



**THE
CONSERVATION
FUND**

LAND SUSTAINS US

Chicago Metro/Midwest Working Farms





Chartered in 1985 with a dual mission of land conservation and sustainable economic development.

THE CHALLENGE

We are losing our local farms and farmers, especially surrounding major metro areas

Development pressure on small and mid-size family farms



In 2022, the number of farms in the US fell **below 2 million** for the first time since 1850



FEWER FARMS

Lack of support for next generation farmers to access land and build viable farm businesses



Average age of U.S. farmer is **58 YEARS OLD**



FEWER FARMERS

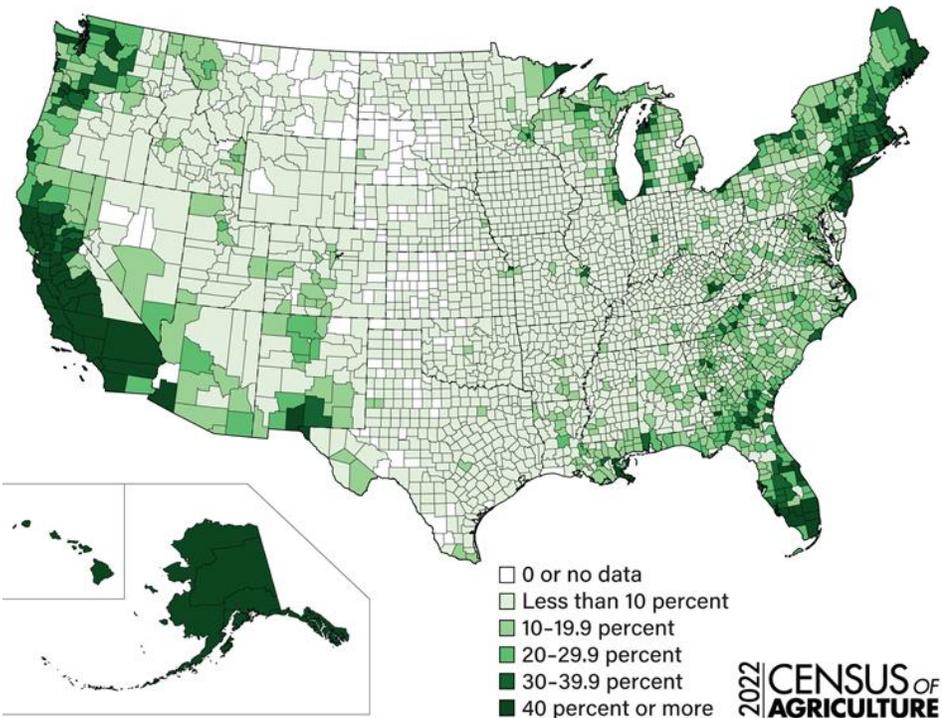
In less than a generation, metro Chicago lost 20% of its farmland to development.

THE CHALLENGE - FOOD IS IN THE PATHWAY OF DEVELOPMENT

Most food is grown in metro and metro-influenced areas.

Share of farms primarily growing specialty crops, by county, 2022

USDA Economic Research Service
U.S. DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE



Source: USDA, Economic Research Service using 2022 Census of Agriculture data from USDA, National Agricultural Statistics Service.

