



# Plant Chicago

ANNUAL REPORT

**2022**

Cultivating Local Circular Economies

Sharing Knowledge • Sharing Resources • Sharing Space

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# EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR'S STATEMENT

It's hard to believe that when the year began, we were still in pandemic-mode, spending the first few months working with local partners to host vaccination events. By the end of the year, our home at The Firehouse was vibrant again and filled with a wide range of people and activities. Throughout the pandemic, time seems to have stretched in a way where events from last year somehow feel both like forever ago and like they happened yesterday. That sense is even greater as I reflect upon just how much our Plant Chicago community accomplished in 2022.

For years, Plant Chicago has offered workshops and educational programs to a diverse range of communities; in our 12-year history, we've hosted groups from every continent except Antarctica! It was neat to see that kind of geographic diversity return to our programming this past year. We led circular economy programming for people from Africa, Europe, and Oceania, including professional athletes representing Sail Grand Prix!

Even more exciting was the return of local school groups. Our education team hosted over 1,500 youth, from Altgeld Gardens to Rogers Park. It is hard not to smile hearing the squeals of 5th graders from the neighborhood touching worms and fungi in our labs or when local high school students figure out how to assemble demonstration aquaponic systems faster than the adults. A group of high schoolers might enter our building looking skeptical but I see them leaving energized, excited to bring what they learned back to their schools and communities.

In April, the Mayor of Chicago visited Plant Chicago to release the City's Climate Action Plan. We had the opportunity to host the Mayor and her team, along with a bevy of reporters and local climate leaders. The fact that the Mayor's team selected our Firehouse as the location to release the plan is a testament to the inspired efforts of our incredible staff and partners.

While it is hard to know for certain, it is my belief that what draws such a diverse set of people to work with Plant Chicago is our people. There is a visible integrity, joy, and friendliness that our staff, volunteers, and partners bring to our shared work. Plant Chicago's mission to cultivate local circular economies is not just about reducing waste, pollution, and carbon emissions, it's the commitment to doing so in partnership with so many deeply dedicated peer organizations. Last year, we worked with over a dozen different local organizations to provide services at The Firehouse

that ranged from vaccine clinics and health fairs, to clothing drives, and cultural celebrations for all ages. These types of events are not explicitly a part of our mission, but they are integral to the health and happiness of our local community.

Ultimately, cultivating local circular economies must involve much more than materials and money; this is why Plant Chicago prioritizes work with a diverse set of stakeholders including small businesses, farmers, local schools, Southwest Side residents, volunteers, and low-income families.

**What good is diverting materials from landfills if the most vulnerable of us are left out?**

**What good is fighting the climate crisis if our economy only benefits the few?**

I hope you keep these thoughts in mind as you read through our collective accomplishments from 2022.



Jonathan Pereira

A handwritten signature in white ink that reads "Jonathan Pereira". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style with a large loop at the beginning of the first name.

# INTRODUCTION

Plant Chicago's mission is to cultivate local circular economies. We envision a paradigm shift in production, consumption, and waste at the local level, generating equity and economic opportunity for all residents.

The core pillars of our work are education, partnership, and location. While we work with schools, small businesses, and residents across the city, Plant Chicago prioritizes impact at the "hyper" local level, meaning the Southwest Side of Chicago with an emphasis on the Back of the Yards neighborhood.

Plant Chicago educates audiences of all ages, both hyper-local and international, to advance circular economy practices. We're working in partnership with others to make circular economies approachable,

accessible, and inclusive. We know there are many groups and individuals across our communities who are invested in the work of circular economies, whether they call it this or something else.

Our focus on partnerships represents our commitment to building mutually beneficial relationships with neighboring organizations and organizers. Together, we can leverage our space to advance circular economy practices as well as environmental and social justice on the Southwest Side.

Plant Chicago's core activities include: education, farmers markets, an Indoor Victory Garden, waste diversion, local food boxes, and small business support.



# What is a Circular Economy?

There is no universally accepted definition of circular economy. What binds all of the various definitions together is that a circular economy is a response to an economy based on disposability. It seeks to transform our linear, "take-make-waste," economic system into a "circular" one, where materials and resources are reused in perpetuity or safely returned to the environment.

Plant Chicago's definition of circular economy takes this concept and expands it to include people as part of the equation. Functionally, we view the circular economy as a collaborative practice sustained on a local scale by the circulation and sharing of materials (natural resources, nutrients, money, space), and intangible yet invaluable goods such as knowledge and experience. The circular economies we foster are empowered by transparency, diversity, and inclusion.

Sourcing goods and labor from within our area reduces our carbon footprint and keeps money in our communities. We see the power and potential of local communities to be leaders in this movement. In fact, our existing local economy is often operated by people who are already maintaining circular practices.

For example, there are numerous appliance repair shops within just a few blocks of our home. Many of our neighbors are minimizing food waste through composting and raising chickens. There is no shortage of waste reclaimers ensuring that every bit of scrap metal gets repurposed.

The ultimate goal of a circular economy is to reduce waste and overconsumption, valuing sustainability over disposability. For Plant Chicago, we recognize that our economy can treat both materials and people as "disposable." We do not seek to reinvent the wheel, but instead to identify the strengths and opportunities in our own community to share knowledge, facilities, resources, and materials.

# EDUCATION

## Closed Loop Labs

Closed Loop Labs are a part of Plant Chicago's education program. These are dynamic and adaptable workshops for K-12 and university groups. Each lab incorporates hands-on activities to demystify the connections between ecological and economic systems.

