

# The Future of Local Produce and Urban Farming in New York City

## Overview

This next couple of pages serves to highlight and discuss our plans and progress regarding our final video project. This paper will be addressing the current “food issues” of present-day New York as well as issues that will give rise in the near future. We will be investigating these “food issues” through several lenses including economic, social, health, and environmental. Our focus will be primarily on the “hyper-local,” or locally produced food in New York. We will examine the benefits and advantages to embracing hyper-local food production and distribution. Accordingly, included in the paper is our intended course of action in terms of the execution of our final video project; this includes the fieldwork we are planning, including people we plan on interviewing and places we plan on visiting, as well as the allocation tasks and responsibilities among each member of our group. Also included is our updated plan and any significant changes we made to our original proposal.



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### **IDC 4001H Group 4**

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## Field Reports

For our project, we divided our fieldwork into three areas: urban farms, greenmarkets, and food vendors. For each field we plan on contacting someone who's knowledgeable in that field and interviewing them. We already started filming places and food vendors around NYC, and have visited some of the sites. Now we are just waiting to conduct interviews.

### Urban Farms

We intend to visit the Brooklyn Botanic Garden as well to take some shots and videos of the green roof there. The Brooklyn Botanic Garden green roof was completed in 2011 and is located right on top of the Visitor Center. While it is inaccessible to visitors, the roof is at a slant that can be viewed at street level, which should provide good footage for our video.



Brooklyn Botanic Garden

<http://www.bbg.org/>



Eagle Street Rooftop Farm

<http://rooftopfarms.org/>



New York Green Roofs

<http://newyorkgreenroofs.com/>



The Battery Conservancy Corporation

<http://www.thebattery.org>

Another rooftop farm we discovered through our research is the Eagle Street Rooftop. It is located in Green Point near the East River atop a three-story building. The concept behind the Eagle Street Rooftop is that it is a for-profit farm where volunteers help grown produce locally so that it can be provided locally, thus reducing the carbon footprint when it comes to production and distribution of fruits and vegetables. We have already scheduled a tour of the rooftop for the end of April.

We also found a green roof firm called New York Green Roofs. Two partners, Amy Falder and Chris Brunner, founded the firm and they are in charge of designing, installing and maintaining green roofs all over New York City and have finished over 50 projects all together. We have reached out to them through email regarding their availability for either in-person interviews or via email and hope to hear from them shortly. While they have not yet responded, we plan on following up with them.

The Battery Conservancy Corporation is another group we discovered through our research. They have a one-acre urban farm located in Manhattan. There, they have several types of organically grown vegetables and fruits. They allow field trips for classes about 60 minutes on Wednesdays and Fridays starting in April. If time and scheduling allows, we would like to coordinate a brief trip there with the group to record and interview members who volunteers there.

One of the newest urban farming initiatives we recently heard about is on the rooftop of Whole Food's Gowanus location. Whole Foods has actually partnered with Gotham Greens, an urban farming company, and constructed the country's first commercial-sized rooftop farm on top of their store in Brooklyn. In the next couple of weeks, we plan on trying to contact the employees at Gotham

Greens and hope to visit the Gowanus Whole Foods and see if there is any way to view the rooftop greenhouse ourselves. We also plan on further researching the success of Whole Food's Gowanus greenhouse and whether they have encountered any kind of problems - in terms of financials, agriculture and sustainability-and if they plan on developing their project further in the future.

### Green Markets

We are conducting more research and interviews in two green markets. One of the locations we visited the Grand Army Plaza Greenmarket in Park Slope. The Grand Army Plaza Greenmarket was founded in 1989 and is one of the largest markets in the program.

And the other one is the Union Square Market, which is a popular market in the city. The organization that runs the Union Square Greenmarket is GrowNYC. In fact, GrowNYC seems to be one of the more progressive and innovative organizations addressing the very same "food issues" we plan on investigating for our project. We decided it would be most appropriate to contact the GrowNYC directors, volunteers and farmers and hear what they have to say about the future of food issues in New York.