CHARTS of NOTE



THE OPPORTUNITY

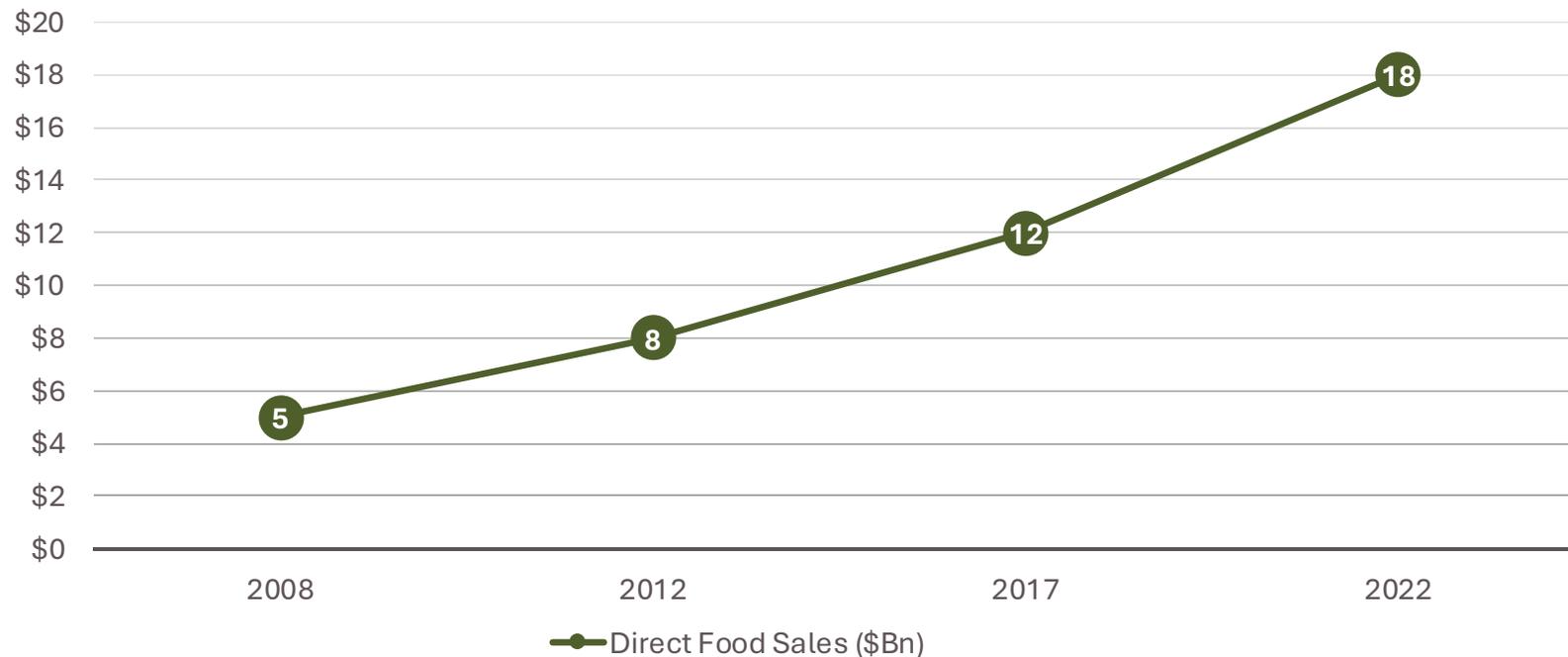
There is a shift happening in how we produce and consume food