**“ This is the best field trip ever! ”**

- 4th grade student,  
Prairie Academy

**“ The kids couldn't stop talking about the experience. We look forward to participating in your other workshops. ”**

- Middle school science teacher, Lara Academy

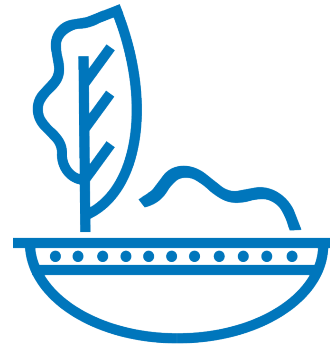
MORE THAN  
**1,500**  
STUDENTS PARTICIPATED  
IN CLOSED LOOP LABS

Students get the chance to collaborate with classmates, gain valuable exposure to concepts not usually covered in the classroom, and bring those concepts back to their schools and communities. We offer these labs to schools on a sliding scale basis, and free of cost to Back of the Yards schools.

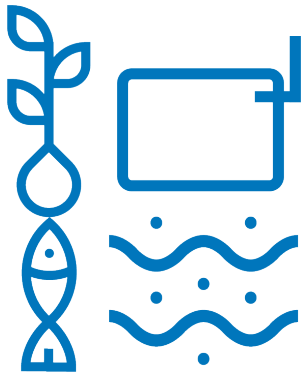
Student groups utilize our indoor farming systems at The Firehouse, including aquaponic farm beds, mycology lab equipment, and vermicomposting bins. Through access to these facilities, students harvest fresh salad greens, learn to grow mushrooms, and even build worm bins to take with them!

Our Closed Loop Labs includes seven unique experiences -  
Aquaponics: Design Challenge,  
Aquaponics: Water Chemistry,  
Circular Economy, Life Cycle of a Salad, Mycology, Native Pollinators, and Vermicomposting.

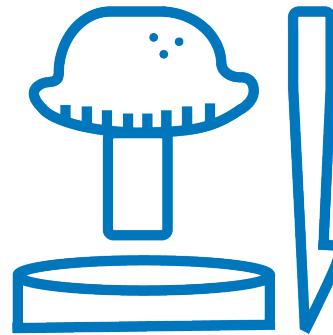
# Closed Loop Lab Topics:



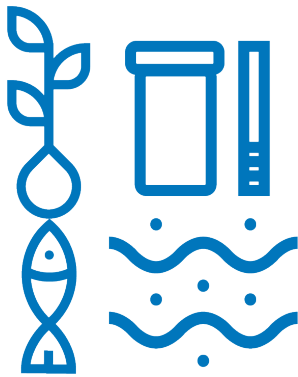
Lifecycle of a Salad



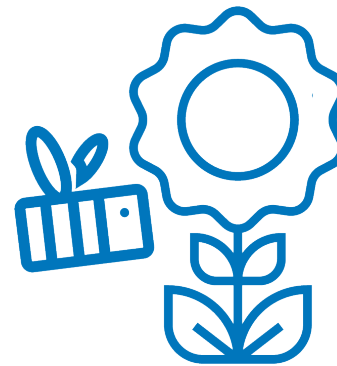
Aquaponics:  
Design  
Challenge



Mycology



Aquaponics:  
Water  
Chemistry



Native  
Pollinators



Circular  
Economy



Vermi-  
composting





**TOM KNAPP**  
**EDUCATION MANAGER**

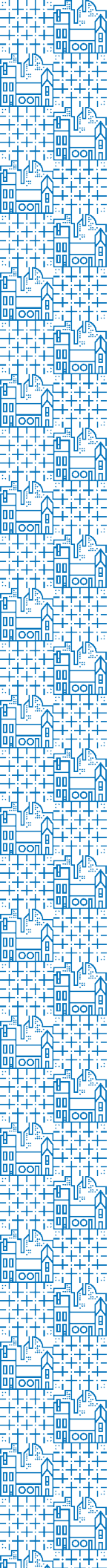
The search for a new Education Manager brought former Plant Chicago intern, Tom Knapp, back to The Firehouse! Previously, Tom worked as the Laboratory Manager for the fungi-forward start-up Mycocycle Inc. and as the Mushroom Cultivation and Aquaponics Program Leader for the Urban Agriculture program at Loyola University Chicago. He enthusiastically leveraged his experience in mycology to develop a new mycology Closed Loop Lab. From petri dish to fruiting block, kids are loving cultivating mushrooms. These decomposers make for the perfect circular economy metaphor!



**Tom is so cheerful and positive, and his love of the topic is infectious. [Plant Chicago] does a nice job of modeling what you want students to do and then letting them get hands-on. The gathering of data and comparing at the end really brought it all together.**



