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Getting farming on the agenda: Planning, policymaking, and governance practices of urban agriculture in New York City[☆]



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ABSTRACT

How and why is urban agriculture taken up into local food policies and sustainability plans? This paper uses a case study of urban agriculture policymaking in New York City from 2007 to 2011 to examine the power-laden operation of urban environmental governance. It explores several ‘faces of power,’ including overt authority, institutionalized ‘rules of the game,’ and hegemony. It also investigates how multiple actors interact in policymaking processes, including through the construction and use of broad discursive concepts. Findings draw upon analysis of policy documents and semi-structured interviews with 43 subjects engaged in food systems policymaking. Some municipal decision-makers questioned the significance of urban agriculture, due to the challenges of quantifying its benefits and the relative scarcity of open space in the developed city. Yet, these challenges proved insufficient to prevent a coalition of civic activists working in collaboration with public officials to envision plans on food policy that included urban agriculture. Actors created the ‘local/regional food system’ as a narrative concept in order to build broad coalitions and gain entry to the municipal policy sphere. Tracing the roll-out of plans reveals the way in which both the food systems concept and specific policy proposals were repeated and legitimized. Unpacking the dynamics of this iterative policymaking contributes to an understanding of how urban environmental governance happens in this case.

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1. Introduction

Whether due to the pressures of urbanization, growth, and climate change, a “mainstreaming of environmental values” (Keil and Boudreau, 2006: 49), or trends in policymaking among competitive cities—local sustainability planning efforts are on the rise (Jonas and While, 2007; Finn and McCormick, 2011). Occurring in parallel to—and sometimes entwined with—urban sustainability planning is a recent increase in attention toward local food systems. At the federal level and in rural areas, food production and sale are regulated and incentivized as an agricultural commodity and market good; however, at the local level and in urban areas, food historically has not been a major aspect of the policy agenda (Pothukuchi and Kaufman, 2000; Clancy, 2004). In some instances, this blind spot toward food and agriculture as objects of urban policymaking is shifting. There has been a recent articulation of a ‘local/regional food system’ as a concept that spans production, processing, con-

sumption and post-consumption of food in a specific geographic region—which can be defined using a range of boundaries from the municipality, to a 100 mile radius, to a 200 mile radius, to statewide, to several states in a food-producing region (Allen, 2010; Donald et al., 2010; Kneafsey, 2010; Conrad et al., 2011). There has also been a development of Alternative Food Networks (Holloway et al., 2007) and a range of local policy innovations, such as local Food Policy Councils, comprehensive food plans, and urban agricultural zoning districts (Hodgson et al., 2011; Hodgson, 2012).

Some scholars question the efficacy of local sustainability efforts, noting that focusing on processes within city boundaries does not remove the impacts of urban lifestyles that are borne elsewhere (see, e.g., Swyngedouw and Heynen, 2003). Local food policies and interventions have similarly been critiqued on scalar grounds as a “local trap” (Born and Purcell, 2006). Many geographers criticize sustainability planning as supporting hegemonic, capitalist social relations, or serving as a ‘flanking mechanism’ to neoliberalism (Brenner and Theodore, 2002; Jonas and Gibbs, 2003). McClintock (2013) provides a more nuanced examination of a theorized double movement around urban agriculture in Oakland, wherein it acts as both subversive alternative to corporate agri-food industries, while also serving as a subsidy to capital accumulation due to neoliberal roll-backs in the social safety net. While these

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critiques are important, less attention has been paid to the politics behind *how* these policies develop (but see Hinrichs, 2003; Werkerle, 2004). Krueger and Agyeman's (2005) perspective on 'actually existing sustainabilities' encourages researchers to conduct "a finer grained analysis into those policies that, in the US, reflect sustainable initiatives. Though requiring us to respect scale, it forces us away from macro-concepts to look at policies, practices and their implications for local places and their differences across space and between places" (p. 416). In this vein, this paper explores how local sustainability planning and food policymaking *actually* unfolds politically and discursively in New York City from 2007 to 2011.

Theories of urban politics engage with timeless questions of who sets the policy agenda and how power operates in the urban sphere. Early work in the pluralist tradition used the decision record to find that influential local actors in different constituencies varied based on issue area, thereby refuting the assertion of elite theory that power remains in stable, hierarchical structures (Dahl, 1961). In response, Bachrach and Baratz (1962) called this *exercise of decision-making power* identified by pluralists the 'first face of power' and identified the 'second face of power' as the *power to decide what issues are on table* for discussion. In so doing, they drew attention to the 'rules of the game,' or the institutional structures that shape agenda-setting. Lukes (2005) extended this view further, proposing a three-dimensional concept of power. While the two-dimensional view can take conflict into account, Lukes identified the *power to prevent conflict from arising* by shaping wants and values, drawing upon Gramsci's notion that hegemony is being exercised when views are taken for granted as 'common sense' (Crehan, 2002). Finally, building upon urban regime theory (Elkin, 1987), Stone (1989) theorized the "social production mode of power" as the *power to act*—rather than *power over others*, which is built through cooperation, with the mayor as a key convener. Taken together, these concepts are helpful for examining overt, covert, and seemingly invisible ways in which power operates.

These theories of how power operates in urban politics can be enhanced and informed by governance approaches that take into account a wider array of actors and the networks through which they interact. Jordan (2008), notes "governance is not the same as government: while government centres on the institutions and actions of the state, the term governance allows nonstate actors such as businesses and nongovernmental organisations to be brought into any analysis of societal steering" (21). Indeed, numerous scholars have pointed out that urban regime approaches gives insufficient attention to the role of civil society (Martin, 2004) and the bureaucracy (Kjaer, 2009) in governance. Pincetl (2003)—drawing upon a broad historical literature review—illustrates the role of civic actors in urban park and open space planning processes. In looking at the expanded set of actors involved in governance, scholarship examines state-led or top-down efforts (Skocpol, 1985); civil society-led, or bottom-up efforts (Piven and Cloward, 1979), as well as networks that "can blur, even dissolve, the distinction between state and society" (Rhodes, 1996, p. 666).

