health issues. The farm is located on 2.5 acres of land at 3669 Howard Street, in Skokie, Illinois, west of the intersection of Howard Street and McCormick Boulevard.

Our one-of-a-kind urban vegetable, herb, and flower farm is a full-production, intensive, teaching farm that implements the best of today's sustainable agricultural technologies and practices, minimizes its impact on the environment, and enhances the local environment by promoting biodiversity and permaculture through the planting of a variety of fruit and nut trees such as hazelnut, Asian pear, cherry, cranberry, raspberry, elderberry, gooseberry, and plum.

We apply sustainable agricultural practices such as crop rotation, cover cropping, companion planting, mulching, composting, and building good soil health by using organic practices that do not rely on harmful pesticides, and minimizing tillage to preserve soil structure and life.



“What I am most grateful for are the friendships with both fellow volunteers, as well as Talking Farm staff members that I have made as a result of volunteering at the farm.” - Volunteer

Through our education programs, our farmer educators teach not just how to grow food using organic methods, but also about the significance of locally- and sustainably-grown food on environmental, social justice, and health issues facing our communities. Our farmer-educators teach people how they can be part of the solution towards a more sustainable, ecologically-balanced, healthy future.

You can find our hyper-local, extremely fresh produce at local restaurants, farmers' markets, schools and community organizations, food pantries, and through a farm membership program.

Our Programs

Educational Programs

In Partnership with Youth Opportunities United Y.O.U.

F Cubed: Food, Farming Future

Designed for high school students, F Cubed is a year-round educational program focused on gardening, cooking, and the business of selling at a farmer's market. Students also learn about how environmental, health, and social justice issues impact our food systems and ways to initiate change.

Elementary Programs

Designed for elementary students, our programs provide enrichment opportunities for after-school and summer programs at on-site school gardens. Our staff work weekly with students to educate on planting, harvesting, garden maintenance, plant care, soil testing, and more.



“Talking Farm has been a space that has helped our young people learn how to be responsible, purposeful within our environment and community through sharing of education and resources.” - Sheryl Coaxum, Afterschool Program Manager

Tot Learning Center

In partnership with the Tot Learning Center, we've developed a curriculum that teaches their pre-school students the basics about growing food. All year long, the students maintain their own raised-bed garden and tour the farm, as well as engage in classroom activities related to urban farming and agriculture.

District 69

Our partnership with District 69 has included both weekly and summer programming. For our weekly programming, students worked outside in the Madison community garden plot to plant, care for, protect, label, and harvest from plants that they started as seeds in the cold months indoors. During the summer, we held garden sessions in the Edison garden where students learned the differences between native and introduced plants, collected decomposers, planted and cared for the school garden, and enjoyed a delicious summer produce bounty.

Our Programs

Educational Programs, cont.

Kingsley Elementary

We partnered with Kingsley elementary to do a series of recess garden programs to help get their school garden back into shape. Working with the PTA, we led students in pruning herb plants, harvesting out the garden, and winterizing the space by weeding, removing old plants, and spreading straw and plant matter to protect the soil over the harsh winter months.



McKenzie Elementary

This weekly program occurs during recess and invites all kids to come and get their hands dirty in the McKenzie garden. Working alongside the PTA, TTF leads garden activities, explorations, and crafts, to help kids connect with the earth, their school garden, and the outdoors in new and fun ways. Throughout the program, which runs in the spring and fall, students see their school garden through every stage, from seed to harvest to removal.

John Middleton Elementary School

In this weekly program, TTF staff goes to Middleton Elementary to help students get their hands in the soil, and learn about planting, harvesting, tasting vegetables, reading, learning, and exploring their student-led garden space.

Harper Elementary

In this program, classroom teachers sign up for slots to come to the Harper garden and learn how to take care of our plants and garden space. Students help to prepare beds, find insects, care for and prune our crops, harvest, and winterize the garden throughout the year. Along the way they learn about important garden topics like fertilization, pests, and how to create a garden that's good for us and the planet.

Internship Program

Farm Education Internship

We offer several stipend internship programs throughout the growing season for those passionate about growing food, protecting the planet, and empowering young people with garden knowledge. By working 8-16 hours per week across 8-12 weeks, participants receive hands-on instruction from our farm staff.

Interns work with our Education and Programming Coordinator to assist in providing garden enrichment activities to an array of program participants, ranging from preschoolers to adults. Participants will help lead, organize, and plan educational activities, as well as refine gardening skills by helping maintain our educational gardens both on the farm and at partner locations.