- 5th grade teacher, The Children's School



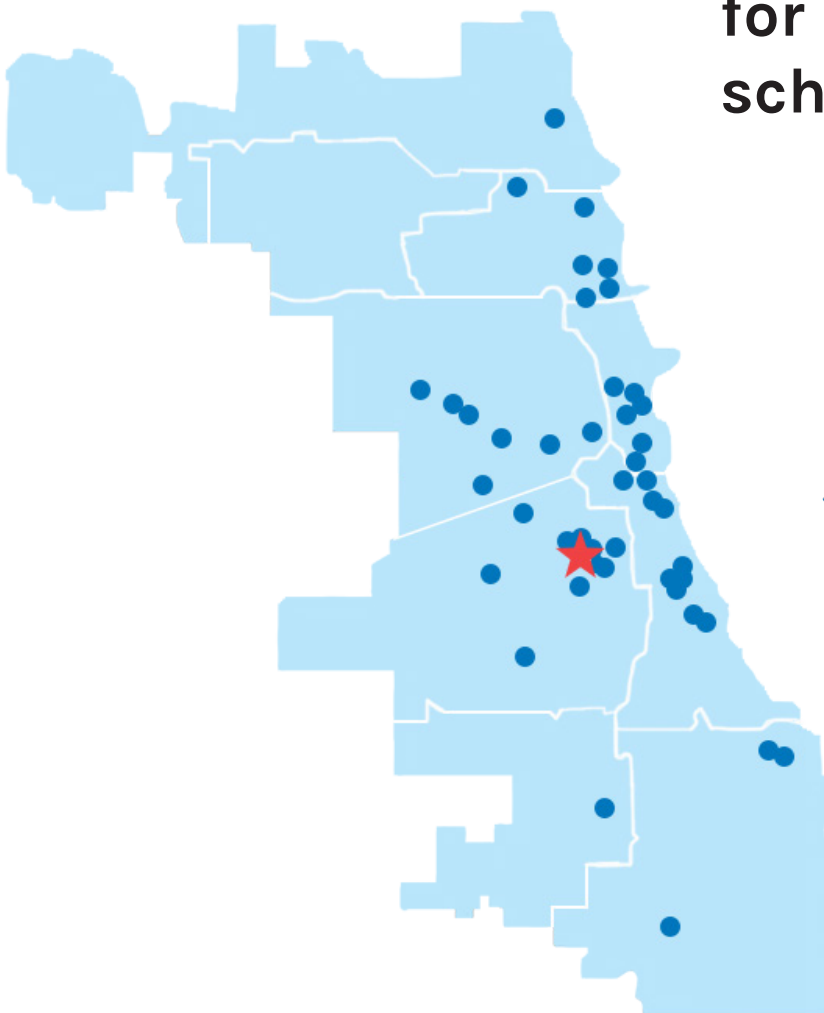
Jonathan and Tom led circular economy working sessions with groups from across the globe, including government employees from Serbia and Mandela Washington Fellowship representatives from over 30 countries in Sub-Saharan Africa.

Members from all of the teams racing in the Sail Grand Prix in Chicago also joined us for a workshop including Australia, Canada, Denmark, France, Great Britain, Japan, New Zealand, Spain, Switzerland, and members of the United States team!

The workshops facilitated brainstorming of circular economy goals and set the stage for action back home. While this international recognition is rewarding, Plant Chicago continues to prioritize our home on the Southwest Side.

**More than  
40 countries  
represented in lab  
attendance.**

**Over 40% of Closed  
Loop Labs hosted  
for Southwest Side  
schools.**





“

**Can I have fifths  
of salad?**

”

- 3rd grade student, British  
International School



## Internships

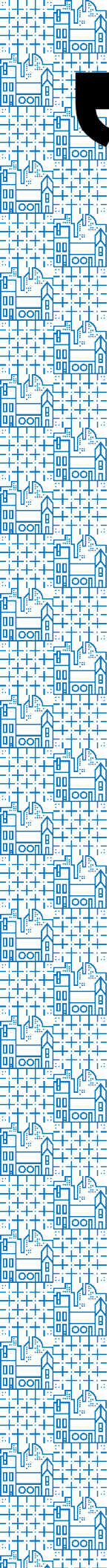
During an internship with Plant Chicago, individuals assist with the day-to-day operations of cultivating local circular economies while working on a project that fits their interests and career ambitions.

The 7 youth interns ages 16-21 who joined our team in 2022 worked on an incredibly diverse set of projects. While interning with Eric, our Director of Operations, Nico fabricated his own aquaponic system from scratch to take home and by the end of his internship he could independently run our hydroponic systems! Karina, a student at Peace and Education

Coalition High School, built confidence while helping with workshops, plant swaps, and the registration of senior citizens for market vouchers. After her internship, Karina was hired on for additional farmers market and retail support.

2022 Plant Chicago interns included:

Nico Christians  
Viky Li  
Da Lin Liao  
Julian Libretti-River  
Nylah Neff  
Karina Quiroz  
Jeanese Shanks



“

To me, aquaponics is more than just a method to grow food; it's the creation of an ecosystem. This ecosystem has the potential to provide healthy, accessible food to people and communities that need it. What I've learned this summer I'll take with me into whatever field of environmentalism I go into. I can't express how much of an impactful and fun learning experience this summer has been.

”

- Nico Christians: Aquaponics / Hydroponics Intern



# SMALL BUSINESS SUPPORT

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**SMALL BUSINESSES  
JOINED THE CIRCULAR  
ECONOMY LEADERS  
NETWORK**



# Circular Economy Leaders Network

Small business owners are well-positioned to collectively cultivate local circular economies through their uniquely close relationships with customers and suppliers. It's rare that a big business can offer the same transparency and adaptability.

The Circular Economy Leaders Network (CELN) is a cohort of local small businesses with whom we partner to improve the circularity of their operations, from sourcing local to minimizing and diverting "waste." Activities include consulting work, networking, resource sharing, and workshops.

Since launching CELN in 2020, networking has consistently been reported as being the most beneficial element of the program. This year, connecting in the form of subgroups served as precious time for business owners to openly share their challenges and how they could support one another. Three subgroups formed including: Fashion & Textiles, Packaging, and Marketing.

CELN network member Maru Braemer, Founder of MB Consulting, led the Packaging Working Group and her expertise was an incredible resource for other CELN 2022 members seeking advice on circular materials. Plant Chicago was inspired to collect gently used packaging at The Firehouse for CELN members' use and by the end of 2022, we had distributed almost 200 pounds of packing materials!

One highlight from this year's cohort was Plant Chicago's partnership with Loyola University's UX Design program. In collaboration with Professor Cassie Slimmer, Loyola's continuing education students conducted interviews with CELN 2022 members to prototype applications for resource exchanging among small business owners. Network member Katy Osborn even hired one of the students for continued work on her own business app!