Environmental governance is also imbued with discursive practices. From a constructivist perspective, we can examine "environmental claims making—how social and political understandings of nature and environmental problems are crafted, contested, and legitimated" (Davidson and Frickel, 2004; 477). Further, Harvey (1996) asserts, "all ecological projects (and arguments) are simultaneously political-economic projects (and arguments) and vice versa. Ecological arguments are never socially neutral any more than socio-political arguments are ecologically neutral" (182). Hajer (1995) says that we must examine the interaction between discursive formations and institutional contexts to reveal how storylines generate political effects. Indeed, discourses about 'nature'

and the city are actively used and contested in the urban planning and policymaking (See, for example, Fischer and Hajer, 1999; Lake, 2003; Keil and Boudreau, 2006). Coming from the social movements literature, scholars have theorized and described the process of constructing frames as an ongoing political act of negotiation, with initial frame alignment being one crucial step in a process of developing shared understanding of an issue and moving toward collective action (Snow et al., 1986; Benford and Snow, 2000).

This paper explores how urban agriculture and food systems entered the municipal sustainability agenda in New York City through interactions among diverse actors involved in discursive and political practices of urban environmental governance, including elected officials, bureaucrats, civic advocates, and the public. Examining how power operates in a range of ways, I explain why food and agriculture were initially left out of New York City's sustainability plan and how the agenda changed over time. *PlaNYC2030* was New York City's long term sustainability plan, created in 2007 and updated in 2011 as a set of strategic policy initiatives by Mayor Michael Bloomberg's administration. *PlaNYC*'s first edition set environmental goals for land, water, transportation, energy, air, and climate change and committed substantial capital to develop green infrastructure—including the urban forest, but neither urban farms nor community gardens were mentioned in the plan (City of New York, 2007; Campbell, 2014). This case shows the way in which activists and decision-makers deployed the concept of a local/regional food system in order to both build broad coalitions and to enable food to enter the municipal policy sphere in new ways. Tracing the roll-out of visions and plans reveals the way in which narrative concepts and specific proposals were reiterated and legitimized as food and agriculture became embedded in municipal policymaking arenas—however nominally, provisionally, or temporarily. I conclude with a discussion about the power dynamics of urban environmental governance in this case.

2. Methods and approach

In conducting case study research, Flyvbjerg's (2001) critiques of the challenges and limitations of creating generalizable theory in social science must be borne in mind. Instead of seeking to predict social phenomenon, I concur with Mitchell (2002) that "theory lies in the complexity of the cases" (8). Moreover, in contrast to a hypothetical-deductive approach, this is a work of qualitative social research that acknowledge the situatedness and subjectivity of the researcher as crucial to shaping the findings (Haraway, 1991; Rose, 1997; Dowling, 2005). I have been working as a researcher of urban natural resource stewardship in New York City for over a decade and am embedded in the networks that I reflect upon here; indeed, the very question of the absence of urban agriculture from the policy agenda was identified by my research subjects and interlocutors—both municipal decision-makers and civic activists alike. Thus, I build upon traditions of embedded, reflexive research in human geography (Mansvelt and Berg, 2005) and follow Flyvbjerg's (2001) charge to "take up problems that matter to the local, national, and global communities in which we live" in creating context-specific and practical knowledge (166).

The case draws upon multiple sources of data. As a primary method, I conducted semi-structured interviews with 43 subjects engaged in planning, urban agriculture, and community gardening: 24 (56%) respondents worked at civic groups; 14 (33%) were public sector employees; and five (12%) worked in private sector businesses. I used snowball sampling until reaching saturation in interview content (Patton, 2002). All participants gave consent to participate as confidential subjects and to be audio recorded (IRB # 11-714M). As a secondary method, I conducted discourse analysis of plans and policies related to food systems from 2007 to 2011, including *PlaNYC*, *PlaNYC 2.0* (the April 2011 update), *Food-*

NYC, *Food in the Public Interest*, and *FoodWorks*. These documents were supplemented with a review of 'grey literature'—reports by academics, professional associations, and citizen scientists—and websites related to urban agriculture in New York City during my period of study (see, for example, Ackerman, 2011; Cohen et al., 2012; Gittleman et al., 2012). This analysis focused on not only content of the core themes in the documents, but also identified the ideological contours and power relations underlying the construction of these documents (Waitt, 2005). I used NVivo, a qualitative analysis software, to code and analyze the plans, grey literature, interview transcripts, and field notes, allowing thematic categories to emerge directly from my data.

3. New York's local food movement grows: from community gardening to urban agriculture to food policy

Since the fiscal crisis of the 1970s, New York City has had one of the largest and most robust community gardening programs in the world, with a broad base of resident engagement (Von Hassell, 2002; Lawson, 2005; Stone, 2009). That base was mobilized with particular urgency in the mid-1990s when then-Mayor Rudolph Giuliani threatened to auction hundreds of garden sites for housing development.¹ Legacies of the garden preservation struggle continue to reverberate during the mid-to-late 2000s. The complexity of land jurisdictions and institutions serving gardeners continues to shape how gardens in New York City function. It is important to note that community gardening and urban agriculture are not synonymous. Although community gardens can be important agricultural sites (Gittleman et al., 2012), certainly not all gardens focus on food production (Ackerman, 2011; Cohen et al., 2012). Instead, community gardens are community-managed open space. Thus, they can serve as space for recreation, space, food production, gathering, culture, or many other functions (Ohmer et al., 2009; Mees and Stone, 2012).

Since the 2000s there has been a growing wave of engagement in urban agriculture—and a broader interest in localizing food systems (see, e.g., Ackerman 2011). New York City has new rooftop farms, school gardens/greenhouses, backyard chickens, beekeeping, and a growing number of CSAs and farmers markets that are frequently spotlighted in the media (see, e.g., Salkin, 2008; Ryzik, 2008; Stein, 2010; Wells, 2010; Cardwell, 2010). According to my interviewees, however, the urban agriculture movement is far from conflict-free. Axes of social difference exist in terms of race, class, gender, ethnicity, and cultural background—an issue that has been brought to the fore by food justice activists. Some activists observed divisions between a new wave of young, often white, 'foodies' and farmers and the prior generation of community gardeners who were often low income people of color. At the same time, these tensions provided productive fodder for discussion, self-reflection, and organizing to help build an inclusive movement.

