The Women's Environmental Institute works for environmental, agricultural, and food justice, one community at a time, one farm at a time, one person at a time, and all of us together.
Dear friends and colleagues,

2022 has been a challenging year for WEI, as it has been for many people, with the continued pandemic, climate change, and increasing economic stress. That said, we believe these challenges reinforce precisely why WEI’s work for environmental, agricultural, and food justice is so needed. And we are grateful to all of you who support that work: our generous donors, volunteers, staff, farmers, board members, community partners, and allies who share our vision of a more healthy, just, and equitable Minnesota.

Though it’s been a challenging year, we remain proud of and committed to the work we’re doing, which you can read more about in the pages of this annual report. Highlights include expanding our Veggie Rx program to serve more M Health Fairview patients, continuing our North Circle Online Farmers Market distributing produce from small-scale organic farms to rural customers, and supporting the East Phillips Neighborhood Institute’s environmental-justice fight for an urban farm at the former Roof Depot site. In September, after two years of cancellations due to Covid, we were also happy to welcome back renowned urban farmer Will Allen for our 12th Annual Will Allen Farmer Training, featuring informative workshops, inspiring BIPOC presenters and attendees, passionate discussions, and lively networking—bringing together our diverse rural and urban participants, as we love to do.

We’re also feeling buoyed by the new leadership structure we created for WEI in 2022, now featuring three administrative directors with the addition of Therese Genis to guide our grant writing, fundraising, and strategic development. We also hired a part-time communications specialist, Anna Befort, and we continue to benefit from Jerry Krier’s finance, facility, and office management. Now, after a challenging farm season, we’ve decided to pause the farm for the winter, giving ourselves time to reset and renew with a several-month strategic-planning process. We hope this will help us emerge stronger than ever in 2023.

Next year is a special year for us: our 20th anniversary! We’d love to celebrate with you, so watch for a save the date for WEI’s 20th Anniversary Celebration. In the meantime, we hope you’ll consider renewing or becoming a WEI member—or making a donation in any amount—to help us stay strong for the next 20 years. Your connection to our mission is what keeps us inspired, so we hope you’ll join us for a year of new growth for WEI and for our communities.

In solidarity,

Karen Clark
Activist Executive Director

Therese Genis
Director of Strategic Development

Jacquelyn Zita
Farm and Education Director

Photos, from left to right: Jacquelyn Zita and participants at the Will Allen Farmer Training Weekend; one of 200-plus apple trees at WEI; our historic Apple Barn; WEI Board Member Collie Graddick joins Will Allen in a panel on Black farming cooperatives.
What Your Donation Helped Support in 2022:

- **98 scholarships** to help lower-income students be able to attend classes at WEI
- **2,080 boxes** of farm-fresh produce and eggs delivered to clinic patients in need through our Veggie Rx program
- **17 farmers, millers, makers, and bakers** building a stronger local food system through our North Circle Online Farmers Market
- **30+ chickens, 4 active beehives, and 200+ apple trees** helping to create a healthy ecosystem at our farm
- **120+ signs** in 5 languages educating residents in the Southside Green Zone about their right to environmental justice
- **Our 32-acre farm** and the upkeep of its facilities, as well as the general operating funds that are so critical to our success

What's Ahead: WEI Turns 20 in 2023!

We are so grateful to all of you who have helped WEI reach its 20th anniversary, and we have so much to be proud of over the years. To celebrate, the WEI co-founders, staff, and board of directors are taking time to reflect and plan for the future of WEI.

**What does this mean?** We're thinking about the future from many angles, including how to advance our mission, make WEI more sustainable, and preserve our legacy. This process will include engagement from our talented board, as well as legacy planning with our co-founders. We're also asking for feedback from community members, students, volunteers, and instructors, all of which will help inform our strategic plans for the next one, three, and five years. This time to reflect is so important because it gives us space to look at the big picture, learn from our past, be creative, and recharge. We look forward to sharing our plans with you in 2023!

Do you have ideas for the future of WEI?