Next-Generation Farmers growing locally and sustainably

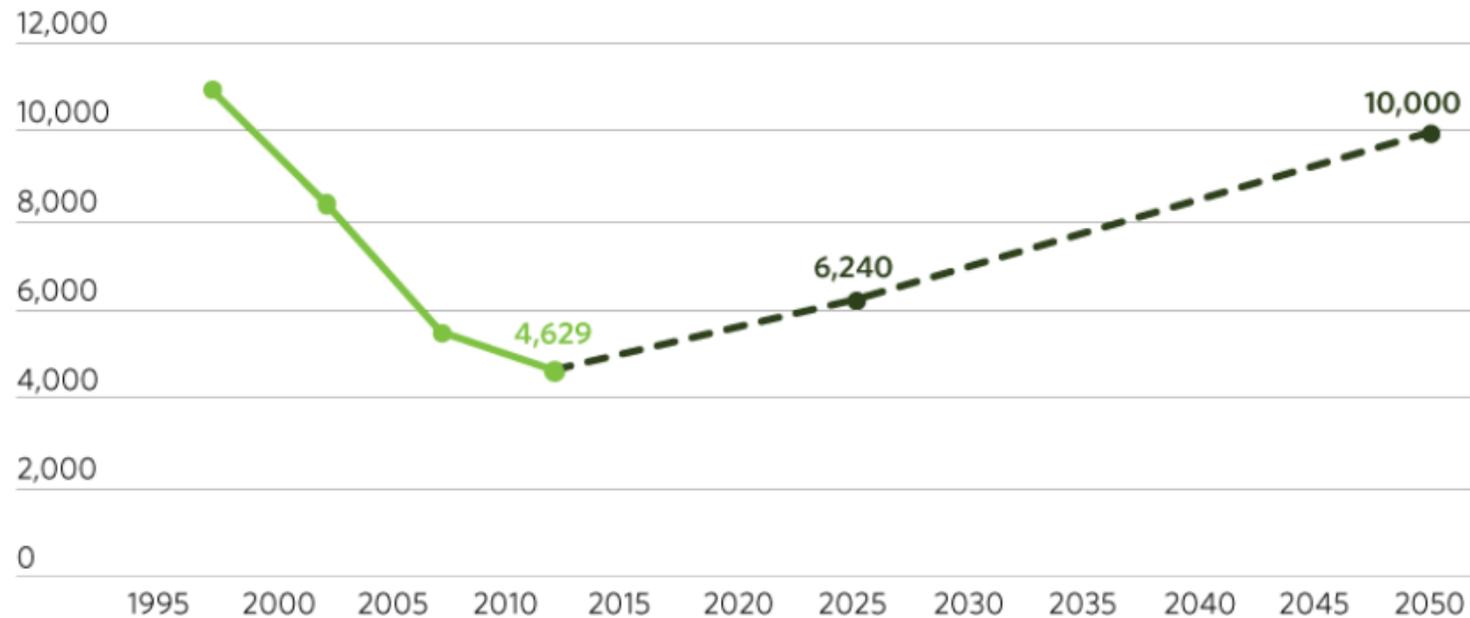


There are more than 1 million new and beginning farmers across the country, an 11% increase in last five years



THE OPPORTUNITY

Increase and protect acres producing food, while advancing equity in land access and ownership.



Metro Chicago's On To 2050 regional plan calls for a 75% increase in total acres used to harvest food for direct human consumption – 10,000 acres by 2050.

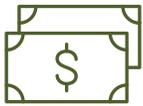
THE SOLUTION: FARMS FUND

The Farms Fund is an innovative program of The Conservation Fund that:

- Creates a patient pathway to **affordable land ownership** for diverse next generation farmers
- Breaks down traditional barriers to **capital for farmers**
- Accelerates adoption of **sustainable agricultural practices**
- **Permanently conserves farmland** at risk of being lost to development
- Grows a **resilient local food system**



THE FARMS FUND MODEL



BUY

- Acquire small to mid-sized farmland facing development threat



SUPPORT

- Create pathway to land access through 3-to-5-year lease-to-own contract
- Invest in farm infrastructure
- Coordinate farm business support
- Support sustainable practices



PROTECT

Secure conservation: Sell conservation easement for permanent protection of farmland



SELL

- Sell underlying fee to farmer at agricultural use value (35-60% of land value)
- Roll proceeds into new acquisition



CHICAGO METRO CURRENT FARM TEAMS



Chicago Metro/Midwest CURRENT FARMS

Garlic eScape Farm, 30 acres (McHenry County)

- Garlic, turmeric, ginger; tinctures & tonics

Chicago Urban Farm Solutions, 20 acres (Cook County)

- Vegetables; prescription produce boxes

Kakadoodle Farm, 74 acres (Cook County)

- Pastured eggs; fruits and nuts; online local subscription aggregation

Rustic Road Farm, 30 acres (Kane County)