Meanwhile, national and local media, celebrity engagement, and new funding streams are all indicators of rising attention to urban

agriculture over the last decade. At the national scale, this includes First Lady Michelle Obama's White House organic garden that was created in 2009; national foundation funding, such as programs from Robert Wood Johnson focused on healthy eating and walkable communities; and the highly popular food writing by author Michael Pollan. Celebrity chefs also play roles as public figures, advocates, media personalities, and donors to urban agriculture programs—these include Alice Waters of Chez Panisse, Dan Barber of Blue Hill, Mario Batali, and Rachel Ray (and her Yum-O foundation). Local funders of note in New York City include the Doris Duke Charitable Foundation, which—in a shift from a previously rural environmental focus—gave seed money to several citywide projects related to urban agriculture starting in 2010.

Despite this growing local movement, during 2007–2011, the City of New York did not embrace comprehensive food planning across the entire food system, from production to consumption to post-consumption. The Bloomberg mayoral administration and its Department of Health and Mental Hygiene focused on food consumption and its links to obesity and diabetes, the food service sector, and consumer behaviors; while food production and urban agriculture were not addressed. Bloomberg successfully created a trans-fat ban and requirements that chain restaurants post calorie counts on their menus. More controversially and with less success, he proposed to disallow the use of food stamps for purchasing soda, a tax on sodas, and a ban on large sized sugar sweetened beverages (Grynbaum, 2012; Kliff, 2012; Park, 2012). In response to advocacy by local food activists and with the support of City Council, Bloomberg created the nation's first-ever Food Policy Coordinator (FPC) in a major city, which helped coordinate implementation of many of the above policies via city agencies.² The next four sections proceed chronologically through the process by which civic activists and public allies outside the bounds of City Hall worked iteratively to place food and farming even further 'on the table.'

3.1. The absence of food from the PlaNYC agenda

As mentioned above, PlaNYC was New York City's long term sustainability plan that was created in 2007. However, PlaNYC was not a traditional 'plan' held to the formal processes of public review and ratification which, for example, the Department of City Planning, is held (Angotti, 2010). Despite the name, it was a set of 127 strategic initiatives originating out of the executive branch—the mayor's office in coordination with municipal agencies. New York's 'strong mayor' form of government, wherein the executive controls capital budgets and directs city agencies, helps set the policy agenda (Eichtenthal, 1990). Responding to a presumed growth of the city by one million new residents, the main aim of PlaNYC was to accommodate that growth and ensure the economic competitiveness of New York City, starting with a focus on municipal infrastructure and land use (City of New York, 2007). In the early stages, Bloomberg, City Hall, and the Office of Long Term Planning (or OLTPS, the entity established to oversee PlaNYC) were not concerned with food or agriculture. One policymaker reflected on the challenges of assessing plan-making retrospectively, saying "To criticize is a lot of 20–20 hindsight. . . Food was not as big an issue then, as it has become. . . I think you have to look at it as a document of the time" (respondent 49). According to my respondents, food policy was seen at the time as largely outside of the purview of city gov-

¹ Starting in 1998, Giuliani began to target community gardens as potential sites for housing development. In May of 1999, the City placed 113 gardens on unrestricted auction, to go to the highest bidder (Lawson, 2005; p. 261). The bulldozing and imminent auction of these gardens led to large-scale protests by gardeners and their allies, with attention from the media and visible actions such as protesting on City Hall steps and building encampments in threatened garden sites (Lawson, 2005; Mees and Stone, 2012). At the final hours, the New York State Supreme Court stopped the unrestricted auction and issued a "cease and desist" order to stop the imminent development of garden sites. This provided a window in which two non-profits negotiated a purchase of numerous threatened garden sites (Lawson, 2005; p. 262). Then, a Memorandum of Agreement—crafted by the Attorney General and the Corporation counsel of New York City, working with city bureaucrats and under pressure from garden advocates—created specific lists of garden parcels in different categories of protection, management, and use (Attorney General, 2002).

² The FPC worked with the Department of Health and Mental Hygiene and the Department of City Planning to create: (1) the FRESH program to provide financial incentives to grocery stores to locate in neighborhoods with poor food access; (2) the Green Carts program to create more mobile vendors of fresh fruit and vegetables; and (3) the Health Bucks program, which offers \$2 vouchers for fruits and vegetables redeemable at farmers markets.

ernment, because so much of the food system occurs beyond city limits or is controlled by the private sector. No one existing agency contained food systems under its purview—bits and pieces of the system were nested within various agencies' mandates. OLTPS was geographically bounded in thinking about the impacts of sustainability policies.

Although the plan included a chapter that focused on parks and the public right of way; this section focused on 'open space' excluded agricultural spaces. The words *community garden*, *farm*, *agriculture*, and *food* were not mentioned and there was just one mention of *roof gardens* in the context of a green roof tax incentive. The words of one official that "It did not come up" highlight the degree to which the framing of open space bracketed out food concerns in the day-to-day negotiation of the plan (respondent 47). This absence obscured the interests of urban agriculture advocates, who explained in interviews that they were not involved in the development or implementation of the first edition of *PlaNYC*. At the time it was made public, residents and academics critiqued *PlaNYC* *substantively* for what it lacked and *procedurally* for the lack of participation in its development (Angotti, 2010; Finn and McCormick, 2011; Rosan, 2011). Moreover, some respondents (including both public agency officials and civic activists) charged that gardening and farming were treated by decision-makers as quaint, and not associated with the new green city of the 21st century that city leaders sought for New York to be.

Part of the reason for this absence was the scalar orientation of *PlaNYC*. Throughout the crafting of *PlaNYC*, decision-makers considered the spatial politics of community gardens: sites either were too small and diffuse to matter citywide, or, conversely, were in competition with housing development. A bureaucrat said:

[Community gardens received] virtually no attention at all. And there's a very simple reason. This exercise was an ambitious game changing opportunity. . . Now all of the community gardens in the city put together—it's maybe forty acres of land. We have a nearly 30,000 acre park system. . . In the context of *PlaNYC* and talking about what will have an impact on this huge shortfall of land available for park purposes, [community gardens] wouldn't have moved the dial at all. The typical community garden is between a sixth and a seventh of an acre (respondent 41).

Moreover, officials were cognizant of the historically perceived tradeoff between housing and gardens that culminated in the garden crisis of the late 1990s. One key *PlaNYC* official said community gardens "came up in a couple of conversations," but decision-makers perceived a "zero sum game between housing and gardens" (respondent 49). According to one public official, the vacant parcels that were available in 2007 were considered as sites for development of affordable and market rate housing as part of *PlaNYC*'s housing goals.

