

**Testimony of the
Mayor's Office of Urban Agriculture
to the New York City Committee on Economic Development
November 14, 2024**

Good afternoon, Chair Farias and members of the Committee on Economic Development. My name is Qiana Mickie and I am the executive director of the New York City Mayor's Office of Urban Agriculture, or MOUA. I am pleased to be here to testify at this hearing on the critical topic of citywide access to fresh produce. Established by Local Law 123 of 2021, MOUA is a newer office that is tasked with leading New York City's efforts to increase access to and production of fresh, healthy, locally grown food, while strengthening climate resiliency and spurring economic activity across our city. Through research, policy development, advocacy, and community outreach, MOUA aims to address the climate, health, and food disparities in our natural and built environments. We collaborate with other city agencies to advance agriculture and equity on several fronts, including community gardens and urban farms, regional food systems, workforce development, environmental justice, and building a green, resilient economy.

New York City is now home to a breadth of urban agriculture models, such as soil-based community gardens, urban farms, rooftop gardens, and non-soil, controlled environment models such as aquaponics and hydroponics. These models are built to teach through growing, foster climate resiliency, and focus on healthy food production. These are spaces of healing, respite, and wellness, in communities. All of these models and sites are critical elements of our city landscape. Infrastructure that extends the season of growing, such as greenhouses, and multipurpose buildings that provide educational centers and hubs of learning, are also a part of urban agriculture in New York City.

Access

In the post-COVID-19 pandemic era, we are all too aware of the kind of damage and deprivation wrought by supply chain disruptions, with much of the pain felt most acutely in Black, Brown, and low-income neighborhoods. One positive outcome of the pandemic has been a renewed focus and emphasis on regional and hyper-local food production. In my experience within the food and farm landscape, I can attest to the resiliency of our local and regional food systems in providing locally grown food, critical access points for larger food distributions, and the organizing of stakeholders to support community.

At MOUA, we are attempting to increase opportunities for local farmers and producers to scale their operations by providing pathways to critical certifications and procurement opportunities. In partnership with NYC Small Business Services (SBS) we have been holding

Jumpstart M/WBE Training and Certification sessions, with dozens of small food and farm businesses participating. This month we are launching our NYC School Food EATS (Enhancing Accessibility, Training, & Support) the city's first farmer/producer business procurement training. In collaboration with New York City Public Schools Office of Food and Nutrition Services and Cornell Cooperative Extension Harvest NY, this multi-month program was designed specifically for regional small-to-mid-scale food and farm businesses that are often left out of city vendor contract opportunities. This training will offer critical knowledge, best practices, and resources to minimize barriers to the New York City school food procurement process. NYC School Food EATS will strengthen the linkages within our regional food system and support historically disadvantaged farmers while increasing healthy, culturally relevant food supply in the city's cafeterias and classrooms.

Our Reimagining Farm to School in NYC initiative, now in its second school year, provides funding opportunities for local urban gardeners and farmers to increase local food access and education for public school students in the classroom and on the farm. As you will read in our annual progress report, this initiative is a two-year pilot in which New York City public school students ranging from elementary to high school grades are provided with the opportunity to build relationships with local urban farmers and learn about farm topics ranging from the seasonality of crops to the critical life cycle of food.

Affordability

MOUA is also exploring how to make local food more affordable and accessible. New York City is home to over 100 community-supported agriculture sites and other direct farm-to-consumer models. Providing resources and training to increase the number of sites and farm operations that can accept and process SNAP/EBT would provide additional opportunities for food insecure community members to leverage their SNAP benefits to purchase fresh locally grown produce. There are other benefits to utilizing SNAP. The USDA Economic Research Service has found that government programs that focus on low-income households like SNAP have a multiplier effect of up to \$2 of economic activity per dollar spent. This favorably impacts our local economies in areas including production, processing, and distribution, helping both our urban-rural food systems and food-insecure New Yorkers.

Enabling access to fresh, healthy, affordable food, particularly in disinvested neighborhoods, as well as strengthening urban-rural linkages, are top priorities of our office.

Land Use

Additionally, as mentioned in our annual progress report, we are working to enable better access to underutilized city-owned land for growers and existing and emerging small urban agriculture business enterprises. Increased land access will be critical to growing hyper-

local food production in the city and must be done strategically so as not to compete with other critical land uses such as housing. We have created an urban agriculture dashboard, which includes a mapping tool and have incorporated the Department of Citywide Administrative Services (DCAS) Local Law 48 of 2011-mandated Suitability of City-Owned and Leased Property for Urban Agriculture list. We are also in the planning stage for innovative land use agreements that would allow for a greater range of urban agriculture-based activity on City-owned land.

Production

Another way we are pursuing increased local production is through the utilization of rooftop urban agrivoltaics – the symbiotic colocation of plants and solar energy panels – to spur rooftop development for both hyper-local food production and solar energy generation. Community access will be a top priority as we create these rooftop green spaces, as evidenced by the rooftop urban agrivoltaics pilot project we will launch at a community site in Hell’s Kitchen. Many growers in the city’s urban agriculture community want to scale up their operations into potential businesses and greater economic opportunity, and we will do all we can to support them.

Introduction 693

A word about Introduction 693, which would require the Mayor’s Office of Urban Agriculture, in conjunction with relevant agencies and local community programs, to create and implement a plan to convert unused industrial areas in each of the five boroughs to sites that can host urban agriculture services, including hydroponic farming, food storage, and food distribution. As I mentioned earlier, we at MOUA are currently already engaged in an effort to map underutilized City-owned land, as well as to develop innovative land use agreements that would enable a range of urban agriculture services and activities on this land. We would be thrilled to work with you, and other Council members and community stakeholders to develop urban agriculture models and opportunities in your districts. We feel strongly that this type of collaborative effort is what is called for and would be more effective than an overall borough-based planning approach. This kind of district-based, targeted approach would not necessitate legislation such as Introduction 693, and would facilitate the sort of collaboration we feel would be most effective, going forward.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify today. We are happy to answer any questions you may have.



**MAYOR'S OFFICE OF
URBAN AGRICULTURE**
Annual Progress Report



The City of New York
Mayor Eric Adams

November 2024

Letter from the Executive Director

To my fellow New Yorkers,

Just one year after releasing New York City's first urban agriculture report, I'm excited to share the Mayor's Office of Urban Agriculture (MOUA) has made significant strides over the last 12 months in integrating urban agriculture into the city's fabric to support a greener, healthier, and more equitable New York.

As the leader of the city's efforts to increase access to and production of locally grown food, MOUA is helping to minimize the city's contributions to the climate crisis and spurring economic activity throughout the city. And our work goes beyond food access, climate, and environmental justice – we're leveraging urban innovation to foster educational and economic opportunities for community-based groups and small businesses.

This annual progress report details accomplishments the office has made over the last year in several key areas including agriculture education, economic development, data, and policy.

As we enter our third year, we will continue to integrate nature-based solutions into the city's plans to support a vibrant, more prosperous city for all New Yorkers. We encourage readers of this report to learn more about us and our ongoing activities at nyc.gov/agriculture or on social media - we're @nycurbanag on Instagram, X, and Facebook.



Qiana Mickie
Executive Director,
Mayor's Office of Urban
Agriculture

Executive Summary

Year of Progress

Since the establishment of the NYC Mayor's Office of Urban Agriculture two years ago, we have worked to meet our mission, fulfill our mandate, and achieve our goals. There have been both valuable successes and unique challenges along the way in our efforts to strengthen equity while advancing urban agriculture in New York City. We have made strides in our community engagement, data collection, and creating economic opportunities through urban agriculture.

The following will be covered in detail regarding what MOUA has accomplished this year:

- Implement Reimagining Farm to School in NYC
- Launch NYC School Food EATS
- Grow business opportunities for emerging urban agriculture & food entrepreneurs
- Strengthen stakeholder engagement and data collection within the city's urban agriculture community
- Explore and design innovative land tenure opportunities
- Integrate urban agriculture innovation into policy and programs
- Measure the impact of urban agriculture and identify models in NYC

PULSES in Urban Agriculture

EDUCATION – One of our most popular initiatives this past year was the Reimagining Farm to School in NYC initiative. Parents, teachers, and students have all indicated that urban farm and farmer engagement is the type of agriculture programming and activity that they would like to see more of in city schools.

BUSINESS DEVELOPMENT – The New York City urban agriculture community has expressed strong interest in the potential for scaling up its operations and gaining access to paid city contract opportunities.

GREEN SPACE – Now more than ever, New Yorkers are valuing their green spaces for health, respite, wellness and education, demonstrating interest in, and enthusiasm for, innovative approaches to developing agriculture spaces in New York City.



Foster Future Urban Agriculture & Climate Leaders

Initiative: Implement Reimagining Farm to School in NYC

Progress Snapshot: The Reimagining Farm to School in NYC initiative is a two-year pilot in collaboration with the New York City Public Schools Office of Food and Nutrition Services (NYCPS OFNS) and Cornell Cooperative Extension Harvest NY (CCE Harvest NY), which is now entering its final year. MOUA utilized New York State Department of Agriculture and Markets (NYSDAM) and United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) Patrick Leahy Farm to School grant funds to design and implement an equitable agriculture-based approach to resource public school students, urban gardeners, and regional food/farm businesses. New York City public school students ranging from elementary to high school grades are provided with the opportunity to build relationships with local farmers and learn directly about farm topics ranging from the seasonality of crops to the critical life cycle of food. Students learned about community gardens in their neighborhoods and were inspired to share their own food stories and recipes from their homes and families. Select school groups also participated in immersive cooking demonstrations led by a community chef, courtesy of Just Food, a food justice non-profit, that used locally grown fresh produce. The learning goes both ways for students and farmers, as farmers also go to the schools to deliver additional educational instruction and observe what students are growing in their classrooms and/or school gardens. Additionally, 16 schools were selected to receive funding to refurbish or develop their school gardens with technical assistance provided by project partner GrowNYC, an agriculture-based nonprofit.

Year Ahead

- Conduct nine school visits, seven on-farm visits, and three cooking demonstrations
- Complete school garden builds and refurbishments for 16 public schools
- Scale up the Reimagining Farm to School in NYC initiative to reach more NYCPS students and gardens

Impacts

5 urban farm visits conducted
3 classroom visits conducted
100 NYCPS students engaged
5 urban farmers engaged
16 NYCPS with gardens engaged

“ It was excellent, I was a sous chef! I helped prepare a delicious salad dressing. It was cool to look, touch, and taste all of the plants.”

– P.S. 721X student

“The Farm to School program provides P.S. 154 students with hands-on opportunities to learn about sustainability, healthy eating, and urban farming. Our students thrive when they get to plant, harvest, and taste. They are engrossed in each experience.

