

CITY COUNCIL  
CITY OF NEW YORK

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TRANSCRIPT OF THE MINUTES

Of the

COMMITTEE ON ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

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November 14, 2024  
Start: 12:37 p.m.  
Recess: 3:14 p.m.

HELD AT: COMMITTEE ROOM - CITY HALL

B E F O R E: Amanda Farías, Chairperson

COUNCIL MEMBERS:

Alexa Avilés  
Erik D. Bottcher  
Jennifer Gutiérrez  
Kevin C. Riley  
Rafael Salamanca, Jr.  
Inna Vernikov

OTHER COUNCIL MEMBERS ATTENDING:

Gale A. Brewer

A P P E A R A N C E S

Qiana Mickie, Executive Director of the New York City Mayor's Office of Urban Agriculture

Rachel Atcheson, Deputy Director for Communications and Intergovernmental Affairs here at the New York City Mayor's Office of Food Policy

Oliver Gonzalez-Yoakum, registered dietician and research associate at the Laurie M. Tisch Center for Food Education and Policy at Teachers College, Columbia University

Yibing Zhou, doctoral student at the Tisch Food Center

Christine Torresson, master's student at the Tisch Food Center

Dr. Natalie Greaves-Peters, registered dietitian and postdoctoral senior research associate at the Tisch Food Center

Megan Nordgren, New York Sun Works

Jesse Miller, farm manager at the Spring Creek Towers Farm

Emily Miller, Director of Development and Communications with Teens for Food Justice

Rae Gomes, National Black Food and Justice Alliance and co-founder of Central Brooklyn Food Co-op

A P P E A R A N C E S (CONTINUED)

Beth Bainbridge, Sylvia Center

Iyeshima Harris-Ouedraogo, Director of Advocacy  
and Programs at Green Guerillas

Joanna Dorsey, Director of Policy and Advocacy  
for Black Farmers United in New York State

Yvonne Saint Luce, self

Yemi Amu, self

2 SERGEANT-AT-ARMS: Quiet please, keep it  
3 down, thank you.

4 Good evening, and welcome to the New York  
5 City remote hearing on the Committee on Economic  
6 Development.

7 Please silent all electronic devices at  
8 this time.

9 Also, please do not approach the dais.

10 If you have any questions, please raise  
11 your hand and one of us, the Sergeant-at-Arms, will  
12 kindly assist you.

13 Thank you very much for your kind  
14 cooperation.

15 Chair, we're ready to begin.

16 MAJORITY LEADER FARIÁS: [GAVEL] Good  
17 morning, and welcome to today's New York City Council  
18 hearing of the Committee on Economic Development.  
19 Today is November 14, 2024. My name is Amanda Fariás,  
20 and I have the privilege of Chairing this Committee.  
21 I would like to thank the Members of the Committee  
22 and the Administration for joining us today for this  
23 important hearing on citywide access to fresh produce  
24 and Introduction 693 sponsored by Council Member  
25 Sandy Nurse, which would require the Office of Urban

2 Agriculture to create and implement a plan to convert  
3 unused industrial areas to urban agricultural sites.

4           Nearly 1.6 New Yorkers face food  
5 insecurity and many neighborhoods continue to lack  
6 adequate access to fresh healthy food. This is simply  
7 unacceptable. The purpose of today's hearing is to  
8 examine how effectively our City agencies are working  
9 to address these challenges, particularly through  
10 urban agricultural initiatives at the Mayor's Office  
11 of Food Policy and the newly established Office of  
12 Urban Agriculture. Since the Council passed Local  
13 Laws 121 and 123 in 2021 establishing the Mayor's  
14 Office of Urban Agriculture, we have seen both  
15 progress and continuing challenges in expanding  
16 access to fresh healthy food across our city. This  
17 progress was documented last October when the Office  
18 of Urban Agriculture released its first annual  
19 report, Cultivating Urban Agriculture in New York  
20 City, which outlined seven key priorities and  
21 numerous initiatives to promote innovation and  
22 improve urban agricultural food production. Today, we  
23 are particularly interested in examining the Office  
24 of Urban Agriculture's progress on these priorities.  
25 According to its report, the Office has begun

2 important work to identify underutilized municipal  
3 lands for urban agriculture, including a feasibility  
4 study targeting East New York. The Office has also  
5 launched initiatives to support emerging urban  
6 agriculture entrepreneurs, including an M/WBE  
7 training and certification program that has already  
8 provided technical assistance to over 20 businesses.  
9 We also want to understand how the Mayor's Office of  
10 Food Policy is coordinating with other agencies to  
11 implement critical food initiatives like Health  
12 Bucks, which provides essential support for New  
13 Yorkers to purchase fresh produce at farmer's  
14 markets, and new initiatives like the farm to school  
15 program, which recently received 200,000 dollars in  
16 state and federal grants. We'll also explore how the  
17 Office of Urban Agriculture is working to identify  
18 and develop new growing spaces while supporting the  
19 City's over 700 existing urban farms and gardens.  
20 Furthermore, we want to understand how both Offices  
21 are coordinating with other City agencies to  
22 implement initiatives like the Good Food Purchasing  
23 Program. This program promotes five core values that  
24 we believe are essential to building a more equitable  
25 food system, supporting local economies, ensuring

2 environmental sustainability, protecting our  
3 workforce, promoting animal welfare, and improving  
4 nutrition. These values align closely with our City's  
5 broader goals for food equity, and we look forward to  
6 hearing from both Offices on how those values are  
7 being promoted across the city.

8           Additionally, we would like to assess the  
9 Office of Urban Agriculture's progress on the seven  
10 key priorities outlined in its report last year and  
11 understand what additional support the office may  
12 need from the Council to achieve its goals.

13           Finally, we will consider Introduction  
14 693 today, sponsored again by Council Member Sandy  
15 Nurse, which would require the Mayor's Office of  
16 Urban Agriculture to create a comprehensive plan for  
17 converting unused and underutilized industrial areas  
18 across all five boroughs into urban agriculture  
19 sites. This plan would need to address several  
20 critical issues including environmental protection  
21 strategies, incentive programs for local community  
22 organizations and M/WBEs, and partnerships for food  
23 distribution to low-income communities. This  
24 legislation represents an important step towards  
25 expanding our City's capacity for local food

2 production while promoting economic development and  
3 environmental sustainability.

4           Before we begin, I would like to take a  
5 moment to acknowledge the Economic Development  
6 Committee Staff, Senior Counsel Alex Paulenoff,  
7 Senior Policy Analyst William Hongach, and Finance  
8 Analyst Glenn Martelloni for their hard work in  
9 preparing for this hearing. I will also like to  
10 acknowledge we've been joined by Council Members  
11 Bottcher, Riley, and Avilés, and Council Member  
12 Nurse.

13           Before we turn it over to Committee  
14 Counsel, I'm just going to give Council Member Nurse  
15 a moment to say a few words about her Introduction  
16 693.

17           COUNCIL MEMBER NURSE: Good afternoon,  
18 everyone, and thank you, Chair, for the hearing.  
19 Today, we are hearing my bill, Intro. 693, which  
20 would require the Office of Urban Agricultural to  
21 create and implement a plan to identify underutilized  
22 industrial areas that can be converted for urban  
23 agricultural production and really, you know, this is  
24 an older bill that we tried to develop when I first  
25 came in. I think we kind of reached out to you all



2 when you all were just setting up and wanted to think  
3 about what are ways that we can make space available  
4 for urban ag production and some of the challenges  
5 that people who want to do this work are facing. This  
6 was also coming out of COVID and the pandemic  
7 response and thinking about the availability of fresh  
8 food when things go really, really bad and how do we  
9 build in resiliency that accounts for what we have  
10 here in addition to what we have in the kind of  
11 regional food shed and looking for ways to  
12 incentivize and make available this space for folks  
13 who know they're never going to make tons and tons of  
14 money off this but are really committed to the  
15 mission of providing fresh food and who want to try  
16 to build in that hyper local food production and food  
17 economy into neighborhoods that really could benefit  
18 from an infusion of fresh food available year-round  
19 and supported in some ways by the City so that's  
20 really the spirit of the bill and love to hear  
21 feedback and looking forward to the conversation in  
22 addition to the larger conversation around access to  
23 fresh food. I think that's it. Thank you so much,  
24 Chair.

1 COMMITTEE ON ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

10

2 MAJORITY LEADER FARIÁS: Thank you,  
3 Council Member Nurse.

4 I'll now turn it over to our Committee  
5 Counsel to administer the oath.

6 COMMITTEE COUNSEL PAULENOFF: Good  
7 afternoon. Alex Paulenoff, Senior Counsel.

8 Will all Members of the Administration  
9 testifying today or answering questions please raise  
10 your right hand.

11 Do you swear or affirm to tell the truth,  
12 the whole truth, and nothing but the truth in your  
13 testimony today and to respond honestly to Council  
14 Member questions?

15 ADMINISTRATION: (INAUDIBLE)

16 COMMITTEE COUNSEL PAULENOFF: Thank you.  
17 You may begin when ready.

18 EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR MICKIE: First, I  
19 apologize. I've lost my voice, but this was a hearing  
20 that was quite important so I hope people can bear  
21 with me with my froggy voice.

22 Good afternoon, Chair Farías and Members  
23 of the Committee on Economic Development. My name is  
24 Qiana Mickie. I'm the Executive Director of the New  
25 York City Mayor's Office of Urban Agriculture, also

2 known as MOUA. I am pleased to be here to testify at  
3 this hearing on the critical topic of citywide access  
4 to fresh produce.

5           The Office was established by Local Law  
6 123 of 2021. It is a newer office that's tasked with  
7 leading New York City's efforts to increase the  
8 access to and the production of fresh, healthy,  
9 locally grown food while strengthening climate  
10 resiliency and spurring economic activity across our  
11 city. Through research, policy development, advocacy,  
12 and community outreach, MOUA aims to address the  
13 climate, wealth, and health and food disparities in  
14 our natural and built environments. We collaborate  
15 with other City agencies to advance agriculture and  
16 equity on several fronts, including community  
17 gardens, urban farms, regional food systems,  
18 workforce development, environmental justice, and  
19 overall building a green, resilient economy. New York  
20 City is now home to a breadth of urban agricultural  
21 models such as soil-based community gardens, urban  
22 farms, rooftop gardens, and also non-soil-controlled  
23 environment models such as aquaponics and  
24 hydroponics. These models are built to teach through  
25 growing. They're also built to foster climate

2 resiliency and many focus on scaling healthy food  
3 production. I would be remiss to not mention that  
4 these are also spaces of healing, respite, and  
5 wellness in their communities. All of these models  
6 and sites are critical elements of our city's  
7 landscape. Green infrastructure that extends the  
8 season of growing, such as greenhouses, multi-purpose  
9 buildings, that also can provide educational centers,  
10 hubs of learning, hubs of process, are also a part of  
11 urban agriculture in New York City.

12           In the post-COVID-19 pandemic era, we are  
13 all too aware of the kind of damage and deprivation  
14 wrought by supply chain disruptions with much of the  
15 pain felt most acutely in black, brown, and low-  
16 income households and neighborhoods. One positive  
17 outcome of the pandemic has been a renewed focus and  
18 emphasis on regional and hyper-local food production  
19 and access. In my experience in the food and farm  
20 landscape, I can attest to the resiliency of our  
21 local, regional, and food systems in providing  
22 locally grown food, being critical access points for  
23 larger food distributions, and organizing  
24 stakeholders that support their community. At MOUA,  
25 we are attempting to increase opportunities for local

2 farmers and producers to scale their operations by  
3 providing pathways to critical certifications and  
4 procurement opportunities here in the city.

5           In partnership with NYC Small Business,  
6 SBS, we've been holding Jump Start M/WBE training and  
7 certification sessions with dozens of small food and  
8 farm businesses participating. This month, I'm happy  
9 to mention that we have launched NYC School Food  
10 EATS. EATS stands for Enhancing Accessibility  
11 Training and Support, as well as EATS. It is the  
12 City's first farmer and producer business procurement  
13 training. In collaboration with New York City Public  
14 Schools Office of Food and Nutrition Services and  
15 Cornell Cooperative Extension Harvest New York, this  
16 will be and is a multi-month program that was  
17 designed specifically for regional small to mid-scale  
18 food and farm businesses that are often left out of  
19 City vendor contract opportunities. This training  
20 offers critical knowledge, best practices, and  
21 resources to minimize barriers to New York City's  
22 school food procurement process. New York City School  
23 Food EATS will strengthen the linkages within our  
24 regional food system and support historically  
25 disadvantaged farmers while increasing healthy,

2 culturally relevant food supply in our city's  
3 cafeterias and classrooms.

4           Our Reimagining Farm to School in NYC  
5 initiative, now in its second school year, provides  
6 funding opportunities for local urban gardeners,  
7 growers, and farmers to increase local food access  
8 and education for public school students in the  
9 classroom and on the farm. As you'll read in our  
10 annual progress report, this initiative is a two-year  
11 pilot, which New York City public school students,  
12 ranging from elementary to high school grades, are  
13 provided with the opportunity to build relationships  
14 with local urban farmers and learn directly about  
15 farm topics such as the seasonality of crops, the  
16 life cycle of food, and what it takes in the  
17 livelihood of a farmer, urban and rural.

18           MOUA is also exploring how to make local  
19 food more affordable and accessible. New York City is  
20 home to over 100 plus community supported agriculture  
21 sites, also known as CSAs, and other direct farm to  
22 consumer models. Providing resources and training to  
23 increase the number of sites and farm operations that  
24 can accept and process SNAP EBT would provide  
25 additional opportunities for food insecurity

2 community members to leverage their SNAP benefits to  
3 purchase locally fresh grown food. There are other  
4 benefits to utilizing SNAP. The USDA Economic  
5 Research Service has found that government programs  
6 that focus on low-income households, like SNAP, have  
7 a multiplier effect of up to 2 dollars of economic  
8 activity per dollar spent. This favorably impacts our  
9 local economies in areas including production,  
10 processing, distribution, helping both our urban  
11 rural food systems and food insecure New Yorkers.  
12 Enabling access to fresh, healthy, affordable food,  
13 particularly in historically divested neighborhoods,  
14 as well as strengthening urban rural linkages in our  
15 food supply are top priorities of our office.

16           Additionally, as mentioned in our Annual  
17 Progress Report, we are working to enable better  
18 access to underutilized City-owned land for growers  
19 and existing and emerging small urban agriculture  
20 business enterprises. Increased land access will be  
21 critical to growing hyper-local food production in  
22 the city and must be done strategically so as not to  
23 compete with other critical land uses such as  
24 housing. We have created the Urban Agriculture  
25 Dashboard, which includes a mapping tool, and have

2 incorporated the Department of Citywide  
3 Administrative Services, also known as DCAS, Local  
4 Law 48 of 2011, mandated suitability of City-owned  
5 and leased property for urban agriculture lists in  
6 that dashboard. We are also in the planning stages  
7 for innovative land use agreements that would allow  
8 for a greater range of urban agriculture-based  
9 activity on City-owned land so we're really thinking  
10 about land use as well as the contracts and  
11 agreements that help people activate on those City-  
12 owned properties and parcels of land.

13 Another way we are pursuing increased  
14 local food production is through the utilization of  
15 rooftop urban agrivoltaics, the symbiotic co-location  
16 of plants and solar energy production to spur rooftop  
17 development for both hyper-local food production and  
18 solar energy generation. Community access will be a  
19 top priority as we create these rooftop green spaces.  
20 As evidenced by the rooftop urban agrivoltaics pilot  
21 we will launch at a community site in Hell's Kitchen.  
22 Many growers in the City's urban ag community want to  
23 scale their operations into potential businesses and  
24 foster greater economic opportunity, and we believe



2 we will do all we can and we'll do all we can to  
3 support them.

4           Just a word about Intro. 693, which would  
5 require the Mayor's Office of Urban Agriculture in  
6 conjunction with relevant agencies and local  
7 community programs to create and implement a plan to  
8 convert unused industrial areas in each of the five  
9 boroughs to sites that can host urban agriculture  
10 services, including hydroponic, food storage, food  
11 distribution, as well as other growing approaches. As  
12 I mentioned earlier, we at MOUA are currently already  
13 engaged in an effort to map underutilized City-owned  
14 land as well as to develop innovative land use  
15 agreements that would enable a range of urban  
16 agriculture services and activities on this land. We  
17 would be thrilled to work with you and City Council  
18 Members and, of course, community stakeholders to  
19 develop urban agriculture models, approaches, and  
20 opportunities in your Districts. We feel strongly  
21 that this type of collaborative effort is what is  
22 called for and would be more effective than an  
23 overall borough-based planning approach. This kind of  
24 District-based targeted approach would not  
25 necessitate legislation such as Introduction 693, but

2 it would facilitate the sort of collaboration we feel  
3 would be most effective going forward.

