

Published on Axiom News (<https://axiomnews.com>)

Documentary Examines Urban Farms as Sustainable Solution to Food Insecurity

Image



[Just Roots Chicago](#), an urban farm, has been helping Chicago Illinois's [Bronzeville](#) neighbourhood flourish since 2017, through food donations, education, and Community Supported Agriculture programs where people can receive fresh produce while assisting the farm financially.

Anna Lee Ackermann shows both the need for organizations like Just Roots Chicago, and the opportunity to make a tangible difference, in [As We Are Planted](#), a documentary that Anna Lee directed and produced.

A five-second aerial shot in the documentary shows volunteers breaking down packaging at St. James Catholic Church's food pantry in Bronzeville as people line up down the block. This food pantry partnered with Just Roots in 2020 to build a new community farm to offer its clients fresh, seasonal, and culturally compatible produce.

"I was taken aback to see the number of people who are benefitting from these urban farms and food pantries to help combat food insecurity," Anna Lee says.

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The majority of the seven-minute documentary focuses on the work at the ground level, as urban farmers and food pantry coordinator Cathy Moore strive for a healthier city.

"A lot of these urban farms are small, and a lot are non-profit organizations — very locally-run farms that are really working for and with the community," Anna Lee says. "The fact that they are sustainable is very inspiring."

Anna Lee says she learned about Just Roots while attending Columbia College Chicago. Now an alumna, Anna Lee hopes *As We Are Planted* will destigmatize food insecurity by "putting a face to a situation that might seem very far off."

Just Roots Chicago turns unused lots into farms, and the twin focuses of food

security and environmental sustainability earned Anna Lee an honourable mention in the One Earth Film Fest's [Young Filmmakers Contest](#).

Sue Crothers, the contest's founding director and co-chair, says that individual actions, combined with others, can have an exponential effect.

"Choose that one thing and be passionate about it and go out there and do something," Sue says. "You might not be able to change the world, but you might be able to change one person's world."

Sue's "one thing" is amplifying environmental stewardship through film.

Winning films receive matching awards for the filmmaker and a non-profit that connects to the film's topic. "We've had non-profit organizations actually turn to our filmmakers and say, 'can you make us a film so we can elevate our work?'" Sue says.

Anna Lee says the Young Filmmakers Contest was her first film festival experience. "I really love that there is a Q and A with the showing of this film," she says. "That's so important to not only watch a film but have a conversation around it."

"We live on a finite planet, and every action has a reaction, both to us personally and to the impact that we make on the planet," Sue says, adding that her own activism began when she saw a television documentary about young seals being killed for their fur.

As Sue reviews film submissions, she sees documentary and animated films having a similar effect — a 2020 honourable mention went to *The Bambi Effect*, a film showing the continued influence of the 1930s animated movie *Bambi* on deer and deer hunting.

"We have had films that pack in a lot in under a minute," Sue says. "You can be really impactful and can influence all age groups."

For Anna Lee, film is such a powerful medium because it combines written, spoken, and visual forms. "Having almost all of our senses involved in the watching process makes film a very intimate medium in both the viewers' eyes and on the side of

whoever is featured,” she says.

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The Young Filmmakers Contest is open to youth in third grade through college graduates. Sue says there were 11 submissions the first year, and as many as 200 now. “The growth of that — to me — shows how much these young people want to be heard,” she says.

Topics are often complex — Sue says that climate change, for example, can intensify food insecurity.

Actions are often local. “Be curious,” Anna Lee says. “Expand your horizon of what you may think is going on in your community.”

“There’s a generation that are living with the consequences of the decisions made before them,” Sue says. “If they’re living with the consequences, shouldn’t they be part of the solutions? That’s why I’m so passionate about lifting up the voices of a younger generation.”