**The Circular Economy Leaders Network played an instrumental role in the progress of my business over the last year. I made many critical connections including upcycling makers who have joined my Nowhere Collective community as well as a user experience designer, Jay [...] They have helped me develop a digital platform prototype that will be the foundation for big things to come this year.**



- Katy Osborn, Nowhere Collective



**Almost two-thirds of the 2022 cohort led by women and over one-third BIPOC-led.**

## **2022 CELN workshops included:**

### **Introduction to Circular Economy for Small Businesses**

An overview of what the "circular economy" is and how it pertains to small businesses. This included a look into Plant Chicago's "Circular Economy Toolkit for Small Businesses," along with dedicated time for small business owners to meet one another and share their goals for the program.

### **Shared Resources 101, featuring Rheaply**

This in-person session reviewed best practices around resource sharing, including a discussion of its financial value, what's needed for behavior change, and feedback for the Rheaply platform.

### **Marketing Strategies for Circular Businesses, featuring CELN member Katy Osborn of Nowhere Collective**

This workshop introduced the "Three Principles to Fostering Creativity" and provided space for circular businesses to brainstorm and share feedback on one another's marketing challenges.

### **Pro Bono Speed Consulting, featuring West Monroe Partners**

A team of 13 consultants from West Monroe Partners provided consulting services to CELN members valued at nearly \$10,000. Participants left with strategies to tackle business-specific challenges.

### **Solidarity Economy 101, featuring Mike Strode of the Kola Nut Collaborative and John Mulrow of Purdue University**

This workshop provided small businesses with alternatives to extractive, linear economy practices through the lens of degrowth and solidarity economy work.

### **Building a Marketing Strategy Timeline, featuring CELN member Rachel Kamins of Bartleby's**

This workshop built upon the previous marketing workshop, with a particular focus on the logistics and organization of a marketing timeline.

### **Improving Your Energy Efficiency, featuring Elevate**

This workshop introduced business owners to water efficiency, solar, weatherization, and bill relief opportunities for their brick and mortar operations and home offices.

### **2022 Wrap-Up: Setting Circular Goals for 2023**

This workshop highlighted the achievements, connections, and learnings throughout the eight-month program. Business owners also brainstormed circular economy goals for 2023.



# FOOD ACCESS

Plant Chicago strengthens two of the most vulnerable links in the food supply chain: small growers and low-income families. We are committed to helping low-income families access local, sustainably produced food while ensuring that small farmers can meet revenue goals.

Small growers often can't afford to be cost-competitive with industrial food producers. In order to close the pricing gap and make nutrient-rich food accessible, local governments and organizations offer a variety of discount programs, or "healthy food incentives," to historically oppressed and marginalized populations.

Our farmers market and on-site retail space, The Firehouse Market, feature produce from growers on the Southwest Side and we provide incentives including senior coupons, sliding scale pricing, and Link matching.

Link is Illinois' program for distributing SNAP benefits (formerly known as food stamps). Through Link Up Illinois, (a program of Experimental Station) Plant Chicago can double the value of each Link dollar spent on produce, so cardholders get twice as much fresh fruits and vegetables for the same cost.

**MORE THAN**  
**\$21,000**  
**DISTRIBUTED IN**  
**HEALTHY FOOD**  
**INCENTIVES**





## Farmers Market

Plant Chicago's farmers market was established in 2015 to provide locally-grown produce to Back of the Yards residents, support local food businesses with a direct-to-consumer marketplace, and serve as a gathering space for the community.

**“ I love coming over with my kiddos and connecting with the vendors. The Link match allows us to buy more veggies and we often end up sharing with George’s grandparents. My husband’s family has lived in this neighborhood for generations, it’s nice having joyful spaces like this in the area. ”**

- Annie & George

This summer, in addition to Link matching at the market, we supported The Senior Farmers Market Nutrition Program run by the Illinois Department of Human Services. As the closest market to Chicago’s Chinatown, we led the registration and distribution of food benefits for nearly 600 people, over 90% of whom were first-generation immigrants.

Partnerships represent a core pillar of our mission and are an integral part of farmers markets. Together with Young Invincibles and Increase the Peace, close to 150 people were vaccinated at the market. And in August, we partnered with Free Street Theater, the Department of Cultural Affairs and Special Events, Chicago Commons, and Fjällräven to bring music, dancing, theatrical performances, cooking demonstrations, and free backpacks and school supplies to community members.



**Over 90% of farmers market vendors are women-led businesses and over 80% are BIPOC-led businesses.**



**4,860**

**POUNDS OF FOOD  
DISTRIBUTED THROUGH  
THE LOCAL FOOD BOX  
PROGRAM**

## Local Food Boxes

The Local Food Box Program provides essential nutrient-rich foods and locally grown produce to our neighbors and partners on the Southwest Side of Chicago, while also financially supporting local growers. We are committed to ensuring that people of all economic backgrounds can access locally and sustainably produced food; over 40% of our food boxes sold at or below cost.

Shopping from local producers financially strengthens our communities and reduces our carbon footprint. And yet, we have to make accommodations to see the real value of local food because we are a consumer base accustomed to endless options (regardless of season or geographic location.)

During the summer, Nylah Neff, Waste Diversion Intern turned chef, provided free samples of recipes featuring food box ingredients, introducing visitors to foods that may be unfamiliar, like celery root or Black Spanish Radishes! Similarly, Andrea Guzman from Chicago Commons led cooking demonstrations with box ingredients.

2022 marked a strategic shift to better leverage the onsite Firehouse Market to advance food access. In addition to showcasing small businesses like those in the Circular Economy Leaders Network, we are now stocking more local produce than ever at The Firehouse Market.



