Over the last year we also dedicated a lot of time and energy to creating a plan for the future, asking ourselves how we could increase the impact we have while building greater financial stability and self-reliance. We asked alumni, their parents, partners at schools we work with, and our key allies, what should the organization look like in five years? Out of these conversations we created a path forward that will guide our growth until 2020. We know our model works, so we want to expand it and are seeking more land to make this dream a reality. We want to share our tools and techniques with others, to help them take the model and adapt it to their own community. We will reconnect with alumni, providing them with support and space to bring their own shared vision of a more just food system to life. And we will engage more children and adults at Grow Dat through classes, activities and experiences that help us generate revenue while allowing more people to experience the magic of our farm.

Throughout this year’s report you will find stories from our past: of young people who were with us at the beginning and are leaders in our organization today, and highlights of this last year at the farm. You will also get a window into our future. We look forward to walking the path forward together.

Johanna Gilligan
EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

This last year at Grow Dat was a time of looking back, and looking forward. We reflected on all we had accomplished in our first five years—converting two acres of land into productive agricultural space, growing 36,000 pounds of food with over 150 young adults on that land, and laying the groundwork for many more productive seasons to come.

Over the last year we also dedicated a lot of time and energy to creating a plan for the future, asking ourselves how we could increase the impact we have while building greater financial stability and self-reliance. We asked alumni, their parents, partners at schools we work with, and our key allies, what should the organization look like in five years?

Out of these conversations we created a path forward that will guide our growth until 2020. We know our model works, so we want to expand it and are seeking more land to make this dream a reality. We want to share our tools and techniques with others, to help them take the model and adapt it to their own community. We will reconnect with alumni, providing them with support and space to bring their own shared vision of a more just food system to life. And we will engage more children and adults at Grow Dat through classes, activities and experiences that help us generate revenue while allowing more people to experience the magic of our farm.

Throughout this year’s report you will find stories from our past: of young people who were with us at the beginning and are leaders in our organization today, and highlights of this last year at the farm. You will also get a window into our future. We look forward to walking the path forward together.

Johanna Gilligan
EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

OUR MISSION

The mission of Grow Dat Youth Farm is to nurture a diverse group of young leaders through the meaningful work of growing food.

INCREASING FOOD ACCESS IN NEW ORLEANS

17,000 lbs. of food grown = 12,000 lbs. of food sold + 5,000 lbs. of food donated

2 acres of land under cultivation = $51,000 sales from our produce in 2015
a typical day at the farm

8:15 a.m.
We start the day with an icebreaker or game as our opener. Games are an essential part of our work at Grow Dat—they foster communication and help invigorate our spirits for the hard work ahead!

9:30 a.m.
One crew splits into two groups to staff both the farm stand at Grow Dat and our booth at the Crescent City Farmers Market.

10:45 a.m.
Another crew participates in a cooking class at Grow Dat’s teaching kitchen, focusing on hands-on lessons where crew members learn practical approaches to cooking healthy food.

11:30 a.m.
Crew members lead our Shared Harvest partners on a tour of the farm as part of the educational component of this community partnership.

12:30 p.m.
Youth participate in a lesson about workers rights in the context of our work at Grow Dat and in the context of food justice locally, nationally, and globally.

2:00 p.m.
Youth and staff participate in Real Talk, a group exercise where they give each other honest feedback on things that are going well and areas for growth in the future. Real Talk is the foundation of building solid communication and fostering teamwork at Grow Dat.

OUR VISION
We envision a vibrant New Orleans where youth and adults transform their communities, their environment and themselves by engaging in the meaningful work of growing healthy food.
When I first came here it was my first job, my first interview. Now I come to Grow Dat, and it just feels like home. I feel like a pirate who sees gold when I see the vegetables that I’ve made because you can do so much with it. You can feed a community. And I’ve seen it happen from the start. I’ve seen the growth.

—YOUTH CREW MEMBER, 2015
Launching the Advanced Leadership Program

Over the fall of 2014, we launched a new four-month program called our Advanced Leadership Program (ALP). The ALP was designed to provide an additional 170+ hours of training and team-building time for program alumni moving into key leadership roles. We welcomed our first cohort of Fellows—adults age 18-25 in full-time, year-long fellowships who work with the farm team and lead their own crew of youth through the program as Crew Leaders. Two of our three Fellows were program alumni—a big milestone for the organization as we transitioned leadership from staff to young people who had come up through the program themselves.

Farm Expansion

Last year’s harvest surpassed our goal of 12,000 pounds—we harvested and sold a total of 17,000 pounds for the 2014-2015 growing season. 70% of this produce was sold through our Community Supported Agriculture farm share program, farmers markets, and wholesale to restaurants. The remaining 30% was donated through our network of Shared Harvest partners to food insecure individuals and families throughout New Orleans. Our produce included: a signature salad mix, head lettuce, collards, kale, chard, beets, carrots, turnips, radishes, tomatoes, eggplant, cucumbers, summer squash, melon, garlic, strawberries, and culinary herbs.

