



# ANNUAL REPORT 2025

Rooted in Growing  
Community



Charity Navigator

Charity Navigator has awarded us 4 stars.

Platinum  
Transparency  
2025

Candid.



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# LETTER FROM THE **EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR**

## HIGHLIGHTS

In New Jersey **10.7%** of individuals and **13.2%** of children experienced food insecurity.

This year our hydroponic greenhouses will produce about **1,500 pounds of fresh produce** which we will distribute through our farm stands and farmer's markets.

As we embark on this next chapter, **I invite you to deepen your partnership** with Greater Newark Conservancy.

### Dear Conservancy Friends and Supporters,

Last month, I watched our young Newark staff members running our mobile farm stand with irresistible enthusiasm, sharing fresh collard greens, okra, and sweet potatoes with neighbors. Their energy captured exactly why our work matters—and why I'm excited to share this year's impact with you.

Moments like this show why we exist: cultivating a community rooted in growth, learning, and hope. These young people weren't just selling produce; they were building connections, sharing knowledge, and demonstrating how environmental action creates real change. They proved that when we invest in youth and the environment, we grow more than food—we develop leaders, community bonds, and a healthier future.

Their pride in offering fresh, locally grown food to families who might otherwise struggle to access it captures the heart of our work. These connections reveal the true power of community-led change.

Communities like ours have faced systematic disinvestment that leaves neighborhoods without healthy food access. **In New Jersey in 2022, 10.7% of individuals and 13.2% of children experienced food insecurity.** In that same year the food insecurity numbers for Blacks were 21% and for Latinos 20%. Even in vibrant Newark, transportation barriers make fresh produce hard to reach. But today, thanks to your support, the Conservancy is working to address this challenge.

We're proud to lead this transformation. This year our hydroponic greenhouses will produce about **1,500 pounds of fresh produce** which we will distribute through our farm stands and farmer's markets. Our collaborative partnerships with seven community gardens and shared growing space with five Newark growers help them expand their markets and sales revenue.

Our local impact is part of a powerful national movement. Cities are transforming vacant lots into spaces that combat hunger, unite neighborhoods, and address climate challenges—a transformation experts recognize as essential.



In addition to better food access, increasingly the mental and physical health benefits of urban agriculture are being recognized – reduction of stress, increased physical activity, and a balanced diet – all of which contribute to a reduction in chronic diseases.

In Newark, we're building on this momentum with **our new 2025–2028 Strategic Plan**, which focuses on four priorities:

- Deepening community collaboration
- Enhancing organizational effectiveness
- Ensuring long-term sustainability
- Investing in essential infrastructure

With goals like increasing student engagement and boosting food production, this plan ensures every contribution creates a tangible impact. Our vision remains clear: a Newark where every neighborhood has access to fresh food, green spaces, and environmental education.

None of this progress would be possible without you, our dedicated donors, volunteers, and community partners. Your generosity inspires us every day. On behalf of our board, staff, and the Newark families who benefit directly from your support, I extend heartfelt gratitude. Your contributions have planted seeds of change that now flourish throughout our city.

As we embark on this next chapter, **I invite you to deepen your partnership with Greater Newark Conservancy.** Your continued support ensures a greener, healthier, and more equitable future for all Newark residents, where fresh food, clean parks, and opportunities thrive.

Together, we're not just cultivating gardens—we're cultivating community, hope, and lasting change.

With deep appreciation,

*Wilson Cano*

Executive Director,  
Greater Newark Conservancy

# OUR MISSION AND VISION

**Mission:** Greater Newark Conservancy expands access to healthy food, environmental education, and green spaces. We provide hands-on community programs that cultivate sustainability, inspire action, and celebrate the power of nature to heal and uplift.

**Vision:** We see a future where every person in our community feels connected to nature, has access to fresh, healthy food, and can learn and grow in green, welcoming spaces. We believe that through nature, healing happens, hope grows, and stronger communities take root.

“ I am experiencing new things and learning where plants get energy from. It’s really exciting to learn something new that’s about nature. ”

**Jasiah**

5th grader at Newark’s Hawthorne Avenue Elementary School

**The Conservancy’s overall goal is to promote the health and wellbeing of Newark residents.** Our following programs and initiatives are designed to achieve that goal.