Our Programs

Community Outreach Programs

Skokie Public Library

Every month during the academic year, TTF partners with SPL to offer climate cafes. These cafes offer light snacks and drinks and encourage folks to discuss issues relating to climate change in a judgement-free, non-academic, supportive space. We offer resources to get involved, and facilitate a conversation focused on rotating topics. We have also partnered with SPL to offer a field trip to the farm in May to wrap up our climate cafes and a start your garden and seed swap class in March to help people get their gardens started.

Orchard Village

In this growing multi-year partnership, we cultivate an organic urban garden that provides fresh, locally grown produce to Orchard Village's clients and community members. In addition to growing food for its clients, Orchard Village's farm has donated over 20% of produce grown in their garden to a local food pantry, sold produce at the Skokie Farmers Market, and distributed vegetables to its constituents.

The Douglas Center

The Talking Farm partners with The Douglas Center to provide community integration opportunities for adults with intellectual and developmental disabilities. Initially offering educational programming, the program has since evolved to build out accessible raised beds at The Douglas Center where participants grow vegetables, herbs, and flowers to be donated to local community organizations. Participants also come out to the farm every other week to seed, plant, cultivate, and harvest flowers to make bouquets for our Flowers from the Hearts program.

“We look forward to continuing to grow together and the many more ways that the lives of people with disabilities can be enriched through this partnership.”

Chicago Hopes

Through a series of one-off programs, TTF partnered with Chicago Hopes to bring the garden indoors. We facilitated window-sill planting programs where participants got to decorate and plant out pots to take home, as well as running programs related to herbs and how to use small harvests in a big way. We made tea bags, lemonade, and herb sachets to help make participant spaces smell lovely.

Our Impact

Together with your support, The Talking Farm has supported thousands of our neighbors through our various educational and community outreach programs and continued to foster sustainability through our every day.



12+

Education & Outreach Programs



3,350

Learning Hours



400+

Program Participants



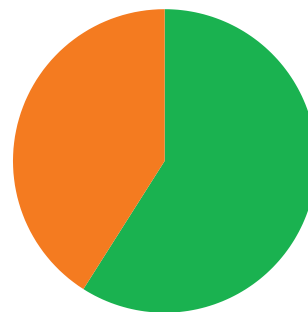
24,000

Lbs of Produce Grown

Demographics of Program Participants

Race / Ethnicity

White	59%
BIPOC	41%

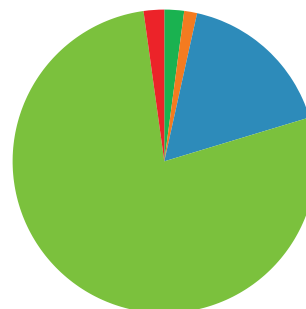


Financials

Fiscal Year 2025 Expenses

April 2025 - March 2026

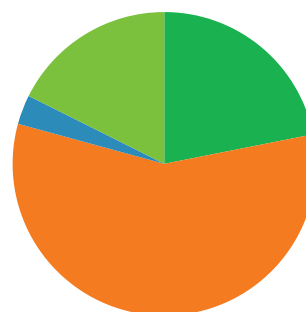
Total	\$294,852
Education	\$3,295
Farm Operations	\$32,258
General / Admin	\$35,608
Personnel	\$218,077
Fundraising	\$5,615



Fiscal Year 2025 Revenue

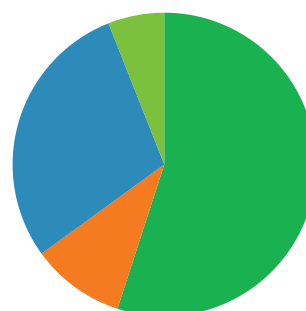
April 2025 - March 2026

Total	\$264,396
Programs	\$42,032
Cash Contributions	\$150,182
Fundraising	\$15,705
Product Sales	\$56,477



Sources of Donations

Individual Donors	55%
Government	10%
Foundations	29%
Corporations	6%



Board & Staff

Board of Directors



Wendy Aeschlimann
Executive Director



Sarah Engle
Secretary



Maureen O'Brien
Treasurer



Jennifer Schmidt
Vice President



Ross Greenspan
Board Member



Michael Stashwick
Board Member

Staff

Jack Phillips
*Production
Manager*

Camille Walker
*Assistant Production
Manager*

Angela Stenberg
*Educator & Programming
Coordinator*

Natasia Goetschy
*Staff Farmer
(Orchard Village)*

Hannah Frink
Staff Farmer

Natalie Infantes-Cordova
*Market Coordinator & Staff
Farmer*