

A Guide for Policy Makers

POLICY BRIEF

NEW MARKETS FOR NEW AMERICANS

“The second I walked through the airport gate, I said ‘I’m going to start something of my own.’”

Oko Farms, Photo Credit: Caroline Tompkins



Executive Summary

Project Vision

We want to live in a city where immigrant neighborhoods are home to thriving markets that create pathways to economic self-determination and food sovereignty.

Core challenges

Small food businesses, founded by immigrants, are the soul of New York City.

- Since 1980, immigrants have founded more than half of all small businesses in the city.¹
- 70% of the undocumented labor force are essential workers.²
- 30% of workers in food/beverage manufacturing/processing are immigrants.²

Immigrants of color experience a lack of support and investment, rooted in systemic oppression.

- 1/5 of minority neighborhood businesses are ‘discouraged borrowers’ who don’t apply for loans, assuming denial.³
- 1% of Black business owners get a bank loan in their first year of business, compared with 7% of White owners.⁴
- 8% of Community Development Financial Institutions are authorized to offer Paycheck Protection Program loans.⁴

The pandemic has exacerbated this inequity.

- 80% of the businesses working with the Business Center for New Americans have closed due to the pandemic.⁵
- 85% of M/WBEs believed they could not survive for six more months as of June 2020.⁶
- 59% increase in clients at foodbanks who were undocumented.⁷

Immigrant food entrepreneurs can create jobs, feed their communities, and build resilience in local food systems.

Project goals

1. Demystify the process for starting a food business and lower the barrier to entry.
2. Support New Americans who are starting food businesses.
3. Help policy-makers see critical barriers faced by New Americans starting food businesses.
4. Recommend ways to improve entrepreneurship pathways for New Americans starting food businesses.

Summary of recommendations

1. Allow gardeners to generate personal income from community garden farm stands.
2. Create a capital pool to support community members creating farm stands and selling locally-grown produce.
3. Support small business incubation with seed funding, process support, and market access.
4. Fund shared commercial kitchens in immigrant communities.
5. Help entrepreneurs apply to the right inspection agency through a clear and concise process.
6. Create more equitable support for New Americans facing food insecurity.

Narrative Summary

“To learn to read any map is to be indoctrinated into that mapmaker’s culture.”

Peter Turchi, *Maps of the Imagination: The Writer as Cartographer*.



East New York Farms,
Photo Credit: UCCE NY

THE AMERICAN STORY told to anyone looking in from a foreign land is one of opportunity, comfort, and abundance. The dream becomes a contract, as the tired, the poor, and the huddled masses are beckoned by Lady Liberty's torch from their hardship into a land where their hard work is rewarded with comfort, security, and material excess.

While millions of immigrants can attest to some version of this reality, the true path to survival is rarely charted out, and even less disseminated from one group to another. There is also an unavoidable comparison that sets race as the differentiating factor when observing how various white passing immigrant groups fared compared to those of color.

In NYC, the melting pot of the US, immigrant enclaves from tenements set up around the coast, near maritime trade, to public housing complexes built on flood lands, newly arrived Americans and their descendants have been on the receiving end of some of the most inequitable policies both upon arrival and from generation to generation.

Their survival creates another thread in the fabric of American identity, one that relies on the strength of the established communities, forged by a will to “make it here.” Those that do, honor their ties “back home,” by sending back money, sneakers, American junk food, and sometimes sending back for other family members. Immigrants are pillars of the city, and platforms for their families, in the US and abroad.

Agriculture, food service, and domestic service have the lowest barriers of entry, and by design, the least protections for its workers.⁸ Immigrants occupy these roles and positions, often working their way up, risking too much to uphold all other industries, and general life.

Policies created throughout the years have helped and harmed immigrants. From the “Great Wave,” that encouraged mass migration from European countries, to the Immigration and Naturalization Act of the 1960’s that removed national origin quotas, immigration policy created the foundation that would determine the cultural and racial makeup of American society.