**40,000 children** have engaged in environmental field trips at this center.

### JUDITH L. SHIPLEY URBAN ENVIRONMENTAL CENTER

Judith L. Shipley Urban Environmental Center, a centerpiece of Conservancy education programming, was New Jersey’s first urban environmental center when it first opened 21 years ago. **During the intervening years over 40,000 children have engaged** in environmental field trips at the Center’s 1.5 acres of teaching gardens. In the past year the **Newark Board of Education sent more than 2,500 elementary school students to our Center for field trips.**



Impacting **2,000 Newark students** with hands-on nutrition education.

### YOUTH & FAMILY EDUCATION PROGRAM

This brings nutrition and healthy eating lessons to **2,000 Newark elementary school students**, introducing them to new fruits and vegetables, engaging them in planting and harvesting school gardens, and involving families through healthy recipe demonstrations.



Fresh food access for **4,000 Newark residents.**

### URBAN AGRICULTURE/ COMMUNITY GREENING/ ENVIRONMENTAL JUSTICE

Through our Plot-It-Fresh initiative, about **100 Newark families adopt community garden plots** to grow their own fresh food with Conservancy-provided materials and training. For those unable to garden, our mobile farm stands and markets offer affordable produce, expanding healthy food access to **over 4,000 residents each year.**



**76-member coalition** improving food in schools.

### ADVOCACY

The **Coalition for Healthy Food in Newark Schools is a collective of 76 stakeholders** comprised of individuals and organizations dedicated to advancing food equity, sustainability, and community-led action in school food systems. This stronger alignment among partners has enhanced the effectiveness and **sustainability of healthy food programs in 22 Newark schools.**

Our goal with the Coalition for Healthy Food in Newark Schools is to engage students, families, organizations, and community stakeholders in advancing policies that reflect the needs of our community. Student-led Nutrition Advisory Council elevates student voices within their touch points, while Coalition meetings engage adult members and organizational partners to identify and advocate for the community’s emerging needs, ensuring the cultural relevance and accessibility of food in Newark neighborhoods.



# 2025 IMPACT HIGHLIGHTS

## OVERVIEW

Provided fresh produce to over **4,000 Newark residents** last year. **100 families adopted** our garden plots and actively raised their own fresh produce.

Successfully formed four **Student-led Nutrition Advisory Councils (SNACs)** at four Newark public schools, reaching and benefiting **2,600 students**.

**80% to 90% of students receiving nutrition lessons,** increased willingness to eat fruits and vegetables and learned how to plant and manage their own gardens.

2025 was transformative—a year of bold decisions and renewed community commitment. From launching our strategic plan to expanding food access in Newark, every step grew from our belief that change starts from the ground up, requiring all of us to make it flourish.

Thanks to your steadfast support, we didn't just sustain our mission—we expanded it. Together, we created opportunities, deepened relationships, and planted seeds that will nourish Newark for years to come.

Charting the future with our new three-year strategic plan, we are reimagining how urban farming, education, and partnerships can tackle environmental injustice and health inequities in Newark.

This plan isn't just a document—it's our commitment to:

- **Centering community** voices in every program we run.
- **Scaling what works**, with a laser focus on measurable impact.
- **Reaffirming our mission** beyond growing food—advancing health, education opportunities, environmental enhancement and dignity for every Newark resident.

We built this plan with and for our community, which means it belongs to every Newark resident dreaming of a greener, healthier city.

### URBAN FARMING REIMAGINED

#### Closing a Chapter, Opening New Doors

When the New Jersey School Development Authority terminated the lease of our beloved Hawthorne Avenue Farm, to build a long-anticipated new school there for the city's children, we faced the challenge of locating and developing new properties for urban agriculture. This significant loss turned into an opportunity to expand our programming into more of Newark's wards through collaborative partnerships with local city growers. With this arrangement we now have seven horticultural sites, with five community gardening partners in three city wards.

- Bringing our Plot-It-Fresh community gardening operations into more Newark neighborhoods has fostered an expansion to **100 Newark families** adopting and actively gardening our community plots. This represents a one-third increase in family participation.

- With support from Whole Cities Foundation, we were able to launch a **new mobile farm stand operation**—bringing fresh produce directly to underserved neighborhoods that face the greatest food insecurity.

- During the off season we established a community supported agriculture (CSA) food box delivery program, providing biweekly access to **healthy food to 50 subscribers (benefiting 200 family members)**.

These program enhancements reflect our core belief: urban farming must be adaptable, just, and community centered. Your belief in our vision and investment in our work enable us to bring more vital services to those who need them most!