We want to hear from you! Scan the QR code at right to take our quick survey and tell us where you would like to see us focus our energy in the future.
Our organically certified demonstration and education farm had both a successful year and a difficult one, as the “new normal” climate and viral challenges continued to be stressful. We struggled with a number of factors, including weather (a cold, wet spring followed by extreme heat and drought), Covid exposures among crew members, the increased cost of fuel and machine parts, and abrupt changes in crew commitments, in addition to other struggles common to small farms in Minnesota.

That said, we had our highest honey production in years, and we thank the resilient bees, along with beekeeper Mike Mackiewicz and his beekeeping training class, for working the hives. We also managed to provide organic produce for 20 weeks of CSA boxes, as well as every-other-week Veggie Rx boxes delivered to local clinics, the North Circle Online Farmers Market, the Mill City Farmers Market (half the season), and various secondary markets.

All of that is thanks in large part to our tireless farm manager, Jacquelyn Zita, our wonderful volunteers, and our top-notch farm crew: Wren Keeler, Addie Morrisette, Mackenna Cristilly, Abigail Zoch, Abby Fenton, and Madison Tomony. Special thanks also go to our elder farm crew member Loren Winsor, who at 82 worked half-days with Jacquelyn sharing invaluable wisdom, focus, and energy. We are also grateful to the trillions of micro-life beings feeding our plants regenerative nutrients from the soil.

We continue learning how to live and work on the farm in this challenging new normal. Fun and laughter are important parts of our ethos as we care for the land and replenish our own minds and bodies. As always, we are committed to producing healthy food (more than 2,000 bushels this year!) for our rural and urban communities as we make real our food-justice mission and our commitment to a more equitable local food system.

What's next? In January 2023 we will open our WEI Farm Stay (through Airbnb), which will provide an opportunity for guests to stay overnight at our farm. Both private rooms and whole house rentals will be available. Our close location to Wild River State Park and all that our area has to offer makes this a great vacation spot, where good food abounds and restful days can be enjoyed.
What's next for Veggie Rx?

We hope to expand to more clinics in our region in 2023. We've also been working with a university researcher, Jeffrey Rowe, to gather feedback from participants. We look forward to using that data to improve our program.

Collaboration is more important than ever as we face climate change and economic uncertainty, and in 2022 we continued to ally with other small-scale organic farmers through the North Circle Online Farmers Market. Created by WEI in 2016, it has the twin goals of providing organic produce to rural communities in East-Central Minnesota (which are sometimes food deserts) while increasing revenue streams for local farmers committed to sustainable practices. Each week from July through October, customers could go online to order pesticide-free produce, humanely raised meat, bread, eggs, honey, and more for pickup at local drop-sites. We also deepened our partnerships with fellow North Circle farms—including Country Road Farm, Big Sky Acres, Clover Bee, and Heirloomista—to provide supplemental produce for our CSA and Veggie Rx boxes when needed. This has become a common model for smaller CSA farms with big deliveries such as ours, and it helps create a stronger safety net for all of us.

In 2022 we were thrilled to continue partnering with M Health Fairview to provide their patients with access to fresh local produce. The Veggie Rx program is designed to support rural clinic patients who may not have easy access to healthy food, while also supporting the small-scale farmers who grow the produce. WEI delivered boxes of organic produce to clinics every other week, which were then distributed to patients in need, helping to increase food security, vegetable intake, and overall health.

Our program expanded to two new sites in 2022: Northland Medical Center in Princeton and the Elk River clinic (in addition to existing drop-sites at Fairview's Rush City, North Branch, and Chisago City clinics). By summer we were delivering 80 boxes every other week, along with a newsletter with nutrition information and recipes. In October, the Rush City clinic closed, but we adapted by delivering boxes directly to patients' homes so they could continue to receive this important resource. We also added farm-fresh organic eggs into our regular rotation, in order to help give participants some healthy protein.

“I am on the verge of type 2 diabetes, and by eating better I can keep my blood sugar down in a safe range. I’ve learned a lot more about controlling it and eventually lost some weight since we started.”

—A Veggie Rx participant
WEI's environmental-justice advocacy work with the East Phillips Neighborhood Institute (EPNI) continued in 2022. That included weekly board and community meetings, rallies, public policy proposals, and media support, all working toward environmental justice in this core South Minneapolis neighborhood.