**DENISE COVARRUBIAS**  
**PROGRAMS ASSOCIATE**

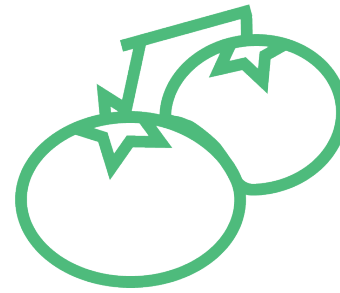
With this expansion, we were thrilled to welcome a Programs Associate to the team, Denise Covarrubias. In addition to supporting programming, Denise oversees The Firehouse Market during open hours and is often the first face community members see when they stop by Plant Chicago.

She holds a Bachelors in Community Health and prior to starting at Plant Chicago, she worked at organizations dedicated to providing healthcare to underserved communities. Through that work in preventative care, she gained an interest in sustainability and food equity in Back of the Yards and surrounding neighborhoods.

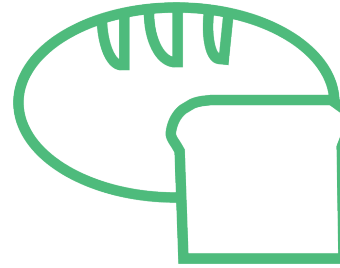
Denise's voice as an advocate for food access and a leader in community engagement here at Plant Chicago is a tremendous resource to both us and the folks coming through our doors.

“

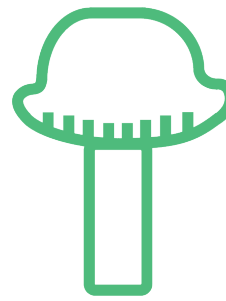
Dear friends,  
I stopped by The Firehouse to pick up a food box today and was excited about all the lovely items...



...Tomatoes: salsa!



...Focaccia: mmmmm!!!



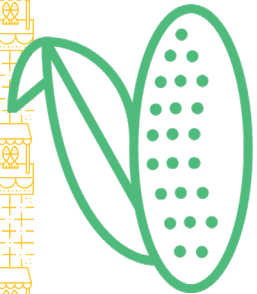
...Mushrooms. Now here is where the enthusiasm came to a halt.

I handed these back and told the Plant Chicago team member that I don't necessarily care for mushrooms nor do I know how to cook them. With a little coaxing, I decided to take them and give it a shot. I created a butter-garlic-mushroom side that is amazing!!!! Best part was spreading it on my focaccia (with a bit of sun-dried tomato.) I promised [her] that I would share my mushroom results!

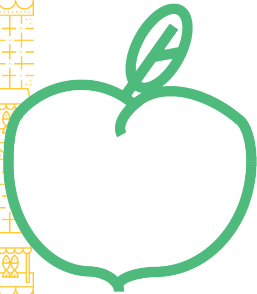
Thank you, Plant Chicago!

”

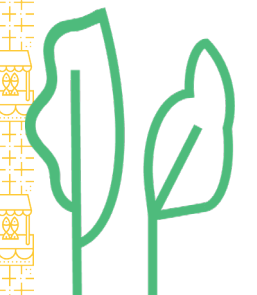
- Dayna, Firehouse Market Visitor



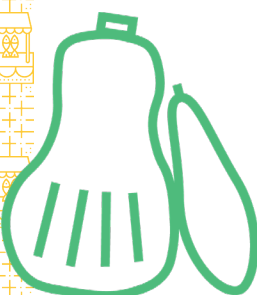
...Corn!! Love corn and it was delicious!!



...Peaches! I'm allergic, but googled proper freezing techniques and will do so as soon as they ripen! (The allergy-related histamines in the fruit die when frozen!)



...Kale: yep! Kale pesto in my future!! Hooray!



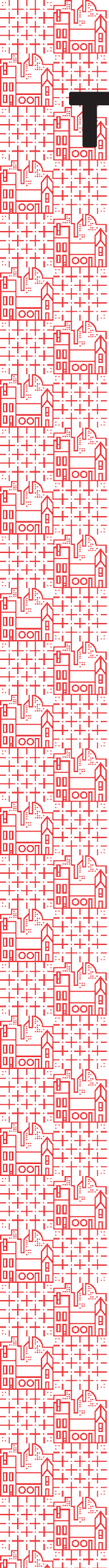
...Yellow squash and zucchini: salads, fritters, zoodles!





**“ I wish I could live here! ”**

- 7th grade student,  
Embarc Chicago Group



# THE FIREHOUSE

Since late 2019, Plant Chicago's operations have been based out of a firehouse built in 1908 and located at the corner of Marshfield Avenue and 45th Street near the heart of Back of the Yards, a predominantly Hispanic neighborhood on Chicago's Southwest Side. The purchase of The Firehouse in 2022 stands as Plant Chicago's literal and symbolic investment in the neighborhood. As a physical gathering space, we have the ability to provide resources demonstrating leadership in circular economy and decarbonization. By making the commitment to stay in the neighborhood, we also deepen our pledge to work with and within Back of the Yards for a healthier, more sustainable, and more connected neighborhood.

The plans for The Firehouse set in motion over the past year will continue these investments through building renovations and programming, with three central foci:

**The Firehouse as a hub for circular economy practices**

**The Firehouse as a leader in green energy and waste diversion**

**The Firehouse as a community resource center and gathering space**

## A Hub for Circular Economy Practices

One of the more frequent conversations we have with visitors, whether they are architects or students, is about how the building we occupy aligns with circular economy practices. Broadly speaking, the fact that we are extending the life of an existing building would be enough to call our use of the building "circular." Countless developers have "saved" buildings from demolition and created intriguing and aesthetically inspiring spaces for a variety of uses like housing, offices, and breweries.

For Plant Chicago, however, cultivating local circular economies means a lot more than just renovating a building.

In order for there to be meaningful change from a renovation project, Plant Chicago is working to make our building a hub whereby circular principles live and, more importantly, action radiates out. In short, it is the people and the activities taking place in the building that determine impact.



