

Neighborhood Fare



Tools for Connecting
Local Food Systems

AUTHORS

- Ellen Abraham
- Kiffa Brathwaite
- Charmaine Browne
- Timothy Duschenes
- Olivia Flynn
- Genea Foster
- Rae Gomes
- April Hurley
- Nausher Khan
- Cristina Lee
- Alexis Luna
- Diana Malone
- Ezra Moser
- Chit Yee Ng
- Fernando Ortiz-Baez
- Catherine Ponte
- Joy Resor
- Ciara Sidell
- Kelvin Taitt
- Despo Thoma
- Will Thomson
- Kimberly J. Vallejo
- Alejandro Vazquez

URBAN DESIGN FORUM BOARD OF DIRECTORS

- Melissa Burch
- Vincent Chang
- Tommy Craig
- Michelle Delk
- Patrice Derrington
- Paul Goldberger
- J. Devereaux Hawley
- Tami Hausman
- Jeff Hebert
- Meredith J. Kane
- Judy Kessler
- Jing Liu
- Margaret Newman
- AJ Pires
- Tom Scarangelo
- Byron Stigge
- Beatrice Sibbles
- Lisa Switkin
- Marilyn Taylor
- James von Klemperer
- Weston Walker
- Barika Williams

Emeriti

- James Corner
- Timur Galen
- Daniel Rose

EDITORS

Katherine Sacco
Natalie Greaves-Peters

DESIGN

Partner & Partners

ILLUSTRATION GRAPHIC DIRECTION

Olivia Flynn
Despo Thoma

Photos by Forefront Fellows, Urban Design Forum, and Sam Lahoz

Urban Design Forum
114 Bowery, Suite 301
New York, NY 10013
urbandesignforum.org



Regional Farms

PRODUCTION

In a food-forward neighborhood, regional farms connect to local markets to provide fresh, high-quality produce.

Regional farms shorten the distance between producers and consumers. New York City's food system benefits from connections to regional commercial farms across Connecticut, Delaware, Massachusetts, New Hampshire, New Jersey, New York, Pennsylvania, Rhode Island, Vermont, and northern Virginia.



OBSERVATIONS

New York City is located amidst a robust regional farm system.

The regional farm system surrounding New York City produces a wide variety of fresh fruits and vegetables. New York State is a leading national producer of numerous goods; the state is especially known for apple production, viticulture, dairy production, honey production, and maple syrup. This diverse array of production increases the potential for regional food self-sufficiency, the biodiversity and adaptability of key food species, and the resiliency of the urban food supply.

Regional farms support New York City's climate resilience by sequestering carbon and building healthy soil. The proximity of regional farms can also help mitigate carbon emissions and air pollution by minimizing food miles traveled, improving the urban food system's overall carbon footprint. Farms can host solar panel arrays to increase clean energy production and increase economic viability, and some regional farms can support anaerobic digesters to process organic waste into renewable energy. Regional farms also serve as spaces where urban food waste can be composted to help build the healthy soil necessary for growing food. The Department of Environmental Protection's (DEP) longstanding funding for regional farms to protect water quality and support farm viability demonstrates the power of a regional system.

The relative proximity and diversity of regional farms improves the overall resiliency and quality of the New York City food supply chain. Regional food items do not need to be transported over long distances by multiple carriers and can more quickly get to urban populations during supply chain disruptions.

A sustainable regional farm network requires continued access to space and capital.

New York State alone is home to over 33,000 farms with farmland making up over 20% of New York's total land area,

close to 7 million acres. Of these farms, 96% are family-owned operations, where land and the farm business are passed down generationally.

Continued access to land and capital are key challenges for regional farmers, exacerbated by an aging population of farmers and development pressure on agricultural land. The average age of farmers in New York State is 57. As farmers age and their children are less interested in farming, current farmers see a better return on investment for selling their farms to a residential developer, especially given the competitive housing market. Across the state, 254,000 acres of agricultural land was converted to commercial, industrial, or residential use from 2011 to 2016.

Regional farms are important economic generators and employers for rural communities. Yet they operate with many risks since both harvests and the market can be unpredictable. Ideally, farms produce the profit they need from their sales and all food produced is able to get to markets where it can be purchased and consumed. However, this is rarely the case and farmers often rely on additional support from the government like subsidies, tax benefits, grants, and loans. Farmers also often seek to diversify their income with on-site energy generation, agri-tourism, and direct-to-consumer retail. These funds support the purchase and management of land, tools, and supplies.

Strategic partnerships are an important part of this system. Farmers often find it economical to share use of expensive equipment, processing facilities, and storage space. Regional farms benefit from local farm hub networks and cooperatives that further support resource sharing and coordination to meet large market demands for specific products.

Regional farms benefit from myriad connections to consumers in New York City.

Connections to the large urban market and population of New York City enables farms to boost regional economies, benefit from layered business models that incorporate

tourism, and tap into fresh agricultural talent and business ideas from the city — all while providing city residents with fresh, local produce.

Regional commercial farms produce a wide variety of foods that are consumed by New York City residents by way of urban supermarkets, restaurants, institutional cafeterias, farmers markets, community supported agriculture models, and the City’s emergency food pantries and other distributors. Regional farmers transport their goods to New York City utilizing existing road, rail, and barge freight transportation networks. The majority of regional farm fare arrives in New York City by truck.