4 Thank you for the opportunity to testify  
5 again. Happy to answer any questions that you might  
6 have.

7 MAJORITY LEADER FARÍAS: Great. Thank you,  
8 folks, for your testimony. I appreciate it.

9 I'm just going to begin with some food  
10 governance questions and kind of talk about the MOFP.  
11 I know it was created by Executive Order over a  
12 decade ago and codified into law last session. What  
13 have been the main achievements of the Mayor's Office  
14 of Food Policy since it was codified into law?

15 EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR MICKIE: Since this is  
16 a question for the Mayor's Office of Food Policy, I'd  
17 like to direct that question to my colleague here,  
18 Rachel.

19 MAJORITY LEADER FARÍAS: Sure.

20 DEPUTY DIRECTOR ATCHESON: Hello, Rachel  
21 Atcheson, Deputy Director for Communications and  
22 Intergovernmental Affairs here at the Mayor's Office  
23 of Food Policy.

24 We are a coordinating body that  
25 coordinates with all of the agencies that serve food

2 and touch food in some way so that means school food,  
3 hospital food, jails, homeless shelters, and older  
4 adult centers. Those are our big buckets. We are very  
5 proud to have advanced the Good Food Purchasing  
6 Initiative that really increases transparency around  
7 food as it relates to the city so right now you can  
8 actually go to [nyc.gov/food](http://nyc.gov/food) and see an interactive  
9 dashboard where you can see all of our available data  
10 on where food is coming from, from the Fiscal Year  
11 that we started, so Fiscal Year 2019. We're very  
12 proud of a lot of the work that is done in the  
13 various offices that serve food around the city. So,  
14 is there a particular agency that you're referring  
15 to, because I'm happy to go into a broad overview, as  
16 a lot of agencies touch food but, if there's schools,  
17 hospitals, jails, happy to speak to the agency.

18 MAJORITY LEADER FARIÁS: I think what I'd  
19 love to hear more about are the agencies that share  
20 the goals and have successes or challenges presented  
21 in front of them and whether or not within those  
22 goals, do you as a coordinating agency create the  
23 overall comprehensive plan or do each of the separate  
24 agencies have their own goals and their own plans to  
25 get to the shared goal?

2 DEPUTY DIRECTOR ATCHESON: Absolutely. So,  
3 let me speak briefly about our Food Forward Plan,  
4 which is our 10-year plan. It's the first ever 10-  
5 year food policy plan, first issued in February 2021  
6 under Executive Director Kate McKenzie. This plan  
7 outlines a comprehensive policy framework to reach a  
8 more equitable, sustainable and healthy food system  
9 in 2031. Since the launch of Food Forward NYC, the  
10 City has made significant strides in increasing  
11 access for fresh produce and healthy food citywide.  
12 Revamping the community food connection program has  
13 been key, as it now provides funding to over 700  
14 community kitchens and food pantries and introduced  
15 fresh produce for the first time. In Fiscal Year '23,  
16 the program saw more than 32.5 million visits and  
17 allocated nearly 47 million in food. The Department  
18 of Health runs a variety of nutrition security  
19 programs that improves access to fruits and  
20 vegetables for low-income New Yorkers at farmers  
21 markets, supermarkets and bodegas, including Health  
22 Bucks, Get the Good Stuff, Groceries to Go, and Shop  
23 Healthy. Additionally, the Health and Hospitals'  
24 Lifestyle Medicine Program increases access to  
25 healthy plant-based foods to individuals with chronic

2 diseases. This year the program expanded citywide,  
3 now serving up to 4,000 people with chronic diseases.  
4 In schools, Chef in the Schools and the Cafeteria  
5 Enhancement Program and Plant Powered Fridays have  
6 made healthier scratch cook meals more accessible for  
7 1.1 million New York public school students, and last  
8 year, the Department of Health revised its food  
9 standards to set minimum serving sizes for fruits,  
10 vegetables and whole grains, requiring at least one  
11 serving of a plant-based entree featuring a whole or  
12 minimally processed plant based protein weekly per  
13 meal type and requiring the elimination of processed  
14 meats by 2025. These revisions have increased healthy  
15 food access to millions of New Yorkers in public  
16 schools, hospitals, correctional facilities, homeless  
17 shelters, and older adult centers. That's a little  
18 bit on what we are up to.

19 We're also providing a briefing to all  
20 City Council Members and Staff virtually in the next  
21 few weeks so also happy to go into detail then as  
22 well.

23 MAJORITY LEADER FARIÁS: Great, thank you.  
24 We've also been joined by a Council Member Salamanca  
25 virtually.

2           Then in terms of the related agencies,  
3 each that you just described with development of  
4 strategic plans and monitoring these frameworks, how  
5 do we do that to make sure the goals are met in each  
6 one of them?

7           DEPUTY DIRECTOR ATCHESON: Absolutely. So,  
8 we meet with all of our agencies that serve food at  
9 least quarterly through our Good Food Purchasing  
10 Initiative. It really depends on the sort of project  
11 we're working on so, for instance, within our jail  
12 system, we brought a culinary training to Rikers  
13 Island to increase and upskill the food service  
14 workers on the island, and we actually just sent out  
15 a press release about that last week. So, for  
16 instance, with them, we're meeting every week. Every  
17 Friday at noon, we're getting on a call and talking  
18 with them consistently, and so it depends on the  
19 initiative that we're sort of advancing with these  
20 agencies, but it's pretty constant communication.

21           MAJORITY LEADER FARIÁS: How would you  
22 describe your role at MOFP in coordinating with the  
23 agencies?

24

25

2 DEPUTY DIRECTOR ATCHESON: We have a  
3 wonderful relationship with the agencies in  
4 coordination.

5  
6 MAJORITY LEADER FARÍAS: Okay. How many  
7 full-time staff does MOFP currently have?

8 DEPUTY DIRECTOR ATCHESON: So, we used to  
9 be an office under prior Administrations of roughly  
10 two. We are now an office of roughly 10 so this  
11 Administration has prioritized giving us the  
12 resources we need to advance food policy under an  
13 Adams' Administration.

14 MAJORITY LEADER FARÍAS: Okay. It sounds  
15 like what I'm going to ask anyway, this is enough  
16 staff to meet its needs and goals?

17 DEPUTY DIRECTOR ATCHESON: This is enough,  
18 yes. We are sufficiently funded. Thank you.

19 MAJORITY LEADER FARÍAS: Okay, great. What  
20 is the Mayor's Office of Food Policy's community  
21 engagement strategy? How do you folks work in food  
22 justice communities, folks that have inequitable  
23 access to healthy food or often the low-income  
24 communities of color that we have throughout the  
25 city?

2 DEPUTY DIRECTOR ATCHESON: Yeah. So, our  
3 work is mostly a behind-the-scenes approach in the  
4 sense of we are coordinating with the agencies that  
5 serve food. We are not directly interfacing with  
6 residents, for instance, so we really are heavily  
7 dependent on the agencies that do those interactions,  
8 whether that's DSS, who works hand-in-hand with  
9 residents who are participating in SNAP, or with the  
10 Office of Food and Nutrition Services with school  
11 lunch. For instance, with the 7,000 workers that they  
12 have distributing school lunches, there's a multitude  
13 of sort of ways in which we have community  
14 engagement, and we're actually going to be giving a  
15 webinar in December on community engagement with the  
16 public engagement unit.

17 MAJORITY LEADER FARIÁS: How often are you  
18 getting that feedback from food insecure communities  
19 and how that's impacting the work, the goals, the  
20 strategic plan?

21 DEPUTY DIRECTOR ATCHESON: So, we just  
22 this year implemented surveys as a part of our Good  
23 Food Purchasing Initiative where we're actually  
24 asking people to fill out surveys about their  
25 evaluation of the food, and so this is the first year



2 that we are doing that, and we're excited to get some  
3 metrics, but this is the first year that will be our  
4 baseline.

5 MAJORITY LEADER FARÍAS: Okay. How are you  
6 measuring the combined impact of different food  
7 access programs like Health Bucks and SNAP in  
8 different neighborhoods?

9 DEPUTY DIRECTOR ATCHESON: Can you repeat  
10 the question?

11 MAJORITY LEADER FARÍAS: How are you folks  
12 measuring the combined impact of the different food  
13 access programs we have, for example, like Health  
14 Bucks and SNAP at the same time in the same  
15 neighborhoods?

16 EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR MICKIE: Is it a  
17 question for the Office of Urban Agriculture or for  
18 Food Policy?

19 MAJORITY LEADER FARÍAS: I have it  
20 specifically in my Mayor's Office of Food Policy  
21 questions, but I'm happy to get feedback from both of  
22 you.

23 EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR MICKIE: Sure. I'm  
24 happy to share. Right now, we find that for the  
25 Office of Urban Agriculture, we've heard from

2 stakeholders that oftentimes it's hard to gather  
3 community-driven data as well as connecting to it so  
4 we've been creating an urban agriculture dashboard as  
5 well as developing tools that will create  
6 opportunities to gather their information. That  
7 means, in particular, not just from individuals and  
8 stakeholders, but also finding a way to get aggregate  
9 data from non-profits that do direct consumer work in  
10 their models around CSAs and creating SNAP so we feel  
11 like reaching out to governmental agencies as well as  
12 our community stakeholders that have that information  
13 is a good way to collect, compile, and aggregate that  
14 information to help inform the work of our office as  
15 well as other offices, but I'll pass the mic to MOFP.

16 DEPUTY DIRECTOR ATCHESON: I think we're  
17 good.

18 MAJORITY LEADER FARIÁS: Okay. Thank you  
19 so much for that. I have questions around Health  
20 Bucks. Do we feel comfortable answering those?

21 DEPUTY DIRECTOR ATCHESON: Yeah. Our  
22 colleague at the Health Department was not able to  
23 attend so I have information about Health Bucks,  
24 though they do run the program so happy to answer  
25 questions.

2 MAJORITY LEADER FARIÁS: Great. A lot of  
3 folks in the Bronx are always really excited about  
4 the Health Bucks program. My District is particularly  
5 always excited about it since I've started doing the  
6 program in partnership with DOHMH. How is DOH  
7 coordinating with the Office of Urban Agriculture to  
8 ensure food access initiatives complement rather than  
9 duplicate the work?

10 EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR MICKIE: With the  
11 Mayor's Office of Urban Agriculture, given our  
12 understanding of relationships with urban ag  
13 stakeholders as well as regional partners, we try to  
14 utilize that information to inform better programs  
15 and activities to ensure that all farmers, no matter  
16 size, are able to have the mechanisms and tools in  
17 order to not just accept Health Bucks, but what we  
18 also do is help them understand the co-benefits of  
19 leveraging different funding mechanisms so, for us,  
20 what we've seen that really builds that multiplier  
21 effect is farmers as well as market managers having  
22 access and capacity to process multiple so that could  
23 look like Health Bucks, that can look like other  
24 double-up incentive programs, and, again, as well as  
25 accepting SNAP at their CSA.

2 I would also mention a lot of these  
3 models like to use Community Chef demos to use the  
4 healthy fresh food to engage their community so they  
5 understand what they're using, why they can use their  
6 fresh food, why they can buy it directly from  
7 farmers, but also it gives them the chance to  
8 understand how they are able to stretch their dollar  
9 so this is information that we leverage directly from  
10 the community and share it into agency with partners,  
11 and we hope to continue to see increased activity and  
12 action with that activity and also the programming  
13 engagement.

14 MAJORITY LEADER FARIÁS: Great. We've also  
15 been joined by Council Member Vernikov.

16 Then in terms of some of the data points,  
17 do we know the total distribution of Health Bucks  
18 through SNAP versus community-based organizations?

19 DEPUTY DIRECTOR ATCHESON: So, in 2023,  
20 the Health Department distributed over 2.3 million  
21 worth of Health Bucks. Most Health Bucks were  
22 distributed through the SNAP incentive program at  
23 farmers' markets, more than 845,000 Health Bucks  
24 worth over 1.69 million; over 110,000 Health Bucks  
25 worth more than 220,000 distributed by more than 600

2 programs at community and faith-based organizations  
3 through their nutrition and health programming;  
4 nearly 220,000 Health Bucks worth over 440,000  
5 purchased and distributed by local elected officials  
6 and programs at City agencies; and, in addition, in  
7 2023, approximately 650,000 Health Bucks worth nearly  
8 1.3 million were purchased and distributed by non-  
9 profit organizations so happy to repeat any of those  
10 numbers as those were a lot of numbers.

11 MAJORITY LEADER FARIÁS: We can bother you  
12 afterward.

13 Do we know how many of those Health Bucks  
14 go unredeemed every fiscal year?

15 DEPUTY DIRECTOR ATCHESON: We do know that  
16 number. It varies year to year. The exact percentage  
17 we'd have to get back to you after this hearing.

18 MAJORITY LEADER FARIÁS: Okay, yeah. If  
19 you can give me, like, the last two, three years of  
20 how many go unredeemed and we can do that average,  
21 that'd be great.

22 Do we know how many vendors participate  
23 in the program from year to year or if there's a  
24 consistency?

2 DEPUTY DIRECTOR ATCHESON: We would have  
3 to get back to you after this.

4 MAJORITY LEADER FARÍAS: Okay.

5 DEPUTY DIRECTOR ATCHESON: Yeah, we'd have  
6 to get back to you with exact numbers.

7 MAJORITY LEADER FARÍAS: That's fine.

8 Thank you. Do we know if there's any specific  
9 challenges that we've encountered in expanding vendor  
10 participation in the Health Bucks program, any  
11 solutions we're looking at developing, if so?

12 DEPUTY DIRECTOR ATCHESON: Yes. Hold on  
13 one second. In terms of some challenges, there is  
14 digital integration so as, you know, we, for  
15 instance, with school food, you know, we are moving  
16 away from paper logbooks to a digital system. As  
17 we're doing in other agencies, we are also doing  
18 that. We're also exploring that with Health Bucks  
19 with digital integration so it's still something  
20 we're digging into.

21 MAJORITY LEADER FARÍAS: What about  
22 reimbursement or repayment to the vendors? For  
23 example, last Fiscal Year, I gave over 25,000-  
24 dollars' worth of Health Bucks out in the District.  
25 What I realized about week three into our Green

2 Market Program was vendors were a little bit  
3 frustrated in that they were saying to me that they'd  
4 have to wait about 30 days to get reimbursement so we  
5 kind of had to readapt our strategy and how we were  
6 engaging the community on it because most folks were  
7 not necessarily, vendors were not leaving with cash  
8 day of or end of week. They were having to wait on a  
9 reimbursement, and so I'd like to know how we're  
10 trying to work, whether that's with digital  
11 integration or do the subcontracting or the repayment  
12 to vendors and how to expedite those because we want  
13 people to have access to fresh and healthy food,  
14 especially if there's an economic need that we're  
15 trying to serve with the Health Bucks program, and I  
16 also don't want any of our farmers and vendors to not  
17 get paid for 30 to 45 days. Can you speak a little  
18 bit to that?

19 DEPUTY DIRECTOR ATCHESON: So, because we  
20 do not, Mayor's Office of Food Policy does not run  
21 the program, I can't speak in detail.

22 MAJORITY LEADER FARIAS: Sure.

23 DEPUTY DIRECTOR ATCHESON: We definitely  
24 have heard this concern and we'll bring it back to  
25 our Health Department colleagues, and I think through

2 potentially that digital integration work that we  
3 might find a way to move that needle faster.

4 MAJORITY LEADER FARIÁS: That'd be great.

5 You can let them know I'll definitely be following up  
6 because I'd like to keep talking about that.

7 How are you measuring progress on the  
8 Food Forward NYC plans goals related to your fresh  
9 produce access?

10 DEPUTY DIRECTOR ATCHESON: So, we put out  
11 the report three years ago now and have copies  
12 available for anyone who wants one. We put out our  
13 progress report last summer, so almost a year and a  
14 half ago. We are working on our next progress report  
15 which will be out this coming summer. Again, some of  
16 that dashboard work is on our website at  
17 [nyc.gov/food](http://nyc.gov/food). Others is integrated and linked through  
18 our website. So, we are trying to be as transparent  
19 as possible as we know that this is an important  
20 need.

21 MAJORITY LEADER FARIÁS: What specific  
22 barriers have you identified, if any, in expanding  
23 fresh food access in underserved communities?

24 EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR MICKIE: Some of the  
25 challenges in expanding access has been, one,



2 capacity. Oftentimes, community stakeholders and  
3 partners are stretched capacity-wise in funding. I  
4 think one of the solutions that we continue to do in  
5 our office, since we can't give grants out, we  
6 increase their awareness of existing programs, city,  
7 state, and federal, that can support their ongoing  
8 work and support capacities such as the New York  
9 State Fresh Connect program, which offers funding  
10 towards capacity for electronic equipment as well as  
11 building out your own farmers' market, community-run  
12 farmers' market, and actually paying for staff. Other  
13 barriers that we hear folks have is access to land,  
14 land to grow as well as land to be able to  
15 distribute. So, again, that goes back to our  
16 priorities on, one, identifying ways to build  
17 economic opportunities for anyone in our stakeholder  
18 community, from volunteers to commercial businesses  
19 and even emerging ones, but also identifying  
20 underutilized land in the city that could be  
21 activated for growing, education, and other climate-  
22 resilient space. So, these are just some of the  
23 barriers that stakeholders continue to find  
24 themselves in that we feel is informing the  
25 priorities of the office, how we move forward.

