



LET'S START SOMETHING GOOD

GROUNDWORK CENTER FOR RESILIENT COMMUNITIES

ANNUAL REPORT 2023

THE LONG GAME. THE INSTANT PLAN.

Both of these approaches are essential to the chemistry of Groundwork, fundamental to how we get things done. And in 2023, both the long game and the instant plan shone brightly in our achievements.

An example of long game that rises to the top: our local food team assembled what we've learned during 20 years of helping create one of the nation's most respected local food economies and began to spread that knowledge throughout 16 counties along the coast of Lake Michigan.

An example of instant plan: Groundwork assembled a rapid-response team and rallied the public to abruptly stop (for now) an outrageously costly and environmentally misguided scheme to build a \$300-million bridge over the Boardman River.

Of course, there's lots more, and all of it is wound around the idea that new and sustainable solutions are necessary for our people and planet to enjoy a resilient and thriving future.

Other highlights:

- ☀ Began work on the required next-phase study for the north-south passenger rail, which will focus on outreach with communities and detailed assessments of markets and infrastructure needs.
- ☀ Organized a weekend-long culinary medicine training based at the Great Lakes Culinary Institute and the Esperance Community Teaching Kitchen.
- ☀ Completed seventh annual Advocate Academy—returning to in-person following pandemic restrictions. 79 graduates thus far.
- ☀ Added a transportation specialist to the rail team to focus on building relationships and support from communities all along the line.
- ☀ Built momentum in an innovative program that purchases locally grown food for pantries and meal sites.
- ☀ Expanded the Access MI Solar group-buy solar panel program to include Petoskey and Traverse City and have thus far enabled 33 families and small businesses to afford systems.
- ☀ Hired a Rural Clean Energy Organizer to speed adoption of clean energy infrastructure in northern Michigan.
- ☀ Continued the fight to shut down the Line 5 oil pipeline and stop construction of the proposed oil tunnel.

