



2025 ANNUAL REPORT

Advancing a More Sustainable Memphis for All



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ABOUT US

Our Mission, Vision, and History



VISION

Engaged Communities.
Sustainable City.
A Better Memphis.

Mission

Educating youth, engaging leadership, and empowering communities to sustain a cleaner Memphis.

History

Founded in 2008, Clean Memphis inspires environmental stewardship through civic responsibility. In 2020, we pivoted toward advancing a zero-waste, circular-economy plan for Memphis and Shelby County. Today we engage leadership with data to drive policy changes; empower community leaders with tools to beautify neighborhoods; implement environmental education programs in schools; and collaborate with the food sector and businesses to reduce food waste and build a resilient local food system.

A WORD FROM OUR PRESIDENT AND CEO

Dear Friends and Supporters,

As I reflect on the past year, I am filled with gratitude for the people and partners who make our work possible. Together, we have taken bold steps toward advancing a circular economy for Memphis, one where waste is viewed not as an inevitable by-product but as a resource that can feed families, empower students, and strengthen our communities.

Advancing a circular economy. This year, thanks to your support, our vision of a circular Memphis came into sharper focus. We hosted our first ever Circular Mid-South Summit, bringing together over 200 people committed to the vision of a zero-waste city. With the support of the Circular Economy Task Force, Clean Memphis is leading the way in keeping resources in circulation and out of landfills.



Educating youth. Environmental education remains at the core of our mission. Over the past year, our educators facilitated 13,455 student interactions through classroom lessons, field experiences, and book clubs. These programs cultivate curiosity and equip students with tools to tackle environmental challenges.

Empowering communities. We forged new corporate and community partnerships and hosted 25 community workshops and tours that demystified recycling, stormwater management and waste reduction. 150 volunteers rolled up their sleeves, and we distributed five landscape equipment toolkits, giving neighborhoods the tools they need for clean-ups and beautification. Each initiative brought us closer to a more connected Memphis.

Rescuing food. With your help, Project Green Fork and its food rescue partners kept more than 300,000 pounds of wholesome food from going to waste. Seven new restaurants joined our certification program, and 43 new food donation partners stepped up to share their surplus. Each of these connections means more meals on tables and less food in the landfill.

Looking ahead, our priorities for the coming year are clear. We will grow our food rescue network, onboarding more restaurants and food donors while increasing grant support to community partners. We will expand the reach of environmental education, adapting curricula for rural communities and providing more resources for educators. We will work closely with neighborhood groups to address waste and blight, offering training, tools and support for resident-led cleanups and beautification projects. And we will advance our circular economy plan by advocating for policy changes and helping build local infrastructure for repurposing, reuse, and recycling through strategic partnerships.

Together, we can continue to transform waste into opportunity, build resilient neighborhoods and create a cleaner, more sustainable Memphis for all. Thank you for your trust, your time and your commitment to our shared vision.

With gratitude,

Nefertiti Orrin
President & Chief Executive Officer, Clean Memphis



WITH GRATITUDE

Thank You to Our Funders and Partners

CORPORATE

Blue Sky Couriers	Georgia-Pacific Cellulose	National Geographic Society	Target
Can'd Aid	International Paper	Papa John's Foundation	
FedEx	The Moore Agency	Sylvamo	

FOUNDATION & NONPROFIT ORGANIZATIONS

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Jeanne and Frank Jemison Fund	Tennessee Nonprofit Network	Williams Family Charitable Fund
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GOVERNMENT

City of Memphis Housing & Community Development	Shelby County Roads, Bridges & Engineering
City of Memphis Division of Solid Waste	Tennessee Department of Transportation
City of Memphis Storm Water	Tennessee Valley Authority
Shelby County Commission	U.S. Department of the Treasury
Shelby County Government	World Wildlife Fund



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- Hyde Family Foundation

In-Kind Sponsors:

