



## From Vacant Land to Urban Farms and Gardens

Just Food Testimony, June 16, 2011

Just Food supports the legislation Int. 248-A calling for the establishment of a free-of-charge, searchable database of city-owned property on the city's website, and particularly supports the call for the database to include information regarding "whether the property is suitable for urban agriculture." (section g74)

Since 1995, Just Food has worked with communities to make fresh, locally grown food accessible throughout New York City. We have helped connect regional farmers to over 100 CSAs, 45 food pantries and 18 community-run farmers markets. Our City Farms Program has worked to increase the amount of food grown, sold and distributed by New York City community gardeners and urban farmers to their neighborhoods.

Time and again we hear from urban farmers and gardeners—new and experienced, young and old—about the challenges of finding land to grow food in their communities.

A free, searchable database to help urban growers find and transform underutilized land into places where communities can grow food would:

- help more New Yorkers of every neighborhood secure an affordable, delicious and nutritious source of fresh produce for themselves, their families, and even their neighbors.
- (It would) provide more places where food is grown, marketed and distributed to the community through farmers markets, farm-stands and donation to food pantries and soup kitchens, and where cooking demonstrations and nutritional information can help transform food-related health epidemic many of our communities are facing.
- (It would also) help address the City's greening, climate and environmental challenges. Food grown in urban environments can bypass the greenhouse gas emissions too often generated by food production, transport and waste, and the green spaces that urban agriculture projects provide reflect radiation from the sun, significantly reducing the city's 'heat island effect.'

We applaud the City Council Speaker for including this proposal in the FoodWorks report, which calls for the creation of a new searchable database of all city-owned and leased properties that would "provide useful information to stakeholders seeking urban agriculture land" as well as those seeking new space for other food uses. We are also encouraged by the Mayor's recently updated PlaNYC 2030, which commits to "take a full inventory of municipal land and identify properties that could be suitable for urban agriculture." Adoption of this legislation would help provide urban growers with an invaluable tool in our collective efforts for a greener, healthier New York City.

Thank you.