With gratitude for the better world you bring,



Groundwork Executive Director

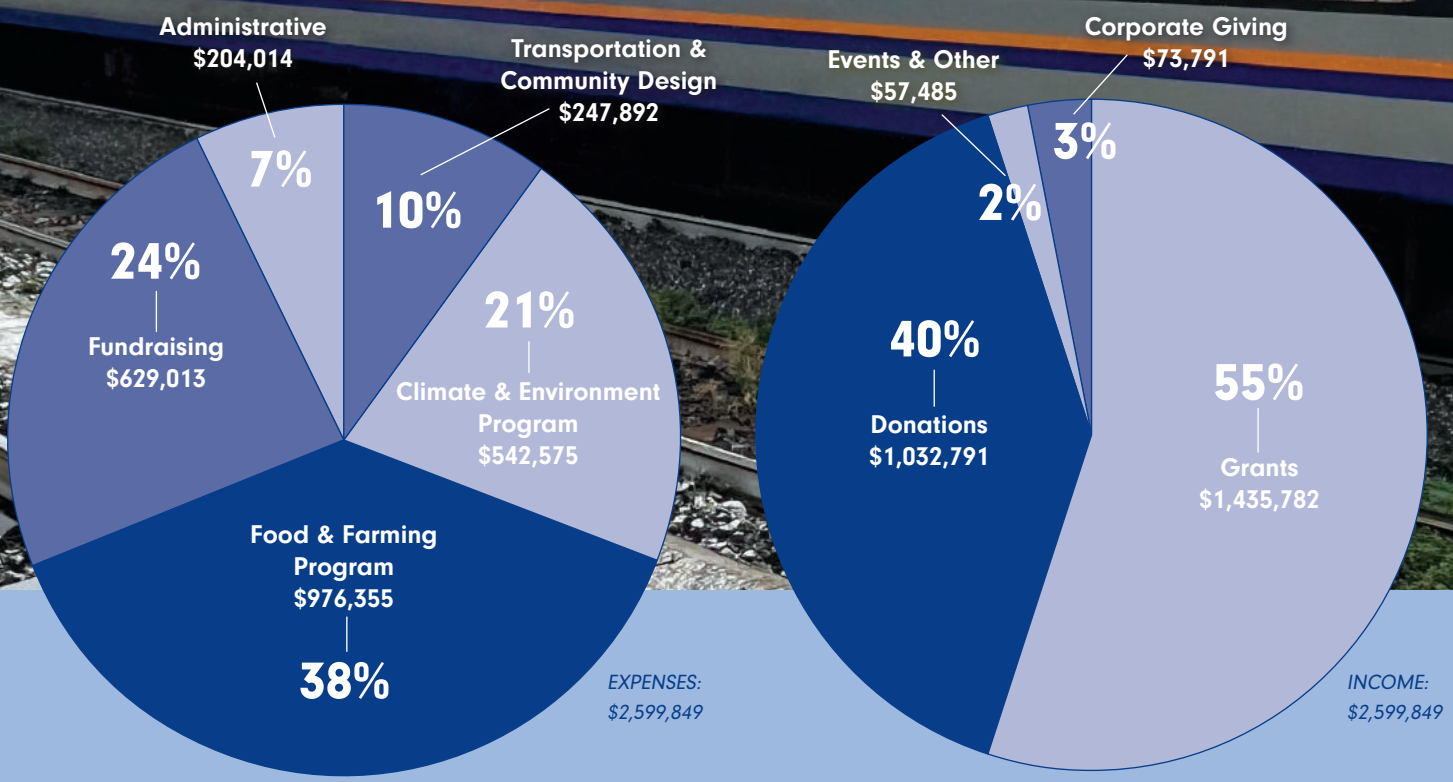
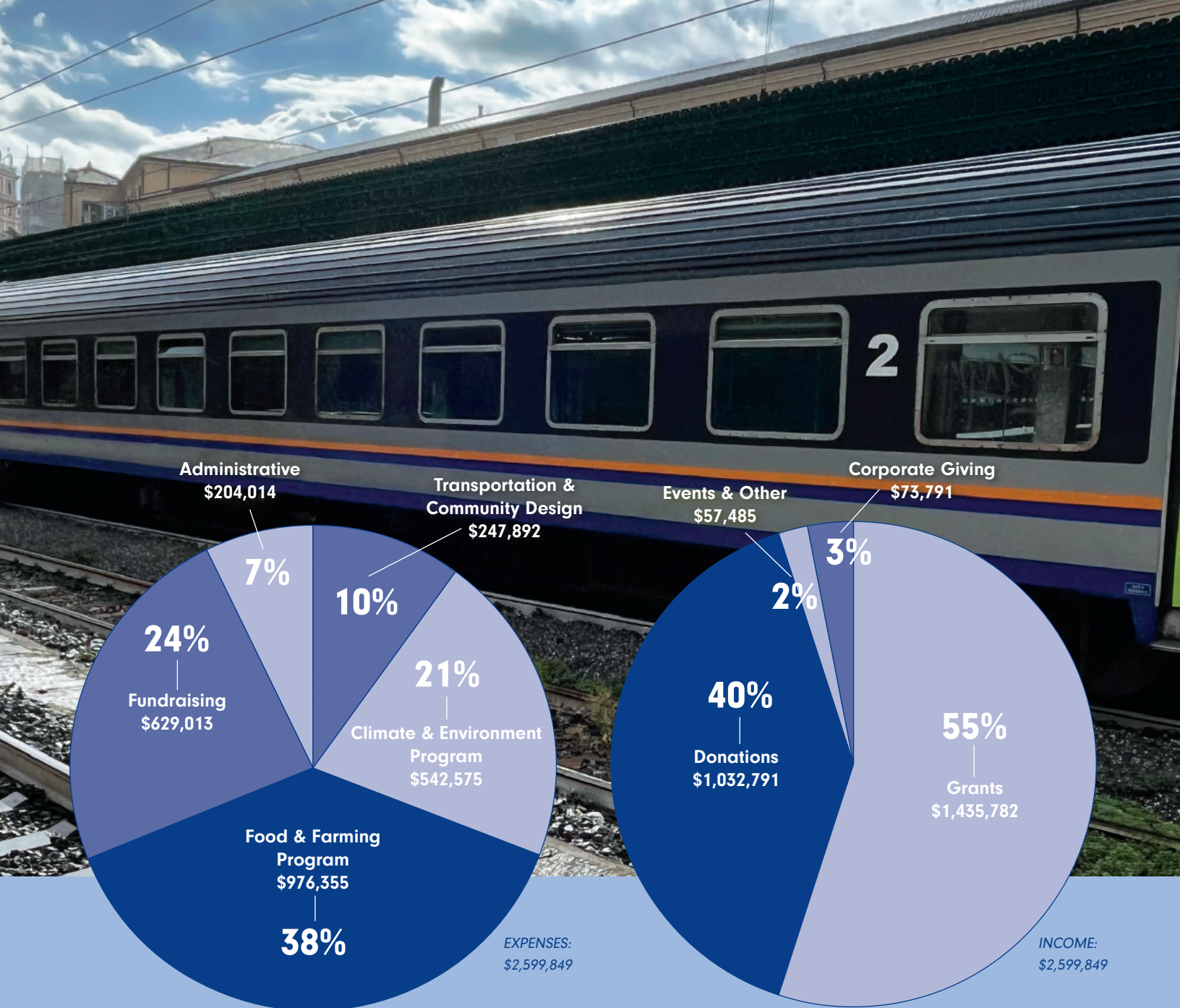