Within the Bloomberg administration, numeric goals were seen as a way of assuring accountability to the plan, but urban agriculture and food systems prove challenging to measure via indicators. Urban environments are highly patchy, featuring multiple property jurisdictions and land owners (see, e.g., Grove et al., 2015); as such, quantifying the amount of vacant, sunny, arable land in the city is a challenge (Ackerman, 2011). Furthermore, because of the diversity of land tenure and management regimes, projecting the potential agriculture output from those sites is an even greater challenge (Gittleman et al., 2012). Finally, many of the demonstrated benefits of urban agriculture come from the provision of a unique form of open space with opportunities for community engagement, youth education and employment, and neighborhood cohesion (Mees and Stone, 2012). Not surprisingly, calculating the holistic costs and benefits of those sites is rarely done. Yet, the preference for quantification is reified within the policy discourse, as indicated by a report

on food systems planning by the American Planning Association: "in the absence of measurable objectives, indicators, and targets, local governments will struggle to evaluate progress in achieving the goals" (Hodgson, 2012; p. 111).

Advocates were sometimes able to adapt the techniques of quantification to achieve their own ends. For example, the Food Systems Network of NYC, a civic coalition of several hundred individual members, wrote a policy memo response to *PlaNYC*, called "Food for the Future," that was sent to decision-makers. The authors aimed for this memo to be as quantitative as possible, in order to appeal to the authors of *PlaNYC*. A policymaker commented that Bloomberg was "less interested in the softer elements" of urban agriculture, particularly its linkages to youth employment and empowerment (respondent 39). An advocate articulated the challenges of comprehensive food planning in the face of the administration's approach:

Bloomberg's a businessman and we want metrics. We want to pick three to five things that we all believe we can get done. . . But I think that when your [food] system is so broken, we can't be looking for what's the big win or what's the low-hanging fruit. . . we have to be saying: "we've got to do it all" (respondent 14).

The need to better measure the potential for and impact of urban agriculture as a means of increasing its legibility for quantitative-minded policy-makers has spurred a recent wave of local academic research and civic science on this topic, including the Farming Concrete Project and the Five Borough Farm Project (Ackerman, 2011; Cohen et al., 2012; Gittleman et al., 2012). As of 2007, however, food vision and plans were still critiqued by municipal officials and staff as "aspirational," not "actionable" (respondents 28, 38, 40, 50, 52).

Finally, during this process, the advocates for farms and gardens were not perceived by City Hall as an organized constituency when *PlaNYC* was being developed. Several interviewees both inside and outside of the city administration felt that the local food movement described above had not yet coalesced in 2006–2007. Others believed that the constituencies were in existence, but were not *recognized* as such by decision-makers. The overt political conflict of the 1990 garden crisis left a legacy. Although the Bloomberg administration was more tolerant of gardeners than the Giuliani administration, many public officials viewed community gardeners as fringe elements and not a constituency they sought to court. One public official critiqued these advocates for their lack of savvy about the policymaking process:

I think that [food advocates] are probably the most curmudgeonly folks in the whole world, because there's this sense of, "Well we've already figured it out. You just need to get on board". . . I think that the way they approached [their advocacy]. . . showed that they weren't as sophisticated in dealing with city government (respondent 52).

A bureaucrat concurred that the Bloomberg administration had "an open mindedness about good ideas," but advocates had to "know the proper channels. . . which is no easy feat" (respondent 50). So, community gardeners who were used to working as activists and outspoken advocates for the preservation of their sites did not necessarily have easy access to working within the administration's channels for making policy changes.

3.2. Food in the public interest and FoodNYC: visionary plans as political strategy

Within the void created by City Hall's lack of engagement with food-related concerns, other municipal officials began to carve out turf for themselves in the food policy arena, working in concert with civic activists. Until November 2012 when he dropped

out of the race, Manhattan Borough President Scott Stringer was a mayoral candidate.³ Stringer had already established his interest in food issues via his “Go Green East Harlem Campaign.” In May 2007, Stringer began community-based planning and providing funding for farmers markets, gardens, and community chefs in East Harlem (Stringer, 2009). Over 2009–2010, Stringer organized two conferences with university, nonprofit, and community-based allies, which were acknowledged by many activists as crucial moments in which the movement coalesced. The first conference, entitled “The Politics of Food”, was held at Columbia University in November 2008. Approximately 600 people, including decision-makers, activists, community residents, and scholars participated (Stringer, 2009). A second conference focusing on the links between the food system and climate change (“Food and Climate Summit”) was held at New York University in December 2009. This event was organized in concert with the United Nations’ Copenhagen climate talks, involved video feeds and live tweeting from the global meeting, and engaged quite a few rural/upstate farmers in the discussion. These two conferences led to the production of vision documents—*Food in the Public Interest* and *FoodNYC*—that advanced wide-ranging proposals related to food and agriculture.

Both these plans used a local/regional food systems concept and examined food production, processing, consumption, and post-consumption in New York City and its surrounding region. The development of these plans coincided with the growth of the local food movement. Activists and allies sought to build large coalitions that could span across the issues of healthy food access, obesity, diabetes, hunger, sustainable urbanism, and regional farm conservation—and the development of a broadly defined local/regional food systems concept was one approach toward that end. *Food in the Public Interest* made recommendations in several domains: hunger; urban and regional agriculture; food distribution; economic development; food and nutrition education; and steps toward implementation. Homing in on the urban and regional agriculture section, it framed the issue around New York State as an agricultural producer and the need to enhance upstate and downstate connections in order to strengthen the regional foodshed.⁴ It used the language of social movements, calling on readers to “develop a critical mass, a movement to effect change” (Stringer, 2009, p. 12). It also made a normative call for attention to underserved and low income residents. *FoodNYC*’s specific recommendations addressed urban agriculture; regional food production; food processing and distribution; new markets; procurement of regionally grown food; education; food waste; plastic bottles; food economy; and a proposed new department of food and markets (Stringer, 2010). More so than the prior document, *FoodNYC* made reference to the policies of other cities, legitimizing recommendations that were pursued in other locales. It also positioned the work in the context of New York City’s global competitiveness. Beginning with its name, *FoodNYC* was created to be a response to and elaboration upon *PlaNYC*. The absence of food from *PlaNYC* was explicitly noted and the document was written with an aim towards influencing the 2011 update to *PlaNYC*.