2           One last thing I would mention, too, is  
3 one of the innovative initiatives that I mentioned  
4 earlier is that AgriVoltaics pilot is to help find a  
5 way for the City to have a way to address the needs  
6 of capital needs as well as food security and, again,  
7 supporting hyperlocal production. Another initiative  
8 with Reimagining Farm to School in NYC, the reason  
9 why we started that work in conjunction with OFNS was  
10 we realized that they were community partners in our  
11 community gardens. Our urban gardens and growers are  
12 vibrant, active spaces that are growing food and  
13 educating community but historically haven't always  
14 had the direct connections with their school gardens  
15 and school communities. The reimagining work has  
16 connected ag education in the classroom and also on  
17 the farm so students in their walking distance from  
18 home or community knew that they were farmers that  
19 were growing food in their community as well as  
20 creating additional opportunities for food access for  
21 regional farmers.

22           Within that work, again, that training  
23 component also comes in. The funding that we've been  
24 able to leverage from the state and the federal  
25 around Farm to School has given us the opportunity to

2 support non-profits, organizations that support urban  
3 growing and food production directly to the farmers  
4 themselves and the sites themselves in their  
5 community as well as supporting emerging farm  
6 businesses because that is, again, part of what we  
7 realized that we need is to grow food here, but we  
8 also need to create economic opportunities for them  
9 to be able to sell into the city so this training  
10 gives them the chance to have a better understanding  
11 on increasing their local food into our system.

12           While it's still in a pilot, we've seen  
13 some great success that is outlined in the progress  
14 report, but what we continue to look forward to is  
15 making better, stronger connections to good food  
16 purchasing because if we're talking about valued  
17 added procurement and valued added producers, it  
18 starts with historically disadvantaged farmers, and  
19 what New Yorkers want to see is them be a part of the  
20 fabric of success in New York City, and we need our  
21 hyper-local farmers, growers, indoors and outdoors,  
22 as well as our regional partners to be small- to mid-  
23 scale businesses to be a part of that success so we  
24 believe that this initiative will only be able to  
25 scale in order to bring in further impact.

2 DEPUTY DIRECTOR ATCHESON: And just to add  
3 on, as we share the interest with MOUA on growing  
4 food, there's also the retail component. So just  
5 bringing your attention to FRESH, which you are aware  
6 of, but for those who are live-streaming, the Food  
7 Retail Expansion program to Support Health called  
8 FRESH, supports the development and retention of  
9 groceries in low-income communities where there's  
10 both a high need for access to fresh food and limited  
11 access to grocery stores. This is achieved through  
12 both financial incentives through EDC and zoning  
13 initiatives through DCP given to participating  
14 groceries who must fall within the eligible land area  
15 and be leased by a full-service grocery operator  
16 after construction or renovation is completed. There  
17 are currently 42 FRESH supermarkets and 17 in  
18 development. There are approximately 1.5 million New  
19 Yorkers within a half-mile radius of the 42 open  
20 Fresh supermarkets. This is an uptick, and we're  
21 excited to see this expand.

22 EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR MICKIE: Can I add a  
23 little bit about FRESH? This is in its early stages,  
24 but we've been talking to DCP, just to circle back on  
25 what are the opportunities that might be being missed

2 in the FRESH program. One of the avenues we've heard  
3 and seen and we want to continue to explore with them  
4 is the opportunity for this incentive to go towards  
5 cooperatives, food cooperatives, regional  
6 cooperatives, even farm hubs. And if folks aren't  
7 familiar with farm hubs, sometimes communities or  
8 neighborhoods, maybe grocery retail is not the best  
9 fit for their scale of product. And again, we're  
10 continuing to try to find ways to support our  
11 regional, hyper-local farmers. Farm hubs or  
12 cooperatives give the opportunity for community to  
13 access in a retail capacity locally grown and  
14 regional produce as well as other value-added  
15 products so one of the things that we're continuing  
16 to explore with them is an incentive that can  
17 actually support our regional food supply system.

18 DEPUTY DIRECTOR ATCHESON: And I would be  
19 remiss if I didn't mention our food access and  
20 affordability working group that a colleague, Lauren  
21 Drumgold, runs, and they're coming out with a  
22 research agenda before the end of the year. We're  
23 really excited about it, and we'll be circulating it  
24 for sure.

2 MAJORITY LEADER FARIÁS: Thank you both  
3 for that thorough response. I appreciate it. I have a  
4 lot of thoughts running through my head, but I'm  
5 going to reserve my time for now and go to Council  
6 Member questions. I'd like to recognize Council  
7 Member Nurse followed by Vernikov then Bottcher.

8 COUNCIL MEMBER NURSE: Thank you, Chair,  
9 and thank you for your testimony. Sorry, I was, like,  
10 looking at... revisiting your testimony, I was looking  
11 for the Urban Ag dashboard. Sometimes it's hard to  
12 find stuff on City websites so I was like, where is  
13 it?

14 EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR MICKIE: Happy to help.

15 COUNCIL MEMBER NURSE: Yeah, so I think  
16 one of the reasons we came up with this bill is  
17 because although sometimes goals are set by the City  
18 and things are written, reports, recommendations,  
19 oftentimes when we face financial situations, stuff  
20 like this becomes some of the first things to get put  
21 on the chopping block, and so while I recognize that  
22 there is work happening, sometimes it's important to  
23 codify certain things to ensure that they do happen.  
24 And by the way, even when we pass laws, it doesn't  
25 mean it happens, right, so this is just another form

2 of accountability so I just wanted to acknowledge  
3 that in your testimony. And I do recognize some of  
4 the land-use work you all have done. What our  
5 legislation is looking at is the industrial spaces  
6 that are across the city. You know, we have the  
7 Industrial Action Plan that actually was led by  
8 Council Member Farías and my neighboring Council  
9 Member Gutiérrez. We were part of that coalition. I  
10 have a 130-acre industrial business zone that has a  
11 lot of public property in it that is inside, you  
12 know, warehouse space and not just open lots, and the  
13 challenge here is the cost of rent, right, like City  
14 land that is a parcel could be great for a community  
15 garden, and that's wonderful, but not all community  
16 gardens are looking for production at a certain  
17 volume, and so we're looking at for, like, operations  
18 that want to set up scaled production or added value,  
19 how do we make that available at an affordable rate?  
20 We worked with EDC on an RFP that went out. There's  
21 some folks here who applied for that. You know, it's  
22 really challenging, right, because people need to  
23 scale up, and cost is so high for everything, and so  
24 the intention of this is to try to see what can we  
25 identify that could be specifically marketed for

2 those kinds of operations that would like to scale up  
3 that aren't just doing education, that are, like, we  
4 want to produce, and we want to sell, and we have  
5 some clients, we want to sell to the City, we want to  
6 sell to schools and hospitals and senior centers,  
7 reduce our impact, all of that and so I'm curious for  
8 what you've mapped out, how many sites that you think  
9 would be appropriate for urban agriculture are in the  
10 manufacturing zones or indoors in the City-owned, in  
11 terms of the portfolio of what the city has  
12 available?

13 EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR MICKIE: Before I  
14 answer that question, I just wanted to echo our  
15 interest and support. I think we're mutually aligned  
16 on wanting to increase and foster economic  
17 opportunities through urban ag. You know, I think  
18 we're both on the same page on seeing that there is a  
19 need for skilled food production as well as other  
20 climate-resilient measures but, in order for that to  
21 really happen, we need partners or practitioners that  
22 are trained and know about urban agriculture, from  
23 growing to production to logistics, to be able to see  
24 themselves in becoming the businesses that they need



2 to scale not just their food production but also  
3 their operations.

4 COUNCIL MEMBER NURSE: Absolutely.

5 EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR MICKIE: Absolutely.

6 We're on the same page. No, we're on the same page.

7 COUNCIL MEMBER NURSE: People need to,  
8 like, have real capacity.

9 EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR MICKIE: Yes. So, you  
10 know, for the Office of Urban Agriculture, what we  
11 hear and see in order to do that work, and I think we  
12 can continue to do that work together in a targeted  
13 approach, is identifying the land that is suitable  
14 for urban ag. In order to do that, there needs to be  
15 an urban agriculture criterion that will really help  
16 to look at the underutilized land beyond the existing  
17 mandate of other agencies, and that is something that  
18 is in our wheelhouse and we're continuing to build.  
19 So, in terms of sites, currently we're leveraging the  
20 DCAS inventory on sites. Additional research is to  
21 build the criterion in order to look at it for the  
22 uses that we're considering. But I think it's also  
23 important to not just talk about the access to land,  
24 and you definitely mentioned the need and the cost.  
25 There's two things there. One is if we're supporting

2 viable small- to mid-scale businesses, and is the  
3 City also creating the opportunities for them, and  
4 that is where some of our Pathways work is happening  
5 with M/WBEs, helping folks understand in order to do  
6 the work that they want on the ground, they're going  
7 to have to be in entities that are able to create and  
8 make good social mission profit.

9           The other thing is the awareness of how  
10 to identify funds to purchase land and continue  
11 operations. As much as scaled hyperlocal food  
12 production can be, they're going to need additional  
13 support, and what we look to as an Office of Urban  
14 Agriculture are existing resources and partnerships  
15 and economic opportunities and grants and other  
16 funding mechanisms at the state and federal level,  
17 and those partnerships help us understand what is  
18 relevant to the scale of partners, whether they're in  
19 the pipeline to become a business or already.

20           So, the question in particular around  
21 indoor, we've seen a great, robust ag tech sector in  
22 an indoor population, and I think we'll continue to  
23 see sites grow. However, in order for this to truly  
24 be equitable and sustainable and for it to support  
25 scaled food production in the city, we're going to

2 need New Yorkers to be a part of the sector of indoor  
3 growing and be a part of innovative production, and  
4 we think that the programs and pilots that we're  
5 providing will create the opportunities to be primed  
6 to access land as well as be in the right entities to  
7 be eligible for the other supports that they need to  
8 move the work that they want to, indoor as well as  
9 outdoor models.

10 COUNCIL MEMBER NURSE: Yeah. So two parts  
11 of that. One, I think, yes, there are mission-  
12 oriented groups that want to do that work, and  
13 there's also businesses that know already they got  
14 some stuff going, we've seen some success stories in  
15 the city, and those are two different approaches to  
16 work, but there's still the question of available  
17 space and just the cost of it and where EDC  
18 specifically has indoor industrial space that could  
19 lend itself towards being a part of jump-starting  
20 that and saturating, like saturate food production in  
21 addition to what we're doing so I guess I'm just  
22 wondering if, to your knowledge, if you don't have it  
23 today, that's fine, if anything that you all have  
24 identified in the inventory is in some of these  
25 warehouse spaces.

2 EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR MICKIE: Well, as you  
3 mentioned, this has been the work of EDC, so since  
4 they're not here, I would rather get their detailed  
5 information in addition to any of the additional  
6 research we're able to find from the office in order  
7 to answer that question best, but happy to continue  
8 to follow up.

9 COUNCIL MEMBER NURSE: Okay. I saw that  
10 the October 2023 report has developed a feasibility  
11 study with EDC targeting East New York with the goal  
12 of identifying underutilized City-owned land and  
13 developing innovative licensing and land-use  
14 agreements. Can you tell us a little bit more about  
15 this work and kind of what are the results of it or  
16 what are some of the challenges you identified?

17 EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR MICKIE: Sure. So, what  
18 we had mentioned in the 2023 report was the start of  
19 the feasibility study with EDC so this is some of  
20 that additional work in the stages that we're talking  
21 about. So, in the progress report, the 2024 progress  
22 report, what we did is kind of we continue to work  
23 with them to explore how to move that forward. I know  
24 they've already did their own action plan and  
25 strategy around certain areas. In particular, I don't

2 want to speak to their work directly. All I can say  
3 to that is we're continuing to work with them on any  
4 additional work around urban ag and criterions to  
5 make it more relevant, but in the progress report,  
6 we're continuing to identify other elements in that  
7 inventory that could also be suitable for  
8 underutilized urban ag production, and when we say  
9 production, it's not just the growing of food. It's  
10 also identifying the space for processing, dry and  
11 cold storage, distribution as well. Absolutely.

12 COUNCIL MEMBER NURSE: Okay, so just to  
13 clarify, you're in a stage of, like, what has you've  
14 identified that you're developing the study? Has the  
15 study been started? Just to clarify.

16 EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR MICKIE: Yeah, no, the  
17 study has taken some pivots. As we've seen, we need  
18 to continue and explore, one, the land, two, building  
19 and refining that urban ag criterion, and then three,  
20 any additional environmental elements and awareness  
21 that we need to have so those things take time, and  
22 we're just trying to be pragmatic about our approach  
23 to the research as well as developing the study.

24 COUNCIL MEMBER NURSE: Okay. I don't  
25 really necessarily have a question about this, but a

2 comment. I know that the Mayor's Executive Order 43  
3 for everybody to be looking for sites for housing  
4 potentially can very much conflict with this, and not  
5 in every case, but in some cases where there might be  
6 some competing interests, and I think that's why  
7 where we have an industrial zone and protected and,  
8 you know, ideally mapped core industrial spaces, we  
9 might be able to really identify and hone in on those  
10 areas, which is what the bill is focused on, is those  
11 particular areas versus where housing isn't  
12 appropriate if we're trying to protect some of our  
13 core industrial space. I guess my question would be,  
14 like, do you see a conflict there where it comes to  
15 industrial sites or in terms of the goals of  
16 identifying more places for urban ag, or do you, you  
17 know? To me, I don't think there's a conflict, but it  
18 is mentioned in your testimony so maybe you could  
19 just share a little bit more about what you thought.

20 EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR MICKIE: I'm sorry, can  
21 you repeat the question?

22 COUNCIL MEMBER NURSE: Yeah, I was, like,  
23 commenting and kind of questioning, but, you know,  
24 the order is saying we need to find housing. Let's  
25 look at every City-owned parcel we have that can be

2 utilized for housing. At the same time, you all are  
3 trying to identify City-owned parcels for urban  
4 agriculture.

5 EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR MICKIE: Yes.

6 COUNCIL MEMBER NURSE: My comment is I  
7 don't think there's a conflict because our bill is  
8 specific to industrial zones.

9 EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR MICKIE: Yes.

10 COUNCIL MEMBER NURSE: But it could be,  
11 depending on the nature of how this order plays out  
12 once things are identified so I guess I was just  
13 wondering, since you did mention it in your testimony  
14 that, you know, local food production in the city  
15 must be done strategically so as not to compete with  
16 other critical land uses such as housing, do you  
17 think we'd run into some major problems at all if we  
18 were to move forward on legislation like this?

19 EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR MICKIE: There's a few  
20 questions there, and I'll try to unpack. One of our  
21 priorities for the Office of Urban Agriculture is to  
22 identify the both-and, meaning how do we use urban  
23 agriculture to be a solution for multiple needs that  
24 the City is trying to address? So, in terms of  
25 looking at City-owned property, that is where the

2 underutilized piece comes in, and this is why it's  
3 taking a little bit longer to look at the urban ag  
4 criteria in order to build that and refine it so we  
5 minimize any conflicts and ensuring that what we're  
6 looking at are not sites that are identified now or  
7 later for other uses and needs because the City has  
8 multiple, but we do feel that food is one of those  
9 critical elements so that's why our initiatives are  
10 focused on looking at land, economic opportunity,  
11 community impact as well as the intersections of  
12 both. So, one of the impetus of the AgriVoltaics  
13 pilot was to help address that. While we're looking  
14 at City-owned land, you know, in the current  
15 inventory, are we also building other pilots that can  
16 say, look up, not just down? Are we looking at places  
17 that we can grow indoor and on rooftops and all those  
18 different ways so we can still grow food but still  
19 address the needs? To us, housing is going to be an  
20 issue, but you can have housing and growing. We can  
21 have housing and climate resiliency. We shouldn't see  
22 it as siloed. We see ourselves as an office that can  
23 work well and collaborate interagency to help inform  
24 how to bring that intersectional, environmental,  
25 racial, and economic equity lens to work that's



2 already moving at other agencies. So, I think in that  
3 way, to answer the question, I don't see our work  
4 moving forward to be in conflict. If anything, it  
5 helps support, identify how to better utilize land  
6 that maybe hasn't, and different ways to meet  
7 multiple needs. But to speak on Executive Order 43,  
8 we understand and hear the community's concerns  
9 around this Executive Order. Currently, as an Office  
10 of Urban Agriculture, we haven't heard of any  
11 particular plans as of yet that the City is going to  
12 displace gardens as a result but, again, we feel that  
13 growing space is critical. That's why we're looking  
14 at it in different ways, and we're exploring  
15 innovative approaches to continue to support the  
16 facilitation of urban ag models in the city.