^^ Clean, smooth, and modern trains may soon be traveling north-south through mid-Michigan.

— Photo by Gail Snable

<<< On the cover: Lettuce from Bear Creek Organic Farm, Petoskey.

— Photo by Beth Price



TREASURER'S STATEMENT

Throughout 2023, Groundwork Center for Resilient Communities maintained its financial stability, supported by the generosity of numerous individual donors, corporate sponsors, and family foundations. The broad financial support enabled Groundwork to not only sustain but also enhance its key programs. The ongoing commitment from donors has facilitated the support and growth of key programs in Transportation & Community Design, Food & Farming, and Climate & Environment, ensuring their continued expansion in the years ahead. Your contributions have been instrumental in allowing Groundwork to concentrate on strategic initiatives of protecting the environment, strengthening the economy, and building community. We sincerely appreciate your ongoing support.

— Michael Lyman, Treasurer

*Fiscal year ending September 30, 2023



33

families and small businesses to date have shrunk their carbon footprints through Access MI Solar program

209

environmentally conscious business leaders are now a part of the Great Lakes Business Network

1

Rural Clean Energy Organizer hired to speed renewable energy infrastructure build-out in northern Michigan



CLIMATE & ENVIRONMENT

The equitable transition to a clean energy economy continues to be among the most pressing public policy issues facing our state, nation, and planet. Groundwork remains committed in this crucial movement and has engaged and expanded efforts on multiple fronts over the course of 2023. We hired a Rural Clean Energy Organizer to speed the adoption of clean energy, developed school science curriculum to prepare students for their future, fought to shut down Line 5 and stop its contribution to climate change, and more.

Highlights from 2023

- ☀ Expanded the solar group-buy program Access MI Solar to include Petoskey and Traverse City. To date, 33 families and small businesses have shrunk their carbon footprint and energy bills with our Access MI Solar program.
- ☀ The Great Lakes Business Network met with Attorney General Dana Nessel and hosted her tour of a regional solar installation. GLBN also hosted a working lunch with Senator Peters and met with Senator Stabenow's office to discuss Line 5 and Great Lakes restoration.
- ☀ GLBN has grown to 209 members, representing companies from Michigan, Wisconsin, Illinois, Indiana, New York, Minnesota, Ohio, and Ontario.
- ☀ Supported Wisconsin's Bad River Band's efforts to remove the Line 5 pipeline from its lands due to trespass and imminent risk of pipeline failure. GLBN co-chair Bob Sutherland, of Cherry Republic, spoke in court on the tribe's behalf.
- ☀ Thrust Line 5 into the national spotlight with quotes from our program director Ashley Rudzinski in Politico's Energy & Environment News.
- ☀ Participated in a Line 5 regional strategy meeting with key organizations leading on Line 5—from several states and Washington, D.C.
- ☀ Hosted two webinars to help businesses and individuals access federal clean energy dollars and learn more about agrivoltaics opportunities and the Farm Bill.
- ☀ Engaged with the Michigan legislature to strengthen recently passed renewable energy legislation, including the Clean Energy Future Package.
- ☀ Revised solar energy curriculum for K-12 teachers and students.
- ☀ Worked with high school students in Petoskey, Frankfort, and Traverse City to promote clean energy with school leaders.
- ☀ Hired a Rural Clean Energy Organizer to work with electric co-ops and communities to speed the expansion of renewable energy infrastructure in northern Michigan.



<<< Former Traverse City Planner Russ Soyring and his wife, Tina, saved on their roof-top solar system by joining Groundwork's Access MI Solar group-buy program.