Their excitement is palpable! ”

– Alison Coviello, Principal, P.S. 154/Jonathan Hyatt



Strengthen Local & Cultural Food Systems

Initiative: Launch NYC School Food EATS

Progress Snapshot: NYC School Food Enhancing Accessibility, Training, & Support (NYC School Food EATS), the city's first farmer/producer business procurement training, kicked off this fall. In collaboration with NYCPS OFNS and CCE Harvest NY, the multi-month program is designed specifically for regional small-to-mid-scale food and farm businesses that are often left out of city vendor contract opportunities. The training covers critical knowledge, best practices, and resources in order to minimize barriers to the New York City school food procurement process. NYC School Food EATS aims to strengthen the linkages within our regional food system to support the sustainability of historically disadvantaged farmers while increasing healthy, culturally relevant food supply in the city's cafeterias and classrooms. The NYSDAM Farm to School grant program provided funding for NYC School Food EATS.



NYC EATS

is a MOUA initiative in collaboration with other city agencies to build stronger connections between New York State/New York City farmers and New Yorkers through healthy local food access, trainings, and resource sharing. NYC School Food EATS is the first series to launch.

Year Ahead

- Implement NYC School Food EATS training
- Develop other NYC EATS training programs

Impacts

9 small-to-mid-scale food and farm businesses in the first cohort

3

Cultivating Economic Development

Initiative: Grow business opportunities for emerging urban agriculture & food entrepreneurs

Progress Snapshot: In New York City, 89 percent of businesses are small businesses with fewer than 20 employees. Increasing workforce and green jobs in the city's food, climate, and urban agriculture sectors will increase opportunities for New Yorkers who want to transition their passions into starting small businesses and make New York City stronger together. MOUA works to foster economic development opportunities for emerging entrepreneurs to improve pathways to city procurement and to reduce barriers to useful business certification programs like the NYC Minority and Women-owned Business Enterprise (M/WBE). In collaboration with the NYC Department of Small Business Services (SBS), MOUA conducted free M/WBE Jumpstart Training and Certification Workshops for small city-based farmers and producers. MOUA will continue its interagency efforts to explore and create new opportunities in land use agreements, food procurement contracts, and urban agriculture maintenance plans. These efforts will foster more paid opportunities for emerging and qualified businesses and generate climate-smart impact throughout the city.

Year Ahead

- Continue to conduct free M/WBE Training & Certification Jumpstart Workshops in collaboration with SBS
- Develop outreach strategy to increase number of eligible participants in sessions
- Collaborate with relevant city agencies to develop climate and urban agriculture-based procurement and maintenance contracts

Impacts

3 SBS/MOUA Jumpstart Sessions

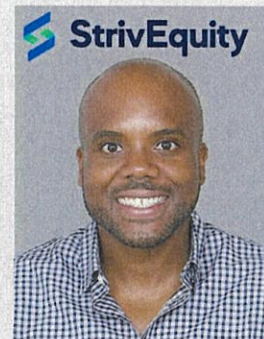
47 firms participating

5 businesses M/WBE certified

9 food and farm small businesses in pipeline

“The MOUA/SBS Jumpstart sessions were instrumental in helping StrivEquity Consulting LLC achieve M/WBE certification and secure a city contract. This support has been crucial to our collaboration with MOUA and NYCPS OFNS on the Reimagining Farm to School in NYC Initiative, where we engage historically disadvantaged farmers to enhance local food procurement for NYC schools. I highly recommend the Jumpstart pathway for small business owners looking to elevate their business.”

– David DeVaughn



Bolster Existing Community Gardens and Urban Farms

Initiative: Strengthen stakeholder engagement and data collection within the city's urban agriculture community

Progress Snapshot: MOUA completed the initial phase of urban agriculture data collection strategy. The goal is to call attention to the importance of urban agriculture data and to measure health, food, and climate benefits in the city and the U.S. MOUA is developing a community-based research data collection tool and information hub that will support the office's efforts to gather, observe, and report findings. (To learn more about MOUA's efforts to collect urban agriculture data, go to page 12). MOUA will also strengthen our grassroots engagement with state and federal governmental offices such as NYSDAM, USDA Farm Service Agency (FSA), USDA Natural Resources Conservation Services (NRCS), and USDA Office of Urban Agriculture and Innovative Production (OUAIP), aiming to increase awareness and access to federal resources and technical assistance for city land stewards and producers.

Impacts

80+ panels, community events, and other outreach conducted to lift up the critical importance of NYC urban agriculture

Urban Agriculture Grant Opportunities



USDA People's Garden Initiative

USDA and Just Food will award funding up to \$10,000, to New York City community gardens. Gardens that have previously not applied for, or received, similar funding are encouraged to apply.

Deadline: 12/01/2023



KidsGardening Youth Garden Grant 2024

Fifty organizations will be awarded \$500 in funding and a collection of gardening supplies for their youth garden program.

Deadline: 12/15/2023

Social media post from the seasonal MOUA Funding Roundup launched this year.

Year Ahead

- Launch NYC Urban Agriculture Explorer Hub in Fall 2024
- Launch NYC's first-ever Urban Agriculture Data Day event in January 2025



City Land Tenure & Activity

Initiative: Explore and design innovative land tenure opportunities

Progress Snapshot: This year, MOUA completed Phase 1 of its land tenure and activity research. In the initial phase, we began to explore existing citywide land inventory datasets, new agriculture-based maintenance contracts feasibility, and regulation review. We expanded the initiative to include commercial and city-owned building rooftops as potential development areas for the co-location of food production and solar energy generation using agrivoltaics models in 2024. (To learn more about agrivoltaics, go to page 10).

Impacts **95k+** Underutilized city-owned land parcels mapped¹

To increase and protect greenspaces, we are developing an urban agriculture criterion to assess the feasibility of climate-smart activities like food production, stormwater absorption, carbon sequestration through soil and solar adoption on underutilized sites. This criterion will also help inform new land use agreements and urban agriculture maintenance plans that can create green jobs, workforce development, and educational opportunities in the city.

Year Ahead

- Identify underutilized land parcels for scaled food production and other commercial activity
- Identify underutilized land parcels for urban agriculture and other climate mitigation projects
- Develop new urban agriculture-based maintenance contracts and procurement pathways



¹ [NYC Open Data for DCAS LL48-2011 dataset utilized.](#)

Climate-Smart & Innovative Urban Agriculture

Initiative: Integrate urban agriculture innovation into policy and programs

Progress Snapshot: MOUA continued to explore opportunities for intra-agency collaborations to advance urban agriculture priorities in city, state, and federal policy. MOUA is embarking on a pilot project focused on developing New York City rooftops with agrivoltaics - the co-location of solar energy and plants - for both food production and sustainable energy generation on rooftops. We are exploring both private community partner and city site approaches to identify sites such as New York City schools, cultural institutions, and other city buildings. Our community site rooftop urban agrivoltaics pilot was entered into the C40 Reinventing Cities global competition, in which professional multi-disciplinary teams compete to transform underutilized sites in cities into exemplars of sustainability and climate resilience. MOUA also worked with NYC Department of City Planning (DCP) and City Council legislative staff to inform urban agriculture recommendations for the City of Yes for Economic Opportunity zoning initiative, which allows for a greater breadth of urban agriculture business development. City of Yes for Economic Opportunity was approved by the City Council in June.

MOUA met with multiple state elected representatives and spoke at the New York State Capitol on Earth Day Lobby Day to advocate for increased free water infrastructure in growing green spaces. On the federal side, MOUA worked with U.S. Senator Debbie Stabenow's (D-MI) legislative staff and stakeholders, to provide policy recommendations for the upcoming Farm Bill. MOUA met with representatives from USDA agencies such as NRCS and FSA to explore increasing green infrastructure, conservation practices, and technical assistance for New York City's gardens and farms. MOUA delivered testimony to the New York City Council on a range of urban agriculture topics including data collection and land tenure. Additionally, MOUA began research on climate mitigation approaches such as carbon sequestration techniques that utilize silica-based rock dust soil amendments.

Year Ahead

- Ongoing advocacy for climate-smart agriculture, small farm viability, urban agriculture, and innovative production in the future Farm Bill
- Launch and develop urban agrivoltaics pilot project at community site
- Continue to identify city sites for future urban agrivoltaics projects
- Kickoff MOUA/CCE rock dust urban trials in underutilized land parcels
- Continue to collaborate with DCP and other agencies to gather community engagement data and inform city recommendations on urban agriculture, climate resiliency, and food systems



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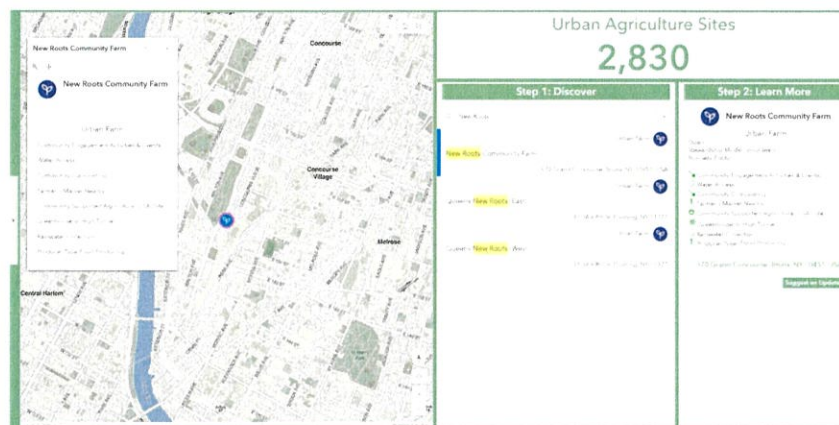
“Great day in Albany with the Mayor’s Office of Climate & Environmental Justice, legislators, and 27 environmental organizations for Earth Day Lobby Day! We are here to advocate for innovative nature-based solutions that can address costly impacts of climate change while increasing food production and climate resiliency in our neighborhoods.”

– Qiana Mickie

Cultivating NYC Urban Agriculture Data & Research

Initiative: Measure the impact of urban agriculture and identify models in NYC

Progress Snapshot: MOUA completed Phase 1 of its urban agriculture data collection strategy. MOUA developed, built, and will launch a beta version of the urban agriculture data map and dashboard, the MOUA Explorer Hub. The hub will utilize existing datasets for school gardens, urban farms, and community gardens and plans to include other models in the future. It is scheduled for public release on the MOUA website in Winter 2024. MOUA will continue to engage stakeholders to help inform its urban agriculture data effort from collection to publishing, through varied community engagement activities in the coming year. Ongoing engagement like events, field visits, and interactive tools will support MOUA's endeavor to build new metrics for urban agriculture and share data to demonstrate its impact.