But immigrants will continue to seek better lives and livelihoods for themselves and their families, in spite of restrictions. And while many get their start in the service industries, they go on to build businesses throughout the city. Since 1980, immigrants have founded more than half of all small businesses in the city.¹

Those businesses that are a lifeline to immigrant communities suffered during the pandemic, with 80% of the businesses working with the Business Center for New Americans closing due to the pandemic.⁵ The pandemic exacerbated the vulnerability of immigrant groups, as those who were undocumented, or who worked in informal economies, had little to no safety nets after the sudden city shut down in March 2020. Immigrants neighborhoods saw the longest lines—with a 59% increase in undocumented immigrants accessing food banks⁷—the highest rates of death by the virus, and the slowest recovery. Undocumented immigrants were also 70% of essential workers². Even though the city shut down, the New Americans did not.

We are past the time to acknowledge, celebrate, and protect immigrants. We are delayed in formalizing rights for these groups, creating and solidifying policy that support them, as they support everyone.

This project, “New Markets for New Americans,” is our love letter to immigrants, our small acknowledgment to those who either already work in the food system, or want to, that we believe you deserve and are entitled to all the protections afforded all Americans.

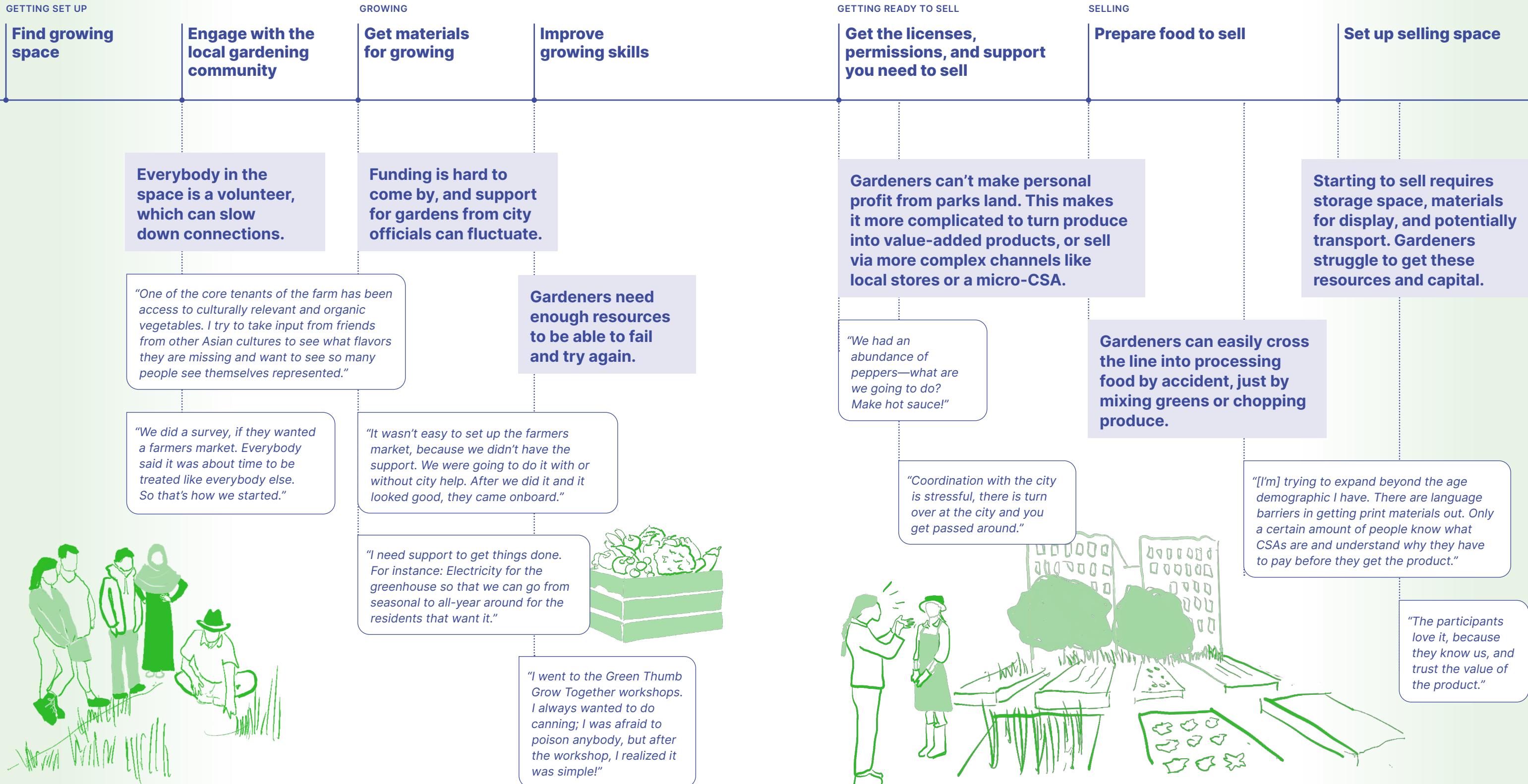
These journey maps chart a course through the bureaucracy that often stalls or halts the progress of immigrant-led businesses. The policy brief is a call to action for electeds to address these barriers and act on removing them.