### LINKING FOOD & HEALTH

#### A New Era of Access

This year we continued to emphasize the integral relationship between nutritious food and a healthy community. Each of our three programs contributed to this theme in the following manner:

- The Urban Agriculture/Community Greening/ Environmental Justice Program implemented monthly farmer's markets, weekly farm stands and CSA food box distribution, **providing fresh produce to over 4,000 Newark residents last year. 100 families adopted our garden plots and actively raised their own fresh produce.**
- The Advocacy Program's Coalition for Healthy Food In Newark Schools expanded its collaborative agency partnerships, hosted dozens of community forums on healthy food initiatives, and successfully formed four **Student-led Nutrition Advisory Councils (SNACs) at four Newark public schools, reaching 2,600 students.** SNAC schools adopted Cultures of Wellness and elevated student voices regarding school menu preferences.
- The Youth & Family Education Program brought health and nutrition lessons to 1,039 students in 55 classes in nine Newark elementary schools. **80 to 90% of these students increased willingness to eat fruits and vegetables** and learned how to plant and manage their own gardens.

This isn't just nutrition education and food distribution—it's a model where food becomes medicine— and the produce distribution methods are transformed into empowerment hubs. These initiatives not only expand food access, but promote healthy schools, and invest directly in urban growers.



# 2026 PRIORITIES

POWERED BY YOU,  
FOCUSED ON IMPACT

## OVERVIEW

Continue to work with **NJFoodCorps** Members to bring to approximately **2,000 Newark elementary school students** nutrition and healthy eating education.

During the year, **100–200 Newark parents and children** will learn **shared cooking responsibilities for preparing healthy meals.**

Implement environmental education field trips for up to **2,000 Newark school children.**

**In 2026,** we'll continue to support approximately **100 Newark families with adoptable garden plots,** essential supplies and tools, technical assistance workshops, and infrastructure upgrades as needed.

We begin our fiscal year with a sense of urgency. Newark families face rising food costs and shifting safety nets—requiring that every dollar is stretched for purchasing healthy food. We're seeing longer lines at our farm stands, hear from parents whose children now ask for vegetables they have grown at school, and have walked with seniors who depend on our programs for fresh food.

With your support, we will rise to meet these needs head-on—building a just and resilient food system.

### EXPANDING YEAR-ROUND FOOD ACCESS

In a city where fresh food access remains unequal, we're ensuring affordable, nutritious produce stays within reach year-round.

- **Community Supported Agriculture Program**  
During the off season we will double our CSA food box distribution program by delivering weekly boxes of seasonal fruits and vegetables to more residents.
- **Mobile Farm Stands** We'll expand the locations for our mobile stands, reaching more neighborhoods with limited grocery stores. From housing developments to senior centers, we'll deliver quality, budget-friendly foods.
- Recently, **The Coalition for Healthy Food in Newark Schools** successfully launched the first installment of its Fresh Roots initiative, in partnership with Rutgers Newark's RUPantry. This innovative program provided over 403 college students, staff and families with over 3000 pounds of food. In the coming year this initiative will be ongoing and expanded, with its design created with and for our community. Fresh Roots will belong to every Newark resident who is dreaming of a greener, healthier city.

### NUTRITION AWARENESS

#### Living in a Healthy Environment and Growing Wellness in Schools

Every child deserves healthy food and the knowledge of what constitutes nutrition and a healthy lifestyle. In the upcoming year our Youth & Family Education Program will:

Continue to work with NJFoodCorps Members to bring approximately **2,000 Newark elementary school students** education regarding nutrition and healthy eating.

- Conduct monthly Family Fun in the Kitchen cooking classes showcasing healthy recipe preparation and encouraging parents and children to share in cooking responsibilities. **100–200 Newark residents** will participate in this program during the year.