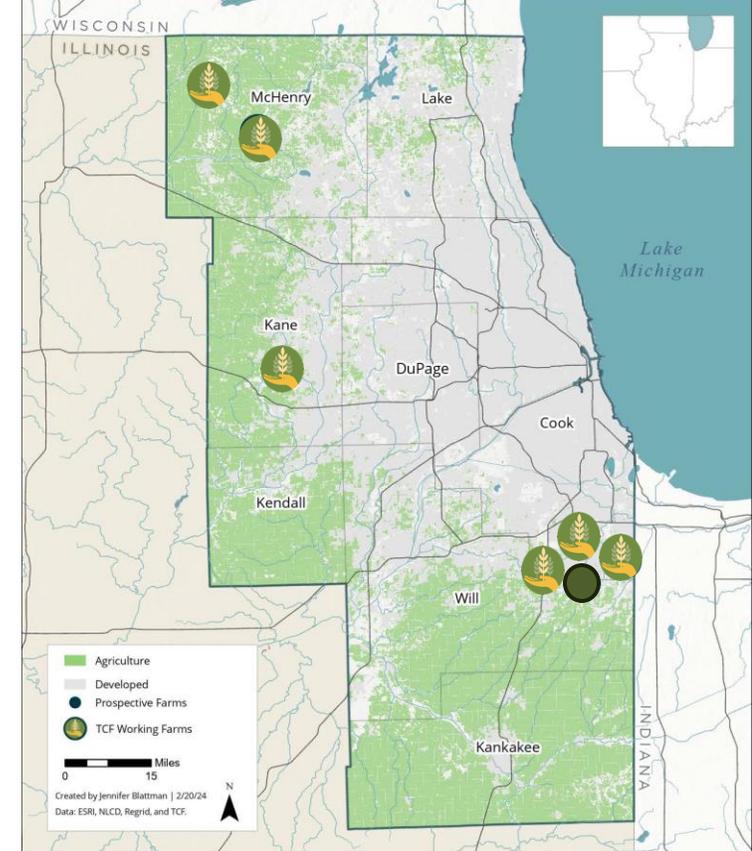
- Cattle; goat; chicken; heritage pork; honey; vegetables & fruits; farm-based grab & go soups, salads, entrees

Urban Growers Collective, 30 acres (Cook County)

- Honey; vegetables; fruits and berries; goat; chicken

Otter Oaks, 42 acres (McHenry County)

- Vegetables; fruits; mushrooms; value-add products



CHICAGO METRO FARMERS

Garlic eScape Farm
30 acres
Woodstock, McHenry County IL



Silvia Abel-Caines founded Garlic eScape to produce garlic bulbs, herbs, health-themed gift baskets, & hand-crafted immune boosting tonics. Silvia provides culturally relevant training on the benefits of living and eating with nature.

The Conservation Fund invested in a 30-acre farm including a 1920s farmhouse that she has a business plan to purchase in 2025 at the agricultural price point.

Silvia and her husband Arturo have expanded production to include Silvopasture and turmeric and ginger production in a high tunnel.



CHICAGO METRO FARMERS

Chicago Urban Farm Solutions
20 acres
Chicago Heights, Cook County IL

Chicago Urban Farm Solutions is owned and operated by **Deshawn Willingham** who leads a farm team of talented growers resulting in a thriving wholesale vegetable business. CUFS is significantly scaling production on a 20-acre farm secured through the Farms Fund program. The farm includes a house & storage.

We have worked with the USDA's NRCS program to put a well, wash/pack station, hoophouse & drip-irrigation onsite.

CUFS grows for local food pantries, a prescription produce program for a health center & provides hyperlocal product to wholesalers.



CHICAGO METRO FARMERS

Kakadoodle Farm LLC
40 acres
Matteson, Cook County IL

Kakadoodle

Kakadoodle Farm is owned and operated by MariKate Thomas & run in collaboration with her husband Marty Thomas. The farm business is an integrated production farm (pastured eggs) and an on-line marketplace that provides weekly and bi-weekly deliveries of quality, locally-grown food, sourced from an additional 12 other local farm operations.

Steady year-over-year growth of demand for their eggs as well as a loyal and expanding customer base for the marketplace leads Kakadoodle to the search for more land and a place to manage aggregation and distribution.

In late 2023, The Conservation Fund purchased the Stuenkel Legacy Farm - 74 acres in Cook County with 2 homes and 10 outbuildings, on their behalf.



CHICAGO METRO FARMERS

Rustic Road Farm
30 acres
Elburn, Kane County, IL



Rustic Road Farm produces organic vegetables, fruit, and honey, while raising heirloom pigs, free-range chickens, and pastured eggs. Owners Marc and Luis Bernard have a 3x week onsite farmstand, a 2x week off-farm market stand, a 750-member CSA as well as online sales and a value-added line of soups, sauces and baked goods cultivated through Marc's two decades as a professional chef.

Marc and Luis needed to expand from their leased land after 11 years of successful, direct-to-consumer diversified farm operations. The Conservation Fund purchased Cloonlara Farm in late 2023, 30 acres in Kane County with homestead, on their behalf.