³ Stringer was subsequently elected to the position of Comptroller in 2014.

⁴ Other policy alliances formed along upstate-downstate lines outside of Stringers’ visioning processes. For example, in 2011, meetings and rallies were organized for New York City residents to get involved in Farm Bill advocacy through the NYC Food and Farm Bill Working Group. New York City-based activists worked with the American Farmland Trust on upstate land preservation issues and hosted Senator Kirsten Gillibrand for a series of public meetings. Programs in support of New York’s regional food systems and economic development (including food processing, industrial retention, and support for regional grain production and bakeries) have also been developed and supported by the New York State Department of Agriculture and Markets.

To appreciate the role of Stringer’s food-related campaigns, it is important to understand that the position of Borough President is something of a remnant of New York’s pre-consolidation history as several distinct cities. New York City is composed of five boroughs—Manhattan, Queens, Brooklyn, Bronx, and Staten Island—each of which has an elected borough president. A once-powerful position, since the 1989 City Charter revision the position has few formal authorities, but nevertheless remains a visible figure in local politics (Eichtenthal, 1990). An academic who worked with Stringer commented on the limitations of this public office:

To most people unfamiliar with civics, [*FoodNYC*] was the food plan for New York City. My colleagues from outside of New York City said “Wow, you guys have a food plan and it looks really great.” Of course I had to explain that it’s not an official food plan. Sorry to be so cynical, but something issued by the borough president, it’s kind of a vestigial organ of city government. It only has meaning to the extent that the borough president is willing to make it have meaning. (respondent 12)

While officials within the mayoral administration critiqued the Stringer plans for not being ‘actionable,’ his staff believed that describing a progressive vision was part of the role of the office. He used the power of the “bully pulpit” to be a “voice for the underdog” and helped push the policy dialogue leftward (respondent 39). Allowing these plans to be visionary documents, particularly given the circumscribed authorities of the office, was part of the strategy. And, as is shown in Appendix A and described in the following sections, several of the particular policy prescriptions and ways of thinking about the food system that were started by Stringer and his allies were later taken up in subsequent plans.

3.3. *FoodWorks*: food system thinking enters the legislative arena

City Council Speaker Christine Quinn—another 2014 mayoral candidate—also developed an interest in local food systems. Quinn had previously focused on combatting hunger and promoting job development via the FRESH program, farmers markets, food stamps, and community incubator kitchens, and had some engagement with community garden rulemaking. But she had not, prior to 2010, developed a full-fledged food policy agenda. Then, it was young staffers to Quinn—valuing the importance of regional food production, minimizing waste, and building strong regional economies—who articulated a broader approach to policy that utilized a multi-scalar (local/regional) food systems concept to address issues across the spectrum of production, processing, distribution, consumption, and post-consumption (NYC Council, 2010). In addition, the 2009 Brooklyn Food Conference was a catalyzing moment for the Speaker when she realized that this could be an important constituency for her, as she spoke to a crowd of over 1000 people.

Following that, *FoodWorks* was launched publicly as an initiative of the Speaker in December 2009 and the plan was issued a year later in November 2010 (See Appendix A for a summary of key initiatives in the plan related to urban and regional agriculture). Although substantively broad in scope, the process of *FoodWorks*’ development was not completely transparent. *FoodWorks* had a hand-picked set of advisers who gave input to the plan. Food justice activist respondents—while they applauded the policy goals of the *FoodWorks* plan—critiqued that none of the 12 advisers were people of color (POC), calling into question the inclusiveness of its creation. One POC activist said,

[I was] very, very upset with it, because when [Quinn] announced the unveiling of her plan and she brought up to the stage, the people who were behind the plan in terms of helping her, there was not one person of color. . . . People, let’s get real.

How are you talking about food when the most impact that food has is [on] low income neighborhoods, neighborhoods of color? And so if we're going to talk about solutions, we've got to be at the table. . . . (respondent 29).

A white activist added, "If it's not inclusive, it's flawed" (respondent 33). Despite these important critiques of procedural justice, the 86-page plan was sweeping and ambitious in its aims. It situated the issue of food policy and food systems in a centuries-long timeline about food production and consumption in the introduction. It included recommendations that went beyond the authorities of the City Council, and it touched on geographies and policies beyond the municipal scale—including state agricultural regulations, federal food stamps, and farm subsidies. In its introduction, the report framed the issues around economy, environment, and health—without an explicit focus on social justice (NYC Council, 2010). Throughout the text there were references to making New York City a "leader" in food policy and food systems change. It included examples from other cities, such as Detroit, and a certain amount of inter-urban competitiveness is evident in the text. Far from being an antiquated practice from the 1970s—as many policymakers perceived community gardening, a strong local food system was framed as providing competitive economic benefits to the city and region, an issue of key political importance in the wake of the 2008 global financial crisis.

In order to show progress on this agenda, Quinn's staff developed legislation, resolutions, and recommendations for policy changes that could be effected immediately at the municipal scale. These efforts were successful, and local laws were passed by the City Council in August 2011, targeting different points in the food system, although only a few portions of the legislation dealt with urban agricultural production.⁵ While many respondents commended the progress, some noted that these local laws were only a first step and a "missed opportunity" to do more (respondent 23). A public official considered the local laws and resolutions as something of an "unfunded mandate" (respondent 6). Without commensurate budget increases to municipal agencies, how would the proposed innovations across the food cycle be carried out?

FoodWorks can be examined through the lens of mayoral politics. First, Quinn built on the prior work of the Stringer conferences and documents, without explicitly acknowledging it. As both were then mayoral candidates, there was pressure to claim leadership in certain policy arenas. Second, *FoodWorks* was 'fast tracked' in order to precede the release of *PlaNYC2.0* in April of 2011. This was done with the knowledge that Bloomberg's signature sustainability plan would include some mention of food; and there was a desire to claim the intellectual turf around food policy for Quinn before Bloomberg could claim that issue area as his own. However, this maneuver had to be handled delicately as Quinn and Bloomberg had to maintain a positive working relationship as speaker and mayor; and candidate Quinn would benefit immensely from a strong Bloomberg endorsement. Thus the plans had to be seen as in alignment, rather than as 'scooping' each other. Finally, the critique of the legislative actions as creating unfunded mandates relates to the structural balance of power between the mayor and City Council

⁵ Local Law 48 requires DCAS to maintain an online database of all publicly owned property in the city, with information about its suitability for agricultural uses. Local Law 49 excludes rooftop greenhouses from contributing to height restrictions under zoning and building codes. As a first step in working to change public agency food procurement practices, Local Law 50 requires DOE and other agencies that procure food to report on the amount of regionally sourced foods. Local Law 51 focuses on reducing packaging waste by developing guidelines for packaged food purchased by the city. Finally, Local Law 52 requires OLTPS to gather and report on information about New York City's food system and to develop an annual food system metrics report (<http://urbanfoodpolicy.com/2011/10/12/update-on-nyc-foodworks-legislation/>).

and the limits on the authority of the Council. Hence, activists were excited about the potential for Quinn's engagement on these issues if she had been elected mayor, though this did not come to pass.