17 COUNCIL MEMBER NURSE: Thank you, Chair.

18 MAJORITY LEADER FARIAS: Thank you so  
19 much. I'd like to recognize that we've been joined by  
20 Council Member Brewer, and I pass it over to Council  
21 Member Vernikov.

22 COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: Well, I certainly  
23 know how wonderful you are and coming to all the  
24 schools, and it was nice to see you at...

2 MAJORITY LEADER FARIÁS: Sorry, Council  
3 Member Brewer, I was just acknowledging you.

4 Council Member Vernikov, please continue.  
5 Thank you.

6 COUNCIL MEMBER VERNIKOV: Thank you,  
7 Chair. Good afternoon, ladies.

8 All right, so as we discussed here,  
9 Introduction 693 would require plants to convert and  
10 use industrial areas to urban agriculture by January  
11 1, 2026. My first question is, what initial steps  
12 would you take to begin developing the plan?

13 EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR MICKIE: I'm so sorry.  
14 Can you repeat the question? It's just not clear for  
15 me?

16 COUNCIL MEMBER VERNIKOV: Sure. What  
17 initial steps would you take to begin developing this  
18 plan to complete it by January 1, 2026?

19 EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR MICKIE: Oh, so we've  
20 already started. I think the next steps are the  
21 continued research on building and refining the urban  
22 ag criterion, identifying any additional needs around  
23 land, land use, any future needs for that, and also  
24 any environmental protections. We'll continue to have  
25 to be informed by other agencies around that as well,

2 but this is work that's already started. I do feel  
3 like we'll be able to meet our goal of January '26.

4 COUNCIL MEMBER VERNIKOV: Okay, and do you  
5 have sufficient staff capacity as well?

6 EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR MICKIE: While we would  
7 always welcome additional staff capacity and  
8 resources, I feel like we are on scale to meet our  
9 goals with the staff we have, but again, we'd love  
10 and appreciate any additional capacity and resources  
11 for the Office of Urban Ag.

12 COUNCIL MEMBER VERNIKOV: Okay, and which  
13 agencies would you be working most closely with?

14 EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR MICKIE: With the plan?  
15 I believe that would be, you know, one, we're open to  
16 interagency collaboration. Our current immediate  
17 partners would likely be our DEP agency, DOT, EDC,  
18 but I think there's others that we'll continue to be  
19 informed by and engage with.

20 COUNCIL MEMBER VERNIKOV: Okay, thank you.  
21 Thank you.

22 MAJORITY LEADER FARIAS: Recognizing  
23 Council Member Bottcher.

24 COUNCIL MEMBER BOTTCHER: Hi. In a  
25 District like the one I represent, one thing that we

2 don't have a lot of is vacant land, but if you stand  
3 on a rooftop and look around, you see miles of open  
4 space in the form of rooftops, and to me, when I look  
5 at the rooftops of our District, it's such an  
6 underutilized asset. What more can be done to get  
7 building owners to use their rooftops for urban  
8 agriculture?

9 EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR MICKIE: Thank you.

10 It's a great question. We had a similar question. The  
11 Office of Urban Agriculture feels in order to  
12 facilitate or encourage more activity on green  
13 rooftops, in particular agriculture production, and  
14 solar, other climate needs, climate-resilient needs,  
15 it needs to have a feasibility. There needs to be an  
16 approach that feels feasible, no matter the scale and  
17 size of the roof. There are some basic guidelines  
18 that they're going to need to consider in terms of  
19 capacity of growing, capacity of weight-bearing.  
20 These are some of the elements that we identified and  
21 have incorporated in our urban agriculture pilot  
22 program. So, we're taking a two-pronged approach to  
23 that program. It's one, looking from a City  
24 perspective, but also looking with community-based  
25 institutions on how we can learn with them on what is

2 needed but, yes, there's definitely funding, of  
3 course, but first and foremost is making sure that  
4 these rooftops are feasible for any additional  
5 weight-bearing use and activity and then some of  
6 those practical matters as well as how to identify  
7 community engagement and access so we think there's a  
8 pathway forward. That's why we're so excited about  
9 starting this pilot so we continue to look forward to  
10 gathering more information and sharing and, again, I  
11 think this is part of our approach on thinking about  
12 how to approach issues at a citywide level, but  
13 building initiatives and approaches that we can work  
14 on targeted with City Council Members as well. Nobody  
15 knows your Districts better than yourselves, other  
16 than the community members.

17 COUNCIL MEMBER BOTTCHE: When we redesign  
18 parks, which every so often we have the opportunity  
19 to do a visioning session with the community, it's  
20 not often discussed, the idea of having, like, urban  
21 agriculture in a New York City public park. Are there  
22 models for that, New York City public parks that have  
23 urban agriculture, community gardens, and do you work  
24 with the Parks Department...

25 EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR MICKIE: Oh, yes.

2 COUNCIL MEMBER BOTTCHEER: And when new  
3 parks are being designed, are you at the table to  
4 kind of advocate for having gardens, like vegetable  
5 gardens and such, included in these new designs?

6 EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR MICKIE: That's a great  
7 question. Being a new office, I would say we haven't  
8 historically been at a table, only because we're new,  
9 but this is a conversation that we continue to look  
10 forward to engaging. We have a great relationship  
11 with Parks, as well as their community garden  
12 department, Green Thumb so, for us, we see as working  
13 in tandem on how to support green spaces in New York  
14 City. We're also, again, as an Office of Urban  
15 Agriculture, thinking about how we can protect and  
16 foster existing green spaces, protect and foster  
17 growing green spaces, but are there underutilized  
18 potential in other spaces for urban agriculture? We  
19 think so, and we'll continue to work with agency  
20 partners, as well as community, to move that forward.  
21 But I think the short answer is not yet, but I think  
22 we have initiatives and avenues that make that  
23 partnership probably work well in the future and  
24 continue to do so.

2 COUNCIL MEMBER BOTTCHEER: I think there's  
3 a lot of potential in New York City public parks.  
4 We've got a good amount of urban agriculture in  
5 community gardens. We don't have a lot of community  
6 gardens in our District. In fact, we have very few,  
7 but we do have public parks, and I can envision urban  
8 agriculture happening more in our New York City  
9 public parks.

10 EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR MICKIE: Yes. We're  
11 open to continuing to explore with Parks any ways  
12 they want to activate innovative use in their  
13 inventory. I think what you're bringing up, too,  
14 which is important, is not every District has current  
15 green space, but what we as an Office of Urban  
16 Agriculture envision is that there are multiple  
17 models in the breadth of urban agriculture that can  
18 support climate resiliency, food production,  
19 community engagement, education, and wellness so it  
20 can look like what's currently in our inventory, but  
21 again, this is why we look around and look up and we  
22 listen to community partners to really understand  
23 what is needed in community that can bring in the  
24 models and support those models so they can actually  
25 be sustainable long-term but also community-engaged.

2 You know, community is really important, but the  
3 breadth of urban agriculture also includes, again,  
4 emerging businesses and existing businesses. So even  
5 if there's Districts that don't have existing growing  
6 green spaces, I'm sure there's ways that we can be  
7 innovative in looking at underutilized parcels of  
8 land. They don't have to be perfect. They just need  
9 to be suitable for certain urban agriculture work,  
10 but also there's different models that are able to be  
11 done so one of the things that we also look at are  
12 are there new models beyond community gardens that  
13 can continue to expand in our city to really increase  
14 urban agriculture, aquaponics, hydroponics, food  
15 forests. Like, these are some of the things. And  
16 again, taking time to build that criterion so it  
17 makes it easier to move that work forward and be  
18 relevant to the District needs and community needs in  
19 that area.

20 DEPUTY DIRECTOR ATCHESON: And just to add  
21 on there, while sometimes various community districts  
22 do not have as many community gardens, for instance,  
23 we are, through our food education roadmap work,  
24 integrating more both urban agriculture and just food  
25 education broadly into as many New York City public



2 schools as possible so while we might not be seeing  
3 it as many places, sometimes it is behind the walls  
4 of school buildings that we do actually have some  
5 access.

6 EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR MICKIE: Thank you,  
7 Rachel. I'm really glad you mentioned it. I almost  
8 totally forgot. I'd be remiss to not mention school  
9 and learning gardens. Council Member Brewer and I  
10 recently were on a rooftop of the High School  
11 Environmental Studies thinking about that. One of the  
12 things that the Office of Urban Agriculture through  
13 our Reimagining Farm to School initiative is  
14 considering is how to activate a green space and  
15 growing space and increasing the square footage, and  
16 school and learning gardens are able to do just that.  
17 We've had some, again, initial success. We're  
18 creating the education program through Reimagining  
19 Farm to School, connecting school gardeners, and we  
20 tell them they are the climate stewards of the  
21 future, to their existing urban farmers but, again,  
22 there's some untapped school gardens, kind of similar  
23 to what you were saying, Council Member, about in  
24 your District. There's school and learning gardens  
25 that could probably be activated more. And in order

2 to do that, it's not just having the access to land,  
3 it's having relevant agreements and contracts that  
4 urban agriculture practitioners are eligible for that  
5 the City can provide that will create not just the  
6 green space to go from underutilized or fallow to  
7 active, but you need the labor to do so, and it's  
8 oftentimes done by the volunteers, our students, our  
9 teachers, or even our community gardeners, but to  
10 really make this sustainable and to really increase  
11 the scaled food production we want to see, the scaled  
12 education of climate and agriculture education, we  
13 need to continue to create more agreements and  
14 contracts that are relevant for emerging businesses  
15 and enterprises that are rooted in climate and  
16 education. I think we have a lot of great urban  
17 agriculture stakeholders right now. There's some here  
18 behind me. But again, we need more folks to feel like  
19 they are a part of New York City's success, not just  
20 in their sweat equity, but in their business  
21 opportunities, and if they don't feel like they can  
22 create a business, then we're missing out and so  
23 again, I think for our office, it's kind of building  
24 different initiatives that support our partners at  
25 different stages, but also inform and work with other

2 City agencies to move our larger initiatives forward,  
3 and school gardens, I think, have been somewhat  
4 undertapped. There are great community partners doing  
5 that work and other existing initiatives, but we see  
6 a lot of great potential scaling up food production  
7 and education and we think with more continued work  
8 and reimagining, we'll be able to reimagine school  
9 and learning gardens in the city.

10 MAJORITY LEADER FARIÁS: Thank you so  
11 much. Recognizing Council Member Brewer.

12 COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: Thank you for  
13 being a rock star. That's what you are.

14 EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR MICKIE: Thank you,  
15 Council Member Brewer.

16 COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: A couple things.  
17 First of all, on the school roofs, obviously I'm very  
18 familiar with not only Environmental Studies, but  
19 PS84, which as you probably know, just got a huge  
20 grant, and they now have apple trees with 60 apples  
21 on every tree and a full-time gardener so it's really  
22 working. Unbelievable science, unbelievable  
23 horticulture, and sustainable so that's perhaps the  
24 best. Randall's Island, Battery Park, Roosevelt  
25 Island, in terms of their school in particular, 145th

2 Street, BroSis organization for young people. They're  
3 all doing it. But I do want to make sure that the  
4 chickens are in every single one. I'm very big on  
5 chickens. I want chickens at every single garden. You  
6 get the eggs. I just wish that we would change the  
7 law and have roosters, but I may be the only person  
8 who cares about roosters. I do want to say, though,  
9 is there a concerted effort at the Department of  
10 Education, by you or others pushing, to figure out  
11 which roofs would be available? In other words,  
12 sometimes parents and teachers and students figure it  
13 out, but is there a concerted effort to say X number  
14 more roofs are available?

15 EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR MICKIE: Yes. That's a  
16 great question, Council Member. Thank you. Yes,  
17 there's been a concerted effort and additional  
18 research with our office and other agencies like DOE  
19 and School Construction Authority as well as DCAS  
20 Innovation to assess and consider what could  
21 potentially be rooftops in schools in particular.  
22 Again, our Urban Agrivoltaics pilot program is  
23 helping also build a feasibility plan and approach  
24 for not just other additional City buildings to  
25 consider if they're able to do ag production as well

2 as solar production and other climate mitigation like  
3 stormwater mitigation, but we're also creating an  
4 avenue where we're supporting community-based  
5 organizations or other developers, landlords that  
6 have the ownership of their building to kind of see  
7 that as well.

8 COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: Okay. But, in  
9 terms of the public buildings, is there an actual  
10 dashboard or some kind of a report as to how many are  
11 available and blah, blah, blah?

12 EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR MICKIE: So, there is  
13 current research happening. It's not in a dashboard  
14 just yet, but these are some of the avenues that  
15 we're continuing to explore with our agency partners  
16 on how to share that information more.

17 COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: You could get the  
18 drones. You could get Caz's drones.

19 EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR MICKIE: Yes. If there  
20 is additional, I will...

21 COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: (INAUDIBLE) else  
22 to do. Give Caz Daugherty's drones something else to  
23 do. I'll suggest that to him.

24 The hydroponics, I think I did the first  
25 one at PS333, and so the question is, they're great,

2 but you know what? DOE won't allow the salad or the  
3 lettuce or the fish at Food and Finance to go into  
4 the lunch for the students. Is that something that we  
5 could work on? In other words, I don't understand  
6 why, but I guess they're afraid it's not been cleared  
7 by some god that the lettuce and the fish can't go  
8 into the student lunch. Is there anything we can do  
9 about that?

10 EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR MICKIE: I think... I  
11 don't want to speak for School Food in this...

12 COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: I can. They don't  
13 allow it.

14 EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR MICKIE: Okay. No. Yes.  
15 I'm aware of the current barriers. I think for the  
16 Office of Urban Agriculture in our partnership with  
17 School Food...

18 COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: We love Chris. We  
19 love Chris.

20 EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR MICKIE: Love Chris.  
21 Love Chris. Big fan of Chris, but what I do think  
22 that we need to do is first understand how to support  
23 the process of food coming into our schools and  
24 making sure that if we're creating opportunities for  
25 food security, like donated food, and if that food

2 can come in, are we also making food procurement  
3 opportunities for small to mid-scale businesses as  
4 well, indoors as well as other soil-based or rural  
5 growers, so I think it's a conversation that's worth  
6 continuing to have, how to expand our salad bar, and  
7 I think these partners like Sunworks and Teens for  
8 Food Justice, Edible Schoolyard, but the ones that  
9 are doing hydroponic in particular, since you asked,  
10 I think there's great avenues that we've learned and  
11 seen that they are able to get food and taste  
12 testings and cooking demos, and I think for food  
13 security, those are really good ways for that food to  
14 get to families as well as the students. In terms of  
15 salad bar opportunities, I don't think we need to  
16 preclude them, but I think the untapped potential are  
17 existing businesses, small, hyper-local to rural  
18 partners that are more primed for procurement  
19 contracts and are more eligible to be able to get  
20 more of their local regional food in our salad bars.  
21 That's one of the elements of our training that we're  
22 looking into.

23 COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: That's my other  
24 question, of course. You're talking about the City;  
25 I'm talking about the State.

2 EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR MICKIE: Yes.

3 COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: So we have the  
4 DCAS law that passed that says City of New York has  
5 to buy the best possible effort, as opposed to  
6 mandated, wasn't able to do that legally, purchased  
7 locally, so you're dealing in a slightly different  
8 area, but do you think DCAS, A, they haven't given us  
9 their reports that they're supposed to on a regular  
10 basis, how much are they purchasing, which agencies  
11 they're going to, etc., but do you have any sense  
12 that DCAS is trying to make more of an effort to  
13 purchase locally? Does that help in terms of your  
14 efforts?

15 EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR MICKIE: I can't speak  
16 to DCAS' work in particular, but what I can say is  
17 the work that we're doing, the research information,  
18 and also the growing network of eligible businesses  
19 that have fresh food supply, this is the information  
20 that we have and continue to share with any of our  
21 agency partners and any of their complementary or  
22 supplemental research and work.

23 COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: Okay. The other  
24 issue is processing facilities.

25 EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR MICKIE: Yes.



2 COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: We've talked about  
3 this in the past. Can you update us if there's any  
4 indication of, without processing, then some of the  
5 urban agriculture, not to mention the Ulster County  
6 agriculture is not going to be able to be sold, at  
7 least to the schools of Rikers Island and so on so I  
8 just was wanting to get an update on processing  
9 facilities. There is a funny story, which is I want  
10 this lettuce processing machine. I've been trying to  
11 get it for 20 years. I get nothing. And so the State  
12 Commissioner gave me a little tiny one for my  
13 kitchen. That wasn't very helpful. So, I'm wondering  
14 if we're getting anywhere on processing facilities.

