Inside the Five-Borough Farm Project

There’s a fantastic organization based here in New York City that might be under your radar, the Design Trust for Public Space. The interesting work they do is in systematically examining, by pulling together the right group of experts, the value of and issues around shared environments, and then raising public awareness of those findings. You may have heard of some of their recent, high-profile projects: *Taxi 07*, exploring ideas for a possible re-design of the City’s taxi fleet, which led to the City’s recent “Taxi of Tomorrow” contest, and *Made in Midtown*, a study of the importance of the garment district as a nexus of creative and economic activity, supported by fashion industry leaders Tim Gunn, Isaac Mizrahi and Diane von Furstenberg.

One of the Design Trust’s currently developing projects is the *Five Borough Farm: The Future of Farming in New York City*, an effort to evaluate the collective impact of the City’s diverse community of urban farmers, to voice and to assist the City in developing policy that addresses the needs of our farming community.
It goes without saying, especially to readers of *Edible Queens*, that there is much innovation and initiative taking place across the City and right here in Queens. For example, Greens for Queens, run by the First Presbyterian Church of Newtown, grows produce specifically for use in local food banks. The Agricultural Program of the John Bowne High School is 94 years old, and the Pembroke Avenue Community Garden of Little Neck has been in continual use since 1925. There are no less than five community farms in Jamaica. And, the Two Coves Garden in Astoria is so popular, there's a waiting list for participants. All across New York City the movement is developing rhizomatically, and with these activities, there isn’t yet a citywide plan to support the industry’s impact.

So, the Design Trust did two things. First, they engaged principal players in the field, including the NYC Community Gardening Coalition; Just Food, a collaborative volunteer effort to promote issues around holistic nutrition, hunger and agriculture; and Added Value, dedicated to the sustainable development of Red Hook by educating a new generation of young leaders, and others. To produce the full study, the Design Trust brought on Rupal Sanghvi, of HealthXDesign, to quantify and measure the impact of urban agriculture on the City and its residents, and Nevin Cohen, an urban food policy expert and Chair of Environmental Studies at the New School, who will evaluate the existing agricultural landscape and identify new opportunities.

The City certainly encourages urban farming. Did you know, for example, that anyone can sell produce grown on one’s own property? Or that you can keep bees and raise chickens right here in the City? However, there’s definitely room for improvement in public policy. While the City offers a tax abatement against the costs to install a roof garden, communities where there aren’t good supermarkets; growing produce for commercial use and thus creating jobs; reclaiming land; educating children about nutrition, health, and where their food comes from; keeping storm water sewers, and other environmental goals; and others, much of which, they found, is about social justice. With farmers said they needed was a hub of information and resources, especially for initiatives that are just getting started – for growing techniques, supplies, and financial support, and guidance in understanding municipal regulations.
your roof can sustain it according to Code), the plants you grow must be drought-resistant, thereby disqualifying vegetables.

So, the goals of the Project are to close those gaps.

Stay tuned! The Design Trust for Public Space will reveal its findings at the end of the year. As growers a challenge and reward of providing food grown here in Queens, improving their communities, affecting their environments, and educating their children, it's great that an organization like the Trust is cause by studying the movement on a macro level, focusing on what's possible for a healthier future. Learn more about the Design Trust for Public Space here.

Policy summary / Five Borough Farm Project / Graphic by Manuel Miranda

Thanks to Jerome Chou, Director of Programs, Design Trust for Public Space

—Written by A

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One Response to Inside the Five-Borough Farm Project

Cindy
May 25, 2011 at 4:38 PM

Use “rhizomatically” in a sentence? Ok: My admiration for Anne’s blogs grows rhizomatically as well as vertically. Kind of like Kudzu!

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