Impact

2,830 urban agriculture sites such as urban farms, community, school, and learning gardens are currently identified in the MOUA Explorer Hub

Year Ahead

- MOUA will kick off the new year with the first Urban Agriculture Data Day, convening in early 2025
 - Roll out additional datasets for urban agriculture models to be included in the MOUA Explorer Hub map and urban agriculture data collection effort
- Continue and broaden stakeholder field research and build new metrics



RESCUING FOOD FOR NYC

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Testimony of Keith Carr, Senior Manager, Policy and Government Relations, City Harvest

**New York City Council Committee on Economic Development Oversight Hearing – Citywide
Access to Fresh Produce**

**Int. 0693-2024 - Requiring the office of urban agriculture to create and implement a plan to
convert unused industrial areas to urban agriculture sites.**

Good afternoon, Chairperson Farias and members of the Committee on Economic Development. Thank you for holding this timely hearing on how to best support the Office of Urban Agriculture and aggregate the immense potential for urban agriculture in New York City by utilizing industrial areas. My name is Keith Carr, and I am the Senior Manager of Policy and Government Relations at City Harvest.

I am writing today to state our continued concern for those hungry in the communities we serve. As the pandemic and economic crisis continue to loom and at a time of uncertainty regarding support at the federal level, we look to the city to remember the many low-income New Yorkers striving to balance food security, personal well-being, and costly housing. The need for emergency food in New York City is staggering and by itself it cannot meet the needs of all hungry and food insecure New Yorkers, it is important that we address hunger through well-rounded approaches that not only include emergency food programs, but supports hyperlocal community led efforts for to increase food access and resiliency such as urban gardens.

A robust, inclusive and comprehensive urban agriculture plan for our city can serve a key role in addressing this and providing the quality, variety and access to affordable nutritionally dense produce and eggs available in the communities that we serve while alleviating the demand on emergency food programs and support emergency food providers. Especially at a time when programs are stretched thin, and the public's attention is drawn towards resiliency beyond the economic recovery.

Background

City Harvest is New York's first and largest food rescue organization, collecting high-quality, nutritious food that would otherwise go to waste to help provide free food for millions of New Yorkers experiencing food insecurity. Since our founding in 1982, we have rescued more than one billion pounds of fresh, nutritious food and delivered it—free of charge—to hundreds of food pantries, soup kitchens, community partners, and our own Mobile Markets across the five boroughs.

This year, we will rescue and distribute more than 81 million pounds of nutritious food to our neighbors in need. By redirecting that food to families, we will also prevent the equivalent of more than 24 million kilograms of CO₂ from entering the atmosphere. City Harvest also works alongside our community partners to build their capacity, expand nutrition education, and advocate for systems change through effective public policy.

Urban Agriculture Can Improve Food Security

We at City Harvest know we cannot tackle hunger in NYC alone, especially in the face of rising costs and steadily increasing need. We look to both public and private partners to collaborate on this critical issue. Just as we partner with upstate and local agriculture to provide food for hungry New Yorkers, the aggregation of hyper-local urban farming and a significant collaboration with those growers would provide even more support to the emergency feeding partners we serve.

NYC has more than 14,000 acres of unused rooftop and the neighborhood of East New York, Brooklyn alone has more than 45,000 square feet of publicly owned, unused land. An organized and determined approach to a comprehensive and inclusive plan to aggregate traditional soil based, rooftop and closed environment urban growing, could greatly expand healthy foods availability to food insecure communities. Increasing fresh fruits, vegetables, and animal products (fish, honey and eggs) in those communities will improve local food security and nutrition and overall health.

Urban farming has grown by more than 30 percent in the United States in the past 30 years. It has been estimated that urban agriculture can meet 15 to 20 percent of global food demand.

In Cuba, over 300,000 urban farms and gardens produce about 50 percent of the island's fresh produce supply, along with 39,000 tons of meat and 216 million eggs. Most Cuban urban farmers reach yields of 44 pounds per square yard per year. 1,200 acres of land would produce 88 million pounds of vegetables—enough to provide 220 pounds per year per person to almost 400,000 residents.

The communities that we serve typically have poor traditional retail access points to fresh fruits and vegetables, particularly to green leafy vegetables and usually there is very little variety among the options. Affordability is always a challenge and as the retail landscape in many gentrifying areas improves, the retailers' prices often increase, and they begin stocking the shelves with items that may be unfamiliar to long-time residents.

A common misconception for those in poor communities is that healthy food is too expensive, and residents believe that they can't afford to eat healthily. This belief is substantiated by store operators who often inflate prices on produce items that are typically inferior in quality and freshness.

The development of more farm stands, food box distributions, CSAs and farmers' markets at community gardens, urban farms and hydronic farms will provide an increase to the variety and availability of green leafy vegetables and other produce that is an affordable (and in many cases) free alternative to traditional retail outlets. Cooking demos and tastings at these sites are very effective in encouraging customers to purchase new items and cook them in a more healthy way.

Other benefits to communities that face food insecurity include:

- More access to and consumption of healthier green leafy vegetables and produce.
- Cost savings frees more funds available in family budgets to purchase other items at supermarkets.
- Less reliance on food pantries especially during the growing season.
- Increase knowledge of where their food comes from and the benefits of hyper locally grown food

The Phoenix Community Garden (Ocean Hill, Brooklyn), 462 Halsey Community Farm (Bed Stuy), Hattie Carthan Community Farm (Bed Stuy), La Finca Del Sur (Bronx) and The Campaign Against Hunger's Saratoga Farm (Bed Stuy and Far Rockaway) are exemplary examples of urban agriculture's power to not just feed residents but to also educate them and create community, stimulate the local economy and develop jobs. I encourage you and the members of this committee to visit these farms and others.

Any plan for urban agriculture in this city must include proposals to provide for and aggregate urban growing by or in support of emergency feeding programs.

For the past several years, successful urban NYC rooftop grower Gotham Greens has become a fantastic partner and food donor for City Harvest's work. In FY24 they donated 64,215 pounds of fresh, sustainably grown salad greens.

Increasing urban ag "tech" and closed environment growing like hydroponic and aquaponic farms represents an exciting opportunity to not only feed New York and improve food access but to also expand opportunities for job creation and employment in an exciting new job sector as well as new business development and ownership for the residents in those industrial areas, as proposed by this legislation. The community must be included in planning and at the center of any economic development plans and the plan must include technical assistance and grant funding for those interested in pursuing business development.

While this is exciting, we cannot let the potential influx of speculation of a new lucrative industry and funding supersede the importance of or neglect those community gardeners who sowed and nurtured the community growing movement over the last 40 years.

As the cost of living in this City is becoming a harsh reality and moving more and more of our neighbors into food insecurity and towards the pantry line we cannot deny the important role that urban ag plays and can play to fill the gap as many families struggled to put healthy food on their tables.

Conclusion

City Harvest remains optimistic welcome continued opportunities to work with the Council and the Administration to support genuine efforts to increase healthy food access and alleviate hunger for all New Yorkers. Food insecurity is not only destructive on a personal level; the ripple effect can cause lasting social and economic damage throughout the community. Thank you for your earnest determination to address the pervasive hunger that continues to threaten our great City.



STRONGER TOGETHER

Testimony Submitted By

Cypress Hills Local Development Corporation % East New York Farms!

613 New Lots Ave, Brooklyn, NY 11207

For the Committee on Economic Development Hearing on Intro 0693

November 14th, 2024

Dear City Council Members,

On behalf of East New York Farms, I am writing to express our strong support for citywide initiatives that increase access to fresh produce through urban agriculture. Our community based nonprofit is dedicated to improving food security by promoting local sustainable agriculture and community led economic development in East New York, Brooklyn. We see this legislation as a crucial step in making fresh, healthy food accessible to all communities within New York City, proven by the work we and similar organizations are already doing.

Access to fresh fruits and vegetables is essential for public health, yet many of our communities lack easy access to these healthy foods. By converting unused industrial spaces into urban agriculture sites, we believe that this bill can bring fresh produce closer to those who need it most, effectively addressing food insecurity across communities. These spaces can also host composting sites, supporting sustainable and local waste management.

Our organization has seen first hand throughout the years how access to urban agricultural programming encourages an improved quality of life, relationship with food and nature, and economic opportunities. Gardeners of East New York can sell their produce at our Farmers' Market, generating income for their hard labor and excess produce. The youth we employ steward our farm, as well as surrounding gardens, encouraging them to interact with greenspace and ecology.

A city-wide effort in bringing urban agriculture to vacant or underutilized spaces would clearly bring multi-faceted benefits to the communities that deserve them. Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

East New York Farms! Staff

718-649-7979 | info@ucceny.org

Testimony Submitted by
Leah Kabran Eden, Executive Director, Equity Advocates
Before the New York City Council Oversight Hearing on
Citywide Access to Fresh Produce
November 14, 2024

My name is Leah Kabran Eden, Executive Director, Equity Advocates. Thank you to Chair Amanda Farías and the other members of the Committee on Economic Development for holding today’s oversight hearing on access to fresh produce and urban agriculture.

Equity Advocates’ mission is to build the capacity of food justice leaders from across New York State to advocate collectively to dismantle food inequity through policy and systems change. We accomplish this through policy development, advocacy education and training, and coalition leadership. Since March 2020 we have convened and acted as the backbone for the [NYC Food Policy Alliance](#), a multi-sector group of 60+ food system stakeholders from across New York, including frontline CBOs directly impacted by food insecurity, that work together to identify and advocate for public policies and funding that not only respond to our current economic and hunger crises, but also address the ongoing vulnerabilities and injustices of the food system.

Growing spaces such as gardens, community land trusts, and urban farms are critical green spaces that provide benefits including increased access to and production of locally grown fresh food, minimize contributions to the climate crisis, education, promote community well-being, plant biodiversity, lessening air pollution, mitigating stormwater run-off and drive local economic activity and more.

Int 0693-2024

We support Int 0693-2024, which would require the Mayor’s Office of Urban Agriculture, in partnership with relevant agencies and local community organizations, to develop and implement a plan to transform underutilized industrial areas in each of the five boroughs into sites for urban agriculture. These sites would support essential services like hydroponic farming, food storage, and food distribution.

Currently, local organizations and businesses exist that are already actively working to create these types of sites, so it’s critical they are included in developing this plan, not just being recipients of the outcome. Early and meaningful community engagement is not just valuable, but should be mandatory. While the bill suggests collaboration with these stakeholders, we recommend strengthening this commitment by requiring the final plan to include a list of all agencies and organizations consulted during its creation. This would ensure transparency and accountability.

Some efforts to establish urban agriculture sites are already underway, but they lack adequate City resources and funding. We are pleased that the bill emphasizes the role of the Office in not only

identifying potential sites but also “facilitating or funding means to convert the sites to hydroponic farming, urban farming, aquaponics, rooftop farming, food production, food distribution, food storage or food hubs.” Once this legislation is passed, we hope that the FY26 City Budget will include specific funding to support these goals.

Office of Urban Agriculture

Before the 2021 passage of Local Law 121 and Local Law 123 mandating the establishment of a Mayor's Office of Urban Agriculture and an Urban Agriculture Advisory Board, there was no formal mechanism for the urban agriculture community to provide input into City policy or funding decisions. The establishment of the new Office of Urban Agriculture (MOUA) housed within the Office of Long-Term Planning and Sustainability (OLTPS) has been a great step forward and we encourage the City Council push for allocating of additional funding for the MOUA to maintain appropriate levels of staffing and increase transparency about Office goals and activities among the community of urban agriculture practitioners. Further, we encourage the use of funding to create a position dedicated to ongoing, intentional community engagement to inform the urban agriculture advisory's development of a set of recommendations as outlined in Local Law 123.