Furthering Food Justice Through Shared Harvest

We significantly re-tooled our Shared Harvest program in the last year to move beyond simply addressing food access—which research is indicating does not address the root problems of food insecurity—to creating a dynamic relationship with Shared Harvest partners in which they are receiving or purchasing produce as well as engaging in youth-led educational activities designed to foster meaningful conversations and spark ideas about how to build a more just food system.

Shared Harvest Partner Highlight: Krewe de Lose

Through our Shared Harvest program, Grow Dat shares 30% of what we grow through donation and subsidized sale to seven partner organizations throughout the city that share Grow Dat’s commitment to social and environmental justice. In addition, Shared Harvest members are invited to visit the farm to participate in youth-led educational experiences designed to foster learning and build relationships.

Krewe de Lose, one of our current Shared Harvest partners, is a weekly weight loss community health program where participants support each other’s health and fitness goals at the Britton Family Health and Healing Center in Mid-City. At Krewe de Lose, community members learn how eating right and exercising can foster healthier living. Sarah Goodman, Krewe de Lose coordinator, speaks of the produce that Grow Dat shares with their program:

“It is such a wonderful complement to the programming we have here and kind of the whole mission of our clinic, which is to connect our patients with resources in the community to achieve their personal wellness goals. Both going to [Grow Dat] to do little field trips and also being able to offer fresh vegetables and herbs to our weight loss group inspires our participants to go home and cook or try a new recipe. They know the produce came really locally with a lot of love put into growing it. People really appreciate it and have really enjoyed having you guys come.”  
— Sarah Goodman, Krewe de Lose

Meet Dai’Zha Robinson

Dai’Zha Robinson is 18—the youngest of all four crew leaders, she will proudly remind you—and is born and raised in New Orleans. She is a 5th year graduate and loves to cook. Dai’Zha considers herself an advocate for social justice, women’s rights, and the LGBTQIA community.

When Dai’Zha first heard of Grow Dat, she was most interested in working to get the paycheck. But it didn’t take long for something deeper to draw her in.

“When of course anyone will be motivated by getting paid every two weeks, but the lessons I was learning—I was becoming a better person, I had more things to do with my time—it was more than just a paycheck to me.”

One of the most impactful parts of her experience at Grow Dat, according to Dai’Zha, is working with so many different young people from across the city.

“When I was a crew member there were people I didn’t know from other schools and my own school too, and soon we were talking on the phone, we were telling each other jokes, we were telling each other stories—so I was building these relationships with people I never thought I would have been friends with. Before Grow Dat, I was so stuck in this little bubble of the people I was used to, but Grow Dat helps you branch out—it shows you that even if someone is different from you, you’re also the same.”

In fact, Dai’Zha says that the bonds she has made with her peers is one of the best things that has happened to her since starting to work at Grow Dat.

“I know that might sound kind of corny, but the relationships I’ve built with people really is possibly one of the best things that’s happened to me. To be able to depend on somebody, to have somebody be there for you—not to have them want something in return, but to have them want something in return, but to have them genuinely want to know how you’re doing, how you’re feeling, what’s going on in your life—that’s one of the best feelings ever”

—Dai’Zha Robinson, Grow Dat crew leader

“Everybody was saying I should be a Crew Leader, and I was like, ‘No, I don’t think I’m ready!’ But I told my mom about it, and she was like, ‘Why not? What’s the worst that can happen?’ So I think this was just the next step up for me—keep advancing instead of just staying stagnant and staying in the same place. I just need to keep growing more and more and keep bettering myself and help other people better themselves as well.”

Dai’Zha wants to come back as a Crew Leader for another year. She is planning to study criminal justice at Delgado and also wants to become a police officer in the future.

Your generous support provides the opportunity for Dai’Zha and other young people like her to have genuinely transformative experiences—experiences that help them gain confidence and insight into themselves, commit to healthy life choices and develop the leadership skills necessary to bring their dreams to life.
annual program cycle

thanks to our supporters

$100,000 and Greater
- Stephanie and David Barksdale
- Baptist Community Ministries

$50,000 to $99,999
- Kaiser Permanente Foundation
- Cricket Island Foundation
- Capital One Bank

$25,000 to $49,999
- Fox Family Foundation
- W.K. Kellogg Foundation
- Greater New Orleans Foundation

$10,000 to $24,999
- Kabacoff Family Foundation
- Goldring Family Foundation

$5,000 to $9,999
- Cathy Pierson
- Stephanie Stone
- Wills Conway
- Patricia Kind Family Foundation
- The New York Community Trust

$1,000 to $4,999
- Congregation of St. Joseph
- Scott and Marjorie Cowen
- Martin de Porres House of Hospitality

Harvard University
- Todd Gordon
- Allen Howard
- William and Nell Howard
- Vincent Ilustre
- Kristy Magner
- Nancy and Mike Marsiglia
- Laura Murphy
- Janet Parrish
- Shawn Pascale
- Ariel Roland
- Emily Schoenbaum
- Victoria Snider
- Kristian Sunnier
- Carol Whelan

Thanks to our home at City Park.