



## **EXECUTIVE SUMMARY 2014-2016 STRATEGIC PLAN**

### BACKGROUND

Since 1995, Just Food has supported New York City communities seeking to increase access to healthy food and to create a more just and sustainable food system. Just Food provides training, technical assistance, and education to community leaders to start community supported agriculture groups (CSAs); community-run, urban agriculture-based farmers' markets; and farm-to-food pantry initiatives. Just Food also trains community members to provide education in fundamental cooking and sustainable urban agriculture skills for their neighbors and to advocate to make their corner of New York City a healthier and more sustainable place to live and eat.

Just Food is a pioneer in the food justice and sustainable agriculture field, emphasizing the role of community leadership and ownership of food projects, particularly in low-income communities. We pioneered the CSA model in New York City and, as a result of our advocacy work, changed USDA policy so that food stamps could be used to pay for CSA shares. Just Food brought community-run farmers' markets to low-income communities, helping groups change the food access landscape of their neighborhoods. Our farm-to-food pantry program was the first of its kind in New York State, connecting local farmers and food pantries and providing fresh produce as well as cooking and farm education for families in need.

The organization spent 2013 re-evaluating its mission, vision, values, and approach in light of how much the landscape of food justice, food access, and community health has evolved, especially in the past decade. Under the guidance of Community Resource Exchange (CRE), we engaged a diverse group of stakeholders—including community partners, key funders, and thought leaders—who helped Just Food to identify emerging needs as well as to better understand our own strengths, weaknesses, and perceived position within the food movement. We identified gaps in services as well as Just Food's unique role in meeting this need. Armed with this data, staff and board members participated in a series of in-depth conversations to examine Just Food's current programming, hone our focus, articulate a theory of change, and establish overall organizational goals.

### KEY FINDINGS

While New York City's food system has changed dramatically in the 18 years since Just Food's founding, food access is still a major issue for New Yorkers—particularly those who are low income and/or living in underserved communities. Awareness of the impact food access has on the health of New Yorkers has increased and many more community-based organizations and grassroots groups throughout the city are working on food access projects. While this is

an exciting development, many of these groups are reinventing the wheel and, as a result, are wasting valuable resources—including time, energy, and funding—in their efforts to launch and/or sustain projects. Many of these groups are unaware of existing models, resources that could ease their implementation, and strategies for community outreach and organizing that could ensure community buy-in and adoption. In addition, they often lack access to infrastructure that could support the immediate success and long-term sustainability of their projects.

For nearly two decades, Just Food has provided training and technical assistance to community leaders to launch and sustain local food access projects, with a targeted focus on a handful of models that included CSAs, farmers' markets, and food pantries. While Just Food's established models have proven successful—as evidenced by the fact that some of our community food projects have been in existence for 17 years—they don't encompass the full spectrum of possible food project models. There are many viable, mission-aligned community food project models that Just Food has not been positioned to work with or support.

## STRATEGIC DIRECTION

Based on this strategic planning process, Just Food began 2014 with a newly recast mission statement:

*Just Food empowers and supports community-led projects that increase access to locally grown food, especially in underserved New York City neighborhoods.*

The overarching outcome of this process was a mandate for Just Food to evolve into a Center for Sustainable Community Food Projects. This Center will be a one-stop resource for a broad spectrum of community projects to increase access to local and sustainably grown food.

According to Just Food, a community food project:

- provides access to locally grown food;
- is of, by, and for the community;
- cultivates self-reliance;
- empowers/includes economically vulnerable people as participants and/or leaders;
- is social justice-minded;
- is collaborative; and
- can be sustainable over the long term.

Although these attributes may not be project components at the outset, Just Food expects the projects it works with and supports to aspire to these principles and to work toward them over time.

## JUST FOOD CENTER FOR SUSTAINABLE COMMUNITY FOOD PROJECTS

Starting in January 2014, Just Food will begin the journey of evolving into a Center for Sustainable Community Food Projects. This Center will be a one-stop resource offering comprehensive services that will support our current partners as well as a broad spectrum of

emerging community projects to increase access to fresh, local food. The Center will provide basic food system training; support the development of project leadership teams; train project managers, advocates, and culinary and agriculture educators; coordinate advocacy efforts; and develop project infrastructure. Just Food will also begin to aggregate information about new project models and share best practices. In addition, Just Food will develop programming that will increase the organization's ability to train and support community food project leaders and educators in their efforts to educate their neighbors, elected officials, and the media about food-related issues and policies that impact the health of their communities.

Over the next five years, Just Food's organizational objective is to support the launch of more than 100 new community food projects, reaching at least 25,000 new people, while maintaining our support of our 200-plus existing community partners. In total, these efforts will result in more than 200,000 New Yorkers gaining access to fresh, local, sustainably-grown food each year.

In order to achieve these goals, Just Food will use the following tactics and strategies:

- Develop curricula and a calendar of trainings for community food project leaders, including project management, advocacy, evaluation, community organizing, media relations, and fundraising.
- Train community leaders to share their knowledge and expertise on subjects including sustainable urban agriculture; local, seasonal cooking; and sustainable food system advocacy within their communities.
- Increase our organizational capacity to provide community food project infrastructure support—i.e. expand insurance offerings, create fiscal sponsorship infrastructure, and create a legal structure for community food projects.
- Develop messaging, marketing, and outreach strategies to promote trainings and services throughout New York City.

As Just Food nears its 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary, we believe the implementation of this plan will position the organization to effectively support the proliferation and sustainability of strong, viable community food projects in New York City's underserved communities.