Local Law 123 mandates “The mayor shall establish an urban agriculture advisory board to advise the director, the mayor and the council on issues relating to urban agriculture.” And yet, the MOUA has yet to publicly appoint and announce the members of the Urban Agriculture Advisory Board. In “Cultivating Urban Agriculture” New York City's first urban agriculture report released in October 2023 states: “The board is currently in development and expected to be fully appointed later this year.” We urge the MOUA to finalize the appointment and publicly release the 13 members of the Advisory Board as well as develop its own rules of procedure, which shall include a procedure or mechanism by which members of the public may make submissions to the board as outlined in Local Law 123. This will serve to strengthen equitable and inclusive urban agriculture governance in New York City.

The Mayor's Office of Urban Agriculture (MOUA) published an informative report in October 2023 on its efforts and future goals. We further submit the following recommendations based on their priorities to bolster urban agriculture, support the next generation of farmers, and foster long-term resiliency and economic opportunity in the food system:

Bolster existing community gardens and urban farms. (MOUA Priority 2)

There is a critical lack of City investment through grant funding or programming to effectively support urban agriculture and gardens. Particularly lack of resources to ensure easy and equitable access to land, healthy soil and clean water sources. We urge the City to appropriately fund GreenThumb in the FY26 City Budget to support the hiring of additional Community Engagement Coordinators, seasonal staff members and to increase the distribution of resources, including the delivery of compost, topsoil, and lumber, for community gardeners.

To support community gardens and farms that are not under Greenthumb jurisdiction (and therefore do not receive support through GreenThumb), the newly established Mayor's Office of Urban Agriculture should allocate funding and resources to address gardeners' water access needs and costs, including hoses, contractors to set up water access, irrigation tools, rainwater catchment systems, maintain water systems, backflow prevention, water system inspections, turning water off and on, plumbing issues, soil testing, and more.

With this in mind, we express deep concern about the potential impact of Executive Order 43 requiring city agencies to review city-owned and controlled land, including land held by NYC Parks, for potential housing development sites. While we understand the critical need for affordable housing in our city, we support the call from Green Guerillas, LUNGS (Loisaida United Neighborhood Gardens) and the New York City Community Garden Coalition urging the Administration to release a clear directive that reaffirms the protection of community gardens and ensures that any land review process fully considers the irreplaceable value these spaces bring to our city. Community gardens are not vacant lots; they are vibrant, thriving hubs that contribute to food security, climate resilience, and the overall well-being of our city's residents.

To support both green space and affordable housing, the Administration should support the Citywide Community Land Trust Initiative, prioritizing the notion that moving public land with insecure tenure to trust land will strengthen land security and sovereignty and prioritize access to lands for people who have deep and historic community connections, especially BIPOC farmers, growers and community gardens. The citywide CLT discretionary funding initiative has helped catalyze CLT organizing, education, training and technical assistance. Public land must be used for public good, and be reserved for CLTs that provide for meaningful community control. It is also critical to raise awareness that CLTs can be utilized for commercial urban agriculture. We believe that this embodies the ability to balance local land control and long-term, stewarded development that addresses changing community needs. Supporting both Community-owned businesses and Community-controlled land together is part of an effort to democratize economic development in NYC's food system.

Empower students to become climate and urban agriculture stewards through their experiences in gardens and classrooms. (MOUA Priority 4)

We applaud the Administration for its release of “Prioritizing Food Education in Our Public Schools: A Path to Developing a Healthy Next Generation.” a comprehensive roadmap to improving food education in New York City’s public school system. A comprehensive approach to food education should create hands-on opportunities for students to learn about the larger food system itself — the production, processing, distribution, retail, consumption, and post-consumption of food. When school gardens become classrooms and spaces for students to both build knowledge about healthy eating and have access to consuming healthy food in schools everyone wins. We encourage the Administration to allocate dedicated funds towards school garden infrastructure into future budgets to further support the nutrition education expansion. Currently funding can be used for staffing and programming but not for garden creation and infrastructure. It is valuable that the expansion allows for external nonprofits to bring supplies to support on site cooking lessons (burners, pots, etc.) but it is not possible for partners to bring in gardens - they need to be on site. Enabling funding for school garden infrastructure and build-out will further fuel the momentum being built around food and nutrition education in schools and provide site-based, hands-on opportunities for environmental, science, and food justice education in schools.

Grow business opportunities for emerging urban agriculture & food entrepreneurs. (MOUA Priority 7)

There is great power and opportunity within NYC’s urban agriculture community to build socio-economic opportunities and improve wealth outcomes for NYC residents. We are heartened by the Office of Urban Agriculture’s effort to create opportunities for urban agriculture and food entrepreneurs. In particular the initiative to make gaining Minority/Women Owned Business Enterprises (M/WBE) certification easier through launching the Urban Agriculture M/WBE Training and Certification Program with NYC Small Business Services can support business development in the food and agriculture sector have been positive.

We encourage the City to continue its support of the Good Food Purchasing Program initiative and continue exploring supports needed and implementing pipelines for urban farmers and growers to access procurement contracts.

To further grow economic opportunities for food entrepreneurs and growers, we urge the City to create a new Food Justice Fund to allocate \$5 million towards community-led projects to grow food justice and build wealth in BIPOC and low-income communities. In Food Forward NYC, the Mayor’s Office of Food Policy calls for the establishment of a Food Justice Fund. We urge the City to invest in this program at \$5 Million and offer grants for both planning and implementation projects serving high need areas identified by Racial Equity Task Force. Funding would be allocated directly to community food organizations historically serving NYC residents with a demonstrated history of meeting the cultural and food needs of their communities. Types of projects funded under this pilot that support the intersection of urban agriculture and economic development could include, but not be limited to:

- Worker Ownership: activities may include establishing or providing technical assistance for worker cooperatives, Employee Stock Ownership Plan (ESOP) and other employee-ownership models within the food system. Providing access to capital for employee ownership models in the food systems is a key strategy to build community ownership within the local food system, especially in BIPOC communities that have historically had low rates of business establishment by residents.
- Strengthen Food Systems and Supply Chain Infrastructure: activities may include creating or expanding community kitchen programs, affordable kitchen and processing space, improving efficiency in food distribution; technical assistance to support MWBE from participating in the City's procurement contracts; local or climate-friendly food production or procurement; food recovery and waste management; support for support community food hub models, and community-owned food retail to leverage existing and growing community-owned food, health, farming and retail infrastructures; and data/technology projects.
- Growing Food System Career Pathways: activities may include community based culinary training and workforce development opportunities to support regional rural and urban agriculture enterprises, especially for youth and BIPOC farmers, to create a pipeline of urban farming and food systems career opportunities.

Thank you for your time. To follow up, you can contact me at: Leah Kabran Eden, Equity Advocates, Leah@nyequityadvocates.org.

Int 0693-2024 Testimony

Farm School NYC in Support of Int 0693-2024

Farm School NYC is a non-profit organization in New York City. We focus on teaching urban agriculture skills to aspiring urban growers and farmers. Our work is rooted in food justice and sovereignty to address inequality and inequity within the food system. The points, topics and concerns that were brought up during the hearing are concerns we've heard voiced by our students, alumni and extended ecosystem. Lack of access to land and land tenure, barriers to start up capital to start a farm and/or maintain a community garden and the prioritization of community feedback from those growing food in New York City, are just some of the common concerns of urban growers and farmers. Securing industrial land for urban agriculture use, can be a stepping stone to providing secure land to farmers and urban land stewards to grow food. There is a growing need and want for a local and equity food system here in New York City. With ample aspiring farmers and growers looking for opportunities and access to put their agriculture skills to work. Thank you City Council for your consideration on this bill.

Sincerely,

Farm School NYC

Testimony Provided by
Iyeshima Harris - Ouedraogo, Director of Advocacy & Programs, Green Guerillas
For the Committee on Economic Development Hearing
on Int. 693

November 14 , 2024

Thank you, Chairwoman Frías and members of the Committee on Economic Development, for the opportunity to submit testimony today. My name is Iyeshima Harris-Ouedraogo, Director of Advocacy & Programs at Green Guerillas and a dedicated community gardener. Green Guerillas is a non-profit organization that has supported New York City's community gardeners and activated youth in the food justice movement for over 50 years.

At Green Guerillas, we lead the Council of Gardeners, a coalition that unites community gardeners across New York City. We know that community gardens are more than green spaces; they are essential to the social, economic, and environmental health of our communities. However, gardeners continue to face significant challenges that threaten the longevity and sustainability of these spaces. We believe it is time for the City to invest in protecting and uplifting community gardens as crucial assets in our neighborhoods.

Challenges Facing Community Gardeners:

- **Declining Membership and Engagement:**
Community gardens have historically relied on a dedicated core of gardeners, often older adults, to maintain these green spaces. However, due to aging populations, declining mobility, and socioeconomic factors, fewer new members, especially younger individuals, are joining or staying involved. The COVID-19 pandemic intensified these challenges, creating a generational gap that threatens the continuity of these spaces. Many young people face economic pressures that limit their ability to volunteer or contribute to garden upkeep, making it difficult to attract and retain members who could carry on the work.
- **Financial Constraints and Lack of Resources:**
Community gardeners face substantial financial burdens to maintain their spaces. Although GreenThumb and other nonprofits like Green Guerillas provide some support, the scale is inadequate to cover the needs of over 550 gardens. Gardeners often purchase materials such as soil, tools, and plants out of their own pockets. Membership dues alone are insufficient to support these expenses. This financial strain hinders gardens from achieving their full potential, limiting their capacity to serve as community resources.
- **Environmental Health and Sanitation Challenges:**
With new housing developments often encroaching on garden spaces, issues like rodent infestations and illegal dumping are becoming more prevalent. These problems not only disrupt gardening activities but also pose health risks to gardeners and visitors. While

programs like the DOHMH Rat Academy provide training and some resources, they are not comprehensive or widely available. Additionally, increased soil testing and pest control services are urgently needed to ensure that gardens remain safe spaces for food production and recreation. However, consistent support for soil remediation and pest control is lacking.

- **Risk of Development and Lack of Permanent Protection:**

Despite existing license agreements with GreenThumb, most community gardens are vulnerable to displacement due to development pressures, especially in high-demand areas. Executive Order 43 highlighted this risk by directing city agencies to identify land for housing development, which could threaten community gardens located on city-owned land. Community gardeners lack assurances that these agreements will protect them long-term, leading to uncertainty and anxiety about the future of their spaces.

- **Feeling Overlooked and Undervalued:**

Despite decades of service, community gardeners feel that their contributions are undervalued by the City. Many have invested years in nurturing these spaces, providing food, green space, and educational opportunities, yet their needs are often overlooked in favor of other development priorities. Community gardeners seek acknowledgment of their work and a clear commitment from the City to protect and invest in these spaces, including dedicating a portion of the city budget to support green spaces.