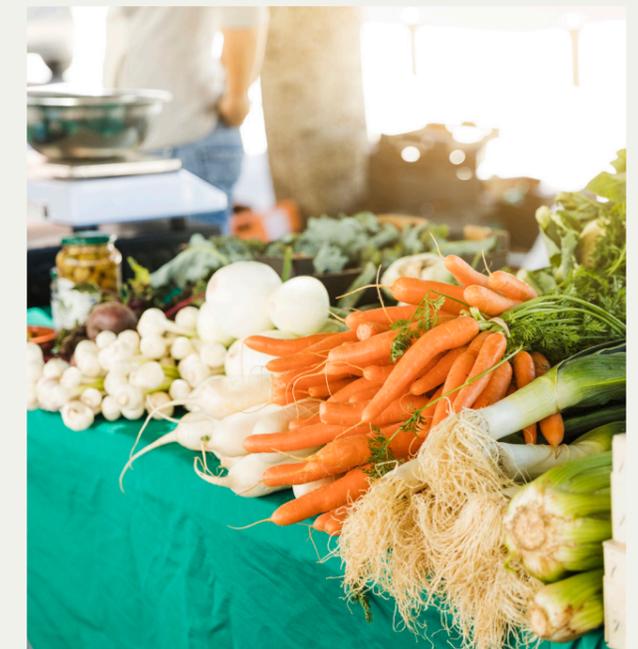
- Implement environmental education **field trips for up to 2,000 Newark school children** teaching what constitutes a healthy environment and how best to maintain healthy lifestyles within that environment.

### CULTIVATING URBAN AGRICULTURE & COMMUNITY RESILIENCE

Newark has great potential. Vacant lots await transformation into vibrant community gardens and thriving urban farms. **We'll continue to support approximately 100 Newark families with adoptable garden plots, essential supplies, technical assistance workshops, and infrastructure upgrades as needed.**

We'll continue to partner with five urban growers' shared garden spaces, providing training, greenhouse support, and new pathways to market. These local farmers — many of them women and people of color — are building sustainable micro-businesses that nourish both body and economy.

Each program investment can have powerful ripple effects. A single garden anchors an entire block, reduces crime, and brings neighbors together. Your support makes it all possible.





## DEVELOPING YOUNG MINDS AND FUTURE LEADERS

The Youth & Family Education Program implements a combination of nutrition, and healthy eating, classroom lessons and activities—providing the students with their first experiences and planting and raising vegetables in their own school gardens.

Young people are connected with nature through their school gardens, classrooms, after-school programs, and environmental education field trips at our Prudential Outdoor Learning Center Teaching gardens, classrooms and demonstration kitchen.

- Our recent Newark Grows School Gardens Tour brought together students, educators, and families to celebrate thriving school gardens and how they can serve as invaluable educational venues for school children.
- Hands-on gardening experiences allow youth to build garden beds, master composting, and learn how to raise and harvest their own produce to promote a healthy lifestyle.



## Together, We Are Cultivating Change.

**From mobile markets to classroom gardens, this year's impact belongs to you.** The story continues—2026 is on the horizon, and we're ready to grow even stronger.

Thank you for believing in our work and helping Newark blossom—with justice and deep community roots.

“ Your generosity did more than fund programs—you stood with us as we innovated and continued our commitment to Newark. You gave us the ability to do more, and to do it better! ”



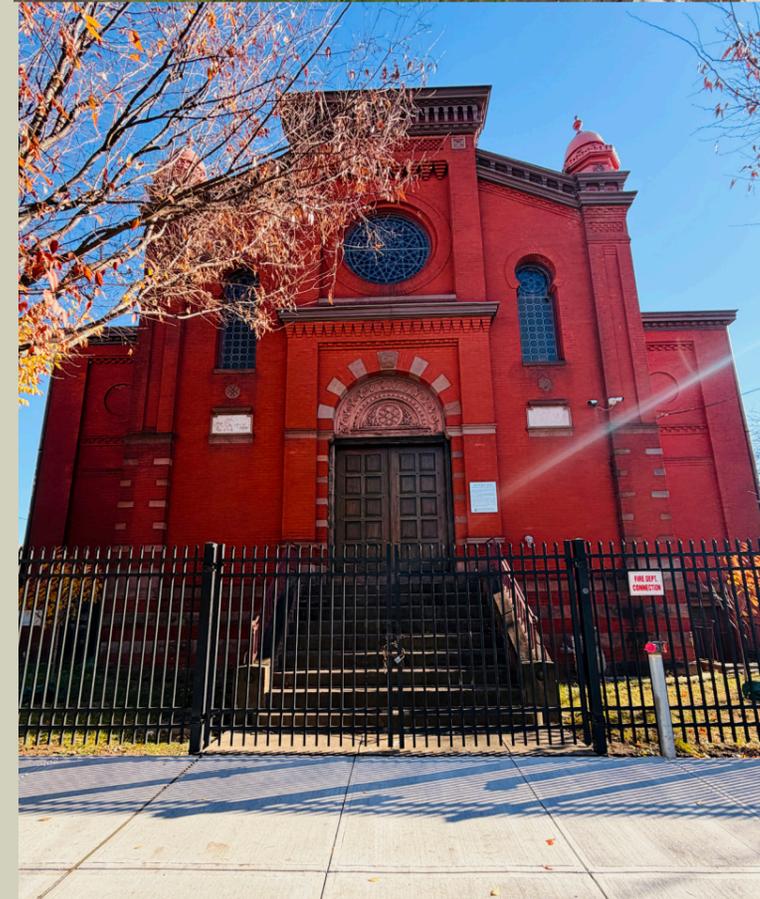
# THE CONSERVANCY IS **EXPANDING** **ITS HOME!**

