Source: https://www.huffingtonpost.com/nevin-cohen/new-york-urban-agriculture_b_5146052.html

For some farmers and gardeners, particularly those in low-income neighborhoods — where a bag of chips can be easier to come by than fresh vegetables, and diet-related illnesses are often rampant — urban agriculture is a means to a more ambitious end: an attack on racial, gender and class disparities and political disempowerment.

In many ways, cultivating social justice is more important than bringing in a bountiful harvest because simply growing more food in the city, as healthy and delicious as it may be, will never feed all those in need. Even a vastly expanded urban agriculture system will not ensure healthy communities until cities address the roots of food system disparities: poverty, discrimination, and unequal power and privilege. That's how urban agriculture can really make a difference.

Many urban farmers and gardeners are engaged in food politics, whether at City Hall protests to save community gardens or in discussions with legislators about cuts to food stamps. Farmers and allied groups organize to improve food access, affordable housing, and environmental justice. And the farms and gardens provide opportunities for individuals to feed their families better or earn extra income from what they grow. Two examples from New York City illustrate the breadth of these efforts:

La Finca del Sur, a community farm and garden in the South Bronx, is sandwiched between commuter rail and subway lines. On a street filled with auto repair shops and warehouses, in a neighborhood in which roughly half the residents receive food stamps, the farm is an edible oasis run by and for women of color dedicated to gender equality. Farming has been an empowering experience for the participants, from a single mom who grows lavender for her own line of beauty products to a family of recent Mexican immigrants who cultivate vegetables for themselves and their friends. La Finca also runs women-centric educational programs for members of the community, and, because decision-making is undertaken collaboratively, it astutely challenges conventional notions of social hierarchy.

In Bedford Stuyvesant, Hattie Carthan Community Garden, named after a local environmentalist and neighborhood leader, is a vital resource — and a place that cultivates spiritual healing alongside chickens and perennial herbs.

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Led by people of color, the garden hosts classes that teach youth about systemic inequities in the food system and help them learn important life skills like healthy cooking and working in diverse social settings. It holds women-only workshops focused on empowerment and connection to the environment, and community residents enjoy seasonal meals from ingredients they've grown themselves. (A recent event featured kale frittata with sage leaves and lemon verbena iced tea, all produced on-site.) Music of the African diaspora is often in the mix. The garden also hosts two weekly farmers' markets (including a Sunday "After Church" market) and a community-supported agriculture program, in addition to a number of education efforts, all centered on a vision to create a healthy and self-sufficient community integrated into its surrounding environment.

Urban farms like Hattie Carthan and La Finca are growing in cities all across the nation, not just in Brooklyn and the Bronx. D-Town Farm in Detroit, People's Grocery in Oakland, and Growing Power in Milwaukee and Chicago use farming and gardening to create food systems that are more socially just, through activities ranging from youth development to policy advocacy. Many also work with farmers in rural areas, recognizing that healthy and vibrant regional food systems benefit urban and rural residents alike.

Recent fascination with high tech urban agriculture has often allowed hydroponic lettuce and rooftop greenhouses to overshadow the work of more grassroots growers. Urban farms and gardens that explicitly confront issues of race, class, and power also present a more challenging story than the provenance of city-grown salad greens served at the newest farm-to-table restaurant. These differences often make it harder for farms confronting structural inequity to attract resources from government and philanthropies, perpetuating disparities among urban agriculturalists and the broader food system.

Amidst a resurfaced national debate about race and racial justice, along with a focus on reducing inequality as exemplified by New York City Mayor Bill de Blasio's reference to *A Tale of Two Cities*, urban food enthusiasts and political leaders should think "beyond the kale." Growing more food in the city is not the solution to food access, nor is it the one and only way to address injustice

in the food system. But the act of cultivating crops, along with the community activities that take place within these spaces, can make a difference by giving people greater control over the food system and by demonstrating how political, economic, and social patterns that perpetuate inequality can be weeded out. Bringing these patterns to the surface is one of the most important contributions urban agriculture can make to improving the food system -not only for locavores, but for all those who need to eat.