Plant Chicago's Strategic Plan states that, "Our location will be utilized as a resource to cultivate circular economy practices and advance them across the city. It will serve as a hub for gathering, learning, and the demonstration of circular economy in action."

2022 certainly felt like a year where we could feel this hub coming to life. Some highlights included hosting Chicago Chief Sustainability Officer, Angela Tovar, for a panel discussion on equity and waste, as well as organizing a workshop with urban composting leaders across the Midwest to share best practices related to community composting projects.

Perhaps the biggest indication of our success in converting The Firehouse into a hub for circular economy practices was the fact that Plant Chicago was selected as the location to release [the City of Chicago's Climate Action Plan in April](#). Our firehouse was filled with press, local sustainability leaders, and even a school group attending a workshop upstairs, all at the same time!

The Firehouse Market is our interpretation of retail, which utilizes our local circular economy approach to help stimulate local business. It is also one of the more unique tiny shops around!

Over 95% of the products stocked at The Firehouse Market are sourced from Chicago-based businesses. We stock items that minimize packaging and work to eliminate the concept of "single use." Additionally, we accept items that are difficult to recycle in Chicago like batteries, lightbulbs, and food scraps to keep them out of landfills. In order to encourage reuse,

we maintain swap stations for people to leave an item and take an item.

Our market is also a hub for local, sustainably produced food. In fact, Hyper-local food comprised 78% of Firehouse Market sales in 2022.

**“ Plant Chicago has been a great year-round resource for seasonal produce to have in the neighborhood. It’s great to reduce my waste and be able to drop off my weekly food scraps. ”**

-Sergio Urbano,  
Southwest Side resident





## A Leader in Green Energy and Waste Diversion

Decarbonization guides Plant Chicago's renovations to The Firehouse, but our commitment to a healthier city does not stop with our own divestment from fossil fuels. We are working to provide the necessary resources and community education to make circular practices a part of daily life.

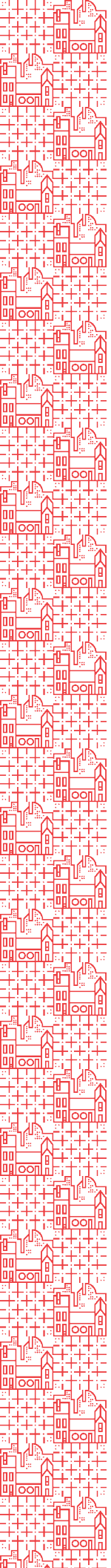
In 2022, our Executive Director Jonathan was recruited to serve on the Building Decarbonization Working Group with the City of Chicago. A focus of this group is to ensure that low-income residents benefited from electrification, not just developers.

Fossil fuels are the epitome of a "linear" economy; once burned, their energy is lost. Our economy therefore must shift to renewable energy sources such as wind and solar.

When we talk about "decarbonizing" a building, we mean decoupling the energy needs of the building from fossil fuels. This involves a combination of energy-efficient improvements like the sourcing and installation of renewable energy technologies as well as the conversion of all appliances to electric.

We took our first steps toward decarbonization in 2022 by installing a 16 kW solar array on the roof, thanks in part to the Illinois Solar for All program. Nationally, only 1.6% of commercial buildings include solar arrays. After the removal of 20 tons of old roofing material and the addition of some of the first insulation The Firehouse has ever seen, we were able to get everything installed just before the snow flew. We were thrilled to flip the switch and finally turn on the system at the beginning of 2023.

We installed the first publicly available Electric Vehicle (EV) charging station to the Southwest Side, ensuring in our own small way that there is equitable access to green infrastructure. Many people do not have access to electric charging at home and have to rely solely on locations like Plant Chicago for charging. One of our neighbors actually purchased an electric vehicle specifically because she knew about this charger in her neighborhood!



A circular economy is one that actively reframes how we see "waste." Rather than simply an unwanted by-product, waste becomes an opportunity.

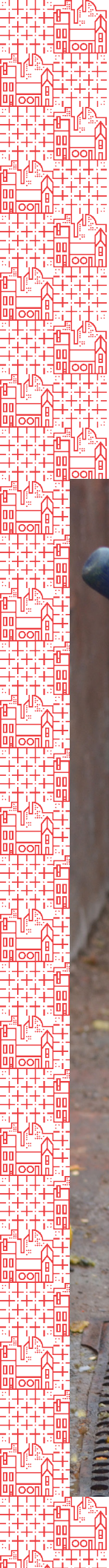
It is with this in mind that we make sure materials stay out of the landfill and make it back into our local economy. We do this by actively accepting materials from our neighbors to be recycled or reused for free and by working with our external partners and small businesses to minimize single-use packaging. Transparency is key to creating accountability and trust in circular economies, so we make sure to measure all of the materials flowing through our building.

In 2022, Plant Chicago reached a total waste diversion rate of 77.3%. This is down slightly from last year due to an increase in school programming. Students bring large amounts of non-recyclable, single-

use packaging with their lunches. Still, we managed to only throw away 613 pounds of trash (22.7%) out of a total output of over 2,000 pounds.

During the recycling process, much of the material can still go to waste due to contamination; the most circular option is to reuse. Since the inception of the Local Food Box Program, we have taken back empty produce boxes, as they are waxed cardboard and can be washed and reused. In 2022, we began collecting packaging materials for CELN member Czubin Industries. All together, we diverted over 800 pounds of material through reuse!

Through our year-round food scrap drop-off combined with our spring organics collection event and fall Pumpkin Smash, we diverted an additional 9,500 pounds of organic material from the landfill. Imagine if there were organizations like Plant Chicago in every neighborhood!