URBAN GROWERS COLLECTIVE

Zeldenrust Farm
30 acres
Chicago Heights, Cook County, IL



Urban Growers Collective (UGC) was founded in Chicago as a Black and women run 501c3 that for over 23 years has worked closely with community partners to develop and support community-based food systems supporting health, economic development, healing, and creativity through urban agriculture. UGC produces vegetables, fruits, culinary and medicinal herbs, edible flowers, ornamental plants, goats, chickens, and honeybees. UGC markets directly to customers through on-site farm stands, a mobile farmers market, a CSA, and restaurant and wholesale accounts. Based on 11 acres, mostly on the South Side of Chicago, UGC needed to ensure a secure land base to scale operations to meet existing demand and advanced farmer training.

On behalf of Urban Growers Collective, The Conservation Fund has purchased a 30-acre farm, which includes 5 greenhouses, a roadside sales center, pole barn and farmhouse. This farm infrastructure is well suited to allow all livestock operations to be brought together, as well as expand their apiary and vegetable operation with a sales center on site. Located in unincorporated Cook County, this farm is strategically located close to existing customers, BIPOC communities and the Chicago city Limits.



OTTER OAKS FARM

Crestwood Farm
43 acres
Woodstock, McHenry County, IL



Otter Oaks Farm is owned by Soraya Alem, and managed by their partner, Jarvi Schneider. Jarvi and Soraya started their urban farm business in Chicago in 2021 on the plots stewarded by the Chicago's Windy City Harvest farm incubator program. Their farm provides Community Supported Agriculture (CSA) shares focusing on specialty crops and herbs used in Lebanese and American South cuisines, in addition to growing for wholesalers in the Chicago Metro region. They plan to expand the farm into pasture-raised chickens for egg production, and will offer agritourism, educational workshops, and a safe and inclusive event space for LGBTQIA+ communities, including hosting their own farm incubator program to support beginning farmers.

In 2024, The Conservation Fund matched Otter Oaks Farm with the 43-acre Crestwood Farm located in McHenry County, northwest of Chicago. The farm features over 35 acres of organic pasture ideally suited to regenerative production. The property also includes wetlands, natural forest, and stream frontage that contribute significant wildlife habitat. The existing well, barn, and farm office provide essential infrastructure to catalyze Otter Oaks Farm's long-term success.



BUY – SUPPORT – PROTECT – SELL

Wrap-around Programmatic Support for Entrepreneurial Farm Businesses

BUSINESS SUPPORT

Business Planning & Strategy: Olivia Tincani and Co.

Financial Planning & Recordkeeping: Bernoulli Finance

Crop-Specific Costs of Production: Know Your Cost To Grow (Oregon Tilth)

Wholesale Readiness Value Chain for Farmers: SupplyChange



CAPITAL ACCESS

Land Management Practices: US Dept. Ag. Regional Conservation Partnership Program

Farm Credit Services: Compeer Emerging Markets

Low Interest Loans & Bridge Funds: Foodshed Capital



IN-HOUSE SUPPORT

Farm Operations Support: Vendors, Land Planning, Food Safety, Zoning, Property Mgmt.

