

ANNUAL REPORT

Director's Letter

It may be that when we no longer know what to do,
we have come to our real work
and when we no longer know which way to go,
we have begun our real journey.



The mind that is not baffled is not employed.
The impeded stream is the one that sings.

-Wendell Berry

I've been thinking a lot about this Wendell Berry poem regarding where we are in the world. We've started yet another year in the midst of unknowns. Yet, despite the known and unknown challenges that are ahead, we can take pride and confidence in knowing that opportunity, creativity, and vision are possible during these challenging times. Sturdy trees start with humble seeds. As I look back on how much we've grown since our humble start, I am in awe of the community we have built, the support we have gained, and the impact we have made.

Last year alone, we raised \$28,000! We grew something out of nothing on the Community Farm. We partnered with over ten different organizations locally to promote healthy food security, sustainability education, Earth justice, and community resilience. We have figured out ways to evolve to transmute obstacles into opportunities for growth and learning. In a phrase: we are singing.

While we still face unknowns, we know for sure that we have the stability of humble beginnings to continue making our mark within our local and greater Earth community. Our community of supporters has been the stewards of Living Earth Center. I am both honored and excited to witness how far Living Earth Center can grow and flow with the support, love, and collaboration of those that know the actual work we can do.

Sing on,



Laura Peterson

Executive Director
Living Earth Center

Board of Directors

Becky Bates, Chair
Briana Baker, Vice Chair
Melissa Martensen, Treasurer
Kelly Karstad, Secretary
Ben Brzeski
Martin Jacaruso
Joyce Prahm
Sr. Anna Marie Reha
Laura Stastny
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Jim Vonderharr
Sr. Monica Wagner
Sr Jeanne Wingenter

2021 Staff

Laura Peterson - Executive Director
Amy Hunt - Program Coordinator
Jonathan Bystrowski - Garden Manager
Lynn Rozen - Garden Mentor
Carol Harder - Farm Manager

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FINANCIAL STATEMENT - 2020 - 2021 FISCAL YEAR

When LEC became its own 501c3 in 2017, we knew becoming financially independent would be a long process.

Along with an annual subsidy, SSND currently pays:

- Executive Director's Salary and Benefits
- Office Space (in-kind)
- Land for the Community Garden (in-kind)

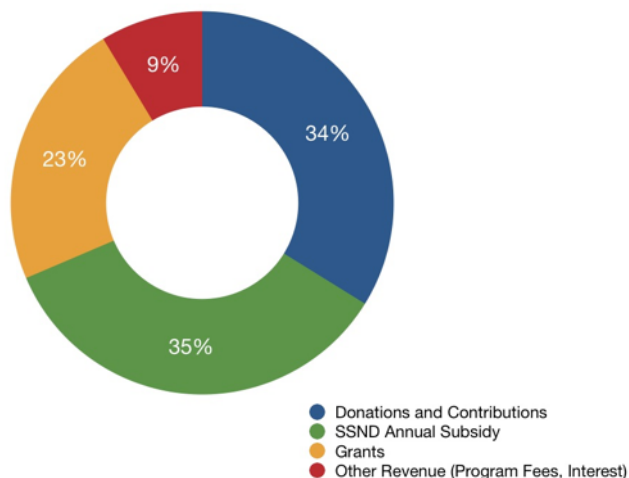
We are grateful for the continued support of SSND. In fact we could not operate without it. To that end, we are working towards our future financial sustainability. Any additional income surplus has been invested in a "nest egg" of sorts towards our goal of future financial independence.