— Photo by Beth Price



200,000

pounds of locally grown and produced food to pantries and meal sites in NW Michigan

300

participants in Esperance Community Teaching Kitchen events

\$9.3 m

funding (again!) for 10 Cent a Meal statewide



illion



FOOD & FARMING

In the past 20 years, Groundwork's local food advocacy work has grown to be a powerful and beautiful expression of our mission. With persistence, passion and strategic clarity, Groundwork has joined with a multitude of partners to help grow what's become one of the nation's most respected local food economies—despite operating in a small rural region in the far north. In 2023 our team continued to make important progress in opening markets and building systems to expand access to locally grown food—all with the purpose of delivering on our mission to help farm family budgets, community nutrition, local economies, and the environment.

Highlights from 2023

- ☀ Were again effective in advocating to pass \$9.3 million for 10 Cents a Meal for Michigan's Kids and Farms, which provides access to healthy Michigan-grown food for more than a million children statewide in K-12 and Early Care and Education settings.
- ☀ Began hosting cooking and nutrition classes in the Esperance Community Teaching Kitchen, in Traverse City. Classes included community groups and medical professionals training for patient education, 300 participants.
- ☀ Began work on a three-year Regional Food Systems Partnership award from the United States Department of Agriculture to expand local food systems and access in 16 counties along the Lake Michigan coast. After witnessing the collapse of long distance supply chains during Covid, the federal government has been funding projects to build food supply resilience, and Groundwork will continue to link networks to assist in this.
- ☀ Continued leadership role in facilitating purchases of locally grown food for more than 70 food pantries and meal sites—a groundbreaking food access initiative. In 2023, we supported distribution of 200,000 pounds of locally produced food from more than two dozen farms and producers, in partnership with the Northwest Food Coalition, Manna, and Food Rescue.
- ☀ Published *Shared Abundance: Lessons in building community around locally grown food*. The 192-page book is a celebration of local food progress and a playbook for expanding local food economies.
- ☀ Completed the third year of Building Resilient Communities, which increases access to locally grown food by expanding infrastructure with micro-grants. Thus far the program has provided grants to 30 applicants, including schools, farms, and daycare centers.
- ☀ Continued partnership with FoodCorps in building schoolwide cultures of health. We again hosted three service members based in our Petoskey office—two in individual schools and one serving the Charlevoix-Emmet Intermediate School District, influencing 11 districts.
- ☀ Continued our 6-year work to embed nutrition and garden education in the schools of Emmet, Charlevoix, and Antrim Counties.

<<< *A riot of radishes harvested at Second Spring Farm
—nutrient-dense and delicious.*

— Photo by Beth Price



79

1

\$320 mi

attendees thus far have graduated in the Advocate Academy

proposed north-south passenger rail system entered the next essential phase of study

NOT spent on a wasteful and sprawl-generating bridge over the Boardman River

TRANSPORTATION & COMMUNITY DESIGN

Advancing transportation planning and systems that establish walkable, bike-able, livable towns continues to be a pillar of Groundwork's mission. This year our team achieved important results in both high profile public ways and also behind-the-scenes, building meaningful long-term relationships in the worlds of passenger rail and local transportation design that will help shape our region and state for decades to come.

Highlights from 2023

- ☀ Began work on the next required study phase for the north-south passenger rail, based on funding from the U.S. Secretary of Transportation and the Michigan legislature. The Phase II study will determine equipment and infrastructure upgrades and also develop a business plan for passenger service. Researchers will fine-tune the project's market and ridership forecasts and identify station towns and potential schedule of service.
- ☀ Continued to serve in the leadership role and as the northern voice for the Michigan Association of Railroad Passengers—the state's lead advocacy organization for passenger rail projects.
- ☀ Quickly organized and launched a rapid-response team that—through partner networking and public advocacy—stopped a preposterous plan by the Grand Traverse Road Commission to build a \$300 million bridge over the Boardman River. The commission had ignored its own consultant's advice to instead implement a mix of traffic fixes that are far less expensive and less invasive—a solution that Groundwork supports.
- ☀ Organized and then presented in the passenger rail session of the Michigan Municipal League's premier annual conference.
- ☀ Participated in statewide transportation policy efforts that brought together transportation and environmental advocates to identify and support state policy changes that will bring more transportation choices to Michigan residents.
- ☀ Hosted the 7th annual Advocate Academy training program—returning to in-person following the pandemic. 79 trained advocates have graduated thus far.
- ☀ Participated in the 2023 Midwest Rail Conference, offering a project profile and status update on the north-south passenger rail to rail thought leaders.