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For over 20 years, the **Conservancy's Judith L. Shipley Urban Environmental Center** has served as an **innovative community facility in the heart of Newark's Central Ward**. During that time, it has provided environmental and nutritional health programming to tens of thousands of the city's children and adults. **Now, as part of our Fiscal Year 2025 initiatives, the Conservancy Board kicked off its Phase 2 Construction** to complete renovation of the next section of the historic 1884 former synagogue/ Baptist church, which serves as the Center's Education Building. The construction will complete the interiors of the second and third floors of an addition on the rear of the original building, creating more programming space for the Conservancy and opening up new opportunities for revenue generating partnerships on part of the Center site.

Following architectural analysis and updating of structural design plans, **the renovation project is ready for construction to commence in fall 2025**. The work is expected to extend for approximately six months. The project will also install an elevator for access to the addition's floors and future access to the final phase of construction — the former sanctuary of the historic synagogue/church.

**Completion of the architecturally impressive former sanctuary will substantially expand the Conservancy's capacity to host programming and services for the Newark community.** Active fundraising is underway for this next phase. A generous \$1.5M challenge grant, which is to be double matched, is providing impetus to this campaign! Supporters are actively being sought to help respond to this challenge.





# FINANCIAL STRENGTH AND PERFORMANCE

## OVERVIEW

Revenue has grown since FY2022, reaching **\$3.4M**.

Net assets stand at **\$13.2M** – a strong foundation for growth.

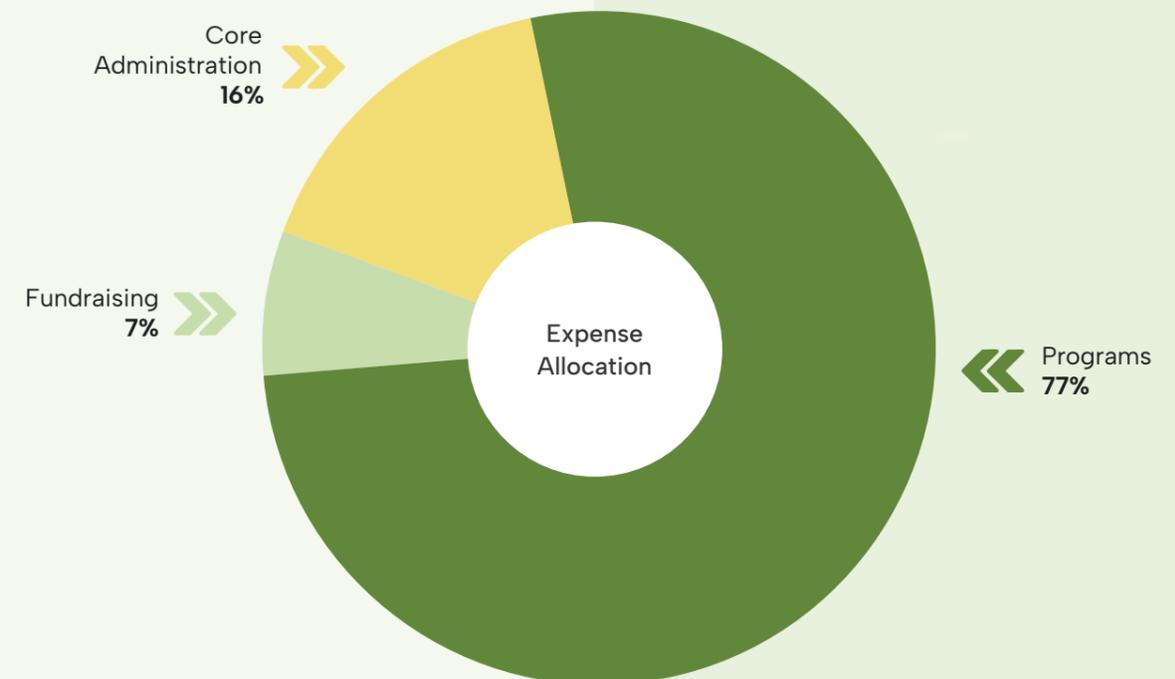
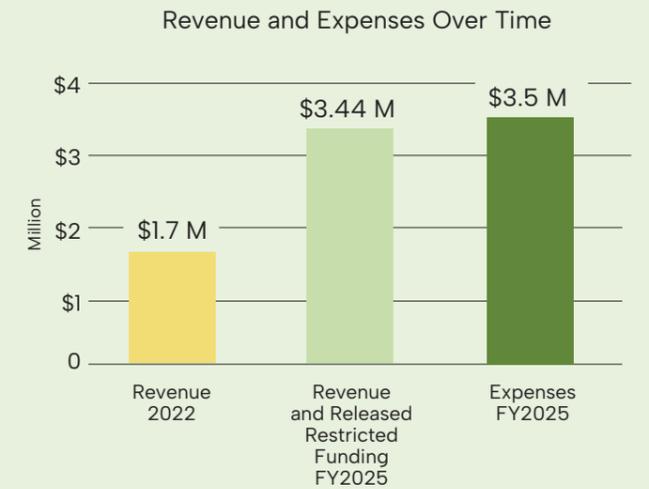
Liabilities are just **over 1% of assets**, reflecting a debt-free balance sheet.