15 EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR MICKIE: So again, I  
16 don't want to speak to other agencies and their work  
17 around infrastructure, but the Office of Urban  
18 Agriculture in conjunction with our other offices  
19 like Food Policy can continue to inform what is the  
20 need of green food and value chain infrastructure for  
21 processing. What I can say is oftentimes I hear from  
22 urban ag stakeholders they've been doing great work  
23 in their non-profits and for-profit businesses in  
24 their community around trying to build processing  
25 opportunities but, again, in terms of facilities, I

2 can't speak to larger agencies around their facility  
3 needs, but what we're continuing to do as an Office  
4 of Urban Ag is identify the needs of our stakeholders  
5 to help inform those conversations so when that  
6 infrastructure comes, it's relevant to the  
7 stakeholders that we need. So, if we're thinking  
8 about infrastructure within our city, but to support  
9 small businesses, rural and otherwise, that those  
10 facilities need to be scaled to those small  
11 businesses, and those are the partners we're  
12 continuing to build in our M/WBE work, our City's  
13 training program with food operators and distributors  
14 so we're getting a lot of great relevant information  
15 that we're happy to share that can inform  
16 infrastructure from the city up.

17 COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: Okay. Thank you  
18 very much.

19 EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR MICKIE: Thank you,  
20 Council Member.

21 MAJORITY LEADER FARIAS: Thank you, folks,  
22 so much.

23 I'm going to go back to some of the  
24 questions I have for the Office of Urban Agriculture.  
25 I try to be equitable with time so folks don't have

2 to wait on me to go through the entire docket of  
3 questions so thank you for riding this out with us.

4 Just some quick burst ones. Since the  
5 Office's establishment last year, how many urban  
6 agriculture projects have you helped facilitate?

7 EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR MICKIE: Do you mean,  
8 just to clarify, initiatives or particular projects?

9 MAJORITY LEADER FARIAS: If you can give  
10 us both, that would be helpful, of initiatives that  
11 we have throughout the city or if there are a handful  
12 of projects. I know I was briefly looking through the  
13 report.

14 EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR MICKIE: So in the past  
15 few years, we've established seven different  
16 initiatives around urban agriculture and innovative  
17 production that supports economic development as well  
18 as other urban agriculture models. However, within  
19 those initiatives, they're designed to leverage our  
20 City's office to support the breadth of urban ag  
21 stakeholders so that number is a little bit larger  
22 than that so while there's seven overall initiatives,  
23 there's different ways that we have been supporting  
24 partners. So, for instance, the NYC Food Eats  
25 training with the current funding that we have, we

2 were able to support nine food and food hub  
3 businesses within that training. With additional  
4 scaling, moving forward, we expect to support more.  
5 Through our work on Reimagining Farm to School, we  
6 connected with four urban gardens and one rural  
7 farmer but, again, the learning doesn't just stop at  
8 that project. It also continues with what we're able  
9 to do. There's one concrete example that I could  
10 probably support. In the Reimagining Farm to School  
11 initiative with our current pilot program, we were  
12 able, with that 200,000-dollar funding, state and  
13 federal, to leverage 16 different City-based  
14 contracts for non-profit partners, urban growers,  
15 food and farm businesses, but in terms of the impact,  
16 we would need to continue to talk to our partners,  
17 but what I can share is beyond that, we worked with  
18 that initiative, a few thousand students in the five  
19 boroughs. With our school and farm visits, students  
20 were able to bring their families, and then they said  
21 they were coming back to the farm so I can say right  
22 now we're at a smaller scale in terms of projects and  
23 initiatives, but what we've seen is the way we  
24 approach our initiatives, the impact goes further

2 into the community and supports existing stakeholders  
3 in the work they're doing already.

4 MAJORITY LEADER FARIÁS: What's the  
5 current process for identifying potential sites for  
6 urban agriculture, and do we have the type of metrics  
7 that we're using to measure the environmental  
8 benefits of those projects?

9 EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR MICKIE: Well, we spoke  
10 earlier about the, I testified earlier in terms of  
11 the additional criterion and research needed for the  
12 site. However, in terms of measuring urban  
13 agriculture impact, what we have heard from  
14 stakeholders is there's comprehensive information.  
15 There's information in different places, or it has  
16 been researched in different ways. What the office is  
17 focusing on is building a community-driven,  
18 stakeholder-driven approach to gathering that  
19 information so we're able to engage with our  
20 community stakeholders or business stakeholders  
21 directly to scale that work so that's in its early  
22 stages, but I'm proud to say that we're looking  
23 forward to launching our first urban ag New York City  
24 comprehensive beta map in the winter and early  
25 January '25, continuing our community and business

2 stakeholder activities on how to build off the  
3 existing beta map information that we do have in  
4 order to identify with them the metrics and criterion  
5 that the City is missing to really speak to urban ag  
6 scale, production, impact, and potential, and work  
7 with them to build those measures, and we're kicking  
8 off that work early January 2025.

9 MAJORITY LEADER FARIÁS: That's great to  
10 hear. How are you working to ensure urban agriculture  
11 projects are economically sustainable beyond the  
12 initial grant funding?

13 EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR MICKIE: The projects  
14 themselves? Yes. Sorry, let me get a little water.

15 MAJORITY LEADER FARIÁS: Yeah, take your  
16 time.

17 DEPUTY DIRECTOR ATCHESON: I'll use this  
18 minute to actually go back to impact on climate. Oh,  
19 go for it.

20 EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR MICKIE: Sorry, can you  
21 repeat the question?

22 MAJORITY LEADER FARIÁS: Sure. How are you  
23 working to ensure urban agriculture projects are  
24 economically sustainable beyond the initial grant  
25 funding?

2 EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR MICKIE: Yes. So, what  
3 the Office of Urban Agriculture is continuing to look  
4 for is additional diversity of funding for our  
5 projects. Again, we start with integrating cost-  
6 neutral approaches that could either work directly  
7 with the leadership of our office, find ways to  
8 integrate into other existing interagency projects  
9 and then also, when we do need additional funding, we  
10 continue to explore funding through the city, state,  
11 federal channels as well as additional public-private  
12 partnerships.

13 MAJORITY LEADER FARIÁS: Okay, and what  
14 partnerships have you developed with agricultural  
15 experts and organizations? Which partnerships, what  
16 partnerships have you developed?

17 EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR MICKIE: Oh, what  
18 partnerships. Yes. So, the breadth of stakeholders,  
19 we continue to be informed and engage with our  
20 community stakeholders on how their work can continue  
21 to be furthered on the ground up in their community  
22 gardens so we've created opportunities to support any  
23 events and activities. We've also created community  
24 funding where, since we're not able to directly give  
25 funding, we provide funding roundups and awareness

2 around existing fundings that they're eligible for  
3 and continue to support and inform them in any ways  
4 that they can get funding for themselves for their  
5 projects. In terms of other partnerships, we explore  
6 ways to support businesses through our free sessions  
7 around supporting their starting to business. We've  
8 identified pathways to create access to more City  
9 procurement contracts and agreements, and we'll  
10 continue to expand that in order to support  
11 partnerships in their work and then, again,  
12 continuing to identify with business partners what  
13 are ways that speak to their needs around engagement.  
14 That tends to look like testimony or hearing other  
15 advocacy around other initiatives, so we continue to  
16 help inform on the inside our interagency partners as  
17 well as businesses to inform that their needs are at  
18 other agendas.

19 MAJORITY LEADER FARÍAS: Great. What role  
20 do you see for emerging technologies like vertical  
21 farming and hydroponics in New York City's urban  
22 agricultural landscape? I know you've spoken a little  
23 bit about this. I think all of us, if not most of us  
24 in the Council, have put in hydroponic labs somewhere  
25 in a school or multiple schools. We're looking at, at



2 least for myself, I'm looking at ways to use our  
3 recreation centers and community centers to also be  
4 coupled with that technology, but even looking at my  
5 NYCHA campuses and where we can create an urban farm  
6 or where we can utilize some of these technologies so  
7 where do you see a role for them?

8 EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR MICKIE: Oh, yeah. So,  
9 urban ag tech, hydroponics, vertical farming, other  
10 controlled environment models are a part of the  
11 breadth of urban agriculture in New York City so,  
12 while we continue to support the existing partners  
13 and businesses and non-profits that are doing this  
14 work and finding ways to explore in different City  
15 agencies or, again, on different City land, part of  
16 our work is also to ensure that we're creating  
17 opportunities in the controlled environment sector  
18 for folks of color, low income, so they have  
19 affordable, scalable models in the controlled  
20 environment. What we've heard from partners in this  
21 controlled environment arena is they need access to  
22 land so this continues to support our work, not just  
23 in schools, but also in City properties like NYCHA  
24 and other underutilized land, including industrial  
25 areas that we're continuing to see if they're

2 suitable for innovative models in controlled  
3 environments, indoor and outdoor. Does that answer  
4 your question? I'm sorry.

5 MAJORITY LEADER FARIAS: Yes.

6 EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR MICKIE: Yes, but we do  
7 see that there are viable needs. Other things that  
8 we've explored and will continue to try to support is  
9 the relationship building that can happen within  
10 communities and looking at underutilized land in  
11 different ways so it doesn't have to just be the  
12 parcel of land. It can also be underutilized centers,  
13 spaces, like you said, like rec centers. We've seen  
14 businesses as well as community start controlled  
15 environment work, say, not just hydroponic and leafy  
16 vegetables, but also in mushrooms so we continue to  
17 try to share resources and information with these  
18 partners who, again, see themselves in the fabric of  
19 work and see how they can work and engage with other  
20 City agencies and other City sites to expand the work  
21 around urban agriculture in the city.

22 MAJORITY LEADER FARIAS: Yeah, I think a  
23 lot of us in the Council would like to keep tabs on  
24 that and work in coalition on that. A lot of us,  
25 before coming into the Council, worked throughout the

2 pandemic on fighting food insecurity, on mutual aid  
3 efforts, and what was most beneficial from, I think,  
4 that moment in time that we were in that still exists  
5 in some sort of framework in our communities  
6 throughout the city was there was this integratable  
7 communicating system of people that were moving food,  
8 moving produce, moving support, and I think when  
9 we're looking at our communities' infrastructures  
10 right now, we have these one-off siloed spaces that  
11 aren't really working with one another or talking  
12 with one another. I use a community garden and a  
13 school as an example in my District all the time. If  
14 it weren't for me talking to the community garden  
15 volunteers and the principals in the school, two  
16 institutions that are literally across the street,  
17 the school has a community fridge and the garden is  
18 growing food and just that natural partnership of,  
19 like, hi, when there's excess, you have permission to  
20 put it into the fridge is now helping adding to the  
21 value in that area, and that's like a one-off example  
22 of volunteerism, but we definitely want to start  
23 seeing where we're growing food, talking to the  
24 schools and the lab that are growing food, talking to  
25 the food that's on the plate of the students or the

2 seniors or in our homes so we definitely all want to  
3 be in communication on that.

4 EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR MICKIE: I'd love to  
5 stay in touch and hear from your Districts what  
6 you're seeing, but your example is a great example  
7 and one of the impetus on why Reimagining Farm to  
8 School was built in the way that it was because, like  
9 you said, oftentimes there are siloed partners,  
10 people, we all eat. We all, and some of us need more  
11 security in our food or more access, but beyond food  
12 security, we also need to support food sovereignty in  
13 New York City so when I say that, it's not just the  
14 access to food and culturally relevant food and local  
15 food or even donated food, it's ensuring that we have  
16 different models that are working together and that  
17 the City is supporting that, not just from the top  
18 down, but from the bottom up, and I think the Office  
19 of Urban Agriculture, given our relationships and  
20 background with our urban ag partners, we kind of see  
21 these silos and again, build initiatives that  
22 directly connect so like the Reimagining Farm to  
23 School, it was one of, again, we have seen that there  
24 were partners like community gardens not connected to  
25 their school partners so we created that initiative

2 to kind of help foster that relationship, not just in  
3 the sharing of education and the sharing of food, but  
4 also just the awareness that there are other  
5 practitioners doing work to support urban  
6 agriculture, food production in the community, of and  
7 by the community so for us in the Office of Urban  
8 Agriculture, we're here to support the City's  
9 existing efforts around food security, but we really  
10 feel like there's a continued need to build that  
11 intersection, but we need New Yorkers of all scale,  
12 we need New Yorkers of all food security measures to  
13 feel like they can be a part of that work and so with  
14 us, we see that our initiatives are building that  
15 interagency connective tissue to inform our agency  
16 partners but build better pathways for our non-profit  
17 partners, our volunteers, and businesses to be able  
18 to be a part of the city's success.

19 DEPUTY DIRECTOR ATCHESON: And to build on  
20 the ecosystem approach, through the Food Education  
21 Roadmap, last year we distributed grants, last year  
22 was 11,000 dollars reaching 60 schools. This year,  
23 we've expanded to 190 schools at 6,000-dollar grants  
24 each, and we are seeing both the interest in that and  
25

2 the work that's coming from it as a wonderful  
3 positive.

4 MAJORITY LEADER FARIÁS: Thank you for  
5 that. Yeah, I'll be bothering both of you folks after  
6 this hearing because I have a random, not random,  
7 it's wonderful, but an apple orchard on one of my  
8 school campuses.

9 EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR MICKIE: Oh, Stevenson?

10 MAJORITY LEADER FARIÁS: There you go.

11 EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR MICKIE: I'm from  
12 Castle Hill, so I know exactly what you're talking  
13 about.

14 MAJORITY LEADER FARIÁS: So, we've got to  
15 figure something else out with that. We've been  
16 trying.

17 EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR MICKIE: Let's talk. To  
18 be fair...

19 MAJORITY LEADER FARIÁS: I want to keep it  
20 too.

21 EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR MICKIE: Yes, well,  
22 we'd love to bring some more. I know we're in  
23 testimony, but you're speaking in inspiration and  
24 especially coming from our home borough and district.  
25 What I've seen in Stevenson over the years, in my

2 years of working in food, there is the need to  
3 connect not just school gardens but, again, the  
4 breadth of urban agriculture models that are suitable  
5 for our communities. We need to support our students,  
6 our teachers, in not just doing the work and doing it  
7 for free. We need to create the relationships and  
8 opportunities where these are City opportunities  
9 contracts, so not just getting money to the teachers  
10 through DOE and not just giving them funds to do  
11 education. We also need to create opportunities for  
12 our ag partners, non-profit, and emerging businesses  
13 to activate or utilize their skills in these  
14 communities. I've seen that space go from a robust  
15 apple orchard with chickens, Council Member Brewer,  
16 to doing their best with what they have but going  
17 mostly fallow, and I also know the teacher who is the  
18 impetus behind that. He retired over 5 to 10 years  
19 ago and is still trying to support that work there.  
20 We can't continue to think we're going to have scaled  
21 urban agriculture and the (INAUDIBLE) or sailed food  
22 fresh produce without, again, the access to the land  
23 as well as the contracts and agreements that allow  
24 it, but we also have to be open to the breadth of  
25 urban agriculture models that we have and really

2 supporting our stakeholders that have the breadth of  
3 approaches and knowledge so community gardens are  
4 great, raised beds are awesome, hydroponics,  
5 innovative, also awesome, but we have models that we  
6 need to continue to expand and explore, which is why  
7 we're doing so much hard work and it's taking a  
8 little bit more time to build that urban and criteria  
9 on identifying not just sites but also understanding  
10 the models. So, Stevenson's a great example where  
11 that cannot just be an apple orchard, it cannot just  
12 be a place for multiple raised beds, it could  
13 actually be a community food forest, and fortunately,  
14 with our Reimagining Farm to School initiative, these  
15 are the scaled projects that we're looking at. How do  
16 we identify additional funding so it doesn't just  
17 start with us but we're able to be here to support  
18 them and where they move forward so an apple orchard  
19 never has to go fallow but a community doesn't just  
20 have a garden. They can also have an edible food  
21 forest that they themselves, from students to  
22 teachers to community, can support the stewardship  
23 of.

24 MAJORITY LEADER FARIÁS: Yeah. I

25 appreciate that. I've been working with a plethora of



2 different organizations to go in and kind of de-  
3 jungle-ize the apple orchard.

4 EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR MICKIE: But you never  
5 talked to me.

6 MAJORITY LEADER FARÍAS: Not yet.

7 EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR MICKIE: Let's do that.

8 MAJORITY LEADER FARÍAS: Not yet, right?

9 But I agree. I mean, I came into this seat in 2022,  
10 and it was really just left however it was left from  
11 previous leadership and so we've been working with  
12 all of the principals in that one school..

13 EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR MICKIE: Absolutely.

14 MAJORITY LEADER FARÍAS: But I look  
15 forward to moving forward with a plan together.

16 I will pause. I have some questions  
17 around the report and the bill, but I'll pass it over  
18 to Council Member Gutiérrez who has questions.

19 COUNCIL MEMBER GUTIÉRREZ: Hi, thank you,  
20 Chair, and my apologies for my tardiness, and so if  
21 you've answered these questions, double apologies.  
22 Good to see you, Qiana.

23 EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR MICKIE: Good to see  
24 you too.

2 COUNCIL MEMBER GUTIÉRREZ: I just had a  
3 question. One, just one specific about your remarks  
4 and your testimony. I'm curious in the partnership  
5 with New York City Public Schools and the Cornell  
6 Cooperative Extension. I know in your testimony you  
7 mentioned that one of the goals of New York City  
8 School Food Eats is to strengthen partnerships and  
9 linkages within our food system to support  
10 historically disadvantaged farmers, and I know you're  
11 maybe like year one and a half or year two of this  
12 partnership. Is that right or wrong?