Proposed Solutions:

- **Establish Permanent Legal Protections for Community Gardens:**

We urge the City to enact legislation or amendments to the GreenThumb license agreement that would ensure permanent protection for community gardens, shielding them from future development. By safeguarding these green spaces, the City can demonstrate a commitment to environmental justice, food security, and community well-being.

- **Create a Garden Equity Fund through a New Speaker's Initiative:**

Establish a fund that empowers garden groups with direct access to financial resources through a streamlined application and reporting process. This Garden Equity Fund could address the funding gaps that currently force gardeners to cover essential costs out of pocket, fostering equity and sustainability for underserved gardens.

- **Increase Investment in Youth Employment and Green Job Opportunities:**

Expand funding for initiatives like A Greener NYC, which creates opportunities for young people to gain experience in environmental stewardship, urban agriculture, and advocacy within community gardens. By investing in green job programs, the City can attract younger generations to gardening and help cultivate a new wave of urban farmers and garden advocates.

- **Strengthen DOHMH and DSNY Partnerships to Address Environmental Health Needs:**

Allocate additional funding to the Get Stuff Clean initiative, expanding the DOHMH Rat Academy's reach and enabling more effective pest control in gardens impacted by development and illegal dumping. Enhanced collaboration between DSNY, DOHMH, and

GreenThumb can support gardeners in creating clean, safe, and healthy green spaces for their communities.

Concerns Regarding Int. 693

The Council of Gardeners, representing NYC's community gardening network, has several concerns regarding Int. 693, which aims to repurpose underutilized industrial land for urban agriculture. We support initiatives that expand urban agriculture, but the following issues require attention:

- **Definition**

This bill fails to fully define Urban Agriculture. The bill mentions "convert[-ing] the sites to hydroponic farming, urban farming, aquaponics, rooftop farming, food production, food distribution, food storage or food hubs," but it makes no mention of community gardens. Within the Mayor's Office of Urban Agriculture 2023 report community gardens are highlighted as an integral part of the fabric of urban agriculture in the city. This raises the question as to how community gardens are being defined or whether they are being included in this legislation.

- **Funding & Resources**

Community gardens are already robust sites of urban agriculture activity and workforce development, yet these sites are underfunded by the city. They lack important protections that would preserve them as public, green spaces in perpetuity. They lack resources in environmental remediation such as adequate soil testing and improvement. They lack critical infrastructure and leadership development investments. Given the stark realities facing our city's existing hubs of urban agriculture activity, how will the newly proposed urban agriculture sites created by this legislation be adequately funded, protected and managed? If a plan is in place or in process to address the challenges pertaining to these new sites, we ask that community gardens be similarly considered for needed economic and environmental resource investments to enable them to more effectively shore up food security across the city.

- **Environmental and Health Risks of Converting Industrial Land:**

We agree that there are significant environmental concerns around converting former industrial sites into agriculture areas due to the risk of soil contamination and want to emphasize the importance of the bill's proposed environmental assessments. Without thorough environmental assessments, gardening on such land could pose health risks. Incorporating comprehensive soil testing and remediation into Int. 693 would ensure that any new sites are safe for agricultural use. We urge the city to share details on how environmental protections will be put into place. What environmental safeguards will be made? Who will ensure that they are adequate and implemented correctly so as to prevent further harm from industrial pollutants? And who will pay for the needed remediations?

- **Finally, we urge community involvement in decision-making.** Int. 693 does not mandate community engagement in the planning and implementation of new urban agriculture projects. This oversight could result in top-down decisions that fail to consider the

perspectives of local residents. Including a requirement for community consultation would ensure that these voices are part of the process.

We advocate for amendments to Int. 693 that secure existing gardens, support community engagement, and ensure equitable resource distribution.

Community gardens are indispensable to the vibrancy and well-being of New York City. As our city contemplates the future of urban agriculture, it is essential to prioritize and protect existing community gardens, which have fostered resilience, sustainability, and community connection for decades. We ask the City to join us in valuing these spaces by committing to permanent protections and policies that ensure gardens thrive for generations to come.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Iyeshima Harris

Director of Advocacy & Programs, Green Guerillas

iyeshima@greenguerillas.org



Testimony submitted by:
Laurie M. Tisch Center for Food, Education & Policy,
Teachers College, Columbia University
tischfoodcenter@tc.columbia.edu

For the Committee on Economic Development - Citywide Access to Fresh Produce
November 14th, 2024

Good afternoon and thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony to the Committee on Economic Development. As residents of New York City, and staff and students of the Laurie M. Tisch Center for Food, Education & Policy at Teachers College, Columbia University, we are testifying in support of urban agriculture and citywide access to fresh produce.

We are joined by members of our Food Ed Hub, a coalition uplifted and strengthened by the City Council's support over the years. The Hub works to provide equitable food and nutrition education for all NYC students and educators. We are profoundly grateful to City Council for their unwavering support in our endeavors.

Access to fresh, nutritious produce is a foundational need for both individual and community health. Research consistently demonstrates that diets rich in fruits and vegetables are linked to longer lifespans, reduced rates of chronic disease, and greater resilience against health disparities. Yet, in a city as dynamic and diverse as ours, this fundamental resource is not shared equally. Barriers like income, geography, and infrastructure prevent many New Yorkers from obtaining fresh produce, impacting health outcomes and quality of life.

However, urban agriculture stands as one of many novel solutions to these challenges. Converting underutilized spaces into urban farms could bring fresh, affordable produce into areas where it's needed most. Creating green spaces can support environmental sustainability, foster community cohesion, and bolster economic opportunity. These gardens can become hubs where New Yorkers not only access healthy food but also build deeper connections to their communities and environments.

Other testimonies you may receive from the Food Ed Hub will include insights from organizations and community members already leading impactful work in support of this bill and heading up the charge to increase access to fresh, nutritious, and delicious produce.

The Importance of Access to Fresh Produce

Access to fresh, nutritious produce is essential for both individual and community health. Studies show that higher fruit and vegetable consumption is associated with longer life



expectancy, lower rates of chronic conditions like diabetes, hypertension, and obesity, and lowered healthcare costs. Unfortunately, many NYC residents in lower-income neighborhoods face significant barriers to obtaining fresh produce compared to residents in wealthier areas. For example, residents of the Upper East Side report higher fruit and vegetable consumption, lower rates of diet-related diseases, and convenient access—within 5 minutes—to grocery stores with fresh produce. By contrast, many residents in the South Bronx report living farther from fresh produce sources, consuming fewer fruits and vegetables, and experiencing higher rates of chronic conditions.

In neighborhoods with limited access to fresh produce, bodegas often serve as primary food sources. However, these stores rarely offer affordable, high-quality produce, forcing the residents to rely on packaged foods that could contribute to poor health outcomes. In addition, household income remains a strong predictor of fruit and vegetable consumption, underscoring the need to increase access to affordable, fresh produce citywide as a step towards health equity for all residents.

Potential of Urban Agriculture

Supporting this bill, which proposes the conversion of unused industrial spaces into urban agriculture sites, is a crucial step toward advancing equity in food access and community resilience across New York City. Our city already has a growing network of urban agriculture sites. According to 2022 data from the Cornell Cooperative Extension, the city is home to over 27 commercial farms and more than 600 community and public gardens; this is an outstanding achievement but not nearly enough to support NYC's close to 9 million residents. Expanding this network through the conversion of underutilized industrial spaces into urban farms would enhance food sovereignty in neighborhoods across the city, directly supporting marginalized communities with limited access to affordable, fresh produce. The Tisch Food Center, together with our coalition partners who you will hear from today, are poised with the expertise and experience in urban agriculture to support the implementation of this bill.

Urban agriculture addresses food insecurity by providing communities with greater control over their food sources, particularly in areas that lack access to fresh, affordable produce. Our experience working with New Yorkers in underserved communities has shown that urban agriculture is not only about food access—it also brings tangible environmental, social, and economic benefits. For example, green spaces created through urban farming help reduce the urban heat island effect, improve local economies by creating jobs, and support climate resilience through carbon sequestration.

Urban Agriculture Building Community Resilience

Urban agriculture provides essential benefits that strengthen community resilience, especially in times of crisis. These urban farms offer a reliable local food source during disruptions to traditional supply chains, such as extreme weather events or public health emergencies. For



example, the Queens Botanical Garden Urban Farm grows food for donations to local food banks and hosts community workshops on sustainable practices, empowering residents to be stewards of their food systems.

In addition to providing fresh food, urban agriculture fosters local job creation and economic stability. This bill's focus on converting underutilized industrial spaces for urban farming will open up sustainable employment opportunities, including jobs in farming, food storage, and distribution—industries critical to food security. By supporting urban agriculture in these spaces, the bill protects industrial zones for local industry and food policy, expanding job training opportunities in food-related sectors, especially for women- and minority-owned businesses.

Through our coalition's work with programs like Red Hook Farms, we've seen how urban farms can create pathways for young people to enter the workforce, develop leadership skills, and contribute to their communities.

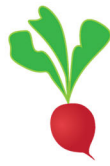
Urban agriculture also reduces the environmental impact of our city's food supply by localizing food production. Currently, much of our food is transported long distances, creating high carbon emissions. By converting spaces within our communities into green spaces and urban farms, this bill allows us to reduce our reliance on imported produce, cutting down on transportation emissions and supporting a sustainable local food economy.

Passing this bill means investing in a resilient food system that can adapt to the challenges of climate change and safeguard the health and well-being of all New Yorkers. We encourage you to hear from our partners at the Tisch Food Center who are already making strides in urban agriculture, demonstrating the transformative potential of these initiatives in communities across the city.

Thank you for your support.

Sincerely,

Jennifer Cadenhead
Oliver Gonzalez-Yoakum, District 3
Gitit Bachiry, District 10
Natalie Greaves-Peters, District 1
Stephanie Lim, District 10
Christine Torressen, District 1



LAURIE M. TISCH CENTER FOR
FOOD, EDUCATION & POLICY

PROGRAM IN NUTRITION

TEACHERS COLLEGE COLUMBIA UNIVERSITY

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Written Testimony in Support of Bill Intro 0693

To the Honorable Members of the Committee,

My name is Melissa Metrick, and I am the Farm Manager at the NYU Urban Farm Lab as well as an Adjunct Professor at NYU, where I teach Urban Agriculture. I am writing to express my strong support for Bill Intro 0693, which mandates the Office of Urban Agriculture to create and implement a plan to convert unused industrial areas into urban agriculture sites.

As an urban gardener for the past 20 years, and having personally managed gardens in industrial areas, I have witnessed firsthand the significant benefits these spaces bring to both the community and the environment. Urban agriculture in these areas is not just a way to grow food; it has become a critical resource for neighborhoods that often lack access to fresh produce, such as those without nearby supermarkets or grocery stores. These gardens provide not only healthy, fresh fruits and vegetables, but also teach community members the valuable skill of growing their own food.