Positioned among mid-sized leaders with peer revenues of **\$3M–\$8M**.

## Financial Growth & Stability Record Revenues and Strong Foundation

In Fiscal Year 2025 revenue received was **\$1,796,911**. This sum was combined with \$1,650,370 in restricted funds released from the previous year to offset operating expenses of \$3,495,470, leaving an operating deficit of \$48,189. Our net assets stand at \$13,220,835, including \$3.5 million restricted for future capital construction expense and \$7.8 million representing the value of the physical buildings and infrastructure at our Urban Environmental Center. Our liabilities remain minimal at just over 1% of assets, reflecting a balance sheet that maximizes funds for mission-driven work.

We prioritize program funding while strategically investing in our capacity to deliver. In Fiscal Year 2025, **77% of expenses went directly to programs advancing food justice, urban farming, and education**, with 16% supporting administration and 7% for fundraising.



## High Program Investment & Strategic Overhead



Our program expense ratio of 77% currently falls right within the middle of the typical nonprofit best practice. Environmental and human-service nonprofits usually allocate 75–80% to programs. **Our ratio reflects essential investments in staff, facilities, and strategic planning needed to scale our impact effectively.**

Sector leaders increasingly recognize that very low overhead can actually undermine effectiveness — reasonable administrative spending is crucial for strong programs. Charity Watch rates organizations “highly efficient” when overhead stays under 25% (meaning 75%+ goes to programs). Our administrative cost ratio (16%) is well below this threshold— the normal range for growing community-based nonprofits.

**We will maintain, and aim to improve, our program expense ratio going forward.** This year’s board-approved budget allocates more resources to on-the-ground programs—deploying new grant funds like our recent major, three-year food justice grant from Novo Nordisk. We maximize dollars for our mission while maintaining the skilled staff and infrastructure needed for lasting results.



# PERFORMANCE BENCHMARKS AT A GLANCE

METRIC	GREATER NEWARK CONSERVANCY	NONPROFIT BENCHMARKS
<b>Total Revenue and Released Restricted Funds</b> 	<b>\$3.44M</b>	Regional peers in urban agriculture average <b>3.9M–\$8.4M</b>
<b>Program Expense Ratio</b> 	<b>77%</b>	The typical best practice for environmental nonprofits is <b>75%–80%</b> for program expense
<b>Administrative Expense Ratio</b> 	<b>16%</b>	Highly efficient overhead rates stay <b>under 25%</b>
<b>Fundraising cost per \$1 Raised</b> 	<b>\$0.15</b>	Better Business Bureau standard is <b>\$0.35</b>



# MEASURING OUR IMPACT

## NUMBERS THAT TELL OUR STORY

“ Being a part of the Conservancy Plot-It-Fresh initiative has improved my health by lowering my blood pressure, helping manage my diabetes and I’ve even lost weight while gardening. I’ve also enjoyed socializing with other gardeners and I feel a sense of pride when I harvest the produce I’ve grown throughout the season. ”

**Valerie Dale**  
A Conservancy Plot-It-Fresh Gardener



### FOOD ACCESS & DISTRIBUTION

## 7,000

Pounds of fresh produce distributed through community gardens, foodstands and farmer’s markets

## 1,200

Families gained regular access to locally-grown vegetables.