For the New Americans who have helped with these maps, to those who help elucidate the path for those after, and for those in our own lives who make it possible for us to do this work, this project is dedicated to you. Thank you, gracias, ευχαριστώ!

—Despo, Genea, Kim, Olivia, Rae, and Tim

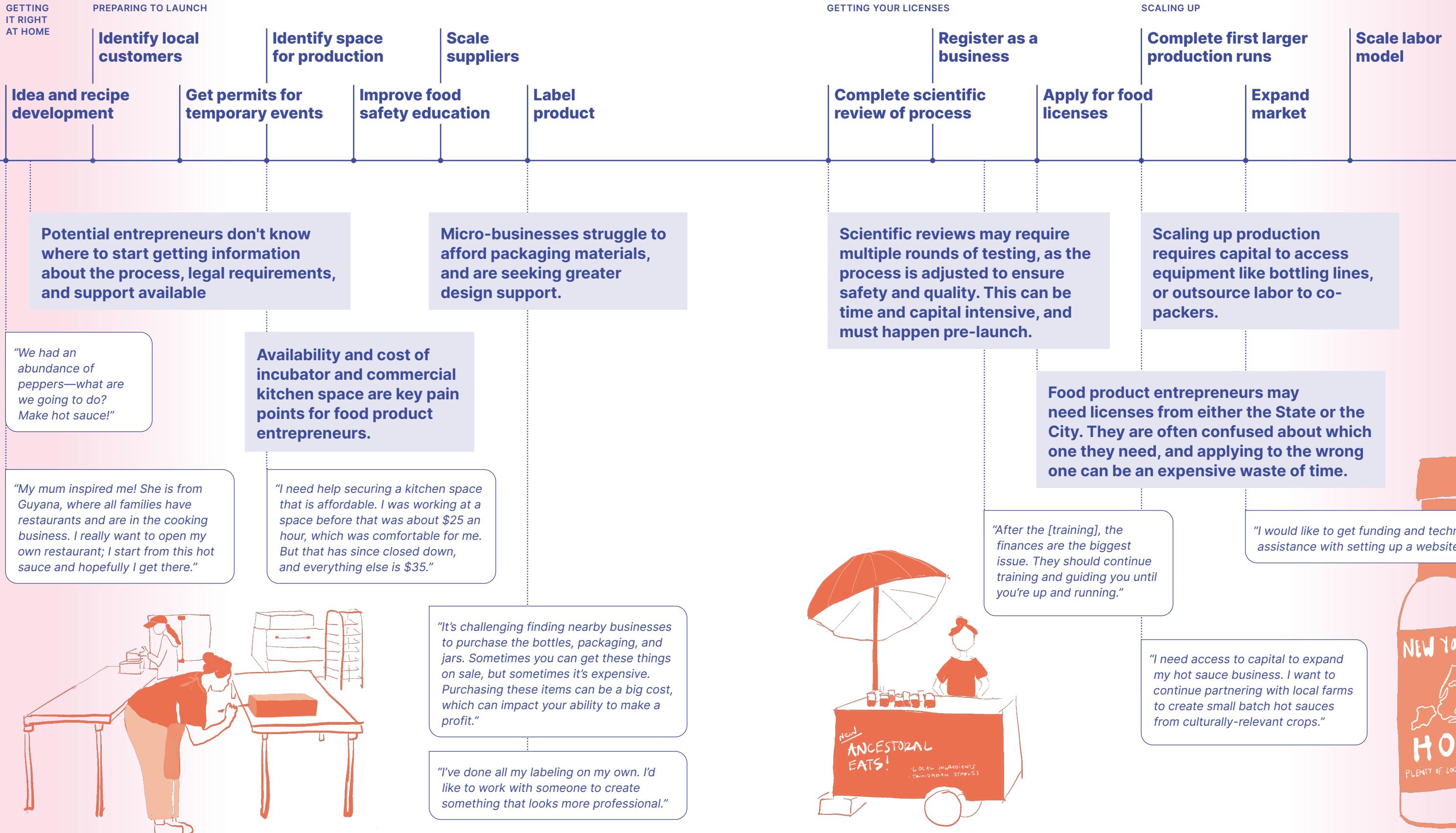
Growing and Selling Produce

For a full step-by-step guide to this process, please see the accompanying zine on 'How to Grow and Sell Produce in NYC'.