Other notes of importance:

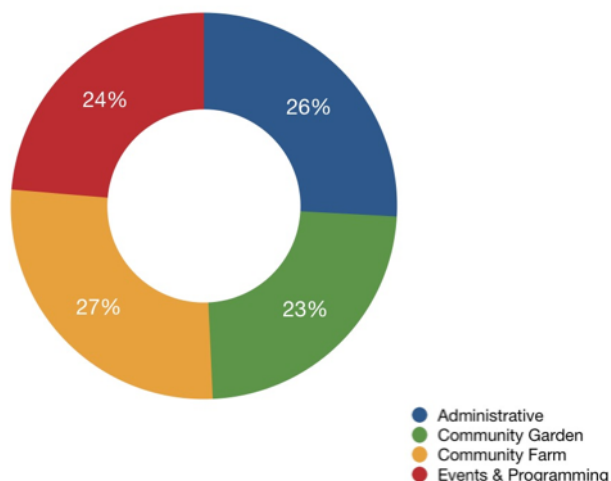
- Portions of the grants that we received carry over into the next fiscal year
- Covid-19 has continued to effect our Programming Income

The percentages below do not reflect our ED's salary/benefits or the in-kind donations from SSND but are our operating expenses for fiscal year July 2020 - June 2021.

INCOME



EXPENSES



BECAUSE OF YOUR DONATIONS:

1645

pounds of **produce** were grown and harvested by LEC Staff and Volunteers and **donated** to local community partners including FOCP Back Pack Food Program, ECHO Food Shelf, Mankato MYPlace, CADA House, and Partners for Affordable Housing.

9

Garden Scholarships were awarded.

111

Community Gardeners and their families had a place to **grow** healthy **food** and quality **relationships**.

25

Programs and Workshops, from Virtual Open Mic Nights to our Common Ground Series, with topics ranging from Water Conservation to Canning 101.



LIVING EARTH CENTER GROWTH



COMMUNITY FARM

In March of 2021, LEC took over management of the Blue Earth County Farm. While the Farm has been in operation for over a decade, this year it was moved to a new location and so we were starting from scratch with an empty field. With the support of Blue Earth County we hired a Farm Manager, and with her work, along with the work of many community volunteers (individuals, companies, church groups, and more) we turned that empty plot of land into a thriving growing space.

Food harvested from the Farm was donated to our Community Partners, ECHO Food Shelf, FOCP Backpack Food Program, CADA House, SW MN Food Recovery Program, and Partners for Affordable Housing.



COMMUNITY CONNECTIONS

Creating Connections in our community is at the heart of LEC's mission. We are proud to continue our joint venture with MNSU's School of Allied Health and Nursing cultivating the Eng-AGE-ment Garden, a dementia-friendly garden for residents of Pillars Senior Living Community.

We also began a new partnership this spring with MAC-V, providing a gardening and gathering space for veterans in the Mankato area. They came weekly up to the Gardens, for coffee, conversation, and to tend their garden plot.



GROWING THROUGH GARDENING

While we have been offering kids' gardening classes for over 15 years, we have had a special partnership with Mankato MYPlace (formerly Boys and Girls Club of Mankato) for the past 4 years.

The MY Place garden plot in our Community Garden provides access to the magic of gardening for children who may not have had previous garden experiences. The group visits their plot weekly throughout the summer and works with our staff growing organic vegetables (tomatoes and cucumbers are among the most popular) that they get to eat and take home to share with their families.



LIVING EARTH CENTER FUTURE GOALS

CONTINUED FARM GROWTH

We have big plans for the Community Farm space - cultivating a free food forest, growing native pollinator plants, partnering with immigrant and refugee communities, and expansion of our soil, garden, and farm training programs.

For the 2022 growing season we will be focusing on implementing sustainable soil management techniques including rotational cover crops, carbon building mulch, and possible small livestock addition.

USDA GRANT WITH REGION 9

As we work towards the above goals of partnering with immigrant and refugee communities and expanding training programs, we have partnered with Region 9 to apply for a USDA Grant.

This grant will allow us to work with area immigrant/refugee communities, giving them space to grow traditional foods that they can then sell at the Farmer's Market and/or donate to local food shelf/community organizations.

INVESTING FOR THE FUTURE

As we work towards our future financial independence from the School Sisters of Notre Dame, we have taken steps to invest our “nest egg” with the Mankato Area Foundation’s Agency Funds.

Through this partnership, MAF pools and invests LEC’s assets with those of the Foundation, thereby providing responsible and professional management on our behalf. This step gives us confidence and professional backing as we move forward towards our future fundraising goals, as well as making it possible for us to now manage legacy and larger donations.