While we have not started recording footage of the interviews within those areas yet, we have scoped out the farmers there and the produce and foods available for sale. There were a huge variety of goods for sale such as vegetables, produce, ciders and baked goods. Most of the vendors were nice and willing to share their opinions when we asked basic questions regarding customer demographic and prices and how they obtain their crops. However, the market does get very crowded and busy so it may be difficult to get more than a few words in while the market is open. We plan to go back and exchange contact information with some of the farmers and then conduct interviews from there.

### Food Vendors

We are going to find some street fruit vendors that are in the lower income areas of the city that are both subsidized by the government and those that aren't in more populated and wealthier neighborhoods. We are mainly going to see out vendors near Baruch and Brooklyn, which is more residential area.



The Grand Army Plaza Greenmarket

<http://www.grownyc.org/greenmarket/brooklyn-grand-army-plaza>



Union Square Farmers Market  
<https://unionsquaremain.org/food/farmers-market/>

## Updates on Initial Plan

Although our original plan for the final project was a bit broad, our group has further refined our plan, in terms of the future of food in New York City, and we decided to focus on the “hyper-local” produce of New York City; in particular, our project will focus on the current social and economic food issues New York is facing and how hyper-local produce and agriculture can better benefit New York in combatting these issues in the future.

We are looking into the benefits of “hyper-local” produce and our concentrations lie within the health, social, economic and environmental impacts it has, whether that includes better food security, better health, and a more self-sustainable New York City as a whole. We will also focus on how the government will be helping low income neighborhoods, which have weak access to healthy foods and supporting local farmers, as well as encouraging farm employment.

Most of our steps have not changed as we are still using the Internet and the library as our sources of information. The essential part of our data still comes from interviews, reaching out to professionals in the industry and local farmers. We have divided the different interview areas to different members. Our group members have begun conducting interviews, surveying the field for a better understanding and recording and editing footage for our video. In terms of timeliness, we believe we are moving at a decent pace with good progress.

### Timeline

#### Before March

- Have a clear understanding of what we are doing
- Find sources

#### First to third week of March

- Reach out to the sources and make appointments

#### Last week of March to third week of April

- Start shooting and conducting interviews around Brooklyn/ Near Baruch/ Lower income neighborhoods
- Union Square Farmers Market/ Rooftops

Last week of April to May: Finalizing and combining video recordings

The IDC class we are currently taking directs all of its attention toward the near and distant future of New York City and how citizens and scientists are continually working to improve it. While one may not think food has much to do with the future, in actuality, it has a lot to do with the future. Food is meant to sustain us so it would be horrible to lead the next generations toward a future filled with the consumption of unhealthy food, food insecurity and the use of environmentally inefficient methods of producing and distributing food.

Every day, New Yorkers are making choices of what and where to eat. When we buy a simple chicken salad, we probably just think about if the chicken is genetically modified or if there are unwanted chemicals used in the process of producing the salad. What we probably never think about all the people and places that were involved in its creation. The simple act of just eating that salad could be creating jobs on a farm in an upstate farm, bought to a distributing factory, then distributed to either a factory in queens where it can be packaged and distributed. Farmers are deciding what fertilizers to use and restaurants are making choices about where to buy their ingredients and how to dispose of their food waste.

According to research such as the Food Works report by the NYC council, New York City is trying to find ways to move from an unsustainable food system to one that promotes health, environmental sustainability, and a thriving economy. To do so, we need to protect our farmland. Protecting cropland and ensuring that farming is economically viable are therefore critical to long-term food security. We must protect them because they are being taken over by developing cities and environmental degradation. Up to 1 inch of topsoil is being stripped from farmlands every 34 years, which takes over 200 years to replenish. Having healthy soil is required to grow food.

