The Women’s Environmental Institute (WEI) is an environmental research, renewal and retreat center designed to create and share knowledge about environmental issues and policies relevant to women, children and identified communities affected by environmental injustice; to promote agricultural justice, organic and sustainable agriculture and ecological awareness; and to support activism that influences public policy and promotes social change. Our mission brings together agricultural, food and environmental justice, one community at a time; one farm at a time, one person at a time and all of us together.
A MESSAGE FROM KAREN CLARK, EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

Friends and Colleagues,

2020 has been a very challenging 17th year for WEI to grow through. We are grateful for a strong team of administrative staff, farmers, numerous dedicated volunteers, WEI Board Members, community partners, allies and generous donors who have continued to support our environmental, racial, gender and agricultural justice work throughout this pandemic, community uprisings and emerging economic crises. Changing most of our educational classes to virtual offerings in response to COVID 19 has required more creativity, flexibility and grew our technical communication skills. WEI expanded our North Circle on-line farmer’s market work with local small-scale organic farmers as well as the “Veggie Rx” program serving three local health clinics. We sustained our Community Supported Agriculture (CSA) program, were awarded two federal CARES act grants that helped us retain our employees and survive a fire that destroyed our wood shed and winter wood heating supply for our hoops houses. WEI continued our advocacy as part of the East Phillips Neighborhood Institute’s coalition fighting City Hall’s attempt to stop the community-based, Little Earth of United Tribes-led East Phillips Indoor Urban Farm Project struggle -- joining in numerous rallies and supporting the Environmental Justice lawsuit against the City of Minneapolis and the MN Pollution Control Agency. This Fall, WEI deepened our focus on food justice as we worked with Will Allen and with MIGIZI Communications to address the growing food shortage crisis in this country through our first nation-wide webinar: “Grow, Harvest, Preserve: 100 Days of Food Supply”. Doing so strengthened our strategic resolve to bring urban and rural constituents together, to grow our regional food system development work, to challenge entrenched powers that need changing and to still find the goodness and joy in this justice movement. We hope you may have joined us for some of these efforts and will be inspired to help us continue to organize for meaningful change in 2021. So please review our year-end report and stay close to WEI!

In solidarity,

Karen Clark

WEI Activist Executive Director
PROVIDED SAFE SPACE AND SHELTER

Despite the limitations of COVID, WEI hosted socially distanced public pizza and music nights and outdoor classes, replaced in-person indoor classes with zoom classes (including our annual Solstice overnight), and welcomed over 100 volunteers to work on the farm or help at Mill City farmers market. We took care of staff, volunteers, and all visitors by strict compliance with WEI’s and Mill City’s rigorous COVID policies. Many commented on how valuable it was for their mental health to have a safe place to volunteer, wander, and socialize during high COVID months.

RESPONDED TO FOOD INSECURITY

Thanks to the commitment of our talented farm crew, WEI more than doubled produce for the Mill City’s Greens for Good program, The Food Group’s Harvest for the Hungry programs and the North Branch Family Pathways food shelf. We also increased our SNAP/EBT sales and continued to develop our Veggie Rx project with bi-weekly deliveries of organic farm vegetables from North Circle farmers to Fairview clinics in North Branch, Rush City and Pine City.

CHAMPIONED BIPOC LEADERSHIP

With our work supporting the East Phillips Neighborhood Institute’s environmental justice initiatives at the Roof Depot site, WEI continued to promote environmental justice as a key part of racial justice. In addition, WEI continued its representation and participation in the South Side Green Zone, Misugiig Gitagan’s 24th Street Coalition, Little Earth United Tribes Board, Wichoie Nazkagen Language Preservation Board, Voice of East African Women, Indigenous People’s Task Force, and Indigenous Food Network.

LIFTED UP LOCAL GROWERS AND GROWTH OF LOCAL FOOD SYSTEM

Working with more than 12 farmers, millers, makers, and bakers North Circle Food Hub provided a covid-safe low-contact local food option through the online farmers market June-October.
In 2020, we began WEI's education program with a very strong and ambitious offering of classes, which unfortunately crashed under the weight of necessary COVID-safe precautions. We cancelled, rescheduled, and provided many refunds. WEI converted some of our classes to ZOOMINARS, while rigorously observing health safety measures of masking and social distancing in our classes and using as many outdoor classroom spaces as possible. We closed down the year with our annual Solstice gathering, this year in Zoom. At the 2020 Solstice, we left behind a year of global suffering, moving into the potential vaccine optimism of 2021, riding alongside continued struggles for sustaining democracy and advancing justice. This will take more than a village!