13 EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR MICKIE: Year two.

14 COUNCIL MEMBER GUTIÉRREZ: Year two. What  
15 are some of the, I guess, goals? What does the goal,  
16 what does it look like for you all, for your office?  
17 What does it look like to be successful in this  
18 partnership, and what are some of kind of like the  
19 long-term goals that you are looking to meet through  
20 these partnerships, and I support it, I think it's  
21 wonderful, I'm just curious how you're thinking about  
22 building it out in year five, ten and beyond.

23 EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR MICKIE: Oh, sure.

24 Well, right now what we've learned in the two pilot  
25 years is that there are some critical elements that

2 need to continue to be supported and scaled. That is  
3 the ag education and, again, it's the connection  
4 between urban farmers who are already growing in the  
5 direct connection to public school students. In  
6 addition, scaling up our Community Chef demos with  
7 that so the students are able to learn about  
8 nutrition education, culturally relevant food, as  
9 well as the life cycle of food. We also realize that  
10 in order for this to continue and be sustainable, it  
11 needs to have an element that we're informing City  
12 procurement, and one of the strongest avenues is  
13 school food. So here, what we're looking at is if  
14 we're trying to increase fresh produce, regional  
15 produce, and our hyper-local farmers as well as our  
16 rural farmers, that we need to give them procurement  
17 that's relevant to their scale, so the New York City  
18 School Food Eats training in particular is modeled  
19 for small to mid-scale farmers to be primed and have  
20 better success in connecting to school food. The  
21 training also gives us the opportunity to help inform  
22 the Office of School Food and Nutrition on how to  
23 build stronger bids to work with urban growers, to  
24 work with value-based growers, to work with regional  
25 growers, but we also have to think about scale, and

2 this is one of those things when it comes to  
3 agriculture and our food system, is we want to  
4 continue to support community agriculture, which I  
5 think this Reimagining Program does with our urban ag  
6 partners, but we want to also support our regional  
7 and urban ag growers to grow at scaled food  
8 production levels, and those levels will be what is  
9 really informative in City procurement and, in order  
10 to work with them, we kind of have to meet them where  
11 they're at so that's helping them better connect to  
12 M/WBE certifications, and this training, we have a  
13 module that does that. It also helps to demystify the  
14 process around bids, RFPs for school food, but this  
15 is really institutional, right? So if we're really  
16 helping, this training that just launched, we're in  
17 our second week tomorrow, it's a multi-month virtual  
18 training with farmers. The goal here in order to  
19 think about scaling moving forward is if we can learn  
20 from the successes of our urban ag growers, our  
21 public school students, our teachers, and identifying  
22 those school gardens as well as City procurement,  
23 this will give us the information that we need to  
24 build those stronger pathways for them so with this  
25 training, we hope to scale the number of farm and

2 food businesses not just in the training, but M/WBE  
3 certified, which is a Mayoral priority and, again,  
4 we've seen that that's an indicator for value add of  
5 value-based procurement as well. We want to make sure  
6 that there's more culturally relevant small to mid-  
7 scale growers. We see this as an opportunity through  
8 this initiative and working with our partners of  
9 Cornell with their experience with regional food and  
10 our school system with procurement to really think  
11 about what the school system's institutional  
12 procurement need and how can we also support regional  
13 farmers, but also how do we support emerging urban ag  
14 businesses and their crops and production into  
15 getting into school food.

16 COUNCIL MEMBER GUTIÉRREZ: I appreciate  
17 the emphasis on scale, right, rightfully so, which I  
18 think is I think in line with a lot of what we try to  
19 do at the Council, which is planning, which is why  
20 I'm in support of this bill, but can you share any  
21 information on which communities you are  
22 prioritizing? I'm sorry. Can I finish? What  
23 communities you're prioritizing or looking at, like  
24 where are the communities that are problematic with  
25 relation to scale and problematic in like we need to

2 do more or we could do more here or this is a  
3 community that is keenly interested and could benefit  
4 from this. Have you already identified those  
5 districts or zip codes or part of the process?

6 EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR MICKIE: Yes. So, with  
7 the initial start of the Reimagining Farm to School  
8 Initiative, we worked with OFNS to identify District  
9 One schools that were on the Chancellor's List for  
10 High Need Schools so we identified in the five  
11 boroughs schools to target there, but what we've  
12 learned in the last few years in building  
13 relationships with schools is learning how we can  
14 continue to scale up that work to go into further  
15 communities so it's actually connected for us to be  
16 able to identify more schools in need to be able to  
17 identify where they're at in terms of garden,  
18 education, and partnership. In addition, what we did  
19 is we looked at neighborhoods that were historically  
20 disadvantaged, food scarce, and also listened to our  
21 urban ag partners, and then we identified partners  
22 that are growing food at different scales in  
23 different gardens to work there, and then in looking  
24 at our rural partner that is involved in the project  
25 and thinking about needs, we identified a partner

2 that is not just a farm of color, but they  
3 particularly grow culturally relevant crops and have  
4 direct existing communities of wholesale and retail  
5 in their neighborhoods. So, what we did was really  
6 start the initiative from the communities of need,  
7 and we also, of course, assessed other needs like  
8 climate injustice, food scarcity, and who's actually  
9 growing food already.

10 COUNCIL MEMBER GUTIÉRREZ: And you  
11 mentioned, are those schools, is that public?

12 EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR MICKIE: It should be  
13 public, yes.

14 COUNCIL MEMBER GUTIÉRREZ: Okay, great.

15 EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR MICKIE: And we can  
16 make sure you have that info if you don't.

17 COUNCIL MEMBER GUTIÉRREZ: Okay, great.  
18 Can I just ask two more questions? I'm so sorry.

19 My following questions are just related  
20 to your testimony with regards to Intro. 693. I know  
21 the general sentiment is your office is doing this so  
22 maybe legislation is not necessary is what I gather  
23 from your testimony. I disagree, and I think this is  
24 the second or third piece of legislation where the  
25 response from the Admin is unfortunately that. Again,

2 I think there has never been emphasis on planning.  
3 Your office is a fairly new office. I think you're  
4 doing wonderful work, but the idea of doing borough-  
5 based planning and research is instrumental to not  
6 just what you're doing today, but what the person  
7 who's going to fill your role in a million years from  
8 today is going to do so I really would love for the  
9 Administration to take what we're saying as a way of  
10 codifying it to empower your office more to do this  
11 work in a more meaningful way. This bill is specific  
12 to industrial spaces, and every Member on here has  
13 been fighting for better planning for manufacturing  
14 zones to begin with, another facet that the City has  
15 never done and never done well, so I would implore  
16 that you consider this as an opportunity to really  
17 allow us to empower your office and to do something  
18 for an industrial sector that, again, no  
19 Administration has been able to really do. The  
20 Council passed legislation, and we're all on it, and  
21 we're all very excited for planning, but this is very  
22 specific, and it's really an opportunity, so I hope  
23 that you take that back.

24 I just had two questions on, and that's  
25 the end of it for me, where your office is mapping



2 underutilized City land. If you can just share how  
3 that looks like, like what tools you're using, if  
4 you're working with any data-specific organizations,  
5 and the last question is, what is your office's  
6 criteria for some of these models, the urban  
7 agriculture models opportunities in some of these  
8 districts. What are some of the criteria? What are  
9 some of the things that you're looking at already  
10 where you think models can be successful? And that's  
11 it. Thank you, Chair.

12 EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR MICKIE: All right.  
13 (INAUDIBLE) might need to restate number three, but I  
14 do want to start off with I really appreciate this  
15 hearing and hearing directly from Council Members on  
16 their perspective on Intro. 693. The Mayor's Office  
17 of Urban Agriculture will take this information back,  
18 and we have the bandwidth and look forward to  
19 continuing to collaborate to move urban agriculture  
20 opportunities and interests forward.

21 Number two, in terms of the dashboard,  
22 the Urban Agriculture Office has collaborated with a  
23 partner which is quite familiar with the City, Esri,  
24 on building our beta map so where we started with was  
25 the existing data that the City already had and just

2 leveraged that so that has been existing OTI data  
3 maps around the school gardens.

4 COUNCIL MEMBER GUTIÉRREZ: Esri?

5 EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR MICKIE: Esri. E-S-R-I.

6 COUNCIL MEMBER GUTIÉRREZ: Okay.

7 EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR MICKIE: I can get more  
8 information, yes, and we share a little bit more  
9 about this in the progress report, but we started the  
10 data map with existing urban agriculture information,  
11 but we do understand there's additional research and  
12 refining to that, but what is missing, again, is the  
13 information from our urban agriculture and partners  
14 and stakeholders in terms of metrics, measurements,  
15 and also maybe additional information if some of our  
16 information from the City is a little bit behind. So,  
17 what we're creating with the tool is not just a map  
18 which will be published soon, but not just a map that  
19 you're able to see existing data sets, and we're  
20 continuing to build and refine existing, I mean build  
21 new data sets to build on top of that. We're also  
22 finding ways to overlay climate-resilient information  
23 so this is comprehensive urban ag information, but  
24 also the intersection around other needs like space,  
25 like climate, and it's great to work with a partner

2 like Esri that has the capacity to build out robust  
3 maps like that moving forward.

4           Again, another partner that I should  
5 mention is our urban ag stakeholders. We are building  
6 an approach that will engage them intentionally and  
7 hopefully accurately in the year to come and starting  
8 in this year and how they can help inform us on what  
9 some of the metrics are that we might be missing as a  
10 City in urban ag so we can tell a stronger story from  
11 the ground up with their information so we have a  
12 place that's not just a repository for information,  
13 but it's an interactive data visualization on urban  
14 agriculture models, sites, projects, activities, but  
15 also ways to leverage that data internally as well as  
16 externally in the community.

17           And then the third question was?

18           COUNCIL MEMBER GUTIÉRREZ: You can get  
19 back to me. I know that the Chair has some more  
20 questions, but it's just related to, maybe it's in  
21 your report, I apologize, some of the criteria based  
22 on these mapping that you are all utilizing.

23           EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR MICKIE: Yeah, so we  
24 started with some initial research around urban  
25 agriculture models, sites, and current activity, but

2 as we mentioned earlier, we're continuing building  
3 urban ag criteria and refining that so it's a little  
4 bit more accurate and relevant and finding a way to  
5 engage more stakeholders in informing that moving  
6 forward. Thank you.

7 MAJORITY LEADER FARIAS: Thank you. A  
8 question from Council Member Nurse.

9 COUNCIL MEMBER NURSE: Yeah, just one  
10 (INAUDIBLE) question was, I understand you're  
11 developing the criteria. Do you have an internal  
12 planning timeline for when you want to have that in  
13 place?

14 EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR MICKIE: We're working  
15 with the timeline on right now and moving towards the  
16 goal of January 2026.

17 COUNCIL MEMBER NURSE: January 2026, and  
18 that's when the criteria for identifying what is a  
19 site...

20 EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR MICKIE: Oh, sorry. No,  
21 was that the criteria in itself?

22 COUNCIL MEMBER NURSE: Yeah, because the  
23 issue that you keep referring to is that you don't  
24 have the criteria of what, besides what is already an  
25 active urban agriculture space, you don't have the

2 criteria to help expand beyond that and so you're  
3 getting people and trying to build that out so do you  
4 have an internal planning timeline about when that  
5 would be developed?

6 EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR MICKIE: So, you know,  
7 keeping with our overarching goal of January 2026 for  
8 our overall reports and work in terms of the criteria  
9 in particular, we foresee continuing work on that in  
10 2025.

11 COUNCIL MEMBER NURSE: So by..

12 EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR MICKIE: Like quarter  
13 two, quarter three, but I will continue to follow up  
14 if there's any changes or updates to that.

15 COUNCIL MEMBER NURSE: And in terms of  
16 that, just as to be more focused on the legislation  
17 at hand, and thank you, Council Member Gutiérrez, for  
18 what you mentioned, because planning is so important,  
19 we don't really do it and the Admin always says no,  
20 they don't want us to do any bills. You are  
21 specifically engaging with EDC on its inventory?

22 EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR MICKIE: We have  
23 engaged with them in the past, and we're open to  
24 continuing engagement on related urban ag projects

2 and encourage any support to continue to move  
3 forward.

4 COUNCIL MEMBER NURSE: And I think, I'm  
5 sorry to hone on this because I'm still, I don't have  
6 it in my notes as getting clarity, but on the EDC  
7 targeting East New York sites, you're saying that, I  
8 know you said you, we talked about you being in the  
9 process of this, the developing the criteria, but  
10 there's no initial findings coming from that work.

11 EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR MICKIE: So, what we  
12 did in the past year is pivot in terms of the  
13 approach to it because we felt that there was a  
14 benefit to refining and building out the criteria,  
15 more about also creating a borough-based strategy so  
16 instead of just looking at what neighborhood, we can  
17 be a little bit more strategic in thinking about what  
18 the elements are needed in order to support our  
19 districts and boroughs in a more direct way.

20 COUNCIL MEMBER NURSE: Okay. Thank you.

21 MAJORITY LEADER FARIAS: Thank you so  
22 much. I'm going to follow up with a lot more  
23 questions, but I have just two that I want to focus  
24 on, two buckets that I want to focus on.

2           Regarding supporting urban agriculture  
3 research, can you tell us more about your  
4 collaboration with Cornell on soil research and what  
5 specific climate resilience metrics you are tracking?

6           EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR MICKIE: Oh, great.

7 Thank you so much for asking about soil. Soil  
8 research is soil science, and soil science is soul  
9 science. We are continuing our relationships with  
10 Cornell around soil research. There have been some  
11 changes internally on Cornell in terms of pivots in  
12 the research, but we've been having conversations on  
13 how to re-pivot for the year to come so what that is  
14 going to continue to look like is identifying urban  
15 agriculture spaces in New York City to continue and  
16 further the work of soil research but also creating a  
17 component where we can create relevant opportunities  
18 for urban ag stakeholders to be a part of that  
19 research. So, we realized that we had an opportunity  
20 in not just doing soil research with soil scientists  
21 at Cornell, but it created the opportunity to provide  
22 education and stipend opportunity, learning  
23 opportunity for other urban ag practitioners so we  
24 wanted to make sure that the research had its time to  
25 go through trials, that we could identify funding for

2 that, and we could also identify opportunities for  
3 more urban ag stakeholders to be a part of that  
4 research so we look forward to that continuing in  
5 2025.

6 MAJORITY LEADER FARIÁS: Great. How are  
7 you folks incorporating those research findings into  
8 the policy recommendations?

9 EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR MICKIE: Sorry, can you  
10 (INAUDIBLE)

11 MAJORITY LEADER FARIÁS: How are you  
12 incorporating the research findings into the policy  
13 recommendations?

14 EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR MICKIE: That  
15 particular, or just in general?

16 MAJORITY LEADER FARIÁS: Around the soil  
17 research.

18 EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR MICKIE: Oh, soil  
19 research. Yeah, so my expectation is once we  
20 continue, once we start getting the opportunity to  
21 evaluate and get the research, we will learn, I  
22 should mention, some of the soil research is not just  
23 to make soil rich, but in particular, looking at  
24 biochar, looking at rock dust to see if we can make  
25 nutrient-dense soil to encourage healthier local



2 fresh produce so what we're hoping is not just to  
3 continue to trial, but to be able to evaluate that  
4 and help inform that, but I think once we have that  
5 data, it will be great to kind of use that to  
6 leverage and inform different urban act policy on  
7 either A, how to scale that, and two, how to  
8 incorporate more viability in soil research in the  
9 City and, you know, how to scale.

10 MAJORITY LEADER FARIÁS: How would you  
11 conduct environmental assessments on the existing  
12 industrial sites? I'm interested in, like, potential  
13 contamination issues, remediation of soil to make  
14 sure that said spaces are usable.

15 EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR MICKIE: Yes. So, the  
16 Office of Urban Agriculture, in order to do this and  
17 do this well, we are continuing to build and explore  
18 relationships with partners, not just folks in our  
19 sit-in science area that already have that expertise  
20 in soil, but also identifying partners like Cornell  
21 and other agency partners to how to build a more  
22 well-rounded environmental approach to urban  
23 agriculture so leveraging best practices, but also  
24 making sure that we're integrating innovative methods  
25 in that but, again, we want to also make sure that

2 we're making it feasible and practical for the scale  
3 of models that we're working with and creating  
4 opportunities for practitioners from students to  
5 other non-profit partners, other academic partners to  
6 be a part of that work. That's something we would do  
7 in collaboration, but we do identify the need of  
8 incorporating that and continue to explore that.

9 MAJORITY LEADER FARIAS: So just to re-  
10 clarify, if we're looking at existing industrial  
11 sites that we're going to convert into urban  
12 agriculture or farm usage, do we have certain  
13 criteria that will be set to conduct X amount of  
14 research around remediation of soil or if any  
15 contamination of soil exists?

