



April 20th, 2021

Dear Senator Hinchey:

I am writing on behalf of the Good Food Buffalo Coalition and Massachusetts Avenue Project, the lead organization for our coalition. First, thank you for your leadership in organizing the public hearing on Diversifying Agriculture and Food Justice. We appreciate this opportunity to provide written testimony and are doing so with the support of many partners, both statewide and national, to highlight opportunities that values-based institutional food procurement policies and engaged community coalitions present to New York State Senators in your efforts to diversify agriculture and address food injustice and inequities in New York food systems.

Despite numerous successes and growing momentum for food systems change, we continue to find persistent inequity in access to markets for Black, Indigenous and People of Color (BIPOC) producers, ongoing exploitation of frontline food workers, a lack of public access to supplier data, and the need for more fair, equitable and sustainable food supply chains. Our coalition is offering several resources, attached to this letter, that provide critical insight on why we have been advocating for a Good Food Purchasing Program for our local municipalities and the significant opportunities that the Good Food Purchasing Program presents to further racial equity goals on the state level through food procurement policies. We are asking that NYS Senators and staff review the resources attached to this letter and reach out to our Coalition to work with us, along with BIPOC farmers and BIPOC-farmer advocates, to become the first state to adopt Good Food Purchasing Program policy statewide.

The Good Food Purchasing Program (GFPP) is a flexible, metrics-based model for evaluating current food purchasing practices and aligning institutional food procurement with community values. In this way, the GFPP can be used as an economic driver and tool to bring about food systems change towards the community values of environmental sustainability, health and nutrition, valued workforce, strong local economies, animal welfare, racial equity, and transparency. Since 2012, the Program has been adopted by 54 institutions across the country and written into the official policies of major jurisdictions like Los Angeles, Boston, Chicago and Cook County, and school districts in Oakland, Cincinnati, Washington DC, and more. Together, GFPP adopters represent nearly \$1 billion in food spending—that is a powerful lever to improve peoples' lives in those communities! And New York State could be the first state to pass GFPP policy.

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New York has a strong reputation as an innovative policy leader. Although other states are currently exploring state-wide adoption of the Good Food Purchasing Program, New York State is in a strong position to lead this issue and become the first state to adopt an official policy on values-based procurement. To date, GFPP has not been adopted by any local municipalities in the state, but community-based coalitions have been building momentum and support for the Program since 2016. Recently, the New York City Mayor's Office identified GFPP as a key strategy in its 10-Year Food Policy Plan. Indeed, there is great potential to use the power of procurement to improve wellbeing and equity in the institutions, cities, counties, and state of New York. For instance, according to the Buffalo Public Schools (BPS) 2020-2021 budget report, the total amount of expenditures for food and staff in 2020-2021 was nearly \$43 million, and in the 2018-2019 school year, the New York City school system spent \$240 million on school food. Those figures only reflect what is spent on food served in public schools in Buffalo and New York City. Collectively, New York State institutions - including schools, hospitals, and jails - spend more money on food than any other state in the country, making food procurement an especially powerful tool for achieving social, economic, and environmental goals statewide.

The money spent on food by public institutions in New York State could be directed to support BIPOC farmers who are struggling to connect with local markets for their products. Those dollars could support dignified jobs for food chain workers, who are primarily people of color. Those dollars could promote sustainable practices that reduce pollution and other environmental harms, which also disproportionately affect people of color. Those dollars could support strong and resilient local economies throughout New York State, and ensure that nutritious, culturally appropriate food reaches people who are most affected by food apartheid and diet-related illnesses. One of the key goals of the Good Food Purchasing Program is to support BIPOC farmers through institutional food procurement policy. Yet, BIPOC farmers in New York currently struggle to access institutional markets because of a lack of infrastructure throughout the food supply chain, including for food processing and distribution.

In March 2021, key findings regarding the food supply chain in Buffalo were featured in a report entitled the *"Transparency for Justice Executive Summary"* (attached). Produced by graduate students in a Social Justice in the Global Food System course at the Yale School of the Environment, the summary explains that many BIPOC farmers interested in pursuing institutional contracts in New York face barriers including a lack of familiarity with the institutional bidding process and the inability to meet institutions' large quantity requirements. Further findings from this report include a range of labor violations and low union representation within companies within the Buffalo food supply chain.

Recommendations in the *"Transparency for Justice Executive Summary"* also align with the *"9 Solutions for Racial Inequity in New York Agriculture"* developed by Black Farmers United - New York State in 2019 (also attached). Black Farmers United NYS's *"9 Solutions for Racial Inequity in New York Agriculture"* seeks to institute systemic change in support of Black farmers and growers statewide.

As such, we ask that NYS Senators, and their staff, read the *"Transparency for Justice Executive Summary"* and the *"9 Solutions for Racial Inequity in New York Agriculture"*. These two documents focus on issues and opportunities to:

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1. Build key infrastructure to support BIPOC producers.
2. Increase protections and living wages for frontline food workers in our public supply chains, the vast majority of whom are BIPOC; and
3. Ensure greater transparency and community engagement in NY's public food supply chains.

Furthermore, to ensure that systems of harm are not replicated, we ask that the NYS Senate committee members and their staff work with our Coalition, along with BIPOC farmers and BIPOC-farmer advocates, to draft legislation to address these issues.

In closing, we would like to thank the Senate Committees for hosting this important hearing and for your interest in the concerns of BIPOC farmers in the state. We hope that this hearing will be only the beginning of our work together across the state. As NYS Senators, you have the power to lead our state in becoming the first state in the country to adopt the Good Food Purchasing Program, and to use this innovative program as a tool to support racial equity and transparency through the state's institutional food purchasing initiatives.

To set up a meeting with members of our coalition, and BIPOC farmers and BIPOC-farmer advocates, please contact me via email at Rebekah@mass-ave.org. We would welcome any questions or future correspondence.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Rebekah A.' followed by a long, sweeping horizontal line.

Rebekah A. Williams
Coalition Coordinator - Good Food Buffalo Coalition
Community Organizer - Massachusetts Avenue Project