3.4. Food, agriculture, and gardens make small inroads in PlaNYC 2.0

There was a clear public response to *PlaNYC*'s lack of mention of gardening, farming, agriculture, or food.⁶ Because Local Law 17 required an update to *PlaNYC* every four years, advocates targeted the 2011 update to include food in its scope. Community gardeners contacted city agencies and showed up *en masse* to *PlaNYC* public meetings to voice their discontent about the absence of gardens from *PlaNYC*; representatives from the Food Systems Network NYC, the NYC Community Gardening Coalition (2010), and several non-profit greening groups were among the many participants. In turn, OLTPS sought to give the public and civil society groups broader roles in the planning process through expanded public meetings in developing the second edition of the plan. A total of 48 public meetings were held from April 2010 to April 2011 in all five boroughs of the city, with more than 220 groups participating (City of New York, 2011).

PlaNYC 2.0's food goals were more circumscribed in scope than those in *FoodNYC* or *FoodWorks*. The issue of food was bracketed by caveats about its complexity and scale in the text of the plan:

. . . food presents a unique planning challenge; unlike sewers or streets, much of New York City's food systems infrastructure is privately owned and shaped by the tastes and decisions of millions of individual consumers. These complicated and inter-related subsystems aren't easily understood or influenced, even by concerted municipal interventions. Furthermore, many of food's most significant climate and environmental impacts are associated with food production, most of which takes place outside the city, and shaped by federal policy (City of New York 2011, p. 164).

During the plan's development, the mayor's office and city agencies sought to identify goals that they knew the city had the jurisdiction, authorities, and resources to achieve. The food-related initiatives focus entirely at the municipal scale, except for one initiative related to agricultural practices in upstate watersheds that affect New York City drinking water that were already subject to existing regulation. Moreover, *PlaNYC2.0* was released after the 2008 global financial crisis; there was no budget surplus and many municipal agencies were dealing with 30% budget cuts. One decision-maker said *PlaNYC2.0* focused on incremental, no-cost changes, "You don't mention huge capital dollars. You need to *tweak* things. You need to nip and tuck" (respondent 52). Participants involved in the planning process were asked to identify targets related to urban agriculture and community gardening that they knew they would meet without any additional funding, according to a bureaucrat:

It basically was right before they put the draft out. . . . I went in this meeting with [City Hall and OLTPS staff] and they were like, "We need to put in something about food production and community gardens in *PlaNYC*. What can we put in? But please make sure that you understand that there's not going to be any additional budget for it at all and it has to be something that you can definitely do with your existing funding and nothing

⁶ There was an equally—if not more—prominent public critique of the plan's failure to address solid waste issues in any form. Solid waste was subsequently incorporated as a chapter in *PlaNYC2.0*. Many food advocates made note of this absence from *PlaNYC* and identified the connection of waste policies to food systems in the post-consumption phase.

else.” I was like, “this is the most cynical exercise I could possibly imagine.” But I was still happy that they were going to be in there. (respondent 6)

Because resources were not committed through *PlaNYC2.0*, some advocates felt that the city was not ready to engage seriously in food policy. Others acknowledged that beginning to write about food, agriculture, and gardens was a step in right direction toward legitimizing these issues, albeit a small one. Indeed, *PlaNYC2.0* mentioned community gardens/gardening more than thirty times. These references occurred not only in the two-page “cross-cutting theme” on food, but also in the core chapters on parks and public space and brownfields. *PlaNYC2.0* committed to planting 129 new NYCHA community gardens and creating one urban farm at a NYCHA site; registering 25 new school gardens per year and retaining at least 75% of registered gardens each year; increasing the number of registered GreenThumb garden volunteers by 25%; and establishing five new farmers markets at community garden sites (City of New York, 2011, see Appendix A). *PlaNYC2.0* set numeric goals that were easily tracked, but also easily met.

Just as *FoodWorks* picked up on concepts, goals, and policies identified in the earlier Stringer documents, so too did *PlaNYC2.0* build upon all three prior planning efforts. Reflecting on the impact of *FoodNYC* on *PlaNYC 2.0* and *FoodWorks*, an interviewee involved in leading *FoodNYC* said:

I think it's made a difference. I think we were the first people to really start the dialogue. I think we did change the paradigm. I don't think without our conferences there would have been a food chapter in *PlaNYC*. . . I think that we've been successful in shifting this idea about the role of food systems and what that means in the city. And I don't think *FoodWorks* would have happened if we hadn't done *FoodNYC*. And as a result a lot of legislation that came out of [*FoodWorks*] was exactly what we had recommended. . . (respondent 39).

An example of this overlap across plans was the call for a public, searchable database of city-owned vacant land that could potentially be used for urban agriculture. The need to assess the potential for urban agriculture was identified in *FoodNYC* and then the searchable database was proposed in *FoodWorks* and codified via Local Law 48. *PlaNYC2.0* called for the city to “survey municipal lands to identify underutilized properties that may be suitable for urban agriculture or community gardens” (City of New York, 2011, p. 164). This goal catalyzed an Urban Agriculture Taskforce, which includes representatives from all city agencies that manage land, OLTPS, the mayor's office, and the FPC. Overall, *PlaNYC2.0* was much more reserved in scope and ambition than prior food planning efforts, but the ‘*PlaNYC* imprimatur’ helped to bring food issues further into the fold of the administration and its sustainability planning efforts—however provisionally and nominally at first.