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<<< *In Traverse City, traffic calming and smart street strategies that prioritize safety of walkers and bikers represent changes Groundwork has advocated for since its earliest days.*

— Photo by Beth Price





GROWING LOCAL FOOD ECONOMIES

We all no doubt remember those weeks of food scarcity as the pandemic began its terrible sweep across the nation. Photos of empty grocery store shelves played across TV screens. In some states, images of miles-long lines of cars at food pantries were juxtaposed with farmers plowing under crops just miles away because the farmer couldn't get the crop to market. The takeaway was clear: when put to the test, our long-distance food supply system with all its muscly semi-trucks and massive trains was startlingly fragile and vulnerable and at key points it crumbled.

Yet, here in northwest Lower Michigan, our local food economy had been building for nearly two decades, and local farmers came to the rescue to help fill the shelves in grocery stores, food pantries, schools, and more. Our local farms didn't supply all the food for the region, but they supplied enough to blunt hunger in the pandemic and avert catastrophe.

It wasn't only local food adherents who saw clearly the resilience and security that locally grown food can provide. Officials at the highest levels of government, most notably in the United States Department of Agriculture, finally understood the need to invest in systems that created thriving local food economies, because food security is national security.

Groundwork became part of a tiny cadre of organizations around the nation to be tasked with working with partners to create a pilot program that would foster markets, build infrastructure, and forge the multitude of relationships needed to coax a strong local food economy from places where such economies had hummed decades ago, but now lie dormant.

At Groundwork, we felt it was especially important that the USDA recognized that relationships and connecting the dots through trust and connection were needed to strengthen the regional food supply chain.

The region of our work is 16 counties along the Lake Michigan coast, from the Mackinac Bridge south to Holland and Ottawa County. This year, members of our Food & Farming team joined staff from other food-focused organizations and mapped out a plan and began the launch by convening groups to explain the purpose and potential and begin the all-important task of building relationships and connections that local food economies thrive on.

If such a pilot program could give rise to a local food economy along Michigan's west coast, what would that tell us about the potential for local food economies to be built in communities across the nation? If successful, a local food economy would bring not only food resilience in times of trouble, but also benefits year in, year out: farm financial stability, farmland preservation, broader local economic boost, community health from the most nutrient-dense food available, and, of course, delicious and beautiful meals.

We will keep you apprised as this important story unfolds in coming months and years.

<<< *Daughter and mother duo Aarie (left) and Debra Wade grow food for their early care and education center in Grand Rapids and also rely on 10 Cents a Meal funding to help pay for additional Michigan-grown food for the center's children.*

— Photo by Beth Price

WHY RURAL, WHY NOW

One of the most exciting changes at Groundwork in 2023 came at the end of the year when we hired our first staff person dedicated to helping speed the build-out of renewable energy infrastructure in rural northern Michigan. Why rural, and why now?

With the 2022 passage of the Inflation Reduction Act and its \$380 billion dedicated to speeding a transition to a clean energy economy, the United States finally made a serious commitment to fighting climate change by stimulating massive investment in renewable energy infrastructure. Adding momentum in Michigan, Governor Gretchen Whitmer and the legislature recently teamed up to pass an important set of clean energy bills. Among other things, the bills establish a new framework for fast-tracking approvals of renewable energy projects.

But despite the exciting investments and fresh momentum, a great deal of work remains to be done. Top on the list is overcoming active opposition that is slowing this essential construction effort, ultimately reducing our state's ability to reap the jobs, investment dollars, and environmental benefits that renewable energy build-out will provide.

Groundwork's Rural Clean Energy Organizer will focus on two constituencies that are essential for Michigan to meet its goals. One focus will be working with three northern Michigan electrical co-ops—Cherryland, Presque Isle, and Great Lakes Energy—to advocate with staff, board members, and board candidates for more rapid expansion of renewable energy generating capacity.

The second key constituency is residents of rural northern Michigan counties, especially those where clean energy projects are being proposed. In some cases opposition groups have formed to stop renewable energy installations—even recalling county board members who have approved a renewable energy project. Our organizer will lay a base of factual information, help illustrate benefits, such as tax dollars to improve community infrastructure, and counter misinformation.