**14,045**  
**POUNDS OF MATERIAL**  
**DIVERTED FROM**  
**LANDFILLS**





## A Community Resource Center and Gathering Space

One of our biggest criticisms of the broader circular economy movement is that it often excludes people from the equation, especially those people that are likely already engaged in the core practices of circular economies, like low-income communities and small businesses. Bringing people together for collective action, learning, and resource-sharing is critical for cultivating local circular economies. In 2022, we were able to expand our existing programming, events, and shared space opportunities to further establish The Firehouse as a space for neighbors.

Sharing resources involves the overall reduction of individual ownership. Equipment, tools, knowledge, and space are all things that can be shared.

The Firehouse is another resource that we deliberately designed to be shared and serve flexible uses. Our Indoor Victory Garden (IVG) is our most notable example of a shared resource. The IVG provides space, equipment, and a knowledgeable community so individuals have a low-risk environment to grow food, year-round. In fact, the entire property can serve as a shared resource, from Oscar's beehives on the roof to outdoor growing space for experimentation.

**“ The IVG is honestly the best opportunity for start-up growers like us. It allowed us to connect with, and learn from, many different kinds of growers and access equipment we didn't even consider as an expense when we started this dream. ”**

-Kathleen, Bridge & Bloom Farms LLC



Plant Chicago acknowledges that important work is being done in the neighborhood that aligns with our ethos but falls outside the scope of our operations.

We can leverage our space to support these efforts. Get to know one of the growers we were lucky enough to share space with in 2022:

**Piyalli, My name is Pancho! I'm 2-Spirited, mixed Indigenous (Mexika / P'urhe'pecha / Chichimeca) and I was born and raised on the Southside of Chicago. I grow heirloom Indigenous seed corn because it's sacred to me as a displaced, 1st generation, Indigenous person. As a crop, it's been abused for far too long by colonizers and corporations. I want to have a legacy to pass on to my future family and strengthen my communities.**

- Pancho, shared-space grower





Our 2022 events provided a unique mix of opportunities to celebrate and support all things healthy and local while also promoting circularity.

Some of our most successful events were swaps at which community members could bring and /or take gently-used or excess items. Swapped items included clothing, tools, books, and so much more. These free events brought in community members who were otherwise unfamiliar with Plant Chicago, providing an accessible event to gather with neighbors and practice everyday circularity.

Plant Chicago hosted many other events attracting attendees from all over Chicago. Our seasonal composting events diverted organics from landfills and our public workshops introduced community members to a variety of new circular practices, like mending and indoor

growing. We co-hosted a film screening for the One Earth Film Festival and even made it on WGN Morning News featuring the Plant Chicago Harvest Fair and our backyard chickens!

Other media outlets that covered Plant Chicago events and stories in 2022 included ABC7 Chicago, Block Club Chicago, CBS Chicago, Chicago Sun-Times, Chicago Studies, Energy News Network, Fox32 Chicago, Streetsblog Chicago, TimeOut Chicago, WBEZ, WTTW, and YOUmedia Chicago.

Our public events are a reminder that bringing together a diverse community of individuals to share resources is critical to cultivating local circular economies. It is not enough just to keep materials out of landfills; we must also work to ensure that local economies are strengthened.

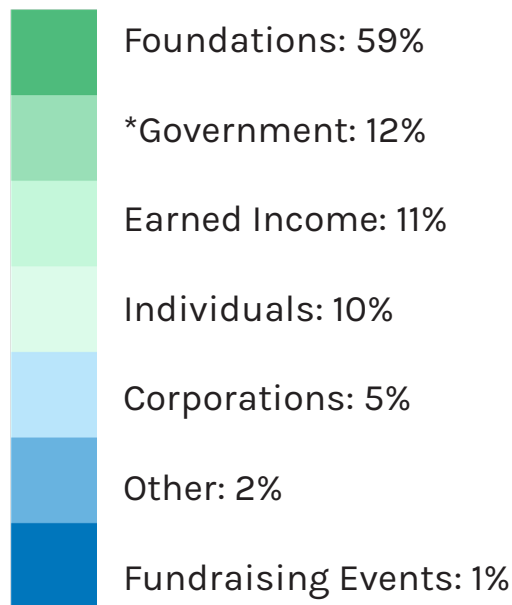
# FINANCES

Plant Chicago's public-facing programming fulfills our mission year after year. We would be acting hypocritically if daily operations didn't also align with the values set forth in the same statement. Transparency empowers the circular economy movement and guides our finances.

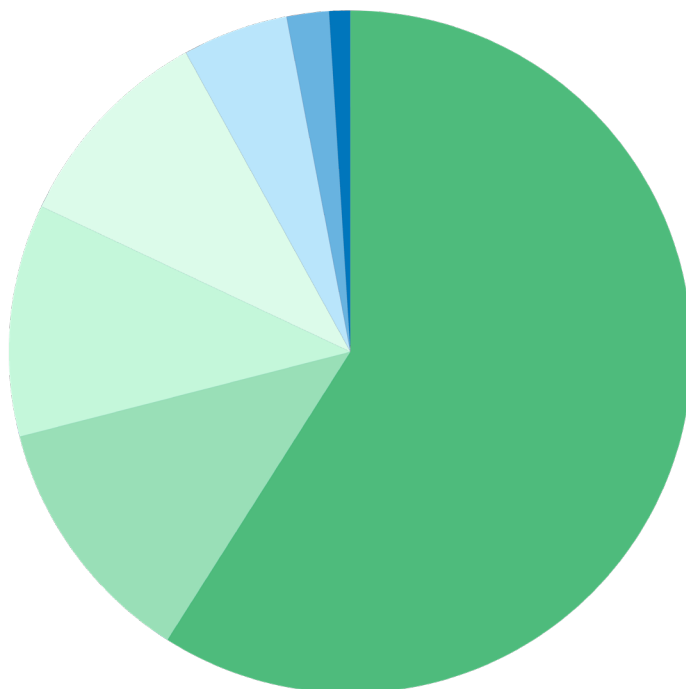
Plant Chicago is committed to ensuring that everyone has access to our programs, regardless of their income level. Public workshops, events, youth programs, shared-use spaces, and the foods in The Firehouse Market are offered on a sliding scale, which often means entirely free.