16 EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR MICKIE: So, we have  
17 additional offices in climate and environmental  
18 justice and environmental remediation as well as  
19 other agency partners that have a wheelhouse and  
20 expertise in that information so we plan to continue  
21 to collaborate and be informed and work with them.  
22 What we're also hoping to continue to do in our  
23 collaboration is include and integrate any other  
24 urban ag approaches or models into that as well.

2 MAJORITY LEADER FARIÁS: Okay. That makes  
3 sense to me so we'll be harassing DOHMH on their  
4 remediation of said soil spaces and they're boring.

5 Seeing no other questions from Members, I  
6 want to thank you folks for coming to testify today.  
7 We'll close the Administration's testimony. We'll be  
8 following up. I look forward to the planning and the  
9 processing we'll be doing both individually in our  
10 home base, something others could not do before, but  
11 we will do together.

12 EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR MICKIE: Yes.

13 MAJORITY LEADER FARIÁS: And for the  
14 future of New York City's urban agriculture so thank  
15 you so much.

16 EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR MICKIE: Thank you.

17 DEPUTY DIRECTOR ATCHESON: Thank you.

18 MAJORITY LEADER FARIÁS: You can now exit.  
19 I appreciate you folks for coming today.

20 EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR MICKIE: Thank you so  
21 much. Thank you, Rachel, for being here as well, and  
22 thank you, Council Members, for joining, especially  
23 Council Member Brewer and Sandy Nurse. Thank you for  
24 taking time.

2 MAJORITY LEADER FARIÁS: I now am going to  
3 open the hearing for public testimony. I remind  
4 members of the public that this is a formal  
5 government proceeding and that decorum shall be  
6 observed at all times. As such, members of the public  
7 shall remain silent at all times.

8 The witness table is reserved for people  
9 who wish to testify. No video recording or  
10 photography is allowed from the witness table.  
11 Further, members of the public may not present audio  
12 or video recordings as testimony, but may submit  
13 transcripts of such recordings to the Sergeant-at-  
14 Arms for inclusion in the hearing record.

15 If you wish to speak at today's hearing,  
16 please fill out an appearance card if you have not  
17 done so already with the Sergeant-at-Arms and wait to  
18 be recognized. When recognized, you will have two  
19 minutes to speak on today's hearing topic, Citywide  
20 Access to Fresh Produce. If you have a written  
21 statement or additional written testimony you wish to  
22 submit for the record, please provide a copy of that  
23 testimony to the Sergeant-at-Arms, and you may also  
24 email written testimony to [testimony@councils.nyc.gov](mailto:testimony@councils.nyc.gov)

2 within 72 hours of this hearing. Audio and video  
3 recordings will not be accepted.

4 I will now call the first panel.

5 Christine Torresson, Yibing Zhou, Oliver Gonzalez-  
6 Yoakum, Dr. Natalie Greaves-Peters. Please join me at  
7 the front.

8 Oh, perfect. You're all sitting together.

9 OLIVER GONZALEZ-YOAKUM: Good afternoon,  
10 and thank you for the opportunity to provide  
11 testimony to the Committee on Economic Development.  
12 I'm Oliver Gonzalez-Yoakum, a registered dietician  
13 and research associate at the Laurie M. Tisch Center  
14 for Food Education and Policy at Teachers College,  
15 Columbia University. I live in Hell's Kitchen and am  
16 a member of District 3. Thanks for all the work you  
17 do in our community. I would say that to Eric if he  
18 were here. I'm joined today by members of our Food Ed  
19 Hub, a coalition uplifted and strengthened by the  
20 City Council's support over the years. The Hub works  
21 to provide equitable food and nutrition education for  
22 all New York City students and educators. We are  
23 profoundly grateful to City Council for their  
24 unwavering support in our endeavors. Access to fresh,  
25 nutritious produce is a foundational need for both

2 individual and community health. Research  
3 consistently demonstrates that diets rich in fruits  
4 and vegetables are linked to longer lifespans,  
5 reduced rates of chronic disease, and greater  
6 resilience against health disparities. Yet, in a city  
7 as dynamic and diverse as ours, this fundamental  
8 resource is not shared equally. Barriers like income,  
9 geography, and infrastructure prevent many New  
10 Yorkers from obtaining fresh produce, impacting  
11 health outcomes and quality of life. However, urban  
12 agriculture emerges as one of the many novel  
13 solutions to these challenges. Converting  
14 underutilized spaces into urban farms could bring  
15 fresh, affordable produce into areas where it's  
16 needed most. Creating green spaces can support  
17 environmental sustainability, foster community  
18 cohesion, and bolster economic opportunity. These  
19 gardens can become hubs where New Yorkers not only  
20 access healthy food, but also build deeper  
21 connections to their communities and environments.

22 My colleagues at the Tisch Food Center  
23 will provide brief comments followed by insights from  
24 organizations and community members already leading  
25 impactful work in support of this bill and heading up

2 the charge to increase access to fresh, nutritious,  
3 and delicious fruits and veggies. Thank you.

4 YIBING ZHOU: Good afternoon. My name is  
5 Yibing Zhou, a doctoral student at the Tisch Food  
6 Center. I'm also a New York City resident living in  
7 District 26. As my colleague Oliver mentioned, access  
8 to fresh, nutritious produce is essential for both  
9 individual and community health. Studies show that  
10 higher fruit and vegetable consumption is associated  
11 with longer life expectancy, lower rates of chronic  
12 conditions like diabetes, hypertension, and obesity,  
13 and lowered healthcare costs. Unfortunately, many New  
14 York City residents in lower-income neighborhoods  
15 face significant barriers to obtaining fresh produce  
16 compared to residents in wealthier areas. For  
17 example, residents of the Upper East Side report  
18 higher fruit and vegetable consumption, lower rates  
19 of diet-related diseases, and convenient access  
20 within five minutes to grocery stores with fresh  
21 produce. By contrast, many residents in the South  
22 Bronx report living farther from fresh produce  
23 sources, consuming fewer fruits and vegetables, and  
24 experiencing higher rates of chronic conditions. In  
25 neighborhoods with limited access to fresh produce,

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

11           Now, my colleague Christine will talk  
12 more about the potential of urban agriculture.

13           CHRISTINE TORRESSON: Thank you, Yibing.  
14 Hello, I'm Christine Torresson, master's student at  
15 the Tisch Food Center and NYC resident here in  
16 District 1. Supporting this bill, which proposes the  
17 conversion of unused industrial spaces into urban  
18 agriculture sites, is a crucial step toward advancing  
19 equity in food access and community resilience across  
20 New York City. Our city already has a growing network  
21 of urban agriculture sites. According to 2022 data  
22 from the Cornell Cooperative Extension, the city is  
23 home to over 27 commercial farms and more than 600  
24 community and public gardens. This is an outstanding  
25 achievement, but not nearly enough to support NYC's



2 close to 9 million residents. Expanding this network  
3 through the conversion of underutilized industrial  
4 spaces into urban farms would enhance food  
5 sovereignty in neighborhoods across the city,  
6 directly supporting marginalized communities with  
7 limited access to affordable fresh produce. The Tisch  
8 Food Center, together with our coalition partners,  
9 who you will hear from today, are poised with the  
10 expertise and experience in urban agriculture to  
11 support the implementation of this bill. Urban  
12 agriculture addresses food insecurity by providing  
13 communities with greater control over their food  
14 sources, particularly in areas that lack access to  
15 fresh and affordable produce. Our experience working  
16 with New Yorkers in underserved communities has shown  
17 us that urban agriculture is not only about food  
18 access. It also brings tangible environmental,  
19 social, and economic benefits. For example, green  
20 spaces created through urban farming help reduce the  
21 urban heat island effect, improve local economies by  
22 creating jobs, and support climate resilience through  
23 carbon sequestration.

24 My colleague, Natalie, will now speak to  
25 how this bill can advance community resilience.

2 DR. NATALIE GREAVES-PETERS: Thanks,  
3 Christine. Good afternoon. I'm Dr. Natalie Greaves-  
4 Peters, also a registered dietitian and currently a  
5 postdoctoral senior research associate at the Tisch  
6 Food Center. I also reside in District 1. As you've  
7 heard from my colleagues, urban agriculture provides  
8 essential benefits that strengthen community  
9 resilience, especially in times of crisis. These  
10 urban farms offer a reliable local food source during  
11 distribution to traditional supply chains, such as  
12 extreme weather events or public health emergencies.  
13 For example, the Queens Botanical Garden Urban Farm  
14 grows food for donation to local food banks and hosts  
15 community workshops on sustainable practices,  
16 empowering residents to be stewards of their food  
17 systems. In addition to providing fresh food, urban  
18 agriculture fosters local job creation and economic  
19 stability. The bill's focus on converting  
20 underutilized industrial spaces for urban farming  
21 will open sustainable employment opportunities,  
22 including jobs in farming, food storage, and  
23 distribution, industries critical to food security.  
24 By supporting urban agriculture in these spaces, the  
25 bill protects industrial zones for local industry and

2 food policy, expanding job training opportunities in  
3 food-related sectors, especially for women and  
4 minority-owned businesses. Through our coalition's  
5 work with programs like Red Hook Farms, we've seen  
6 how urban farms can create pathways for young people  
7 to enter the workforce, develop leadership skills,  
8 and contribute to their communities. Urban  
9 agriculture also reduces the environmental impact of  
10 our city's food supply by localizing food production.  
11 Currently, much of our food is transported long  
12 distances, creating high carbon emissions. By  
13 converting spaces within our communities into green  
14 spaces and urban farms, this bill allows us to reduce  
15 our reliance on imported produce, cutting down on  
16 transportation emissions, and supporting a  
17 sustainable local food economy. I will now look  
18 forward to hearing from some of the Food at Hub  
19 community members.

20 MAJORITY LEADER FARIÁS: Thank you so much  
21 for your testimony.

22 Any questions for this panel? Thank you,  
23 folks.

24 I will now call the next panel up. Megan  
25 Nordgren, I'm going off of your penmanship, folks,

2 Jesse Miller, Emily Miller, and Renee Keitt. I don't  
3 want to struggle. I'm sorry. I want to make sure I  
4 get it right. People butcher my last name all the  
5 time.

6 MEGAN NORDGREN: Thank you, Chairwoman  
7 Farías, and, of course, Council Member Brewer and  
8 Council Member Nurse and Council Member Gutiérrez and  
9 virtually Council Member Salamanca. We've had the  
10 pleasure of working with all of you to bring  
11 hydroponic classrooms to your schools over the years.  
12 Thank you. I'm so appreciative of the opportunity to  
13 speak today and so appreciative of all of your  
14 support in the past. I'm excited to join our  
15 colleagues from the Food Ed Hub to support citywide  
16 access to fresh food and urban agriculture. I'm Megan  
17 Nordgren. I'm with New York Sun Works. We are a non-  
18 profit that builds hydroponic farm classrooms in New  
19 York City public schools, and in these farm  
20 classrooms, we are using the hydroponic technology to  
21 educate students and teachers about the science of  
22 sustainability and bring quality STEM education  
23 through the lens of urban farming. We envision a  
24 generation of environmental innovators empowered to  
25 create solutions to our global climate challenges.

2 Since opening our first hydroponic classroom in 2010  
3 in the wonderful District 6, we've partnered with  
4 over 350 schools, including in all of your Districts,  
5 reaching more than 140,000 students annually in New  
6 York and beyond and, each year, our school partners  
7 are training tens of thousands of New York City  
8 students, the vast majority of whom are in Title I  
9 schools, and many who live in food deserts, to grow  
10 food from seed to harvest, and these students are  
11 then bringing, with tremendous pride and joy, these  
12 vegetables, the fresh vegetables and fruits that  
13 they're growing in their classroom, home to share  
14 with their families. Our hydroponic classrooms across  
15 the city have the capacity to grow 200,000 pounds of  
16 vegetables per year. Further, our urban agriculture  
17 workforce development program that we're implementing  
18 in about 10 high schools across the city is giving  
19 the students the skills they need to enter the  
20 emerging workforce in farming, industry, and green  
21 economy. Thank you. We support the bill. Apologies.

22 MAJORITY LEADER FARIÁS: Thank you. Please  
23 feel free to submit the testimony to us at  
24 [testimony@council.nyc.gov](mailto:testimony@council.nyc.gov).

2 I'd like to also call up Rae Gomes, if  
3 they're in the room. Great. And is Beth Bainbridge  
4 also in the room?

5 Sergeants, can we get an additional  
6 chair? Thank you so much.

7 JESSE MILLER: My name is Jesse Miller.  
8 I'm the farm manager at the Spring Creek Towers Farm,  
9 which is a new but quite large urban farm in East New  
10 York, Brooklyn. It's in the Starrett City affordable  
11 housing development. I'm speaking on behalf of the  
12 Opportunity Hub, a community development non-profit  
13 serving Starrett City, Brooklyn. We provide various  
14 social services to our residents, including the  
15 Spring Creek Towers Farm. As the farm manager, I have  
16 witnessed the profound positive impact that our urban  
17 farm has had on the community. In East New York,  
18 affordable, high-quality produce and healthy food are  
19 often difficult to find. Many residents express a  
20 desire to cook healthier meals and incorporate more  
21 plant-based products into their diets. However, some  
22 lack the knowledge and skills to prepare these meals.  
23 Additionally, many students I work with have little  
24 experience growing food and are often surprised to  
25 learn how vegetables grow and how fresh produce

2 differs significantly from processed options. Both  
3 children and adults are eager to engage in outdoor  
4 and social activities, and they're very supportive of  
5 our community farm and others in the neighborhood.  
6 Our urban farm addresses the East New York food  
7 desert in several key ways. First, by cultivating  
8 culturally relevant produce, we provide nutrient-  
9 dense vegetables that are excitedly consumed by our  
10 Starrett City residents. Second, our older adults  
11 gardening program and community engagement events  
12 allow residents to participate in the garden, learn  
13 how to grow food, and experience the documented  
14 health benefits of gardening in a community. It's  
15 truly amazing to see these older adults come into the  
16 garden, maybe feeling sick, dealing with physical  
17 ailments, dealing with maybe some feelings, and come  
18 out of the garden feeling so much better and  
19 enlivened. Moreover, we offer garden education to  
20 students at PS346, Abe Stark Elementary, teaching  
21 them about food systems, fostering a love for fresh  
22 produce, and creating a magical outdoor classroom  
23 experience. I've witnessed incredible growth in my  
24 students since I began at the farm. Okay, I'll just  
25 end here. We support the bill, and we would also love

2 to seek financial support in this bill and from the  
3 Council to continue our work in East New York so  
4 thank you so much.

5           EMILY MILLER: Good afternoon. My name is  
6 Emily Miller. I'm the Director of Development and  
7 Communications with Teens for Food Justice, and I'm a  
8 resident of District 10, Washington Heights. It's a  
9 pleasure to be here today. Thank you so much. On  
10 behalf of Teens for Food Justice, TFFJ, I am speaking  
11 to express our strong support Intro. 693. As a non-  
12 profit organization empowering young people to combat  
13 food insecurity through indoor, closed environment,  
14 high-yield hydroponic farming, we recognize this  
15 initiative as a critical step to increasing equitable  
16 access to fresh produce. At one of our farms, Martin  
17 Luther King Jr. Educational Campus in Councilwoman  
18 Brewer's District, students grow up to 10,000 pounds  
19 of fresh produce annually inside their school. This  
20 produce is distributed to the campus cafeterias,  
21 shared with campus families, and shared with Lincoln  
22 Square Neighborhood Center across the street,  
23 significantly increasing access to healthy food for  
24 the entire community as well as the school  
25 population. For many of our students, nutrition-



2 related health challenges such as diabetes and  
3 hypertension are not just statistics, they are the  
4 realities they face every day. Many of these students  
5 are responsible for preparing after-school meals for  
6 their younger siblings, which makes their  
7 participation in our nutrition education programs  
8 especially critical. Through TFFJ, they gain the  
9 skills and knowledge to create healthier meals at  
10 home and advocate for better nutrition in their  
11 communities. Urban agriculture also provides an  
12 invaluable opportunity to prepare these young people  
13 for careers in the growing green economy. By  
14 integrating STEM education with hands-on farming,  
15 TFFJ equips students with practical skills in  
16 sustainable agriculture, environmental science, and  
17 technology, while fostering leadership and agency.  
18 Expanding these initiatives citywide will open doors  
19 for countless individuals to thrive in this rapidly  
20 evolving sector. Beyond food production, urban ag  
21 addresses inequalities in nutritious food access and  
22 subsequent health outcomes. Legislation like 693  
23 tackles social determinants of health by increasing  
24 this access and offering tangible solutions for a  
25 healthier, more equitable city. Thank you for your

2 leadership on this critical issue and for  
3 prioritizing the well-being of all New Yorkers.  
4 Thanks.