- Corinne's Very Special Catering
- The Compost Fairy
- Get Green Recycleworks

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Presenting Sponsors:

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Gold Sponsors:

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- International Paper
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Silver Sponsors:

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- Evolve Bank
- The Kroger Co.
- The Marston Group
- Memphis Travel
- Pinnacle Financial Partners
- Shelby Electric



In-Kind Sponsors:

- The Compost Fairy
- Cordelia's Market
- Get Green Recycleworks
- Memphis Wine Society
- Mempops
- Mid-South Food Bank
- Waymar Gin House
- Wiseacre Brewing Co
- Tennessee Department of Environment and Conservation





2025 AT A GLANCE

What We Achieved Together

Sustainable Schools Initiative

- **13,455 student interactions** through hands-on environmental education programming
- **2,100 books** distributed to second and third graders to build environmental literacy beyond the classroom
- **122 teachers** engaged in sustainability education across schools
- **100% of 4th grade students in participating schools** engaged in hands-on cafeteria food waste audits
- **70%** average reduction in school cafeteria waste
- Across four MSCS elementary schools:
 - Unopened milk waste decreased by **up to 74%**
 - Opened milk waste declined by **up to 51%**
 - Plate waste dropped by **up to 47%**

Project Green Fork



- **180+ food rescue partners**, including FedExForum, the Renasant Convention Center, and Hilton Hotels
- **387,662 pounds of surplus food** rescued and diverted from the landfill
- **323,051 meals** recovered for Memphians experiencing food insecurity
- **545.42 tons of CO₂e** avoided through food diversion efforts
- **22,990,001 gallons** of water saved
- **50** Project Green Fork-certified restaurants, a **19% increase** over 2023
- **25** restaurants participated in the 901 Save the Food Challenge
- More than **250 community members** attended Love Food Hate Waste and Reharvest to raise awareness about food waste.
- **\$6,000** awarded to grassroots food rescue organizations through mini-grants, expanding operational capacity



2025 AT A GLANCE

Continued



Community Engagement

- **225 attendees** reached through **11 community workshops**, building environmental knowledge
- **15 new partners** engaged, expanding collaboration across neighborhoods and sectors
- **400+ volunteers** mobilized across community events
- **76 service hours** contributed by **31 volunteers** at the FedEx St. Jude Championship
- Launched the Toolkit Lending Library in partnership with the Memphis and Shelby County Public Library at five branches, expanding access to sustainability tools and resources



Advancing a Circular Economy

- **35 cross-sector leaders** convened as the Circular Economy Task Force to advance a zero-waste, circular economy strategy for the Mid-South
- Task Force members collaborated to shape regional priorities and plan the inaugural Circular Mid-South Summit
- **200+ attendees** at the Circular Mid-South Summit, bringing together national and regional sustainability leaders