Subsequently, our organization remains highly dependent on the generosity of others! In 2023, 86% of our funding came from philanthropic sources. Plant Chicago also values people over property, which is why our largest expense is consistently personnel.

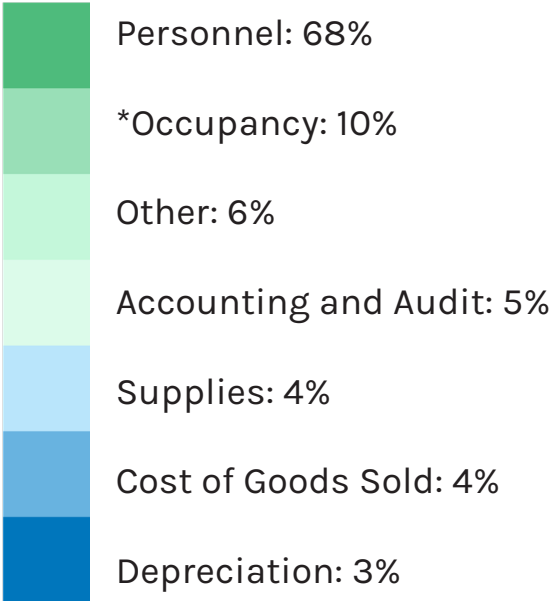
## Revenue: \$503,446.29



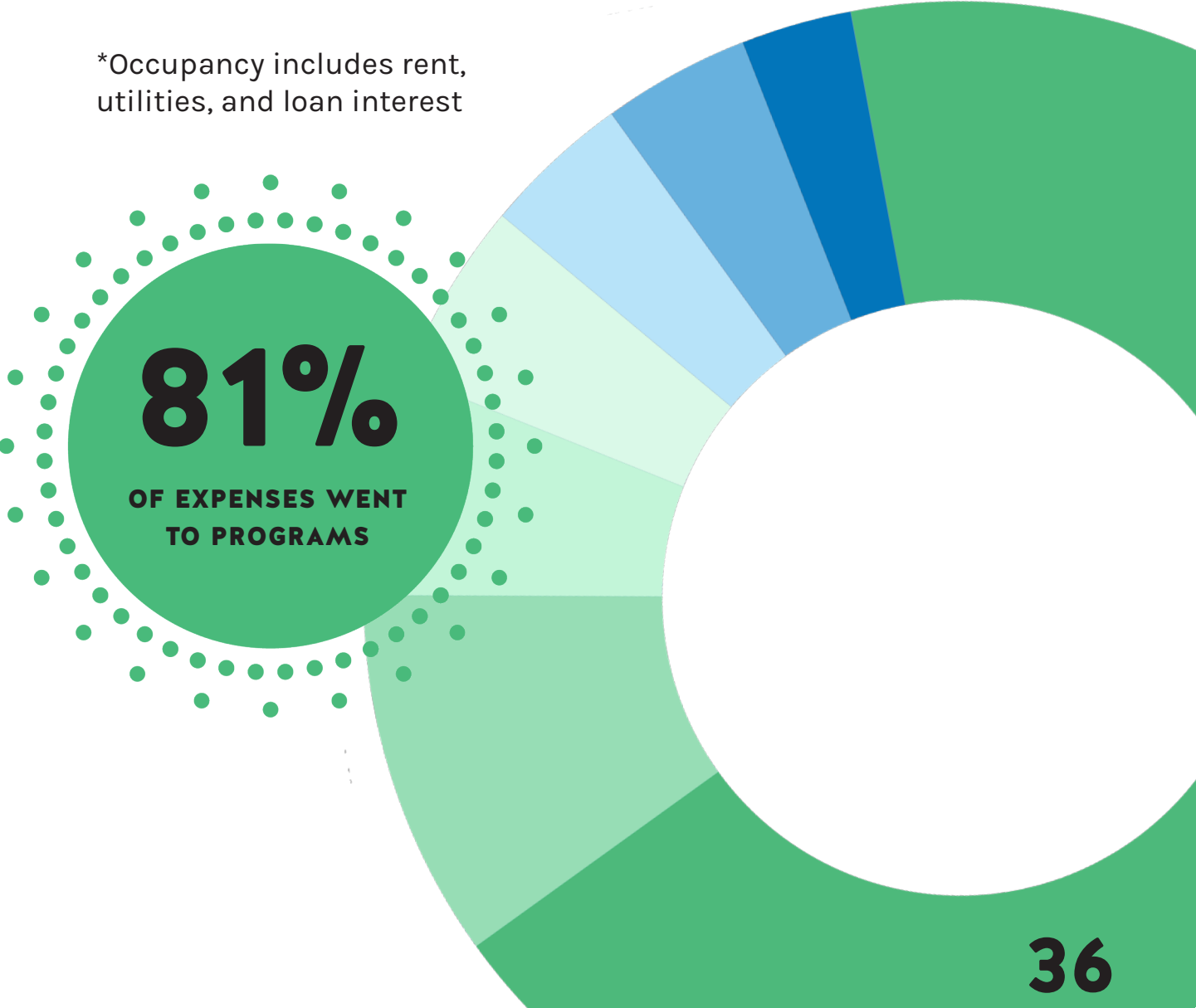
\*A portion of government revenue includes the forgiveness of a PPP loan



# Expenses: \$470,658



\*Occupancy includes rent, utilities, and loan interest



**81%**


**OF EXPENSES WENT TO PROGRAMS**

# ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

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