Inclusion of food, agriculture, and gardens in the plan was seen as signifying potential future directions in which City Hall might head. Many of the long term goals were contingent; they can and will change in the future. As an executive-led initiative, *PlaNYC* was identified with Bloomberg; Bill de Blasio and other future mayors will establish their own, unique programs and policies. Despite the political need to re-brand *PlaNYC*, a policy staffer felt that the way of thinking about sustainability could not easily be reversed: “But this is now part of government's responsibility. . . promoting a sustainable city is now part of the mission of a good administration. And so in that sense I think it will live on probably forever” (respondent 26).

4. Conclusions

Food, gardens, and agriculture were initially left out of *PlaNYC* for a number of reasons related to deeply-held assumptions among policymakers about the food system, the role of municipal government, and the appropriate scope and process for sustainability goal-setting. First, the food system was seen as too broad, complex, and multi-scalar for the municipality to address, and food itself was viewed as a commodity that the market could effectively distribute. For its authors, the problems of the globalized food system and challenges of nutrition, hunger, and food inequity did not mesh well with *PlaNYC* as a set of strategic local initiatives affecting municipal infrastructure and land use.⁷ Second, decision-makers saw community gardening and urban farming as ad hoc and difficult to scale, such that they could not change ratios of open space access citywide. Urban gardening was seen by mayor's office officials as competing for space with other land uses, particularly housing—which was prominently featured as one of the chapters in the plan. Third, given the administration's commitment to metrics, urban agriculture was critiqued for a ‘lack of data’, which prevented the establishment of numeric goals. Fourth, the food movement and its plans were seen by municipal officials as “aspirational,” not “actionable”—one of the more damning critiques from an administration focused on policy that made ‘business sense’. Finally, farm advocates and community gardeners were not taken seriously as a constituency in the sustainability planning process.

How, then, did food issues rise to the level of being considered relevant? Through examining this case, we observe that the initially top-down *PlaNYC* process without public deliberation or input, shifted to include more public input on the agenda of *PlaNYC2.0*—though these later initiatives lacked funding support. By crafting collaborative food visions and plans, civic activists influenced municipal policies; and vice versa, public officials felt that they were part of social movements working in alliance with civic actors. We see the political work that these plans achieved, both as procedural *moments* and as written *artifacts*. Employing flexible narratives—such as the ‘local/regional food systems’ concept—to build broad-based coalitions was one of the key strategies of civic and public sector actors. Once plans were articulated, the ideas began to gain traction as they were reiterated within different facets of the political apparatus. The food system concept, as well as the particular initiatives, became legitimized. Thus, we see that actors, working in collaborative arrangements, and deploying particular concepts, had the ability to move an issue from policy inaction to being ‘on the table’—albeit perhaps ephemerally.

While the extant urban regime literature focuses on the role of mayors in arranging coalitions, this case shows that we must take a more expansive view of governing coalitions and how they evolve and grow. *PlaNYC* was a top-down strategic initiative of the executive branch. The mayor continues to have a strong role in setting policy trajectories and funding initiatives at the local level—these formalized authorities and mandates can be detected via a pluralist lens. However, precisely the issues that were *left out* of the mayor's agenda created a policy void into which other public officials and civic activists could step. First, the role of borough president is unique to New York City—and it allowed another layer of access for the public to elected officials. Working beyond the neighborhood scale, the borough president was well-poised to bridge between citywide concerns of City Hall and the concerns of the public, build-

⁷ *PlaNYC*'s goal of providing accessible parkland within a 10-minute walk of each New Yorker also had the potential to address obesity and diabetes through promoting walkable neighborhoods. However, this goal was framed as addressing recreational needs and neighborhood livability, rather than these diet-related diseases, which were not mentioned in the plan.

ing creative coalitions. Second, the City Council Speaker took the policy concepts further in their institutionalization through local resolutions and laws. This leader of a legislative body influenced agendas not only through the passage of laws, but also through how those initiatives were strategically packaged and presented as ‘plans’. Third, the role of normatively committed bureaucratic staff should not be overlooked in this case, as these were the individuals responsible for research, framing, outreach to constituents, and substantive development of the written plans. Finally, we see the work of activists and civic scientists who contributed to visions and plans—in some cases using the tools of quantification and speaking back to existing municipal documents.

Asking whose voice is heard throughout both formalized deliberative processes and beyond their bounds attends to which *constituencies* ‘matter’ in the political arena. Young’s (2000) analysis of democratic participation is relevant here in considering the marginalization of gardeners and farmers as constituents. Young (2000) notes that in order to have participation in governance, members of the public must first have “recognition” as constituencies. The absence of POC from the *FoodWorks* advisory group is just one example of this sort of lack of recognition in this case. Young further argues that conventional privileging of “articulateness” and “orderliness” can silence marginalized populations that use non-rational modes of communication (e.g., yelling, display of emotion) to express their political aims. Some gardeners’ confrontational style of organizing (with legacies in the 1990s crisis) indeed violated norms of orderliness and rational speech. Several of the *PlaNYC* decision-makers that I interviewed saw food and farming advocates as lacking political savvy. However, the perception of constituencies’ political relevance can shift. Civil society groups interested in food systems organized and raised their profile to the point where they were recognized as constituents that counted to Stringer and Quinn.

Examining what ideas and values are espoused draws attention to what *issues* ‘matter’, exposing the assumptions that underlie plans. The absence of gardening and farming from *PlaNYC* reflected the ‘common sense’ of the mayoral administration and the third face of power at work. What was left out said as much about the values of plan-makers as what was included—perhaps more. To the architects of *PlaNYC*, urban agriculture was not easily integrated into the growing city. Prior policies focused on healthy food consumption, but leaders saw no scope for promoting urban food production in the land-scarce, developed city. Re-envisioning whole food systems, from production, to processing, to consumption, to post-consumption was previously seen as “not actionable” and therefore was absent from *PlaNYC*.

Yet, what is considered “actionable” is not fixed: values and assumptions change. Even hegemonic ‘common sense’ can shift over time, such as in changing preferences around food. So, too, can hegemonies be challenged with counter-narratives that contest assumptions (Fraser 1992). However the notion of challenging hegemony through counter-narratives misses the fluid power of using broad narrative concepts or *flexible frames* to re-align issues. As Benford and Snow (2000) note, “Frames help to render events or occurrences meaningful and thereby function to organize experience and guide action. Collective action frames also perform this

interpretive function by simplifying and condensing aspects of the ‘world out there,’ but in ways that are “intended to mobilize potential adherents and constituents, to garner bystander support, and to demobilize antagonists” (Snow and Benford, 1988: 198).”