In addition to improving food access, urban gardens in industrial zones create much-needed green spaces that foster community connection and well-being. They provide residents a place to gather, interact with nature, and experience the psychological benefits of being in green environments. Moreover, these gardens have become sanctuaries for wildlife, including migrating birds and pollinators, and have contributed to increasing biodiversity in our urban spaces.

From an environmental perspective, these gardens play a critical role in mitigating the damage caused by industrial use. Techniques such as phytoremediation, which uses plants to remove toxins from the soil, help to restore land that was once degraded by industrial activities.

Having both lived and worked in urban agriculture for many years, I can confidently say that these spaces have a transformative effect on both the land and the communities that surround them. The conversion of unused industrial areas into urban agriculture sites is not only a practical solution to the challenges of food insecurity and environmental degradation but also an opportunity to foster community resilience and sustainable practices.

I urge the committee to consider the positive impact of urban agriculture, as I have experienced it, when deliberating on Bill Intro 0693. Thank you for your time and for considering my testimony in support of this important legislation.

Sincerely,
Melissa Metrick
Farm Manager, NYU Urban Farm Lab
Adjunct Professor, Urban Agriculture, NYU

To: Committee on Economic Development

From: Adaeze Okoli, Chief of Staff, Rethink Food

Re: Int. No. 693 Requiring the Office of Urban Agriculture to create and implement a plan to convert unused industrial areas to urban agriculture sites.

Good morning, Chair Farías and Members of the Committee on Economic Development.

My name is Adaeze Okoli and I serve as Chief of Staff at Rethink Food, a New York City-based nonprofit on a mission to create a more sustainable and equitable food system— one where every New Yorker has access to dignified, culturally competent, and nutritious food.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify on behalf of Rethink Food’s support of [Int. 0693-2024](#), which would require the Office of Urban Agriculture to create and implement a plan to convert unused industrial areas to urban agriculture sites.

Rethink operates two meal-making programs that span all 5 boroughs of NYC and 35 council districts: our Sustainable Community Kitchen, which transforms excess food from restaurants, corporate kitchens, produce donated from urban agriculture, and grocery stores into meals delivered to community-based organizations (CBOs) and migrant shelter sites—a model that concurrently tackles food waste and food insecurity. We also operate Rethink Certified, where we partner with restaurants to prepare meals for CBOs and shelter sites. We provide culturally competent meals while keeping restaurants open, employing staff, and providing jobs in communities.

Throughout New York City, food insecurity and lack of green space are challenges that intersect and deepen the city’s need for sustainable, community-centered food systems. Unused and underutilized industrial areas offer an untapped opportunity to address both issues while creating resilient local food networks. By converting these spaces into urban agriculture sites, we can create food production, storage, and distribution hubs that support low-income communities, promote public health, and foster environmental sustainability.

If passed, [Int. No. 693](#) would mobilize a citywide effort to reclaim idle industrial spaces for food resiliency initiatives like hydroponic farming, rooftop gardens, and food hubs. It would remove existing barriers to these conversions, creating partnerships across city agencies and incentivizing community involvement, including support for minority- and women-owned businesses. This proposal would increase New York City’s access to fresh, locally grown food and contribute to long-term job creation and environmental resilience across all five boroughs.

For over two years, Rethink has partnered with Brooklyn Grange Farm at the Javits Center. This rooftop farm is an impressive urban agriculture project, covering over an acre atop the iconic convention center. Installed in 2021, this unique green space brings sustainable farming

practices to the heart of Manhattan, producing vegetables, herbs, and flowers. Beyond food production, the rooftop farm serves as a biodiverse habitat for pollinators and native plants, aiding in stormwater management by absorbing rainfall and reducing runoff. It also functions as an educational hub, hosting workshops and events that connect New Yorkers with sustainable practices and urban farming.

Every week, our trucking team picks up fresh produce from the Javits Center. we transform it into nutritious, culturally appropriate meals at Rethink's Sustainable Community Kitchen, then distribute it to community-based organizations and migrant shelters across the five boroughs. Donations from the rooftop farm include baby kale, zucchini, cilantro, pea shoots, microgreens, cabbage, parsley, mint, oregano, and leeks. These valuable produce donations support up to 200 meals each week, promoting the nutrition and well-being of community members throughout New York City.

If passed, [Int. No. 693](#) would encourage the creation of more projects like the Brooklyn Grange Farm at the Javits Center, utilizing underused spaces to enhance the nutrition and health of all New Yorkers.

I want to thank Council Member Nurse for sponsoring *Int. 0693-2024* and the Council Members who have signed on in support. Rethink looks forward to continuing the conversation on how, in partnership with the Council and the Administration, we can continue to create more green spaces and eliminate food insecurity. With *Int. 0693-2024*, the City can take an important step in empowering community members to transform underutilized space and feed their neighbors. Thank you for considering this key piece of legislation.



**Majority Leader Amanda Farías
Committee on Economic Development
New York City Council**

November 14, 2024

Re: Oversight Hearing Citywide Access to Fresh Produce

Good afternoon Chair Farías and Members of the Committee on Economic Development,

My name is Bianca Bockman and I am writing as the Director of *Our Food* at RiseBoro Community Partnership. .

Since 1973, RiseBoro Community Partnership's (RB) mission has been to unleash the potential of communities to thrive, no matter the odds. We seek to eradicate the conditions that foster generational poverty within historically marginalized communities by providing critical economic and social services. The Our Food team at RB invites communities to build a vibrant, robust food system with and for all of us. We believe that our food should keep our communities healthy, give our people dignified work, drive a just transition through the climate crisis, and bring our neighborhoods to life. Our work supports community-led solutions to our food system crisis through urban farming and community-based food marketplaces.

I am here to testify in support of Intro 693, which would require the Mayor's Office of Urban Agriculture to create and implement a plan to convert unused industrial areas to sites hosting urban agriculture services.

As a leader in building ecologically sustainable affordable housing developments that foster environments built for community gathering, RiseBoro often develops projects with land devoted to agriculture and we seek out partnerships with farmers and farming organizations in order to facilitate land access for the city's farmers. What has become incredibly clear in doing our work, however, is that even with our commitment to this, our organization could never provide the land needed to properly support the city's farmers with access to land. As the climate continues to change, we must invest in resiliency infrastructure - including land dedicated to the growing and distribution of fresh produce.

This bill is an important step to localize our food systems, create green jobs, and deliver fresh food to communities – especially communities of color – most affected by food insecurity.

Thank you for the opportunity to submit this testimony to the record.

Sincerely,

Bianca Bockman
Director, Our Food
RiseBoro

Testimony Committee on Economic Development
Seeds to Soil Renee Keitt

My name is Renee Keitt, and I serve as the lead of Seeds to Soil, a modular rooftop garden in Hell's Kitchen. I am also a community gardener in East Harlem/El Barrio and the Bronx, working in the Hunts Point/Longwood section of the Bronx. Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony today on urban agriculture, food justice, and sustainable development in New York City.

I am here to express my strong support for the proposed bill requiring the Mayor's Office of Urban Agriculture, in conjunction with relevant agencies and local community programs, to create and implement a plan to convert unused industrial areas in each of the five boroughs into sites for urban agriculture. These spaces could host hydroponic farming, food storage, and food distribution, all essential to fostering equitable and sustainable food systems.

Equity is often touted as a value, but it's time to actively practice it. Utilizing local spaces for food storage reduces transportation needs, addresses logistical challenges, and provides meaningful employment opportunities for people across all demographics.

1. Addressing Food Access and Local Needs

Looking beyond access to land, the city must address critical gaps, including identifying funds for purchasing urban agriculture sites, providing technical support, and offering resources for soil remediation, infrastructure, and processing facilities. Grants are often inaccessible to those in underserved and disadvantaged communities because they rely on reimbursement structures that exclude those who lack upfront capital. If we want to foster equity, we must build systems that allow individuals—not just nonprofits—to gain access to resources.

At Kelly Street Garden, we run a farm share program from July to November. Each year, I receive just 100 Health Bucks to distribute, and they are gone within a week. The actual need is at least 500 Health Bucks, yet funding consistently falls short. More places to redeem Health Bucks are urgently needed in the Hunts Point/Longwood area of the Bronx, where food insecurity is a significant issue.

2. Supporting Urban Agriculture as a Visionary Approach

Identifying sites to farm is important but this must be more than that. The logistics of farming must be taken into account—such as refrigeration, workforce development, and processing facilities—and are often overlooked. If we fail to address these, urban agriculture will not reach its full potential. Too often, grants are awarded to universities and nonprofits without trickling down to the individuals and communities who do the actual work. We must ensure stipends and direct support for stewards on the ground.

Urban agriculture is about more than just growing food; it's about creating resilient communities. Supporting pollinators, integrating greenhouses and high tunnels, and providing education about food as medicine will transform how we think about food systems and health. Community chefs and cooperative models, as part of the solidarity economy, must be supported and funded.

3. Gardens vs. Housing: A False Dichotomy

The narrative of “gardens versus housing” is a harmful false dichotomy that leads to environmental destruction. The city can and must support both. The demolition of community gardens for development is a shortsighted and damaging practice. There are numerous vacant lots and boarded-up apartments across the city that can be revitalized to meet housing needs without destroying vital green spaces.

Executive Order 43 should not be a giveaway to developers at the expense of our gardens. The [Elizabeth Street Garden](#), which proposed an alternative site at 388 Hudson Street, is a prime example of this failure. Despite offering a solution that preserved both housing and green space, it hasn't been enough to prevent the garden's possible destruction. Now, [Smiling Hogshead Ranch](#) faces eviction. These spaces are essential to our communities and must be protected.

4. Ensuring Equity and True Access

If individuals don't believe they can build viable businesses or projects, they won't participate. This is a constant refrain I see. Government entities want to know why their programs aren't used and you tell them the same thing. Investments are often made to analyze why programs fail to reach their intended users, but the issue is clear: the funding model favors those with upfront capital who can afford to wait for reimbursement. This structure excludes many, raising questions about whether the programs are designed for practical use or merely to check a box. The real beneficiaries are often the consultants hired to study the problem, not the individuals or communities doing the work. If we want programs to succeed, they must be built for the people on the ground, not institutions that profit from analyzing their shortcomings.

There's a limit to how much sweat equity people can contribute without meaningful financial and logistical support. The city must invest in infrastructure, from soil remediation to cooperative business models, to ensure that those who do the work are empowered to succeed.

Equity must guide every aspect of urban agriculture and development. This means ensuring access and opportunities for all communities, not just those traditionally labeled as underserved. Even in neighborhoods like Chelsea, perceived as affluent, some residents face systemic inequities and deserve support.

