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January 26, 2026

Re: NYRP Testimony before Agriculture & Markets/ Parks & Recreation

Thank you, Chairs Krueger and Pretlow, and members of the Committees on Parks & Recreation and Agriculture, for convening this important joint hearing. My name is Cory Hasson, and I am the Government Affairs Manager at New York Restoration Project (NYRP). NYRP is the only citywide nature conservancy dedicated to serving low-income communities across all five boroughs of New York City. As we recently celebrated our 30th anniversary, we remain guided by a simple belief: everyone deserves access to high-quality public green space. For three decades, NYRP has partnered with residents to reclaim and transform public land, removing trash, planting trees, renovating community gardens, and stewarding parkland that strengthens neighborhood health and resilience.

Food insecurity remains a critical challenge in New York City. According to Food Bank for New York City, city residents make up roughly half of all food-insecure people statewide, and New York City's food insecurity rate exceeds the national average by approximately 12 percent. In this context, access to affordable, fresh, and culturally relevant food is more important than ever, particularly in communities that have been historically under-resourced.

Since 2021, NYRP's Urban Agriculture Program has supported community gardeners in growing healthy food, improving soil health, strengthening local ecosystems, and building climate-resilient neighborhoods. In 2025 alone, the program hosted 19 hands-on workshops for nearly 500 participants across all five boroughs, covering topics such as composting, soil health, pest management, seed saving, mushroom cultivation, and specialty crop planting.

NYRP also led citywide spring and fall planting campaigns that delivered critical resources to hundreds of community gardens. These gardens not only supplement household food access, but also provide educational opportunities, social cohesion, and environmental benefits such as stormwater capture and urban heat reduction.

NYRP applauds Governor Hochul's commitment to advancing projects that mitigate the impact of climate change and support New York State's critical agriculture resources. We support the Governor's proposal to include \$425

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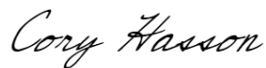
million for the Environmental Protection Fund (EPF) in furtherance of these important goals.

However, urban agriculture faces growing funding uncertainty. Federal support for urban agriculture, particularly through the USDA, is expected to expire in 2026. This uncertainty also jeopardizes two New York State Agriculture & Markets grants that currently support our work. Together, these changes represent a projected \$250,000 annual funding gap, which would significantly curtail NYRP's ability to deliver high-quality urban agriculture and food access programming in the communities we serve.

New York State has a critical opportunity to step in and support the urban agriculture sector by sustaining and expanding funding through the FY27 budget. We encourage the Legislature to include funding for urban agriculture in its respective "one house" budget proposal. Community gardens and urban farms are proven, cost-effective tools for addressing food insecurity, public health disparities, and climate resilience, especially in neighborhoods where grocery access is limited.

In food deserts across New York City, community gardens serve as a vital lifeline. As the Legislature considers the upcoming budget, NYRP urges the State to recognize urban agriculture as essential infrastructure and to invest in programs that allow New Yorkers to grow their own food, strengthen their communities, and build a more resilient city.

Thank you for your time and consideration.



Cory Hasson
Government Affairs Manager