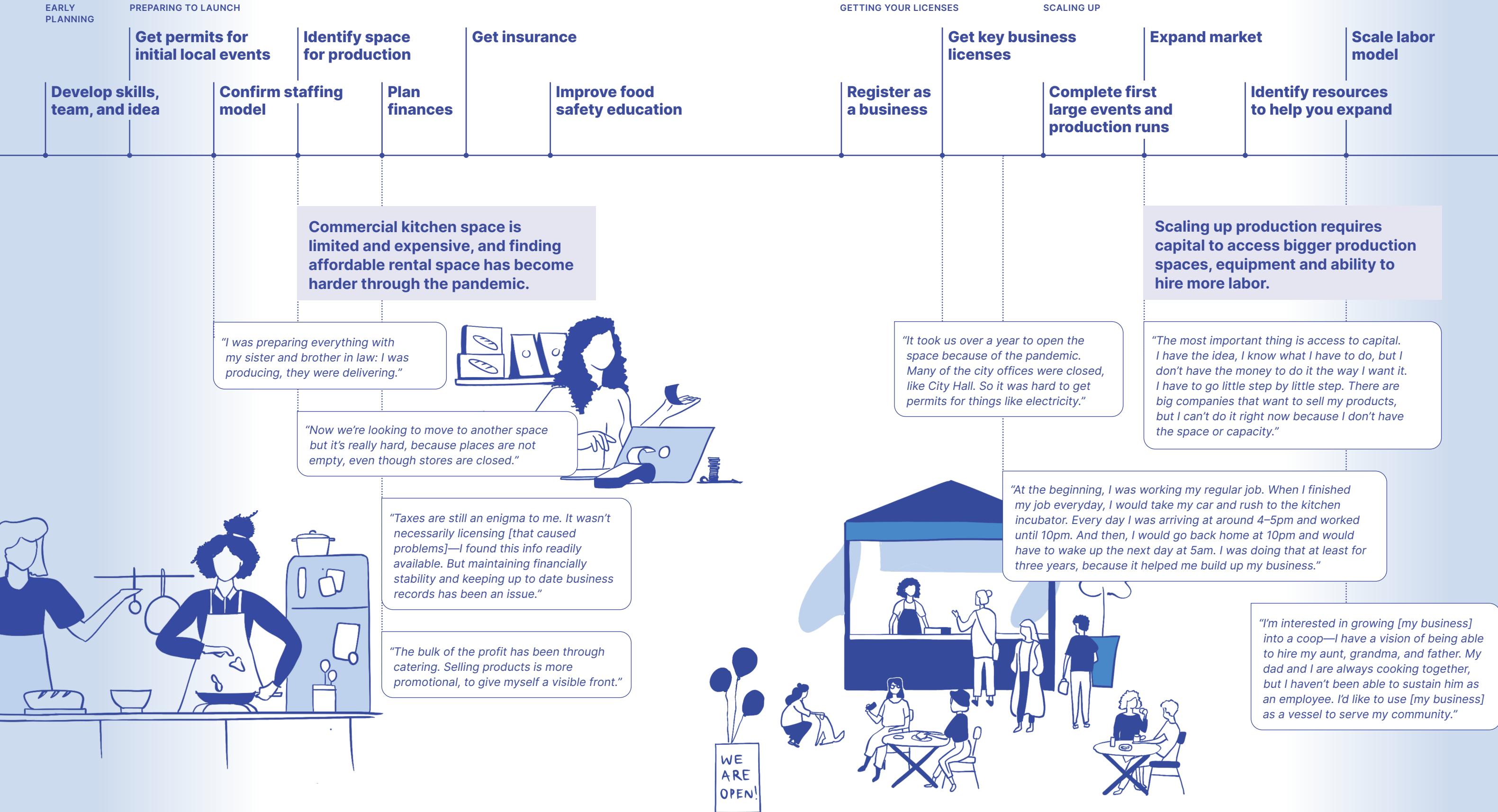
Creating and Selling a Food Product

For a full step-by-step guide to this process, please see the accompanying zine on 'How to Start Selling a Food Product in NYC'.



Starting a Food Service Business

For a full step-by-step guide to this process, please see the accompanying zine on 'How to Start a Food Service Business in NYC.'



Recommendations

1

PROCESS/REGULATORY FRAMEWORK

Allow gardeners to generate personal income from community garden farm stands.

Description Make it easier and explicitly permitted for garden groups to sell produce they grow to their local community. Provide technical assistance and funding for equipment for gardeners who want to apply for EBT.

Why it matters Most gardens in NYC are owned by NYC Parks Department and the sale of items on premises is treated the same as concession sales on parks property. This means an expensive and arduous process that is not something small community groups can manage.

Where to start Create a form of vendor registration for community gardens who want to sell produce. This could be akin to a "Home Processors" registration (free, no inspection/ not a license) but operated at the city level for garden groups who are farming or actively producing for market.

Related NYC initiatives NYC Food Box programs (GrowNYC/ NYS Agriculture and Markets) would also benefit from this, as more groups could grow their own items to supplement immediately available produce from local farmers, allowing gardeners to add more culturally relevant crops to existing food boxes. Also housing these types of interventions within gardens would make sense and there are funding streams out there to support operational costs as they get set up.

2

FUNDING

Create a capital pool to support community members creating farm stands and selling locally-grown produce.

Description Mini-grants to help garden groups get the equipment and materials needed to safely sell produce grown in their community.

