



## Community Gardens: Building a Healthier New York

Just Food<sup>1</sup> Testimony, August 10, 2010

Just Food calls for the extension of rules in the 2002 Community Gardens Agreement that states “all gardens are for preservation as community gardens,” thereby renewing protection for city-owned community gardens.

Garden permanence is crucial to the economic, environmental and personal health of every community in New York City, especially where residents lack access to fresh, affordable, healthy food.

Walk into a community garden in New York City and you might find:

- Vegetables, herbs and fruit trees being tended and harvested by neighborhood residents
- Teens building a greenhouse or painting a mural
- Happy hens laying eggs
- Hives of bees making sweet honey
- Gardeners harvesting produce for their neighborhood farmers market
- Organic waste transforming into nourishing compost
- Community members holding workshops that tackle food justice issues
- Cooking classes teaching families how to prepare and eat healthy, delicious meals

A growing group of community gardeners young and old are dedicated to developing City Farms: places where food is grown, marketed and distributed to the community through farmers markets, farm-stands and donation to food pantries and soup kitchens. The presence of farmers markets with cooking demonstrations and nutritional information have been proven to improve the shopping, cooking and eating habits of the communities they serve.

Also, food grown in community gardens can bypass the greenhouse gas emissions too often generated by food production, transport and waste, and the green spaces that gardens provide reflect radiation from the sun, significantly reducing the city’s “heat island effect.”

With community gardens providing these benefits and more, the new Garden Agreement should ensure the extension of protections to community gardens, not scale them back.

In addition, we recognize that these new rules are not where our work ends. Like their predecessor, the new rules are temporary by nature, and we need to work together--as community gardeners and supporters, city agencies, City Council and the Mayor’s office--to advance a permanent legislative solution to protecting our sacred community gardens.

Thank you.

---

<sup>1</sup> Just Food works to increase access to healthy food in NYC and to support the local farms and urban gardens that grow it. Just Food’s City Farms program promotes urban agriculture to help low-income NYC communities to grow, market and distribute fresh food in some of NYC’s most food-insecure communities. More than 35 community gardens are affiliates of The City Farms program. This program also aids in the development of community-controlled, garden-based farmers’ markets in low-resource communities in the Bronx, Brooklyn, Manhattan and Queens.