OUR PROGRAMS: SUSTAINABLE SCHOOLS

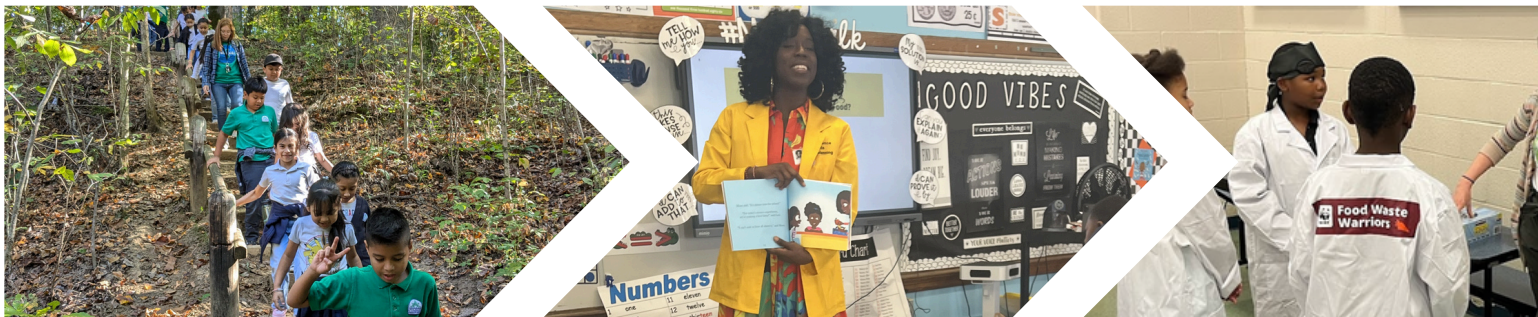
Youth Environmental Education

At Clean Memphis, we see environmental education as a long-term investment in our city's future. When students understand how systems work, from food systems to solid waste, they begin to see themselves as part of the solution. This year, that belief translated into measurable impact.

During the 2024-2025 school year, our team facilitated 13,455 student interactions, bringing hands-on environmental science directly into classrooms and cafeterias across Memphis. Students conducted food-waste audits, engaged in real-world data collection, and participated in field experiences that connected academic standards to everyday life.

Through our Environmental Book Clubs, we also strengthened literacy while expanding environmental awareness. After engaging with environmental science texts in class, more than 2,100 books were given to second and third graders at the end of the year, helping build home libraries and reinforcing the connection between environmental literacy and stewardship.

We know that lasting change happens when educators are supported. This year, 122 current and pre-service teachers participated in professional development designed to equip them with the tools they need to integrate environmental concepts into their core curriculum. These numbers represent a growing culture of environmental stewardship in our schools, where students develop critical thinking skills, teachers are equipped to lead, and sustainability becomes part of how Memphis learns, teaches, and grows.



Food Waste Warriors

Through the Food Waste Warriors initiative, our education and Project Green Fork teams engaged 100% of fourth grade students at nine Memphis-Shelby County Schools (MSCS) in hands-on cafeteria food waste audits and "Offer vs. Serve" training. We helped students understand USDA meal guidelines and empowered them to make informed choices about what they take and consume.

By pairing education with interventions, including share tables and refrigeration, participating schools achieved an average 70% reduction in cafeteria food waste. Milk, initially the most discarded item, saw some of the most dramatic improvements; across four MSCS elementary schools, unopened milk waste dropped by as much as 74%, opened milk declined up to 51%, and plate waste fell between 28% and 47%.

Beyond the numbers, students became informed decision-makers and advocates for reducing food waste, proving that when young people are equipped with knowledge and responsibility, tangible environmental impact follows.

OUR PROGRAMS: PROJECT GREEN FORK

Strengthening Memphis's Food System

In the United States, up to 42% of food goes uneaten, and here in Memphis alone, an estimated 5,000 tons of rescue-appropriate food are available each year. Through Project Green Fork (PGF), we are working alongside restaurants, hotels, venues, and hospitality partners to change how that system works.

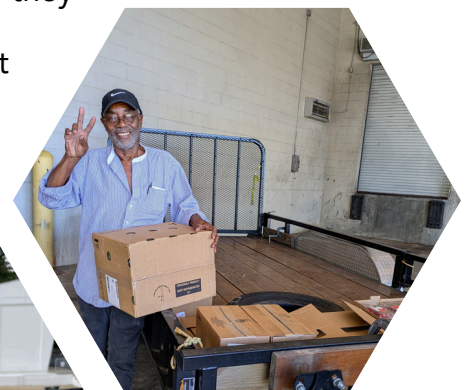
With a growing network of more than 180 partners, including FedExForum, the Renasant Convention Center, and Hilton Hotels, PGF provides sustainability certification, connects businesses to composting and recycling partners, and expands food rescue capacity across the city. This year, that collaboration led to measurable impact:

- 189,976 pounds, or 90 tons, of surplus food rescued and redirected
- The equivalent of 158,313 meals recovered for Memphians experiencing food insecurity
- 203.29 tons of CO₂e avoided and 11.26 million gallons of water saved

We also strengthened the infrastructure behind this work. Through our mini-grant program, we invested \$10,000 directly into grassroots food rescue organizations, helping expand capacity across our network. At the same time, PGF grew to 50 certified member restaurants, a 19% increase over 2023, signaling that the hospitality sector is poised to lead on sustainability.