5           RAE GOMES: Good afternoon. All right. My  
6 name is Rae Gomes. I'm a mother. I'm a writer. I'm an  
7 activist, food justice organizer, mostly based in  
8 central Brooklyn, but I do organize nationally. I am  
9 on the leadership team of National Black Food and  
10 Justice Alliance. I'm also a co-founder of Central  
11 Brooklyn Food Co-op, and I also contributed to the  
12 creation of Central Brooklyn Food Hub. I am speaking  
13 in opposition to this bill, not because I disagree  
14 with the main infrastructure and the platform that it  
15 is, more so the process of how this has gone about. I  
16 am from the marginalized communities that folks are  
17 mentioning here. I also work very extensively in  
18 Brownsville and East New York as well. I help create  
19 a food as medicine program called Root to Wellness at  
20 OBH, One Brooklyn Health, where we, between June and  
21 October, sold over 7,000 pounds of food to over 400  
22 participants. We were able to get subsidized funding  
23 for folks so that it could be affordable to them and  
24 also affordable and sustainable to our partners,  
25 Brooklyn Packers, and we also work with GrowNYC where

2 the food is purchased specifically from BIPOC  
3 farmers. I say that because there are a lot of  
4 programming and a lot of initiatives that are  
5 happening in the city that seem very disconnected,  
6 specifically from the Mayor's Office of Food Policy,  
7 and these initiatives are really addressing access to  
8 fresh produce and are really centering the  
9 communities that folks keep mentioning here that I  
10 don't see here so I'm really just disappointed in the  
11 lack of community engagement for this process, and I  
12 know, personally, because I've worked with these  
13 various offices at various times in my career. I've  
14 worked at the Health Department, so I'm very familiar  
15 with Health Bucks and Fresh. I can give you some real  
16 on-the-ground issues with those programs and those  
17 statistics that I keep hearing because I'm talking  
18 directly with communities as well as other people,  
19 and I'll just finish up really quickly. There is a  
20 food equity assessment tool that we help create with  
21 the Mayor's Office of Food Policy that talks about  
22 how we can center community in these types of  
23 efforts, and I really would invite folks to look at  
24 that and use that in continuing creating these  
25 things. Thank you.

2 BETH BAINBRIDGE: Hello. My name is Beth  
3 Bainbridge and I am here representing the Sylvia  
4 Center. Thank you, Council Member Fariás and all the  
5 Members of the Economic Committee, for convening this  
6 hearing today. We appreciate the opportunity to  
7 submit this testimony on behalf of the Sylvia Center  
8 and as a member of the Tisch Food Center or the Tisch  
9 Center's food hub in support of the plan to convert  
10 unused industrial areas to urban ag sites.

11 MAJORITY LEADER FARÍAS: Sorry. Sergeant,  
12 can you pause the time?

13 BETH BAINBRIDGE: There's feedback, right?

14 MAJORITY LEADER FARÍAS: There is  
15 feedback. I think you have to move it a little bit  
16 away from you. Okay. I think we can begin again.

17 BETH BAINBRIDGE: Great. Thank you. We see  
18 this initiative as an important step to making fresh  
19 healthy food accessible to all New Yorkers,  
20 particularly those who live in neighborhoods with  
21 limited fresh food access. Founded in 2007 to address  
22 diet-related diseases in under-resourced communities,  
23 the Sylvia Center educates young people and their  
24 families through culinary programming to promote  
25 health and well-being. The Sylvia Center programming

2 runs in all five of New York City's boroughs and  
3 served more than 6,000 participants last year. We  
4 help young people and families take control of their  
5 health through better food choices and encourage them  
6 to be healthy food advocates in their communities. 94  
7 percent of program participants report eating one or  
8 more healthy meals per week as a result of our  
9 nutrition-focused classes. Through our experience in  
10 providing food education programming citywide, we  
11 know firsthand the importance that fresh food access  
12 has on positive student and community health  
13 outcomes. Through our program, students learn about  
14 food justice, food insecurity, and food waste along  
15 with food access, lessons that can only truly be  
16 learned with urban ag sites based in our  
17 neighborhoods. Urban farming activities will support  
18 the development of a new generation of community food  
19 advocates that we are cultivating at the Sylvia  
20 Center. Urban agriculture spaces bring together  
21 students and community members and provide  
22 opportunities for connection, collaboration, and  
23 cooperation. Understanding the importance of  
24 community space, as one of our students said, I'm

2 getting to explore the world around me and community  
3 because Queens...

4 MAJORITY LEADER FARIÁS: You can take a  
5 few more seconds.

6 BETH BAINBRIDGE: Okay, great. Because  
7 Queens is the most diverse place on Earth, and I  
8 think I get to explore that not only through these  
9 places, but its people and its food so we urge the  
10 City Council to adopt legislation. Thank you very  
11 much.

12 MAJORITY LEADER FARIÁS: Thank you so much  
13 for those that testified.

14 Any questions for the panel? Sure,  
15 Council Member Brewer.

16 COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: Thank you. I know  
17 I love your hydroponics program, but my question is,  
18 I've had trouble getting the Department of Education  
19 to agree to utilize the food. Understandably, folks  
20 want to take it home, that's great, and you do  
21 tastings, and that's great, but I can't tell you how  
22 many times the salad bar sucks at the school, and  
23 they see the wonderful hydroponics lettuce right  
24 there, and they can't use it so I'm just wondering,

2 is that a discussion or is that something that we  
3 still have to work out?

4 MEGAN NORDGREN: I know in the past it was  
5 able to be used but, at New York Sun Works, since  
6 we're growing it in the classroom, we really strongly  
7 advocate for the students to taste it in the  
8 classroom and to bring it home because, if you remove  
9 it from the classroom and the connection to where  
10 they grew it and how they grew it, they lose their  
11 interest in it so 98 percent of the kids in the  
12 classroom are willing to taste the food and are  
13 excited about it and passionate about it and just  
14 truly joyful, but if you take it and put it in the  
15 salad bar, then it becomes something that might not  
16 be as, they don't feel that connection that I grew  
17 this, I grew that, so through our Harvest Program, we  
18 send the food home with information about nutrition,  
19 how to cook, cultural experiences, and then encourage  
20 students to share back what they're learning from  
21 their families and to build that homeschool  
22 connection as well, but in the past, schools have  
23 been able to use it so I'm surprised to hear that  
24 they couldn't use it.

2           EMILY MILLER: If I can also add to an  
3 answer, at the TFFJ, at the six farms that we're  
4 operating in New York City, we are able to distribute  
5 our produce to the cafeteria. They are our first and  
6 highest priority customer, if we will. Though they do  
7 not pay for the food, we donate it to the salad bars  
8 and, as much as possible, the school cafeterias love  
9 to find ways to incorporate it into the food that  
10 they are able to prepare, although most kitchens are  
11 not set up for scratch cooking.

12           COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: All right, well,  
13 I'll talk offline about King. That's not happening.

14           EMILY MILLER: Okay.

15           COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: Thank you.

16           MAJORITY LEADER FARIÁS: Any other  
17 questions? No?

18           Thank you. You folks are excused.

19           I'm going to move to virtual testimony at  
20 this moment, and I'd like to call on Iyeshima Harris,  
21 Joanna Dorsey, Yvonne St. Luce, and Yemi Amu.

22           Iyeshima Harris, if you can unmute  
23 yourself.

24           IYESHIMA HARRIS-OUEDRAOGO: Thank you,  
25 Chairwoman Fariás and Committee of Economic



2 Development for the opportunity to testify. My name  
3 is Iyeshima Harris-Ouedraogo, and I'm the Director of  
4 Advocacy and Programs at Green Guerillas, a non-  
5 profit organization supporting community gardeners  
6 and youth in the food justice movement across New  
7 York for over 50 years. I'm here in support of Intro.  
8 693, but before I jump into the reason why I'm  
9 supporting it, I also want to raise some concerns  
10 that community gardeners are facing, and we know that  
11 these spaces are crucial to our city's social and  
12 economic and environmental health. However, due to  
13 their challenges, community gardeners are facing a  
14 threat for longevity and sustainability, and some of  
15 these challenges are that our community gardeners are  
16 aging out, and there are socioeconomic challenges  
17 that are leading to decline in membership in  
18 community gardeners, particularly among our young  
19 generations. Community gardeners bear heavy financial  
20 burdens to sustain our city's green spaces. Even  
21 though the City funds Green Fund, there's still a lot  
22 more that can be done. Community gardeners are still  
23 having to come out of their pocket to pay for the  
24 basic necessities that they need. Nearby housing  
25 developments have been causing a lot of increased

2 rodent infestation and illegal dumping that affects  
3 the livelihood of community gardeners and the  
4 neighborhood in general, and community gardeners feel  
5 that their longstanding contributions are undervalued  
6 by the City. I've done a lot of trainings with  
7 community gardeners, and they always ask, like, does  
8 the City really care about us, and to address these  
9 challenges, we're asking for the City to enact  
10 legislation that secure the permanent protection for  
11 community gardeners, establish a green equity fund to  
12 provide...

13 SERGEANT-AT-ARMS: Thank you. Your time is  
14 expired.

15 IYESHIMA HARRIS-OUEDRAOGO: Community  
16 gardeners with resources to underserve, and for the  
17 support of Intro. 693, we just want the bill to fully  
18 define what does urban agriculture mean and to  
19 incorporate community gardeners as a part of that,  
20 and to also be explicitly clear and consider...

21 MAJORITY LEADER FARIÁS: Your time has  
22 expired. Can you please make sure...

23 IYESHIMA HARRIS-OUEDRAOGO: Thank you so  
24 much for the opportunity.

2 MAJORITY LEADER FARÍAS: Absolutely. Thank  
3 you for coming to testify. Can you please make sure  
4 to email us your full explanation of what you'd like  
5 to see within Intro. 693?

6 IYESHIMA HARRIS-OUEDRAOGO: Thank you.

7 MAJORITY LEADER FARÍAS: Oh, sure, and  
8 Council Member Nurse has a question.

9 COUNCIL MEMBER NURSE: No, I just wanted  
10 to say hi because I've known Iyeshima for like a  
11 decade, or longer than that, and yes, we want to  
12 include community gardens in what we want to do with  
13 the legislation, and I hope to work with you on some  
14 feedback around it, so thank you.

15 MAJORITY LEADER FARÍAS: Perfect. Thank  
16 you so much. I'd now like to call on Joanna Dorsey to  
17 unmute themselves.

18 SERGEANT-AT-ARMS: You may begin.

19 JOANNA DORSEY: Good afternoon. Thank you  
20 for the opportunity to be here. My name is Joanna  
21 Dorsey, and I serve as the Director of Policy and  
22 Advocacy for Black Farmers United in New York State.  
23 BFU is a member-led organization of over 150 black  
24 farmers, land stewards, and educators across the span  
25 all across New York State, and today I'm here to

2 testify in support of Councilwoman Sandy Nurse's  
3 bill, Intro. 0693. One thing that I really just  
4 wanted to uplift is the testimony that we heard  
5 throughout the day so far that really touched on key  
6 points that are essential to this bill, such as  
7 benefits to the community, the economic benefits, as  
8 well as the health benefits, but I would also like to  
9 uplift the importance and the availability of veteran  
10 farmers, specifically farmers of color, to support in  
11 the implementation of this bill. As a sister from the  
12 National Black Food and Justice Alliance mentioned,  
13 there may have been a missed opportunity in the  
14 development here, but there is certainly an  
15 opportunity to include BIPOC farmers in this project  
16 through the utilization of black-led non-profits such  
17 as MBFJA and Iyeshima's organization as well as Black  
18 Farmers United. These organizations have members that  
19 have established networks and community outreach,  
20 technical expertise and knowledge sharing, the  
21 capacity for workforce training and development, and  
22 then also the firsthand knowledge of what's needed in  
23 order to allow our farmers to be able to take part in  
24 the equitable possibilities that a bill like this  
25 could present. I'm part of the Coalition for the Good

2 Food New York Bill, which is the statewide version of  
3 the New York City Good Food Purchasing Program, and  
4 with that, we surveyed a lot of our members to really  
5 find out what the barriers are that they face with  
6 accessing institutionalized purchasing, and one of  
7 the main barriers was access to land so I just wanted  
8 to uplift the importance of this bill and how this  
9 can really help to scale smaller farms, specifically  
10 those who have been historically disenfranchised. I  
11 don't know if I've reached my time, but I just want  
12 to wrap it up because a lot of what I've wanted to  
13 say has been said and just to show support for the  
14 testimony that's been given so far. Thank you so much  
15 for your time.

16 MAJORITY LEADER FARÍAS: Thank you,  
17 Joanna. I really appreciate it.

18 I'd now like to recognize Yvonne St.  
19 Luce.

20 SERGEANT-AT-ARMS: You may begin.

21 MAJORITY LEADER FARÍAS: Pardon my  
22 mispronunciation.

23 YVONNE SAINT LUCE: Hey, it's all right.  
24 My name is Yvonne. I'm just a regular, regular  
25 citizen. I came to New York two years ago, and I'm

2 just a testament as to what all of you guys are  
3 doing. I just want to commend you. I know everybody  
4 is trying to incorporate everything together, but I  
5 think you're on the right path. There was a young  
6 lady who spoke about going against the testimony, I  
7 believe, and I can see where she is coming from  
8 because one thing that I would say that could be  
9 beneficial is because I started with the composting  
10 program, and I got an opportunity to go to the  
11 community gardens, go to the different composting  
12 sites, and it was beneficial because I gained  
13 community, and I gained a lot about New York and the  
14 (INAUDIBLE) New York, and I think these people that  
15 are in the micro settings are people that you  
16 probably need to target because they can tell you  
17 exactly, you know, how we can make all of this  
18 beneficial for everybody on a grander scale so it's  
19 just on a micro level that needs to be addressed for  
20 my opinion, but I'm happy that everybody is on the  
21 same page, even if it's a different, you know, a  
22 different page, but we're trying to do the same goal,  
23 basically so it's been an honor hearing all the  
24 beautiful things, and I would love to be a part of

2 something to help with the process. Thank you so much  
3 for the opportunity.

4 MAJORITY LEADER FARIÁS: Thank you for  
5 coming to testify, Yvonne.

6 I'd like to now call on Yemi Amu.

7 SERGEANT-AT-ARMS: You may begin.

8 YEMI AMU: Hi, everyone. My name is Yemi  
9 Amu. I'm sorry, there's noise in the background. I'm  
10 actually at a cafe right now because we are just  
11 moving out of our farm. We lost our lease. I'm really  
12 thankful for this opportunity. I'm thankful that this  
13 bill, 0693, exists. I'm speaking as a black farmer. I  
14 have been running local farms for over a decade now.  
15 We raise freshwater fish and vegetables. We're an  
16 outdoor aquaponics farm because we believe that  
17 aquaponics should be accessible. We do everything  
18 from school groups to adult education on our farm.  
19 Every year, we host at least about 2,000 young  
20 children. We have wellness and nutrition workshops.  
21 We provide free culinary education, and we also  
22 donate about 60 percent of the produce that we grow  
23 to our partner who runs community fridges. They run  
24 and maintain community fridges around the city. The  
25 work that we do is not easy. We do it with very

2 limited resources and constantly facing the barrier  
3 of land tenureship is very hard. There's been a lot  
4 of talk about making sure people get fed. I think it  
5 is equally important to talk about how we sustain the  
6 folks who are growing the food. Urban farmers do the  
7 work of both growing food and educating people, and  
8 we have to do it with a lot of land insecurity. I  
9 support this bill, but I would love to hear more  
10 about how to support small-scale farmers, mid-scale  
11 farmers, and how to think about providing them not  
12 just resources but land tenureship. That is something  
13 that is really lacking. A lot of the work that we do  
14 also involves training young people. We pay the young  
15 people that we work with, and the question that comes  
16 up for me all the time is, how can I have this as a  
17 career for myself. Without making sure that there's  
18 land available for these young people, we're not  
19 going..

20 SERGEANT-AT-ARMS: Your time is expired.

21 YEMI AMU: To have a future of urban  
22 farmers. Thank you.

23 MAJORITY LEADER FARÍAS: Thank you so much  
24 for all the folks that showed up virtually,  
25 especially our black women farmers. I really am



2 appreciative of getting your perspective on this  
3 hearing topic and the bill specifically.

4 If there's no questions for this panel.

5 Great.

6 With that, last call for anyone in  
7 person. Amazing.

8 This hearing is now adjourned. I really  
9 appreciate everyone's thoughts today, the  
10 comprehensive questions and conversations and  
11 dialogue we are really creating from this going  
12 forward, at least for the women in this hearing room  
13 right now. We are community-grown local people that  
14 are on the ground working to try to solve some of the  
15 problems our communities are facing, and we're hoping  
16 that this is conversation one of many to come on this  
17 one topic and also this bill. Thank you all for  
18 coming today. [GAVEL]

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C E R T I F I C A T E

World Wide Dictation certifies that the foregoing transcript is a true and accurate record of the proceedings. We further certify that there is no relation to any of the parties to this action by blood or marriage, and that there is interest in the outcome of this matter.



Date November 22, 2024