Groundwork is uniquely suited to play this role, because through staff work in promoting local food for 20 years, we have built a multitude of strong, trusting relationships among farmers and others in rural communities. We have also earned a reputation for working with both sides of the aisle to accomplish good things. Our goal is to help arrive at clean energy siting solutions that work for farmers and their neighbors so that Michigan can reap the economic and environmental benefits that this moment offers.

Photo opposite page >>>

Rural build-out of renewable energy will be essential to Michigan meeting its goal of a net-zero carbon economy by 2050.

— Photo Andreas Gucklhorn



— Photo by Gonz DDL



LOOK AHEAD

In 2024, Groundwork will enter its 30th year of bringing sustainable system-level change to create resilient and thriving tomorrows for northern Michigan and the state. We stand proud of our achievements and feel they affirm the principles that guide our work. Think with a big vision. Operate strategically, looking for key points where change can leverage even greater change. Think small and up close, so that details are covered and relationships are forged in trust. Keep equity at the center of our work and relationships.

Food & Farming

2024 will be another exciting year for our Food & Farming teams as big new initiatives hit their stride and established projects gain momentum. As profiled earlier in this annual report, the USDA project to foster and strengthen local food economies in 16 counties along the Lake Michigan coast will command a great deal of thought and attention. Staff and partners will focus on creating markets, identifying infrastructure needs, and, very importantly, creating the multitude of relationships and partnerships needed to make a local food economy thrive. The culinary medicine program will continue to build momentum, entering its second year with the Esperance Community Teaching Kitchen, offering expanded education opportunities to community groups and healthcare professionals—a long-sought goal of Groundwork. Our efforts to bring local food into food pantries and meal sites will continue strong, coming off a big year of a 50% increase in pounds of food distributed. And the 10 Cents a Meal team will be pushing for continued strong funding from the state while making it easier for schools and other grantees to participate.

Climate & Environment

The year ahead begins with the addition of a very important staff person who will work with rural electric co-ops and communities to speed the installation of renewable energy infrastructure in northern Michigan—essential for Michigan to meet its carbon reduction targets. We have also re-doubled efforts to shut down Line 5 and will be allocating more staff time and also a skilled contractor to that critical mission at this critical moment, as key permit steps for the oil tunnel hit, and court cases related to the proposed tunnel, the existing outdated pipeline, and the Bad River Band's case in Wisconsin play out. The Climate & Environment team will also continue to work with schools on solar curriculum and assisting in installing solar on schools. And we look forward to another round of Access MI Solar group-buy discounts in northwest Lower Michigan.

Community Design & Transportation

The Community Design & Transportation team looks ahead to another momentous year of planning for the north-south passenger rail. Work will begin on the next extensive study that is required by government agencies, and active outreach will begin with community leaders all along the line to discuss how each community can best benefit from the arrival of passenger rail. As 2024 rolls into 2025, we will begin to hold public meetings to present and answer questions. The team will also monitor Traverse City transportation design conversations, notably to support smart road strategies related to the “mix of fixes” that are being implemented to alleviate Traverse City-area traffic congestion.



— Photo by Beth Price

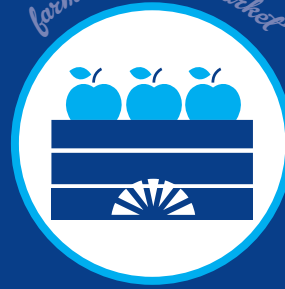
climate and environment



community garden



farm and farm market



farm to school



farmers support



food access



food and farming



food and health



grow solar



health and community center



mobility lab



passenger rail



school and early childcare



solar on schools



transportation and community



affordable solar systems



local food for kids



pro-environment, pro-business



make a difference here



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Stormcloud Brewing Company
Sugar 2 Salt
Thayer Strategies
Voss Equipment, Inc.
Wineguys Restaurant Group



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Tangila Lemcool, of the Grand Traverse Bay Band of Ottawa and Chippewa Indians, collaborates with Groundwork in providing locally grown food to pantries and meal sites. The squash she holds is descended from seeds discovered in an 800-year-old vessel in Wisconsin during an archaeological dig.

— Photo by Beth Price

ENVIRONMENT. ECONOMY. COMMUNITY.



groundwork
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