Community awareness continues to build. 250 attendees attended Love Food Hate Waste and Reharvest to elevate the conversation around food waste, and 25 restaurants participated in the 901 Save the Food Challenge, demonstrating that sustainability and hospitality can go hand in hand.

At its core, Project Green Fork is centered on meeting businesses where they are and helping them move forward with practical, achievable solutions. We make sure that in Memphis, surplus food doesn't become waste — it becomes nourishment, impact, and shared stewardship.



OUR PROGRAMS: COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

Empowering Communities To Lead Lasting Change

When residents come together around sustainability, lasting change begins to take root. This year, we hosted 11 workshops reaching 225 participants, creating places where community members could better understand how systems work, from solid waste and stormwater to food waste and the circular economy. These sessions focused on practical, solution-oriented conversations designed to help people see where they fit into the bigger picture of sustainability and what actions they can take right now.

We also strengthened our network by engaging 15 new corporate and community partners, expanding the circle of organizations committed to advancing sustainability in Memphis. One of the most meaningful examples of this collaborative strategy is our partnership with the Memphis and Shelby County Public Library. Together, we launched the Toolkit Lending Library as part of the Library of Things collection, available at five branches including Benjamin Hooks and Whitehaven. This initiative makes tools accessible to residents in their neighborhood, removing barriers to access and encouraging repair over replacement.

Volunteers continue to power this work. At the FedEx St. Jude Championship alone, 31 volunteers contributed 76 hours in support of waste diversion efforts. Across community events throughout the year, more than 400 volunteers stepped forward to serve, demonstrating that sustainability in Memphis is driven by a community of stewards.





OUR PROGRAMS: ADVANCING A CIRCULAR ECONOMY

Redesigning How Memphis Manages Waste

A circular economy means designing systems where what we use stays in circulation as a resource. In Memphis, that starts with how we manage materials, food, and waste. That kind of shift requires coordination, collaboration, and shared commitment.

Last year, Clean Memphis convened more than 200 leaders from business, philanthropy, higher education, government, and nonprofit sectors for the Circular Mid-South Summit, a regional gathering designed to accelerate the transition to a more resilient and economically competitive circular economy.

With generous support from title sponsor FedEx, the Summit highlighted Memphis' unique opportunity to lead in circular supply chains, materials recovery, reuse, and remanufacturing — building on our strengths as a global logistics hub.

The day opened with a presentation from the Kresge Foundation, framing circularity as both an environmental imperative and an economic development strategy. The message centered on redesigning systems to reduce waste and strengthen local supply chains, critical components to building inclusive economic opportunity in the Mid-South.



Sessions focused on practical, implementable solutions across key sectors:

- Food waste reduction and composting, with insights from Kroger, The J.M. Smucker Company, Project Green Fork, and state and local partners.
- Recycling system innovation and investment, featuring national perspective from Closed Loop Partners and regional operators including Republic Services, Get Green Recycling, BDC Bizz Hub, and HD Pallet Co..
- Construction and demolition material recovery, spotlighting Rockwood Recycling.
- Electronics refurbishment and hard-to-recycle materials, with participation from Brother International and ER2
- Circular supply chain opportunities, advanced through collaboration with FedEx and Pyxera Global.

Across every session, the focus remained on closing material loops, attracting investment, strengthening infrastructure, and building cross-sector collaboration.



OUR TEAM

Our People, Advancing Sustainability



Ali Manning
*Program Consultant,
Project Green Fork*



Amber Lipford
Lead Educator



Emma Simmons
Lead Educator



Heidi Rupke
*Food Rescue
Manager*



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