

# *edible*

MANHATTAN

## Meet Just Food's Jane Hodge, Director of NYC's First Farm School



Editor's Note: Besides our own events (the next being [Edible Escape](#) on October 19) there's a few we look forward to each year, mainly because of the fine organizations they support. One of those is Just Food's [Let Us Eat Local](#) on September 21. Not only one of the better walk-around tastings in town, featuring local produce and proteins from all the places that know exactly what best to do with it, it supports an organization that is at the

forefront in getting better, fresher, more nutritious food to more of the city.

They're pretty much responsible for the boom in city CSA programs; have their hands (literally) in many more effective and higher yielding community gardening and farming projects, including dozens of chicken coops; work to get more locally produced food to pantries and soup kitchens; help train home cooks how to plan, prep and cook more nutritious meals; and also take part in advocating for better policies on local levels.

So in honor of the organization, we're profiling a few of the folks who work for or with Just Food on so many of the very cool projects they manage citywide. The first is [Jane Hodge](#), the Director of their new [Farm School NYC](#) program, which offers New Yorkers two year certificate course and individual classes professional urban agriculture with an emphasis on practical sustainable farming practices for urbanites, including full farms, rooftop rows and community gardens.

Hodge has worked with [Just Food's City Farms Program](#) since 2006, but the first true Farm School classes began this January, with 15 certificate students ranging in age from their 20s to early 60s—some doing the course for a career change while others already grow food as a career and are looking to improve their skills. One thing all students have in common, says Hodge, is their interest in becoming advocates for local food and the community, just like Just Food. Below are excerpts from our conversation with Hodge about the new Farm School.

## **Q. What are The Goals of Farm School?**

Farm School wants to 'train new farmers,' with a focus on food justice. Part of all the curriculum is recognizing that great food in the city is not just about growing food, its about empowering communities and having people

take control of their food sources.

One of the things that Farm School is trying to get across is that there are lots of different ways to grow food. It's not just about rooftops farming, there's a network of hundreds of community gardens in the city that need people. There's so much abandoned space in the city, there's window sills, there's back and front yards, there's churches, and other religious grounds, and food pantries and food kitchens. There's so much space that can be farmed.

The Farm School program hopes to encourage more farmers by getting more people and communities to grow more food. What's exciting about having students graduate through Farm School is that they are motivated to do more than just grow food; they also want to go and teach other people how to grow food. Our students are very much focused on making sure that the word is getting out there.

### **How does Farm School NYC's work with the rest of [Just Food](#)?**

Being under the Just Food networks means that Farm School can share resources and benefit from the experience of Just Food staff. Many Just Food trainers trained in City Farms Programs now teach Farm School classes and serve as host sites. For example, [Taqwa Community Farm](#) on 164th St. and Nelson Ave in the Bronx, run by Abu Talib and Bobby Watson—both Just Food trainers—and [Bk Farmyards](#), a Brooklyn-based farm network in Crown Heights. Many Farm School classes are held there.

### **What kind of jobs could graduates get after they complete the program?**

There are lots of next steps for the graduates. Hopefully, they will do

different things; be it teaching youths and adults about urban farming, starting their own sustainable food projects such as rooftop farms or working at farms close to city. But always with the focus on building up the community and the food resources in New York City.

### **Why do you do what you do?**

I believe that food is at the heart of everything, a basic human need, and is something that is deeply entrenched in our cultures. Food brings people together. When people are growing their own food, they have so much control over their lives and their health.