

Impact 100 Metro Detroit 2020 Grant Summary
Grant Finalist: **Micah 6 Community**
Project: **Community Garden Expansion Project**

Background: Micah 6 Community was founded in 2012 when a group of friends became passionate about supporting and working in the city of Pontiac, Michigan. We bought a house, moved in and began looking for ways we could begin to make a difference in the community.

Through a lot of conversation and discussions with our neighbors, we began to understand the many challenges and barriers affecting the low-income neighborhood we lived in. One glaring challenge was access to fresh, quality food. We quickly realized that several areas of Pontiac are categorized as food deserts by the USDA. Food deserts are areas without fresh foods, and where residents have to rely on small convenience stores with limited options. In these stores, healthy foods, if they are available, are overpriced and often families opt for cheaper yet higher calorie but less nutritious options. In Pontiac and other food desert communities, many residents have very limited transportation and are unable to access healthy foods. Research has linked obesity, diabetes, and deficiencies in critical nutrients to low fruit and vegetable intake and unhealthy diets.

So in 2013, Micah 6 Community decided to make food access its top priority through community gardens. We began farming on a single vacant lot and have slowly expanded. This includes two greenhouses, fifty fruit trees all growing on seven formerly unused vacant lots in the community. These lots are maintained by volunteers who contribute nearly 20,000 volunteer hours a year to the gardens. Our volunteers are made up of both people in the community and volunteers from outside. Produce goes first to our neighbors. What does not get taken by neighbors, goes to our Sprout Fresh Food Store, our vegetable store we opened in our community in 2017. Sprout is a small produce operation, in the neighborhood, meant to expand food access to the greater Pontiac community.

Unmet Need: The Community Garden Expansion Project will address several critical needs in Pontiac.

- Food access/health and wellness: This project will address the food desert and the need for quality fresh fruits and vegetables. This will improve the overall health and wellness of the community.
- Employment: This project will add 3 FTE new jobs for community members.
- Transportation: This project will eliminate the need for transportation by providing fresh fruits and vegetables within walking distance for the neighborhood.
- Community Revitalization: This project will expand green space and urban farming, and replace vacant land with productive gardens.
- Neighborhood stabilization: This project will increase a sense of pride and investment by giving community members a way to work together to improve their neighborhood.

Project Summary: Impact 100 funding will be used to expand our growing space on the site which includes 4,000 square feet of hoop house space, twelve raised beds, a small hops operation and twenty fruiting trees.

Where we are (January 2020):

4,000 feet of hoop house
April to December Growing
Six Part-Time Garden Employees
No year-round Greenhouse
10,000 pounds of food annually

Where we want to be (August 2021):

6,000 feet of hoop house; 2,000 feet of Greenhouse
Year-Round Growing
Three Full-Time Garden Employees, three part-time employees
Apprenticeship Program aimed at local high schoolers
50,000 pounds of food annually

Outcome: The success of the Community Garden Expansion Project will be defined by increasing food access and eliminating the food desert through Sprout our retail location, and numerous pop-ups around the city. This project also builds community. Our neighbors volunteer in the gardens, and provide input in planning, planting and harvesting of crops. Other benefits of the project include job creation, improved food quality, increased nutrition education, increased green space, and improved public health.

Sustainability: If awarded the Impact 100 grant, Micah 6 Community will sustain the project through our retail store, Sprout Fresh Food Store, pop-ups and through contracts with other agencies. We will also seek grant funding from foundations, corporate giving programs, individuals and fundraisers.

Since we have become so successful at growing, several agencies are contracting us to provide healthy food to the people they serve. These organizations include Oakland Livingston Human Services Agency, The Baldwin Center, St Joseph Mercy Oakland Hospital, Community Housing Network, Ruth Peterson Senior Center and The Bowen Senior Center.