Why it matters Starting up a farm stand takes some equipment and materials that might otherwise be costly for individuals or community groups to obtain. Funding in the form of small grants would help encourage garden groups to sell their produce items and better serve their local community.

Where to start Funding to operate a mini-grant program could be made available via non-profit partners who operate the gardens and/or offer technical assistance and other support to garden groups.

Related NYC initiatives Model after Citizens Committee grants, easy to apply for, little reporting required, small amounts to just cover material costs.

3

FUNDING TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE

Support small business incubation with seed funding, process support, and market access.

Description Creating a pool of funding to help immigrant entrepreneurs start a food business will help create income streams and create more outlets for culturally relevant food for immigrant communities across the five Boroughs.

Why it matters Small businesses face huge barriers to starting up and staying in business in NYC, namely affording rent and finding the capital to start up in the first place. In gentrifying neighborhoods, small food businesses are forced to close, move, or simply never start up because rising costs make the dream of starting a food business feel impossible. Despite these challenges, immigrants are more likely to pursue entrepreneurial endeavors and tend to be net job creators for our city. Investing in these businesses to help them remain viable despite rising costs and gentrification pressure, encouraging more of these businesses to start would help immigrant communities generate income while caring for and feeding one another even in trying times.

Where to start Support/fund current initiatives and services that fund start-up and new worker-owned cooperatives run by BIPOC and immigrants

Related NYC initiatives NYCHA Food Business Pathways (FBP) is a great model here, but maybe there is a spin-off in other languages, serving immigrant neighborhoods beyond just NYCHA? Note that undocumented people are not typically eligible for Section 8, therefore not able to qualify for NYCHA public housing and thus not being served by FBP by default.