Grassroots momentum grew to support the neighborhood's proposal for a community-owned urban farm, green jobs, and affordable housing development at the former Roof Depot site. But the City of Minneapolis continued to try to force the creation of a public works maintenance yard instead, which would bring more industrial and traffic pollution to this low-income, majority BIPOC neighborhood that's already overburdened with toxic pollution. Documentation of the neighborhood's severe racial health disparities and a 2008 state environmental-justice law protecting this community have helped bring environmental and civil rights allies to support the call for “Urban Farm, Not Toxic Harm.” Things looked hopeful in March 2022, when a majority of the Minneapolis City Council voted to stop the city's plan and support the neighborhood's proposal, but the mayor immediately vetoed that vote. Attempts at compromise broke down, throwing this struggle back into the courts with a pending lawsuit and the prospect of prohibitively huge legal fees for the neighborhood to be able to pursue its right to environmental-justice enforcement.

This struggle is centered in Minneapolis' Southside Green Zone (SSGZ) next to the Little Earth of United Tribes community, which has helped lead the efforts. In 2022, WEI received two SSGZ grants that helped:

1) Fund EPNI's community organizer and develop multilingual signs identifying the Southside Green Zone to promote visibility, community awareness, and policymakers' accountability to the SSGZ's stated purpose of protecting the environmental health of low-income BIPOC communities.

2) Update the original environmental-justice map WEI produced (for legislation in 2008) documenting the severe environmental health disparities related to race and income in the Phillips neighborhood.

WEI also continued its representation—either on the board of directors or through other partnerships—with urban community organizations including Wicoie Nandagikendan, Little Earth of United Tribes' Housing Board, Indigenous Peoples Task Force, the Indigenous Food Network, Nawayee Center School, and the Higher Education Consortium for Urban Affairs. We celebrate and honor these relationships as we continue to work for environmental justice in 2023.
WEI’s educational offerings continue to be an important part of our mission, sharing skills and information to empower more people and help all of us live more lightly on this planet. After two years of Zoom classes and creative problem-solving, you can imagine we were very excited to offer in-person classes again. We held 25-plus classes in 2022, ranging from soil health to hemp farming to herbalism. Some of our most popular classes were on growing mushrooms, grafting fruit trees, foraging with Hope Flanagan, and our seven-month certificate programs in beekeeping and in aquaponics. We also provided nearly 100 scholarships, because we believe making education more equitable and accessible to all is an essential part of justice work.

We were also excited to do more in-person community-building again, with events such as our annual Red Ball Party, volunteer appreciation lunch, garlic planting weekends, and six pizza nights at the farm this summer, featuring local musicians and pizza ingredients sourced from small-scale organic farms in our area.

Our biggest event of 2022 was our 12th Annual Will Allen Farmer Training, which was back in person for the first time since 2019. We welcomed more than 80 participants and raised 37 full and partial scholarships to help a wider range of people attend. With rising food prices and a changing climate, we focused on the theme “Grow Where You Are: Skills and Solutions for a More Equitable Food Future.” Workshops included how to compost, start seeds, grow microgreens, begin aquaponic farming, and build an affordable hoop house. We also had wonderful panels on Indigenous food sovereignty, farming across cultures, and Black farming cooperatives. We look forward to more inspiring collaborations in 2023.

“I loved the foraging class with Hope Flanagan at WEI. It inspired me to care for the land and our plant friends in a different way.” —A WEI student

Above: pizza night chef Patti Bontjes. At right: aquaponics instructor Chad Hebert talks with Nawaye Center School students.
Donate to WEI at w-e-i.org/donate.

5 Ways to Get Involved with WEI in 2023:

1. Become a member of WEI or make a donation at w-e-i.org/donate.

2. Volunteer to help with farm work or packing Veggie Rx boxes: w-e-i.org/volunteer.

3. Attend one of our classes or community events: w-e-i.org/events.

4. Purchase a CSA share when they become available in January.

5. Subscribe to our newsletter to get the latest updates: w-e-i.org/subscribe.