Conclusion

This bill represents a vital step toward a more sustainable and equitable urban agriculture

system. However, its success depends on robust implementation, equitable resource distribution, and a commitment to valuing the individuals and communities who make urban agriculture possible. This needs to go beyond simply creating an inventory. The necessary infrastructure must be developed to make these programs usable and viable for the people doing the actual work. Without thoughtful planning and support systems, these efforts will become inaccessible and ineffective for the communities they are meant to serve.

I urge the council to protect gardens, invest in equitable food systems, and address the systemic barriers that prevent communities from thriving. With visionary planning and real action, New York City can lead the way in building a future that balances development with environmental stewardship and social equity.

I will reiterate this. I'm tired of being asked why people don't take advantage of these programs. The answer is clear: the infrastructure to make them accessible and effective was never built, despite it being obvious that this was a problem from the start. If I can see the gaps, why couldn't those designing the programs and legislation? This cannot just be another inventory that will lead to funneling resources to the usual suspects already lining up for their share. It must be a meaningful effort to create systems that genuinely support those who do the work and need the resources the most.

Thank you for your time and commitment to these critical issues.

Sincerely,

Renee Keitt

Lead Seeds to Soil

Committee on Economic Development

Teens for Food Justice
33 W 60th St., #1211
New York, NY 10023

New York City Council

Dear City Council Members,

On behalf of Teens for Food Justice (TFFJ), I am writing to express our strong support for Int. No. 693-2024, which aims to convert underutilized industrial spaces into urban agriculture sites. This legislation has the power to bring fresh, locally grown produce to communities that need it most, addressing long-standing inequities in food access across New York City. As an organization focused on empowering young people to fight food insecurity through youth-led, in-school, high-yield, hydroponic farming, we see this as a crucial step toward equitable food systems, educational innovation, and workforce development in the green economy.

Expanding Access to Fresh, Nutritious Food

Fresh, nutritious food is essential to public health, yet many communities in our city face significant obstacles to accessing it. These barriers—affordability, availability, and proximity—are especially acute in communities of color, where systemic inequities have led to disproportionately high rates of diet-related illnesses like diabetes, pre-diabetes, obesity, cardiovascular issues, and hypertension.

At TFFJ's hydroponic farm at the Martin Luther King Jr. Educational Campus—one of seven we've built in New York City—students grow up to 10,000 pounds of fresh produce annually. Unlike gardens or greenhouses, hydroponic farms produce food year-round, ensuring a consistent supply of fresh vegetables. This produce is incorporated into school meals, distributed to families, and shared with the Lincoln Square Neighborhood Center, increasing access to healthy options and addressing the nutritional needs of the broader community.

Empowering Students Through Food and Leadership

Urban agriculture spaces are not just about growing food—they are hubs for learning and leadership. TFFJ combines STEM education with hands-on farming, teaching students skills in hydroponic agriculture, environmental science, and technology. But the impact goes further. Our programs include nutrition education that helps students connect what they grow to what they eat.

One of our students reflected on the difference in food access between their home country of Guyana and the United States. They described how, back home, fresh fruit and vegetables were abundant and easily accessible, with vendors selling produce in neighborhoods every afternoon. After immigrating to the U.S., they saw a stark contrast—fast food restaurants dominated their community, and fresh produce was scarce, often expensive, and of poor quality. Through TFFJ, they have reconnected with their roots, learning how to grow fresh produce and advocate for equitable food systems that reflect their cultural traditions.

At the Martin Luther King Jr. Educational Campus, another student shared how the farm's impact extends beyond the classroom to the cafeteria and even to their homes. "The salad bar in the cafeteria is exciting and encourages students to choose healthier options. Seeing fresh ingredients from the farm makes a real impact on what we eat. My friends often talk about their favorite items from the salad bar and how exciting it is to have fresh produce available. The bag pick-up allows us to take home fresh fruits and vegetables directly from the farm, which not only reduces waste but also promotes sustainability. This has helped build a sense of community and increased our awareness about making healthier food choices."

These stories illustrate how urban agriculture transforms students' relationships with food, health, and sustainability. For many, it is their first exposure to fresh, locally grown produce and its potential to improve health and wellness. By equipping them with the knowledge to make healthier choices and share what they've learned at home, TFFJ is addressing nutrition inequities at their roots.

From Farm to Advocacy

TFFJ's farm programs are just the beginning of students' journeys. Many of our Food Policy Interns first came to this work through their exposure to hydroponic farming in afterschool and curricular day programs. What began as hands-on learning has grown into a commitment to advocate for their communities and families across the city.

With support from program funders such as the Center for Science in the Public Interest (CSPI) and the International Federation for Public Health Nutrition (IFPHN), our interns have engaged in critical policy advocacy. They have worked to support legislation like the Big Apple Kids Meal Bill (Int. 641), which focuses on improving children's meal standards. These young advocates demonstrate the transformational impact of urban agriculture, showing how education and experience can empower students to lead change at both the local and citywide levels.

Addressing Social Determinants of Health

Urban agriculture goes beyond growing fresh food—it tackles social determinants of health head-on. Communities of color, in particular, have been disproportionately affected by systemic inequities that limit access to nutritious food and contribute to high rates of chronic health conditions like diabetes, pre-diabetes, obesity, cardiovascular issues, and hypertension. Programs like TFFJ address these challenges by integrating hydroponic farming and nutrition education into schools, creating year-round access to fresh, nutritious produce directly within communities and a deeper understanding of the connections between diet and health.

This approach not only improves access but also empowers individuals to make healthier food choices, reducing the risk of these chronic conditions over time. Beyond physical health, urban agriculture supports mental well-being and fosters community resilience. By creating spaces where students and families can grow, learn, and connect, these programs help build stronger, healthier communities. Students involved in TFFJ are not only improving their own health outcomes but are also gaining the skills and confidence to advocate for systemic change in their neighborhoods.

Through its holistic approach, TFFJ is addressing both the immediate and long-term factors contributing to health inequities, ensuring that underserved communities have the tools and resources to achieve better health outcomes and greater equity.

Conclusion

Int. No. 693-2024 represents an innovative solution to some of the most pressing challenges our city faces. By transforming underutilized spaces into vibrant urban agriculture sites, this legislation can increase access to healthy food, support educational and economic opportunities, and build healthier, more equitable communities across New York City.

Teens for Food Justice is proud to support this important initiative. Thank you for your leadership and commitment to addressing these critical issues for the well-being of all New Yorkers.

Sincerely,

Emily Miller

Director of Development and Communications

Teens for Food Justice



Committee on Economic Development

November 1, 2024

Support for Int. No. 693:

A mandate for New York City to build urban farms across 5 boroughs

To: Amanda Farias

From: The Opportunity Hub; Jesse Miller – Farm Manager

Dear Councilwomen Farias,

I am writing on behalf of The Opportunity Hub, a community development nonprofit serving Starrett City, Brooklyn. We provide various social services, including the Spring Creek Towers Farm. As the farm manager, I have witnessed firsthand the profound positive impact our urban agriculture project has on the community.

In East New York, affordable, high-quality produce and healthy food are often difficult to find. Many residents express a desire to cook healthier meals and incorporate more plant-based products into their diets. However, some lack the knowledge and skills to prepare these meals. Additionally, many students I work with have little experience growing food and are often surprised to learn how vegetables grow and how fresh produce differs significantly from processed options. Both children and adults are eager to engage in outdoor and social activities, and they are very supportive of community farms.

Our urban farm addresses the East New York food desert in several key ways. First, by cultivating culturally relevant produce, we provide nutrient-dense vegetables to Starrett City residents. Second, our senior gardening program and community engagement events allow residents to participate in the garden, learn how to grow food, and experience the documented health benefits of gardening in community settings. I have seen how much better our seniors feel after each gardening club meeting.

Moreover, we offer garden education to students at PS 346, teaching them about food systems, fostering a love for fresh produce, and creating a magical outdoor classroom experience. I've witnessed incredible growth in my students since I began at the farm. After a

year of experiential garden education in 1st grade, my now 2nd graders can identify radishes, bitter melon, and even ginger growing in the garden. They enthusiastically explain to new classmates how to hill soil around root vegetables, demonstrating a deep respect for the plants, bugs, and their peers. They are always eager to try new crops and appreciate the bounty of the earth.

Councilwoman Farias, I urge you to support this amendment to increase the number of urban farms like ours throughout New York City. We need more farmers growing fresh, nutrient-dense produce for their communities. We need more urban farms where residents can learn to garden and build community with the guidance of experienced urban farmers. And we need many more opportunities for our youth to engage with vegetables, enjoy safe & magical spaces, and have positive outdoor experiences.

Thank you for considering my testimony.

Blue Skies,

Jesse Miller

The Opportunity Hub



Creating Healthy Communities
Through the Power of Cooking

**Testimony for the
New York City Council Committee on Economic Development
November 14, 2024**

Thank you to Council Member Amanda Farías, Chair, and all the members of the Economic Development Committee for convening this hearing today. We appreciate the opportunity to submit this testimony on behalf of The Sylvania Center and as a member of the Food Ed Hub, a project of the Tisch Center for Food, Education & Policy at Teachers College, Columbia University, in support of the office of Urban Agriculture creating and implementing a plan to convert unused industrial areas to urban agricultural sites. We see this initiative as an important step in making fresh, healthy food accessible to all New Yorkers, particularly those who live in neighborhoods with limited fresh food access.

Founded in 2007 to address diet-related diseases in under-resourced communities, The Sylvania Center educates young people and their families through culinary programming to promote health and well-being. The Sylvania Center programming runs in all five of NYC's boroughs and served more than 6,000 participants last year. We help young people and families take control of their health through better food choices, and encourage them to be healthy food advocates in their communities. In the past 17 years, The Sylvania Center has served approximately 45,000 New Yorkers. Through our experience in providing our food education programming citywide, we know firsthand the importance that fresh food access has on positive student and community health outcomes. 94% of program participants report eating one or more healthy meals per week as a result of our nutrition-focused classes.

Urban agriculture contributes to food access by increasing the availability of fresh foods for residents. For young people, urban farming and urban agricultural activities are engaging, experiential, and hands-on ways to learn about where to find healthy food, how to access it, and how to incorporate these available food options into their diets.

Urban farming activities support the development of a new generation of community food advocates. Through our programs, students learn about food justice, food insecurity, and food waste, in addition to the food access components. These are lessons that can only be learned with urban agricultural sites based in our neighborhoods. In addition, urban agricultural spaces bring together students and community members and provide new avenues for engagement through neighborhood-based opportunities for connection, collaboration, and cooperation.

As one of our students said, "I'm getting to explore the world around me and my community because Queens is the most diverse place on earth and I think I get to explore that, not only through these places, but its people and the food. So yeah, I get to be a part of these communities and share these communities with other people." We urge the New York City Council to adopt the legislation (Int. No. 693) supporting Citywide Access to Fresh Produce.