Grant Support for BIPOC Led Ops: helped secure \$700k+ in farmer grants

Technical Assistance: Annual Fellowship Event; Monthly 1:1 Meetings; Referrals



MARKET SUPPORT

Purchasing Commitments from Intuitional Buyers



CHICAGO METRO IMPACTS TO DATE

6

FARMS

226

ACRES

38

FARMERS

\$5M

in Land
Value
Secured

\$1M

Secured &
Invested in
On-Farm
Infrastructure

\$7.97M

Dollars
Awarded
from USDA

50% of Farm Owners
are Women

75% of Farm Owners
are BIPOC

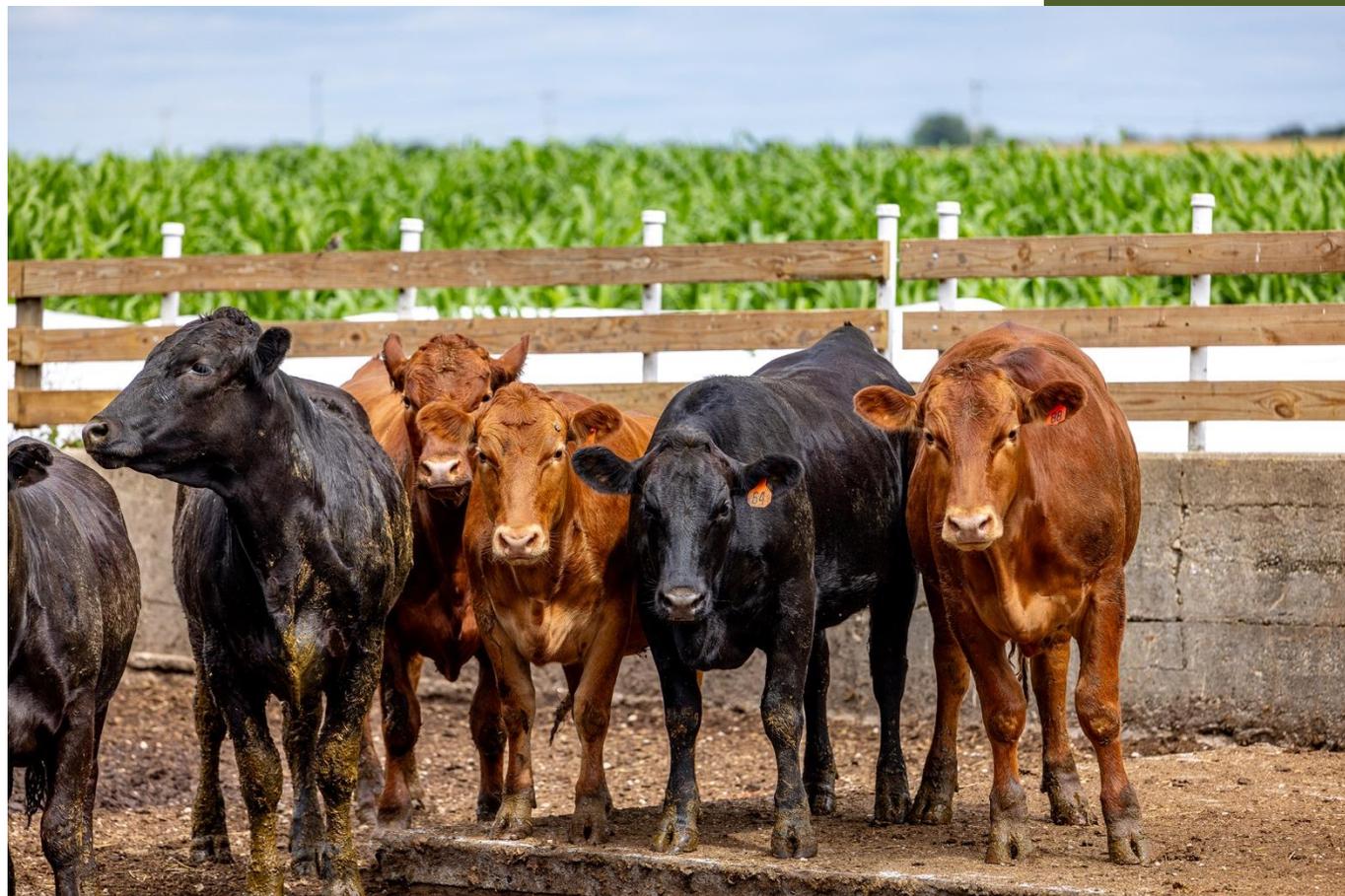




Collective Work:

Illinois Natural Resources and Agricultural Legacy Act

- Creates a new Grant Program within IDNR (Illinois Department of Natural Resources) to support permanent land conservation in Illinois.
- The program will make grants to non-profits and local governments to purchase conservation easements on natural areas and farmland.
- These grants can be used as match to access federal conservation dollars.
- 28 States have adopted this program.



“Being able to consolidate into one location has allowed us to focus and lay the foundation for growth.”

Arturo Caines,
Garlic eScape

“Now the people who want to expand actually have a pathway that's not just by themselves.”

Paul Krysik,
Just Roots

“Something like this gives people hope.”

Deshawn
Willingham,
Chicago Urban
Farm Solutions

Thank you!

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