Regional produce moves through distribution centers like Hunts Point and Brooklyn Terminal Market. Brooklyn Terminal Market, located in Canarsie, currently receives only a limited amount of regional produce — primarily apples, onions, and potatoes. Regional produce also arrives directly at farmers markets, community-supported agriculture (CSAs), pantries, and farm-to-table restaurants.

GrowNYC plays a unique role in this ecosystem, operating over 50 Greenmarkets that host regional producers, alongside wholesale distribution and, soon, a regional food hub in Hunts Point with 60,000 square feet of cold storage.

|| The farm ecosystem faces challenges in diversifying.

There is a vital need to grow and diversify the agricultural workforce in New York, especially amongst farm owners. While farms in New York State are predominantly white-owned, there are growing shares of women and non-white farmers. In 2017, over 37% of New York’s farmers were women, and the percentage of Latinx farmers had grown by 27% since 2012.

However, long-standing discriminatory lending and farmer support systems have made it especially hard for BIPOC farmers to keep their farm businesses or start new farms. Lack of diversity and inclusion in rural communities can further challenge BIPOC farmers seeking to start new regional farms within these spaces.





Site & History

Chester Agricultural Center (CAC) manages an agricultural land trust in Chester, NY, part of New York state's fertile black dirt region. CAC's mission is to help grow an equitable and inclusive regional food system. The organization was founded in 2014 with a focus on building organic farming models, and expanded its goals in 2017 to support resilient regional farms, farm workers, and a thriving community.

Operation

CAC is a nonprofit that conserves over 270 acres of farmland. The organization has a three-person staff. Their farmland is currently home to eight farms: Choy Division, Dig Acres, Field & Larder, Gilded Farms, The Grandpa Farm, Huerta Farms, Rise & Root Farm, and Sun Sprout Farm.

Activities

CAC connects beginning farmers, many of whom come from underrepresented identities in farming, to affordable farmland and provides technical assistance to help them sustain their farm businesses with organic agricultural methods and equitable labor practices. CAC supports language access for farmers who do not speak English. Their eight current member farms range in size and business model, from half an acre to 40 acres.

CAC reduces barriers to land access and capital by providing affordable long-term leases for farmers. They also reduce the capital costs that farmers incur by building infrastructure that is shared across their member farms. This shared infrastructure includes a wash-and-pack station, crop houses, and greenhouses. Many beginning farmers and seasonal farmworkers struggle to find affordable housing upstate, so they are working to reduce this barrier by developing housing on-site. Through a grant from Enterprise Community Partners, CAC is developing 25 units of affordable housing that will be shared by farmers, farm workers, and visitors.

Funding Sources

CAC was founded with investment from five individuals and the Ralph E. Ogden Foundation.

Products

Member farms grow fruits and vegetables, East Asian heritage crops, honey, flowers, herbs, and more

Food System Connections

CAC operates a farm store with a tiered fair pricing model. Member farms sell their produce through CSAs, at farmers markets, and to stores and restaurants. CAC partners with organizations across the Hudson Valley, like the Hudson Valley Farm Hub, to provide farming training and education. They also have programming dedicated to farmworkers, to support them in becoming farm owners. Due to the shared nature of their production space, their member farmers regularly exchange lessons learned, resources, and advice with one another. This naturally occurring ecosystem of mutual support contributes to the viability of beginning farms in the long run.



Case Study

Chester Agricultural Center

Site Size

270 acres



Image Credit: CAC via Civil Eats

RECOMMENDATIONS

→ Build creative partnerships with state and federal agencies to fund stronger connections between regional farms and urban neighborhoods.

City programs could expand, in partnership with state and federal agencies, to benefit the regional food system, modeled off of DEP's contract with the Watershed Agricultural Council for regional watershed work. The Department of Transportation (DOT) should leverage existing clean truck programs to seek additional funding from the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) or New York State to expand clean trucking for smaller regional farms. The City and State could partner to secure funding for urban BIPOC farmers to buy or manage regional farmland, then support knowledge-sharing back to urban growers. The City and the State could provide targeted grant funding for nonprofit programs that further connect urban and regional farmers, such as regional grower conferences.

→ Create a design toolkit to activate plazas and streetscapes for farmers markets and CSA share distribution.

DOT should develop design parameters that ensure street, sidewalk, and plazas can support farmers markets, CSA distribution, and similar activities. Parameters should account for delivery vehicle parking, secured tabling areas for vendors, electricity access, bathroom, and wifi. City agencies can integrate this toolkit into existing efforts like the NYC Plaza Program or Open Streets to shape public realm upgrades and support the expansion of farmers markets citywide. The toolkit could also be available as a public resource.

→ Invest in neighborhood food hubs that bolster the regional food supply chain.

As stated in Food Forward NYC, the City should invest in developing neighborhood food hubs, building on the ongoing food hub effort in Central Brooklyn. A network of food hubs could aggregate regional food, provide cold storage, and offer processing, packing, and distribution facilities. These hubs could provide market growth opportunities for regional farms through wholesale and direct-to-consumer sales. The food hubs could rely on cooperative models to promote community ownership, based on precedent at Hunts Point Cooperative Market and Brooklyn Terminal Market. The City should look to models such as Mandela Partners in Oakland, CA and CUMAC's regional food hub in Paterson, NJ.





**Neighborhood Fare: Tools for
Connecting Local Food Systems**

©2022 Urban Design Forum