4

FUNDING

Fund shared commercial kitchens in immigrant communities.

Description Publicly funded commercial kitchen spaces would make safe food processing affordable for all of NYC's many food entrepreneurs.

Why it matters Commercial kitchen space at the market rate is often out of reach for lower-income New Yorkers to access, and recent history has shown that the private sector. Public support for shared use commercial kitchen spaces is essential for keeping them operating, and affordable/ accessible to food entrepreneurs operating on a tight budget.

Where to start Do a mapping analysis of available commercial kitchen space and make the list accessible to community members—through language, advertising etc.

Related NYC initiatives NYCHA Food business pathways program helps cover costs, but kitchens are still hard to locate in many parts of the city.

5

PROCESS/REGULATORY FRAMEWORK

Help entrepreneurs apply to the right inspection agency through a clear and concise process.

Description	Agencies like SBS can offer more direct support to food entrepreneurs by consolidating licensing information across agencies and levels of government.
Why it matters	Food businesses are inspected by city, state and/or federal agencies, depending on what they make. The lines of jurisdiction are not clear to many who start down the path of food entrepreneurship and because inspecting agencies are siloed from one another, there is need for centralized guidance and support that understands what rules apply based on what the business is making and how they operate.
Where to start	SBS is already a powerhouse resource for licensing and other business development services. They could host and share (or adapt) our journey maps to help clarify some of the lines for food businesses specifically. Their ability to translate these tools would also help us better reach and serve immigrant entrepreneurs.
Related NYC initiatives	SBS Food Business Pathways, SBS pre-inspections walk-through services.



6

PROCESS/REGULATORY FRAMEWORK

Create more equitable support for New Americans facing food insecurity.

Description	Public benefits could be made more readily available to immigrants, (particularly those who are undocumented) in a number of ways. Doing so will help shore up their food security and wellbeing, particularly during difficult times.
Why it matters	Immigrants are the lifeblood of NYC, and throughout the pandemic, so many have worked in essential functions, only to be left out of much of the economic support and recovery programs rolled out by our government. This is reinforcing deep inequity in our city, and is putting particular strain on immigrant families
Where to start	NY's Excluded Workers fund sets a great precedent for how public dollars can better serve immigrant communities. Easing or erasing citizenship requirements for public benefits will go a long way in supporting food security for New Americans, their families and communities at large.
Related NYC initiatives	Excluded Workers Fund.

“It should all be simpler! A simplified way! Come to the ground, see what we’re doing, and make it simple for us to serve this need!”

New Roots Bronx Community Farm, Photo Credit: Byron Smith



About this project

This policy brief was created by the New Markets for New Americans working group for the Urban Design Forum's Forefront Fellowship.

This project was developed through interviews with a range of stakeholders to understand the landscape that New Americans food entrepreneurs are navigating. Interviewees included farmers, community gardeners, community organizers, small business-owners, market creators, and policy experts.

If you would like to get in touch about anything in this policy brief, please email us at [NewMarketsForNewAmericans@gmail.com](mailto>NewMarketsForNewAmericans@gmail.com).

Sources

- 1: <https://nycfuture.org/research/under-threat-and-left-out>
- 2: <https://cmsny.org/publications/new-york-essential-workers/>
- 3: <https://ncrc.org/disinvestment/>
- 4: <https://www.nytimes.com/2020/04/10/business/minority-business-coronavirus-loans.html>
- 5: <https://nycfuture.org/research/under-threat-and-left-out>
- 6: <https://comptroller.nyc.gov/reports/minority-and-women-owned-businesses-at-risk-impact-of-covid-19-on-new-york-city-firms/>
- 7: <https://www.foodbanknyc.org/fighting-more-than-covid-19/>
- 8: <https://www.ssa.gov/policy/docs/ssb/v70n4/v70n4p49.html>

“Markets are force multipliers, with systems in place to help people advance on an economic level, to build trust, reliability. Only a market could be so special that it can be all of these things at once.”

Team

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Photo Credit: Kit An' Kin



