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28 Organizations Transforming Chicago's Food System

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28 Organizations Transforming Chicago's Food System



The city of Chicago, Illinois is full of inspiring organizations working to build a better food system.



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These community groups are feeding neighbors, offering job training in the culinary arts, developing urban farms, and so much more. Through this work, they are striving to build stronger local food systems that nourish eaters, support local economies, and protect the environment.

On August 24, 2022, Food Tank heads to Chicago to celebrate the city and its diverse food and agriculture system. In partnership with University of Illinois Urbana Champaign, Illinois Institute of Technology, Northwestern University, Illinois Agri-Food Alliance, The Hatchery, and Chicagoland Food & Beverage, we will explore the intersection of food and technology at our Summit “[Technology and the Future of Our Food System](https://www.eventbrite.com/e/chicago-food-tank-summit-technology-and-the-future-of-our-food-system-tickets-195001583987) (<https://www.eventbrite.com/e/chicago-food-tank-summit-technology-and-the-future-of-our-food-system-tickets-195001583987>).”

Speakers include **U.S. Congresswoman Marie Newman** (IL-03); **U.S. Congresswoman Jan Schakowsky** (IL-09); **U.S. Congressman Raja Krishnamoorthi** (IL-08); **Celebrity Chef and Restaurateur Rick Bayless**; **Sam Acho**, ESPN sports analyst, a nine-year veteran of the NFL, a Vice President of the NFL Players Association, and author; **Ertharin Cousin**, Founder and CEO, Food Systems for the Future; **Bill Jackson**, Executive Director, Discovery Partners Institute; **Danielle Nierenberg**, President, Food Tank; **Ariel Cheung**, Journalist Chicago Tribune; **Brett Chase**, Environmental Journalist, Chicago Sun-Times; **Monica Eng**, Journalist & Podcast Host, AXIOS; **Mike Sula**, food writer, Chicago Reader; **Michelle Rellerford**, Weekday Morning Co-Anchor, NBC 5 News; **Michael Hirtzer**, Ag Reporter, Bloomberg; **Jean-Pierre Comte**, President, Barilla USA; **Maryann Byrdak**, CIO, Feeding America; **Luke Saunders**, Founder and CEO, Farmer’s Fridge; **Lucie Basch**, Co-founder, Too Good To Go; **Alan Reed**, Executive Director, Chicagoland Food and Beverage Coalition; **Tyler Strom**, Executive Director, The Illinois Agri-Food Alliance; **Sanjeev Krishnan**, Chief Investment Officer, S2G Ventures; **Karen Sauder**, President, Global Client and Agency Solutions and Site Lead for Google Chicago.; **Shayna Harris**, Managing Partner, Supply Change Capital; **Marc Zornes**, Founder, Winnow; **Natalie Shmulik**, CEO, The Hatchery Chicago; **Mark Kaplan**, Co-Founder, Envisible; **Osayanmo Osarenkhoe**, Co-Founder, ClearCOGS; **Anthony Edwards**, Co-Founder, EatOkra; **Beth Conerty**, Integrated Bioprocessing Research Laboratory and the Food Science Human Nutrition Pilot Processing Plant; **Kerri McClimen**, Vice President, Niman Ranch/Perdue; and **Shelby Parchman**, Chief Operating Officer, FamilyFarmed.

Learn more about the event and register now by clicking [HERE](https://www.eventbrite.com/e/chicago-food-tank-summit-technology-and-the-future-of-our-food-system-tickets-195001583987) (<https://www.eventbrite.com/e/chicago-food-tank-summit-technology-and-the-future-of-our-food-system-tickets-195001583987>).

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A newsletter sign-up form for Food Tank. It features a green background with a photo of a woman on the left. On the right, there are two input fields labeled 'NAME' and 'EMAIL'. Below these is a blue 'SIGN UP' button. At the bottom left is the 'foodtank' logo, and at the bottom right is a green 'LISTEN NOW' button. A speech bubble icon with three forks inside is also present.

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And check out some of the amazing changemakers working to transform Chicago's food system.

1. [Bigger Table \(https://chicagolandfood.org/Bigger-Table-\(501c3\)\)](https://chicagolandfood.org/Bigger-Table-(501c3)))

Launched by the Chicagoland Food & Beverage Network (CFBN) in 2020, Bigger Table is a nonprofit that works to identify opportunities to provide charitable and economic growth initiatives. They help to forge new connections between industry stakeholders, promote long-term employment in the culinary industry, and deliver products where the need is greatest.