Sincerely,

Barbara A. Glassman
Executive Director

Beth Bainbridge
Education Programs Director

My name is John Zieran, and I am testifying on behalf of Just Food, alongside my colleague, Ranya Perez. We would like to support this bill, but have these grave concerns:

1. Current community gardens and farms must be fully supported and protected before any new, precarious sites are created.
2. Community growers should be full collaborators throughout the entire process, not just consulted at select stages.
3. It is essential that the land being surveyed reflects the needs and desires of both the land and the community—whether that be for housing, green spaces, CSA food storage facilities, or other uses that align with community priorities.

For almost 30 years, Just Food has been deeply involved in promoting food justice and sovereignty across New York City, particularly in marginalized communities where residents are more likely to face food insecurity and environmental racism. Over the past few decades, we have worked to support community-supported agriculture (CSA), community gardens, and farmers' markets throughout the city, seeing firsthand how beneficial these institutions are, especially in underserved communities. Our commitment to these spaces has shown us that protecting them is essential for both the immediate and long-term well-being of the communities we serve.

With much of our focus on supporting over 60 CSA groups in New York City, we are well versed in the challenges these groups face in supplying fresh produce to their communities. One way in which we believe the passing of Int. No. 693 would be beneficial to CSA is through food storage facilities. Most of our CSAs are partnered with regional farmers outside the city, who are usually only able to make one trip weekly to drop off their produce, essentially locking CSAs into a certain pickup day or time if they wish to partner with that farmer. With underutilized industrial plots being transformed into equitable food storage facilities, there is a possibility for more CSAs to make a connection with a given farmer, or even the opportunity to have more flexibility surrounding their pickup days, while also making the dropoff process easier for the farmer themselves. A streamlined CSA dropoff process could increase interest in the program for both members and farmers alike.

Another aspect of urban agriculture in which we are deeply entrenched is with New York City's many community gardens. We are currently in partnership with the USDA in the administration of the People's Garden Initiative. This initiative offers funding to community gardens in need with the aim of directly scaling up their infrastructure and practices. Through the administration of this funding, we have seen the drive and ingenuity of community gardeners in terms of maximizing the potential of relatively small urban gardens. Regarding food resiliency, many gardens are expanding systems such as solar power, hydroponics, and aquaponics- all relevant practices which could be applied to industrial plots, along with traditional urban

farming. Additionally, the People's Garden Initiative emphasizes education and community involvement- two aspects of community gardens that enrich and promote health in the neighborhood, even outside the garden. Through our work with community gardens, the drive to expand, both within their own garden plots and to new spaces, is apparent, showing that these converted plots will quickly transform into community hubs which educate residents on healthy eating and food sovereignty.

While Int. No. 693 sounds promising, one potential area of concern is the emphasis on large-scale production. We would like to see a clearer definition of "urban agriculture." Ideally these spaces will be utilized by small community groups in promotion of food sovereignty. Beyond just being a place for food production, community gardens are a space for healing, learning, and community solidarity. This raises the question- how can this bill ensure that both new urban agriculture sites are created and that current gardens and farms are protected and prioritized? We believe that in order for the MOUA to align with the goals and priorities of community gardeners, relevant growers and organizers must lead the way in shaping the implementation of this legislation.

Another potential area of concern we have regarding the bill is to ensure that these industrial areas are not better suited for affordable housing. While urban agriculture and green space are valuable, there have been instances where green space has been replaced with housing. Both affordable housing and green spaces are vital to the well-being of our communities, and we must ensure that they are not pitted against each other. We must find ways to protect and expand both, ensuring that neither is sacrificed in the pursuit of the other.

In a city as densely populated as New York City, any underutilized space is incredibly valuable. Our city is already home to a deep network of urban agriculture, with many organizations, ourselves included, who see great potential and value in furthering our goals. The passing of this introduction has the potential to be a major step forward in strengthening New York's urban agriculture infrastructure, especially in underserved areas where these industrial sites are more likely to be present.

Nothing About Us, Without Us

Int. No. 693

Position: Opposing Proposed Legislation

Thank you for the opportunity to share my concerns regarding the proposed legislation aimed at increasing access to fresh produce in New York City. While I wholeheartedly support initiatives that genuinely adopt a community-centered approach to improving fresh produce access, I do not believe this legislation reflects such an approach.

By the Mayor's Office of Food Policy's (MOFP) own admission, there is no community engagement strategy embedded in this effort. As the office behind this hearing, in partnership with Councilmember Sandy Nurse, it is troubling that there appears to have been no coordination with the Mayor's Office of Urban Agriculture (MOUA). MOUA has demonstrated a commitment to community-informed approaches, and its involvement could have enriched this initiative. My concerns are grounded in statements and examples presented by representatives from both offices.

For context, I am a mother, writer, and food justice organizer, with deep ties to Central Brooklyn. I co-founded the Central Brooklyn Food Coop and currently serve on the leadership team of the National Black Food and Justice Alliance. My work has focused on improving access to fresh, healthy food in historically marginalized communities. Currently, I collaborate with One Brooklyn Health, Brooklyn Packers, and GrowNYC on *Root to Wellness*, a food-as-medicine project. Through this initiative, we launched three Community Supported Agriculture (CSA) programs at hospital sites, engaging over 400 participants and distributing approximately 7,000 pounds of food between June and October this year. Our success relied on a multi-stakeholder, co-governance approach that leveraged staff capacity and funding to subsidize weekly food boxes for patients.

I understand the critical importance of thoughtful planning and inclusive engagement of diverse stakeholders. Unfortunately, most stakeholders engaged in this legislation appear to have been white-led nonprofits and academic institutions. Given the time

between the legislation's introduction and this hearing, there was ample opportunity to engage more community-based organizations and leaders.

A robust and equitable process is essential for initiatives of this scale and significance. In 2022, the Urban Design Forum's Forefront Fellows, in collaboration with MOFP, developed a food assessment tool specifically for projects like this. I respectfully urge MOFP, MOUA, and Councilmember Nurse to utilize this tool (accessible at UDF.nyc) or another equity-centered framework. Such tools can ensure that projects designed to address inequities in food access truly serve the communities most impacted.

Too often, food access programs in communities of color fail to address the inequities they were created to combat. A "build it, and they will come" approach has never worked—and it never will.

I hope this testimony serves as a constructive contribution to the conversation. Thank you for considering these perspectives as you move forward with this important work.

Good Day!

My name is LA "Cherokee" Dickens, I am a member of Communtiy Board 16. Myself and my partner Nancie Katz with Seeds In The Middle have questions regarding food pantry funds that the City Council allocates in our district.

We are deeply concerned about the lack of local fresh fruits and vegetables provided, especially as we have among the highest rates in New York City for food insecurity, diabetes, heart disease, and premature death.

We live in a Food Desert in the community of Brownsville. For every 1 grocery store there are 10 Bodegas. We want healthy food options too. We don't have a Whole Foods, Traders Joe's, e.t.c. We are asking

for a Brownsville Farm Fresh market were we bring farm to table experiences, using New York local Farmers.

In addition to our first farmers market supermarket we are asking: Why does the healthy stuff have to be so expensive? We need healthy foods that are affordable.

Lastly, we are requesting a hearing.

Currently we have a petition of 300 signatures and counting. We are throwing our last free Food & Fashion Fusion community event, this Saturday from 2-6pm at The Brownsville Heritage House located at 581 Mother Gaston Blvd on the 2nd flr. All are welcomed!

Here is a copy of the current petition

<https://chng.it/fDL4DkYgJ7>

Thank You!

Food Ed
Hub

THE COUNCIL THE CITY OF NEW YORK

Appearance Card

I intend to appear and speak on Int. No. _____ Res. No. _____
 in favor in opposition

Date: _____

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Emily Miller

Address: _____

I represent: Teens for Food Justice

Address: New York, NY

THE COUNCIL THE CITY OF NEW YORK

FOOD ED
HUB

Appearance Card

I intend to appear and speak on Int. No. 06913 Res. No. _____
 in favor in opposition

Date: _____

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Megan Nockin

Address: _____

I represent: NY Sun Works

Address: 157 Columbus Ave. Ste 432 NY 10023

THE COUNCIL THE CITY OF NEW YORK

Appearance Card

I intend to appear and speak on Int. No. _____ Res. No. _____
 in favor in opposition

Date: _____

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Mickie Franc

Address: _____

I represent: MouA

Address: _____

**THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

I intend to appear and speak on Int. No. _____ Res. No. _____

in favor in opposition

Date: _____

Name: Rachel Actherson (PLEASE PRINT)

Address: _____

I represent: NOFD

Address: _____

Food Ed
Hub

**THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

I intend to appear and speak on Int. No. 0693 Res. No. _____

in favor in opposition

Date: _____

Name: Dr. Natalie Greaves-Peters (PLEASE PRINT)

Address: _____ NY NY 10020

I represent: Tisch Food Center

Address: 525 W 120th NY NY 10027

Food Ed Hub

**THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

I intend to appear and speak on Int. No. 0693 Res. No. _____

in favor in opposition

Date: 11/14/24

Name: Christine Torvessen (PLEASE PRINT)

Address: _____ NY, NY 10013

I represent: Tisch Food Center

Address: 525 West 120th St. NY, NY 10027

Please complete this card and return to the Sergeant-at-Arms

Food Ed Hub

THE COUNCIL THE CITY OF NEW YORK

Appearance Card

I intend to appear and speak on Int. No. 0693 Res. No. _____

in favor in opposition

Date: 11/14/2024

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Yibing Zhou

Address: _____ NY 11101

I represent: Tisch Food Center

Address: 525 W. 120th St. New York, NY 10027

Food Ed Hub

THE COUNCIL THE CITY OF NEW YORK

Appearance Card

I intend to appear and speak on Int. No. 0693 Res. No. _____

in favor in opposition

Date: 11/14/24

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Dr. Victoria Rodriguez-Cabrera

Address: _____ NY 10036

I represent: Tisch Food Center

Address: 525 W. 120th St. New York, NY 10027

THE COUNCIL Food Ed Hub THE CITY OF NEW YORK

Appearance Card

I intend to appear and speak on Int. No. 693 Res. No. _____

in favor in opposition

Date: 11/14/2024

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Jesse Miller

Address: _____ Brooklyn NY

I represent: The Opportunity Hub

Address: 1234 Pennsylvania Ave Brooklyn NY

Please complete this card and return to the Sergeant-at-Arms

**THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

[]

I intend to appear and speak on Int. No. 693 Res. No. _____

in favor in opposition

Date: 11/14/2024

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Beth Bainbridge

Address: 2417 3rd Ave, BX NY 10451

I represent: The Sylvia Center

Address: 2417 3rd Ave, BX NY 10451

**THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

[]

I intend to appear and speak on Int. No. _____ Res. No. _____

in favor in opposition

Date: 11/14/24

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: RAE GOMES

Address: 1378 Fulton St.

I represent: Cultivating Justice LLC

Address: (same as above)

**THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

[]

I intend to appear and speak on Int. No. _____ Res. No. _____

in favor in opposition

Date: _____

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Renee Keitt

Address: _____

I represent: seeds to soil

Address: 424 W. 24th St.



Please complete this card and return to the Sergeant-at-Arms