## 81%

Of participants reported improved health due to better access to healthy food options.

### YOUTH & FAMILY EDUCATION

## 2,000

Students received education regarding planting fruits and vegetables in school gardens.

## 2,000

Students participated in environmental education programming.

## 92%

Of program participants demonstrated increased nutritional health and environmental knowledge in post-assessments.

## COMMUNITY HEALTH & WELLNESS

**100**

Newark families provided with gardening plots, tools and expertise to support their horticultural efforts

**120**

Residents trained in urban agriculture techniques

## ADVOCACY

**2,600**

Newark school students whose school menu preferences are promoted by Student-led Nutrition Advisory Councils



**These numbers represent more than statistics**—they're families eating better, students discovering their power to create change, and neighborhoods reclaiming their right to clean, healthy environments.



# ACKNOWLEDGMENTS AND GRATITUDE

Our achievements wouldn't be possible without our funders, partners, and volunteers.

We're grateful to major supporters like **Prudential, Victoria Foundation, and Geraldine R. Dodge Foundation**— along with champions like the **Horizon Foundation for New Jersey, F.M. Kirby Foundation, Newman's Own Foundation, and Tito's Handmade Vodka.**

A game-changing **grant from Novo Nordisk** launched a citywide healthy food initiative in Newark schools. Such a catalytic investment has enabled the Conservancy to build the capacity of the Coalition for Healthy Food in Newark Schools to implement a cross-sectoral collective impact initiative, aiming to sustainably transform Newark's school food system and positively impact more than 40,000 students across 66 schools.

Thanks to you, our work thrives on collaboration. By partnering with five local Newark growers we've extended our reach into three city wards.

To every volunteer, partner, and donor who gave their time, talent, or treasure:

### THANK YOU!

Greater Newark Conservancy  
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greaternewark.org

“You nurture every seed we plant, and we are profoundly grateful.”

## Major Gifts This Year

Bassett Associates  
Bayer Fund  
Columbia Bank Foundation  
Geraldine R. Dodge Foundation  
Devils Youth Foundation  
EY  
William L. Gibson Fund, CFNJ  
Givinga Foundation  
E. J. Grassmann Trust  
The Healthcare Foundation of New Jersey  
The Horizon Foundation for New Jersey  
J. C. Kellogg Foundation  
F. M. Kirby Foundation  
Klemme Family Fund  
Landsberger Foundation  
McKinsey & Co.  
Murnick Family Foundation  
Newman's Own Foundation  
NJM Insurance  
Notaboat Fund, CFNJ  
Novo Nordisk  
Otterstedt Insurance  
Pierson Family Foundation  
Provident Bank Foundation  
Prudential Foundation  
PSEG  
Robert Wood Johnson Foundation,  
President's Grant Fund of Princeton Area  
Community Foundation  
Carolyn Jane Scott Charitable Fund  
Stone Foundation of New Jersey  
Charles Emil Thenen Foundation  
Tito's Handmade Vodka  
Turrell Fund  
USDA NIFA  
Victoria Foundation  
Wakefern Food Corp.  
Johanette Wallerstein Institute



# TOGETHER, WE DO MORE



## Volunteer

Join our workshops, fundraisers, and garden celebrations. Get your hands dirty planting trees, building and maintaining garden beds, and helping us grow. Your presence builds awareness and strengthens our community.



## Share Our Story

Follow us on social media and tell your friends about us. When you share our story you inspire others. Stay connected and get involved. Visit: [greaternewark.org](http://greaternewark.org). Follow on Instagram: [@greaternewarknj](https://www.instagram.com/greaternewarknj) and on Facebook and LinkedIn.



## Donate

Support our programs financially. Each dollar helps us serve Newark youth and adults yearly through green spaces, education, and fresh food initiatives.



**Support Access to Fresh Food,  
Education, Advocacy, and Green  
Spaces — Scan and Give.**