2. [Chicago Botanic Garden \(https://www.chicagobotanic.org/\)](https://www.chicagobotanic.org/)

Through their Windy City Harvest program, The Chicago Botanic Garden helps to bring food, health, and jobs to the local community. In addition to overseeing their 15 farms that produce more than 100,000 pounds of fresh produce each year, they support a network of more than 60 community garden plots and offer cooking and nutrition classes. Through the program, the Garden also provides paid on-the-job training for more than 150 people each year.

3. [Chicago Council on Global Affairs \(https://www.thechicagocouncil.org/\)](https://www.thechicagocouncil.org/)

The Chicago Council on Global Affairs is a nonpartisan organization that works to increase knowledge and engagement on global affairs. Their Center on Global Food and Agriculture is working to advance a more sustainable, resilient food system through reports and policy briefs, expert analysis, and events that bring together leaders from the public and private sectors.

4. [Chicago Food Policy Action Council \(https://www.chicagofoodpolicy.com/\)](https://www.chicagofoodpolicy.com/)

The Chicago Food Policy Action Council (CFPAC) works to ensure that all Chicago residents are able to access and grow culturally relevant and nutritious food that is sustainably produced. CFPAC helps to advance good food purchasing practices, develop urban agriculture in the city, and support food systems research.

5. [Chicagoland Food & Beverage \(https://chicagolandfood.org/\)](https://chicagolandfood.org/)

Chicagoland Food & Beverage launched in 2017 to help Chicago's food and beverage industry grow. Their membership includes food and beverages companies of all types sizes, ranging from international manufacturers to small startups. By helping these businesses connect and collaborate, they hope to drive innovation in the region, support local economies, and revitalize the city's neighborhoods.

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Getting Grown Collective (GGC) strives to equip Black and Brown communities with the tools they need as they work toward food and land sovereignty. GGC operates multiple gardens, which they use to provide local community members with fresh produce. They also collaborate with the Little Village Environmental Justice Organization to organize Black and Brown Farmers' Exchanges and encourage solidarity between local Black and Latinx farmers.

12. [Global Garden Refugee Training Farm](https://www.globalgardenfarm.org/)
(<https://www.globalgardenfarm.org/>)

The Global Garden Refugee Training Farm is an urban farm in the neighborhood of Albany Park. The nonprofit serves a space for refugee families to access fresh produce, form connections with neighbors, and earn supplemental income. They also operate a compost program to keep food waste out of landfills and build soil health.

13. [Grow Greater Englewood](https://www.growgreater.org/) (<https://www.growgreater.org/>)

Launched In 2017, Grow Greater Englewood works to develop local food economies and land sovereignty to ensure everyone can lead safe, healthy, fulfilling lives. They are working to build an African centered community in Englewood to improve community health, produce fresh produce, and protect the land and environment from further harm.

14. [Growing Home](https://www.growinghomeinc.org/) (<https://www.growinghomeinc.org/>)

As a nonprofit urban farm and workforce development center, Growing Home is helping residents find careers through farm-based education. The organization provides paid job experience and job-readiness training on their farms as well as the support residents require as they manage medical, childcare, and housing needs.

15. [I Grow Chicago](https://www.igrowchicago.org/) (<https://www.igrowchicago.org/>)

I Grow Chicago engaging more than 3,000 residents per year through their programs designed to nurture communities. Operating under the belief that healthy food is a human right, the organization runs a community kitchen to ensure everyone has access to nutritious meals. They also started Peace Garden, an urban farm where they grow fresh food and offer educational opportunities to youth.

16. [Illinois Agri-Food Alliance](https://ilagrifood.org/) (<https://ilagrifood.org/>)

Working to drive positive change while meeting the needs of the ever-changing food system, the Illinois Agri-Food Alliance works to champion food and agriculture solutions. They believe that collaboration is

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essential for change, and strive to provide an environment for stakeholders to engage, network, and develop frameworks and strategies for the future.

17. [Illinois Food Scrap Coalition \(https://illinoiscomposts.org/\)](https://illinoiscomposts.org/)

The Illinois Food Scrap Coalition (IFSC) is a nonprofit organization dedicated to supporting and promoting composting. They offer resources to help businesses and residents connect with composting pickup services, purchase compost, identify nearby compost sites around the state, and start their own compost program.