"I can not say enough good things about WEI and the people who work & volunteer to make it such a magical place. it is run by people who are committed to the environment, food justice and our local food system."
-WEI Friend and DTE Student

WEI held on to our beloved Will Allen Farmer Training event by providing our first Zoom webinar - a free-of-charge, hour-and-a-half Will Allen farmer training event with breakout sessions on composting, growing microgreens, at-home aquaponics, and foraging for food and medicine. At that nation-wide gathering, WEI announced our 12th Annual Farmer Training Weekend theme for 2021: Grow, Harvest and Preserve; 100 Days of Food Security scheduled for September 25th-26th.

Over 100 people registered to join us virtually for our online farmer training in October 2020. Many thanks to our collaborators, MIGIZI First Person Productions and FarmerWillAllen.com, for their help producing this event.

What's coming up?
We continue to plan 2021 classes, more of which may be virtual. We look forward to hosting CSA events, pizza nights, and bringing back our in-person farmer training weekend. WEI will continue to provide the highest level of safety and care for our staff and our farmers, as well as for all our volunteers, visitors, guests, teachers, and students.
The plants, worms, and chickens had a good growing season despite the ongoing challenges of COVID for the humans. Many people really wanted organic produce delivered in a CSA box or fresh at the market. This year we delivered over 1120 CSA boxes, participated in year round markets, donated food to the North Branch food shelf, and managed food hub programs Veggie Rx and North Circle in collaboration with other local organic farms.

In late November, we had a fire on the farm which destroyed our outdoor wood burning stove and most of the shed where we store our wood for the winter. At the end of 2020 we are still recovering and hoping to continue our winter farming and aquaponic fish care which rely on a continued heat source. This story to be continued.

What's next at the farm?

We look forward to continuing to collaborate with colleges by working with St. Thomas professors and farm volunteers, Liz Wilkinson and Paola Ehrmantraut, on a special course designed to include learning at our farm. We’re excited to welcome many members of our farm crew back next year and continue to work collaboratively.
WEI's work with the **East Phillips Neighborhood Institute (EPNI)** coalition continued in 2020 with weekly meetings, rallies, and advocacy support to challenge Minneapolis City Council’s and Mayor's plans to expand Public Work’s maintenance plant at the former "Roof Depot" site already chosen by the neighborhood for alternative “green” community-based Environmental Justice development. Funded by the MN Department of Jobs and Economic Development, **East Phillip’s “Urban Farm Project”** would convert the huge former Roof Depot warehouse to grow year-round fresh, affordable, organic vegetables along with aquaponic-raised fish in this “food desert”; to create living-wage jobs for neighborhood residents, cultural markets, a youth-led café, small business incubators, recovery space for nearby businesses and organizations damaged in the uprising following George Floyd’s murder; and to develop desperately needed low-income affordable housing. The City’s plan would, instead, demolish the Roof Depot and increase toxic industrial and traffic pollution in this majority low-income and BIPOC neighborhood already overburdened with severe health disparities from toxic pollution.

**Little Earth of United Tribes** continues to lead this multi-racial community coalition effort that includes a lawsuit in District Court charging the City and MN Pollution Control Agency with environmental injustice. Numerous BIPOC investors and supporters have joined the community to demand Minneapolis honor the special state EJ law protecting East Phillips residents and EPNI started Go-Fund-Me to raise needed legal funds.

*WEI's guidance, as requested by the **White Bear Neighborhood Concerned Citizens Group**, helped them pass the first US law to phase out toxic Trichloroethylene polluting their neighborhoods from Water Gremlin industries.

*WEI's hands-on support with **Mashkiikii Gitigan** urban farm has been mostly paused by COVID restrictions.

The City wants to build a Public Works maintenance facility in the heart of the Arsenic Triangle. The facility will also add another source of toxic air pollution in our already overburdened community. Worse, the City refuses to conduct a cumulative impact analysis, a type of environmental review, despite being required by state law (Minn. Stat. § 116.07, subd. 4a)!