While there are multiple areas in food production, distribution, and waste that have futures that should be looked into, our video will mainly address “hyper-local” produce. The main ideas that will be presented in this video are the advantages of hyper-local produce, economic development and progress taking place, how we are becoming better at combating food security, and why the selling and consumption of hyper-local produce is better for the environment. Through the researching and interviewing of food vendors, urban farmers, and those in the farmers’ markets we will learn about what’s already being done, and what plans are in the works for the near future.

One organization that has been on the forefront of addressing these issues is GrowNYC, the organization that runs several Greenmarkets throughout NYC, among them the Union Square Greenmarket. After conducting further research of the organization we discovered that GrowNYC does a lot more than just run the local Greenmarkets; in fact, GrowNYC seems to be one of the more progressive and innovative organizations addressing the very same “food issues” we plan on investigating for our project. GrowNYC is a non-profit organization that strives to improve the quality of life in New York City through a wide variety of environmental programs and initiatives. These programs include the various Greenmarket Farmers Markets, as well as other gardening and agriculture related programs, recycling initiatives and environmental education programs.

In terms of economic development, the Greenmarkets provide financial support to both the local farmers and the consumers. On one hand, they are encouraging smaller, and family-owned farms; at the same time, the Greenmarkets also provides healthy and fresh produce to those that may not normally be able to access or afford it. This is made possible because the Greenmarkets currently accept Electronic Benefit Transfer, or EBT, cards which allow customers who use food stamps to access their accounts through a "Food Card" which functions similarly to a debit card. Interestingly enough, EBT sales have significantly contributed to the revenue generated at NYC Greenmarkets and local farmers have reported that EBT sales make up between 25-50% of their total income. In addition, they have been cooperating with several local food pantries and distributors so that all leftover produce is donated and distributed to those in need.

By having good farmlands, we can therefore produce healthy crops. Urban farming was at one time really popular during World War II when the government strongly encouraged the population to grow their own victory gardens to allow for more food to be sent abroad to the troops. Once again gardening at home to produce food to be eaten by the family has returned and this trend is spreading. However, unlike before, there are now two ways in which people are taking advantage of home gardening. The crops grown on urban farms are distributed to over 24,000 restaurants in New York City. By having healthier and more organic food choices, the population's diet improves.

Over the past centuries more and more urban farms has increased because we see the benefits of growing our own crops. Brooklyn and a lot of places now have organization dedicating itself to turning the backyards of Kings Borough New Yorkers green. The only work the citizen has to do is contact the organization and the volunteers do the rest. These volunteers clear the backyard, prepare the land, plant, care, and pick the crops. The homeowner is given a certain percent of the crops harvested while the organization takes the rest to be sold across the rest of the borough. This program called BK Farmyards is helping lead the way toward not only a greener city but also a healthier future. By producing these crops nearby they are lowering costs and also training New Yorkers on how to take care of plants so they too can practice this at their own estates.

Another initiative that has taken place over the past couple of years is rooftop farming. The concept behind this is that the owners of buildings convert and use their rooftops to grow food. During New York City's growing season, farmers supply an onsite farm market and supply local restaurants with produce. The ultimate goal of these farms is to provide locally grown produce and reduce our overall carbon footprint on the environment.

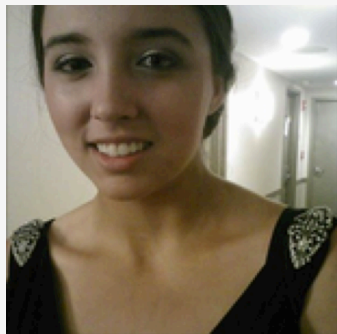
Some examples of rooftop farming in New York City are the Eagle Street Rooftop Farm and the Brooklyn Grange Farm. The first one is located in Green Point near the East River atop a three-story building. The concept behind this is that it is a for-profit farm that volunteers help grown produce locally so that it can be provided locally, thus reducing the carbon footprint of fruits and vegetables. The second one is a collective that includes two farms, an apiary, and a mushroom farm. It produces over 50,000 pounds of produce each year, also lessening the carbon footprint of produce in New York City.