We can view the deployment of flexible narrative concepts and the building of broad coalitions as two sides of the same coin. The ‘local/regional food systems’ concept served as a large tent under which many diverse actors could be organized, including anti-hunger activists, rural producers, locavore consumers, and public health advocates. It offered a way for urban agriculturalists—facing the limits of space, costs, and productivity in the developed city—to ally with other actors to advance their cause. And it created the New York City food system as an object/site to be governed. Rather than directly contest the dominant, green growth agenda, food advocates found a way to reframe urban agriculture as fitting into—or at least aligning with—prevalent municipal goals. Thus we must attend to framing as a crucial discursive practice that helps shape our political imaginary. Our history may be path-dependent, our institutions rigid, our infrastructure obdurate, but the discursive realm is malleable and creative—we can envision new futures through the stories we tell.

In examining these political and discursive processes of coalition-building, framing, and planning, it is important to consider whose values or voices may have been more marginalized. In other words, who wins and who loses? Future research should examine in greater detail the processes of frame construction, alignment, and extension to observe the tradeoffs in the urban food policy arena and look comparatively across localities and regions for different planning approaches. Do we see examples of food policies and sustainability plans that incorporate more radical visions of food justice and food sovereignty? Or are only certain aspects of local food systems integrated into plans for green growth? Can the incremental policy changes of today lead to future progressive change, or do they mute those possibilities?

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Appendix A.

Goals, initiatives, and proposals related to community gardens or urban and regional agricultural production in *FoodNYC*, *FoodWorks*, and *PlaNYC2.0*.

Recognizing the complexity and interconnectedness of the food system, this table focuses only on initiatives focused on strengthening community gardens or urban/regional *food production*. Thus, it does not cover issues like distribution (including farmers markets) and post-consumption (including composting) unless explicit reference is made linking these policies to production.

FoodNYC		
Goal	Strategy/Initiative	Proposal/Target Action
Establish food production as a priority in NYC for personal, community, or commercial use by the year 2030	Urban Agriculture	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Assess land availability and suitability for urban agriculture Create a citywide urban agriculture program Ensure the permanence of community gardens Facilitate the development of rooftop agricultural greenhouses (pp. 9–10)
Promote and support regional agriculture by connecting upstate and Long Island farms with downstate consumers, and by mapping the food grown and sourced from the region within approx. 200 miles of NYC	Regional Food Production	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Determine the capacity of the regional foodshed Develop a state strategy for farmland and food production Accelerate the protection of New York's farmland (p. 12)
Launch twin composting initiatives: (a) support for large-scale composting through creation of a municipal facility; and (b) support for small-scale composting through education, decentralized composting bins, and more pick-up locations.	Food Waste	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Eliminate Barriers to Food Composting in Community Gardens (p. 26)
Educate New York City's children to become a new generation of healthy and environmentally aware eaters.	Education	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Expose City Students to Farms and Gardens—"The State Legislature should also mandate that every school has access to agriculture, be it a community garden, urban farm, or relationship with a rural farm." (p. 24)
FoodWorks		
Goal	Strategy/Initiative	Proposal/Target Action
Preserve and increase regional food production	Strengthen regional food supply channels	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Reorient federal farm subsidies to support healthy, sustainable food production Improve the New York State Farmland Protection Fund. Encourage new farmers. Build a permanent wholesale farmers market. Expand and support farmers markets. Expand the electronic benefits transfer (EBT) program and acceptance of the Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants, and Children (WIC) benefits at farmers markets. Expand and support community supported agriculture (CSA) (pp. 18–22)
Preserve and increase regional food production	Leverage the city's economic power to support regional producers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Track and encourage regional food procurement. Support farmers in the upstate watersheds (pp. 22–24)
Increase urban food production	Better use existing space for urban food production	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Protect community gardens. Ensure urban farms are counted in the Census of Agriculture. Create a searchable database of city-owned property. Identify city-owned properties with roofs suitable for urban agriculture. Waive the Floor to Area Ratio (FAR) requirements and height restrictions for certain rooftop greenhouses. Change the state green roofs tax credit to encourage food-producing green roofs. Change water rates to encourage green roofs. Streamline the green roof permit application process (pp. 26–29)
Increase urban food production	Restore food and horticultural knowledge	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Ensure garden education is available citywide. Support urban agriculture technology development (pp. 29–30)
Increase resource recapture in the food system	Increase residential, commercial, and governmental composting	<p>Establish a voluntary household composting program. . ."</p> <p>By recapturing these source-separated organic materials, we are also diverting this byproduct from consumers into a stream to use the materials as a resource for growing food" (p. 71)</p>

PlaNYC 2.0

Chapter	Goal	Strategy/Initiative	Proposal/Target Action
Parks and Public Space	Target high impact projects in neighborhoods underserved by parks	Facilitate urban agriculture and community gardening	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increase the number of registered GreenThumb garden volunteers by 25% • Establish five new farmers markets at community garden sites in partnership with Just Food • Register 25 new school gardens per year to the Grow-to-Learn program and retain at least 75% of registered gardens each year • Take a full inventory of municipal land and identify properties that could be suitable for urban agriculture. • Review existing regulations and laws to identify and remove unnecessary barriers to the creation of community gardens and urban farms. • Plant 129 new NYCHA community gardens and create one urban farm at a NYCHA site (pp. 37, 164)
Solid Waste	Increase the recovery of resources from the waste stream	Create additional opportunities to recover organic material	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To capture the roughly 4% of residential waste made up of leaf and yard trimmings, we will reinstate leaf and yard waste collection for composting in the city. This will create a high-quality soil product for use by City agencies and non-profits in parks and natural resource programs. (p. 140)
Brownfields	Expand the use of green remediation	Promote green space on remediated brownfield properties	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Design protective measures such as liners for state-of-the-art community gardens on remediated brownfield properties. • Work with GreenThumb and the New York Restoration Project to pilot a community garden on a remediated brownfield site. (pp. 57, 164)
Water Supply	Ensure the quality of our drinking water	Continue the Watershed Protection Program	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Continue our partnership with the Watershed Agricultural Council to promote sustainable farming techniques that limit the amount of fertilizer and other waste products that run into our reservoirs. (pp. 81, 164)

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