**ANNUAL REPORT 2020**

**Urban Environmental Justice**

**WEI** supports EPNI's EJ struggle:
North Circle Food Hub work continues as online farmers market and farms to pharmacy

In 2020 North Circle entered its fourth year as a local online farmers market as more people were confronting some of the weaknesses in international supply chains and avoiding doing their shopping in person. From June to the end of October, products from 12 local farms, ranchers, and millers were delivered to 8 drop sites in East Central Minnesota. North Circle had a great year thanks to many volunteers and the commitment of our local farmers. We believe that a local farming-to-food economy will be the best way to solve access to healthy sustainably grown food and the elimination of food insecurity with the coming climate crisis and other disruptions of supply chains. We especially want to thank the Sisters of St. Joseph of Carondelet (Partners in Justice Fund) for their grant supporting the North Circle Program.

Veggie RX Program

After a Veggie RX pilot program during the winter of 19-20, North Circle farmers grew fruit and veg to fill boxes for the patients at North Branch, Pine City, and Rush City’s Fairview Clinics. Each box contained a newsletter that included cooking tips and nutritional information. We thank the Statewide Health Improvement Partnership and M Fairview for collaborating with WEI on this program.

What’s next for North Circle?

In 2021 we’ll continue aggregating and delivering food from North Circle farmers to our local rural communities. We plan to expand the Veggie Rx program into more local clinics, allowing us to provide food to more patients and buy more from local, organic farmers.

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Endless thanks to our volunteers:

Adison Tansom
Alison Benfield
Alex Philstrom
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Angela Hume
Annika Peterson
Annika Skoog
Ashley Monk
Barb Loida
Becca Kropp
Becca Van Sickle
Bri Mathias
Byron Thompson
Carly Kryzer
Carol Hume
Carolyn Cruys
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Cynthia Meyer
Dawn Miller
Denice Fair
Dieter
Drake Swanson
Drew W
Emily Chase
Emily Lund
Emily Raup
Emily Strasser
Emma
Emma Schurink
Eric Sharpback
Erin Stevenson
Erin Thompson
Eris West
Gina Giorgi
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Hilary Sandall
Hylana Sandall
Ian Mac Moore
Jacquelyn Zita
Jamie Kluegel
Jean Chagnon
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Karen Clark
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Kathy O'Rourke
Katrina Swanson
Kevin Hinkle
Kim Koket
Kioe Coles
Kirsten Kennedy
Kristy Nielsen
Krystal Morley
Kyra Christopherson
Lauren Baur
Laura Crandall
Lauren Sweeney
Lily Wood
Lisa Frank
Liz Wilkinson
Lucia Hunt
Luna Zeidner
Lyne Riley
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Maris Scheer
Marjorie Otto
Mark Holub
Mark Lindsay
Megan Greene
Michele Parsons
Mike Merino
Mitch Hawes
Molly Oace
Nancy Vezner
Nancy Victorin-Vangerud
Paige Haber
Paola Ehrmantraut
Phyllis Tonne
Porshoua Yang
Rebecca Debaker
Rebekah H. Kropp
Roberta Benson
Robin Swanson
Rupa Kryzer
Sara Charis
Sarah Hanlon
Sarah Hunt
Sharon Johnson
Sharon Meister
Sharon Watkins
Shelby Wolfe
Tara Lewis
Tracy Roloff
Wren Reller
Xieng Lee
Zede Harut

With Gratitude for our Friends (WEI Members) & Donors:

Aileen Rosa Kasper
Aileen Sanchez
Alison Hoyer (Doe)
Allyson Green
Amy Dietz
Amy Daher-Waller
Andrew Lentz
Barbara Wiener
Beverley Phlipott
Bharati Acharya
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Kitty Bell
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Leah Shepard
Lida Tunesi
Lily Wood
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Linda Radimkev
Linda Halcon
Linnea Olesen
Lisa Albrecht
Lisa Frank
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Liz Kerwin
Liz Wilkinson
Lynda & Paul Fossing
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Little Earth of United Tribes ⊕ USDA CARES Grants ⊕ Chisago Age Well Coalition
Small Business Administration
Many thanks to our talented 2020 Board of Directors:

Co-chairs: Kirsten Kennedy, Shannon Crabtree
Susanne Patterson  Elizabeth Sobiech
Whitney Terrill Michele Parsons
Nancy Hylden  Patricia Torres Ray

Become a Friend of WEI!
https://w-e-i.org/membership/
Friends receive special invitations to events and are invited to contribute to the future planning of WEI!

Order your CSAs at amadorhillfarm.org

Look for our Education Program Catalog in February 2021!
Grow, Harvest, Preserve

100 Days of Food Security

save the date!

12th Annual Will Allen Farmer Training Weekend

Saturday & Sunday September 25th-26th, 2021