Each of these farms uses sustainable methods for growing produce. Some of these include crop rotation in which the produce that is being grown is changed every growing season. Another practice is the physical removal of weeds. Although it might seem impractical for large farms, smaller crops can easily be taken care of without the use of chemicals. And since most of these rooftop farms are small in the sense that they almost never exceed one acre in size, therefore physically removing it is the more eco-friendly approach to control weeds. Lastly, just the fact that the farm is atop a building puts in the category of vertical farming, makes the practice even more sustainable.

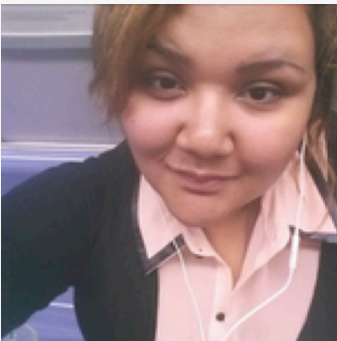
As we move into the future, planning for the growing population is very important, especially in New York City. As a growing metropolis, we have to plan where the food eat is going to come from. We should take into consideration using public space to grow food that will be free for everyone. That's why we want to find out more about how are we addressing the current social and economic food issues and benefits in New York City through "hyper-local" produce. Through interviews and interacting with many people we will be able to find out more about the economic development and how it is better for both the environment and the body.



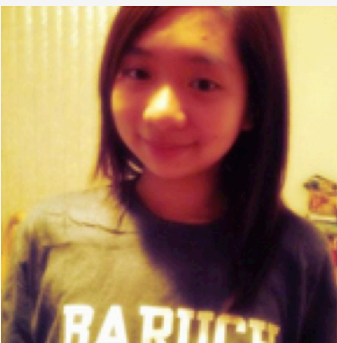
Amanda Lederman



Jennifer Mukofsky



Yamel Favela



Phoebe Lau

## Responsibilities

We are all clear of what we have to do and are moving forward in our responsibilities. Most of us are in the process of going to the places to interview and we just need to wait on confirmation from a few places to set up an appointment. Everyone is doing their tasks however getting things done on time and communication could be a bit better. Besides that it should work out in the end.

### Amanda

Amanda will be responsible for gathering information and interviewing around Union Square's farmer's market and also contact GrowNYC. She will focus more on the economic aspect and urban farming initiatives such as Gotham Greens, an urban farming company.

### Jennifer & Yamel

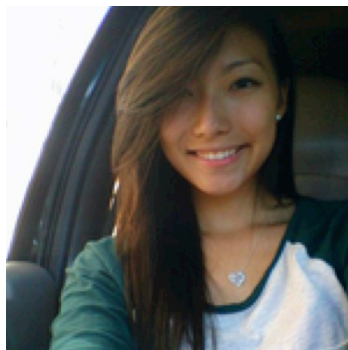
Jennifer and Yamel are responsible for interviewing food vendors around Baruch to find some that are subsidized by governments and some that are not. Also visit green gardens such as the Eagle Street Rooftop Farm.

### Phoebe & Sunny

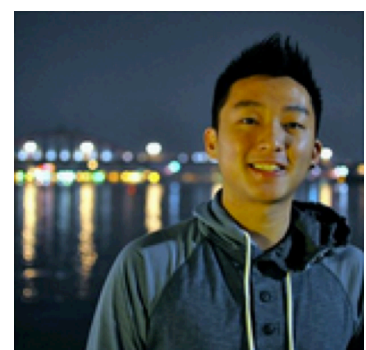
Phoebe and Sunny will go throughout Brooklyn to conduct interviews and research. They are responsible for interviewing and going to the Battery Conservancy Corporation, New York Green Roofs, Grand Army Plaza Greenmarket in Park Slope, and food vendors in different areas of Brooklyn.

### Jonathan

Jon is responsible for the filming and video making. He will try to follow interviewers to film around the city and Brooklyn. He will also be gathering footage of different street vendors and gardens like the Brooklyn Botanical Garden and farmer markets.



Sunny Xu



Jonathan Park