18. [Illinois Hunger Coalition \(https://www.ilhunger.org/\)](https://www.ilhunger.org/)

For more than 30 years, Illinois Hunger Coalition (IHC) has served as a statewide membership organization working to end hunger by addressing its underlying causes. IHC is working to expand programs that reduce poverty, bring federal and state resources to low-income communities, and provide training to support community leaders.

19. [Illinois Stewardship Alliance \(http://www.ilstewards.org/\)](http://www.ilstewards.org/)

Illinois Stewardship Alliance works to bring more transparency to the food system and empower producers and consumers. They do this by forging connections between farmers, eaters, and policymakers, and helping communities engage more deeply in democratic processes to transform the food system.

20. [Impact Culinary \(https://www.impactculinary.org/\)](https://www.impactculinary.org/)

Through their free, 12-week culinary training program, Impact Culinary helps young adults ages 16-24 launch their careers in the hospitality industry. They offer participants an 8-week classroom course followed by a 4-week paid internship in a Chicagoland restaurant. Through the program, students earn their food handling certificate and learn about knife skills, food preparation, cooking methods, nutrition, and job readiness skills.

21. [Little Village Environmental Justice Organization \(http://www.lvejo.org/\)](http://www.lvejo.org/)

Founded in 1994, Little Village Environmental Justice Organization (LVEJO) is fighting for environmental justice and healthier communities in the Chicago area. Using their Semillas de Justicia Garden as a community hub, they offer knowledge exchanges, free weekly dinners, bike repair workshops, and educational workshops on sustainability and climate adaptation.

22. [Nourishing Hope \(https://www.nourishinghopechi.org/\)](https://www.nourishinghopechi.org/)

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Through multiple food distribution programs, Nourishing Hope reports that they serve the equivalent of 4 million meals to Chicago residents each year. More than simply a food pantry, the organization also provides mental wellness and other social services to address neighbors' health holistically. They help to connect families with clothing, toys, and hygiene kits, provide employment resources, offer financial support, and more.

23. Pilot Light (<https://foodedu.pilotlightchefs.org/>)

Pilot Light helps students make connections between food, wellness, and community to support the next generation of leaders fighting for a more equitable, sustainable food system. Through their food education programming, they help students make informed dietary decisions and help them develop a lasting, positive relationship with food. The organization also offers free lesson plans to help teachers incorporate food education into traditional school subjects.

24. Rescuing Leftover Cuisine (<https://www.rescuingleftovercuisine.org/chicago-il>)

By partnering with local restaurants and food businesses, Rescuing Leftover Cuisine (RLC) Chicago is working to reduce food waste and redirect surplus food to homeless shelters, food pantries, and other community-based organizations. RLC Chicago will rescue food of any size in an effort to reduce waste at all levels.

25. Slow Food Chicago (<http://www.slowfoodchicago.org/>)

A local chapter of Slow Food International, Slow Food Chicago offers events and programs for residents in and around Chicago. Along with their partners, they also operate the preSERVE garden, where they provide residents with green space and grow fresh fruits and vegetables.

26. The Hatchery Chicago (<https://thehatcherychicago.org/>)

The Hatchery Chicago is a nonprofit food and beverage incubator that works to help Chicago-based entrepreneurs develop successful businesses. They offer business leaders access to commercial kitchen facilities and an entrepreneurship curriculum, while strengthening strengthen local economies through job training and placement programs

27. The Love Fridge Chicago (<https://www.thelovefridge.com/>)

The Love Fridge Chicago works to place community fridges around Chicago in an effort to reduce food insecurity. They believe in providing support through solidarity, not charity, and use their mutual aid model

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to care for their neighbors. Community members can support their work by donating food, helping to maintain and stock fridges, or distributing food from partner organizations.

28. Urban Growers Collective (<https://urbangrowerscollective.org/>)

Operating eight urban farms, primarily located in Chicago’s South Side, Urban Growers Collective (UGC) strives to develop community-based food systems that nourish communities. In addition to growing and selling fresh produce, the organization offers opportunities for staff-led education, training, and leadership development. They also partner with After School Matters to run Youth Corps, a job training program for teens.

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Elena Seeley is Food Tank's Content Director. She earned a BA in Biology from Grinnell College and an MA in Food Studies from New York University, where she focused on food policy and food-based social movements. Elena has worked with food justice nonprofit organizations, including WhyHunger and The People's Seed, and is passionate about promoting stories to help build a more equitable and sustainable food system.

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