



## Urban Agriculture

# NYC Mayor’s Office of Urban Agriculture

## Values-Aligned Food Procurement in New York City

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### I. Introduction

Values-aligned food procurement refers to public purchasing policies and practices that prioritize health, environmental sustainability, social equity, and local economic support through institutional food sourcing. This concept also aligns with frameworks like the Good Food Purchasing Program (GFPP) that is managed by the [Center for Good Food Purchasing](#), which cities nationwide have adopted to transform their food supply chains. For New York City (NYC), with its vast institutional food footprint spanning schools, hospitals, and public agencies, values-aligned procurement represents a powerful lever for systemic change. This report aims to present a grounded, actionable overview of the policy landscape, stakeholder dynamics, and systemic barriers in NYC and New York State (NYS), identifying gaps and promising innovations that can drive equitable local food systems. Its goal is to equip advocates, community stakeholders, and policymakers with the insights needed for informed dialogue and collaborative strategy-building in upcoming Purchasing with Purpose workshops.

### II. MOUA Efforts and Local Food Procurement Innovations

To understand values-aligned food procurement in NYC government, it is essential to first explain procurement in plain terms – it is how government institutions buy food products and services, often through competitive bids and contracts. The Mayor’s Office of Urban Agriculture (MOUA), a [legally mandated office](#), has become central to advancing local food procurement in New York City, particularly for small and mid-scale growers and producers. MOUA, in collaboration with Cornell Harvest NY, created the “NYC School Food EATS” initiative, a first-of-its-kind farmer and producer procurement training program designed to reduce barriers for regional, historically disadvantaged farm and food businesses seeking access to city institutional markets. The full cohort of nine small and mid-sized food businesses successfully completed the training, effectively leveraged New York State Farm to School grant resources for local procurement and set the stage for the next phase of scaling up values-aligned local procurement opportunities in NYC in the coming year.

Over the past year, MOUA also executed successful micro-purchasing efforts totaling \$2,564.25, sourcing from NYC School Food EATS cohort farmers for the Reimagining



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Farm to School in NYC events at public schools, Gracie Mansion, and more recently, for fresh produce giveaway events in Harlem in collaboration with City Council Member Yusef Salaam and the Mayor’s Fund to Advance New York City. Leveraging funding to buy directly from farmers and distribute to key partners demonstrates how the training translates into real purchasing and community benefit. Beyond procurement pilots, MOUA’s work also includes supporting the development of school food forests and educational gardens while advancing interagency efforts on city land use agreements and maintenance contract innovation, increasing Minority and Women-owned Business Enterprise (M/WBE) certified small businesses and expanding stakeholder engagement through the launch of the “Purchasing with Purpose” series to deepen relationships between producers, agencies, and communities.

Readers can learn more about these initiatives in the [NYC Mayor’s Office of Urban Agriculture 2025 Annual Progress Report](#) and sign up to join future Purchasing with Purpose workshops.

### III. Policy Landscape Overview

#### *NYC Executive Order 8*

As we discussed in the Purchasing with Purpose Roundtable in September 2025, different cities and states are working with the [Center for Good Food Purchasing](#) (CFGF) to integrate and meet [Good Food Purchasing Standards](#). New York City is pursuing a parallel path that uses similar value categories as CFGF Good Food Purchasing Standards, but different metrics, standards, and accountability tools. In 2022, Mayor Adams issued [Executive Order \(EO\) 8](#), which created a citywide “good food” purchasing reporting that provides transparency about how mayoral agencies’ procurements impact core values relating to categories such as local economies, environmental sustainability, a valued workforce, animal welfare, and nutrition.

While values-based procurement reporting has improved somewhat in the city, available data (previously handled by the CGFP<sup>1</sup>) show, due in part to price-differential rules and large contract structures, that procurement still favors major vendors and there are only modest increases (if any) in purchases from local farms, minority- and women-owned businesses, or BIPOC producers since 2022<sup>2</sup>. At the same time, new nutrition standards

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<sup>1</sup> The Center for Good Food Purchasing provided reporting for seven NYC agencies between 2016-2023. Agencies received between 2-6 annual reports during that period.

<sup>2</sup> Barriers include persistent price-differential rules and contract size hurdles. NYC still lags on structural changes needed to deeply raise local/culturally relevant food procurement, as contract values going to M/WBE suppliers remain under 20% of total value. [comptroller.nyc](https://www.comptroller.nyc.gov)



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and procurement shifts—aligned with EO 8’s value categories—have helped reduce purchases of processed meat and increase plant-based proteins across participating “Good Food Cities,” including New York City, but have not yet produced a major jump in local or culturally relevant sourcing.

### *New York State Good Food NY Bill*

The Good Food NY bill (A.7264A / S.6955A) was recently vetoed by Governor Hochul, although it is returning to the legislature this session. The bill would have allowed public institutions to use a “best value” approach, explicitly scoring vendors on factors like support for local economies, environmental sustainability, fair labor, racial equity, animal welfare, and nutrition, and to pay up to ten percent more than the lowest bid for vendors meeting those standards. By vetoing the bill in late 2024, Governor Hochul left in place New York’s default “lowest responsible bidder” rules, which makes it difficult for NYC to require local or value-aligned products in large contracts.

New York’s current procurement framework makes it difficult for NYC to require local or values-aligned products in large food contracts primarily because legally, most large purchases must go to the lowest responsible bidder once basic specifications are met, so agencies generally cannot select a higher-priced local or values-aligned vendor simply because their practices are better. Courts and state guidance interpret [General Municipal Law §103](#) as pre-empting local laws that try to override this rule, preventing NYC from creating its own stronger local-vendor or values preferences beyond what state law allows. Existing price preferences for New York State food are narrow and often too small to cover real cost differences for smaller or higher-standard suppliers, and the veto of the Good Food NY bill left agencies without clear authority to pay modest premiums specifically for values-based vendors.

Although “best value” awards are allowed in some contexts, food procurement is still organized around sealed bidding, where non-price factors are hard to weigh, and staff face legal risk if they reject the cheapest qualifying bidder on qualitative grounds. Broader values such as local sourcing, fair labor, or climate benefits are also difficult to encode as tight, enforceable specifications, and to verify at scale. Finally, fragmented authority and weak data systems across multiple city agencies make it harder to coordinate common standards or justify paying more for values-aligned products. NYC can incorporate Dietary Guidelines for Americans (DGAs) driven nutrition standards (e.g., sugar caps, product exclusions) into bid specs, indirectly favoring some values-aligned products, but it still cannot easily require local or BIPOC-owned suppliers in large contracts without state-level procurement reform.



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### IV. Comparative “Good Food” Purchasing Models and Other City Examples

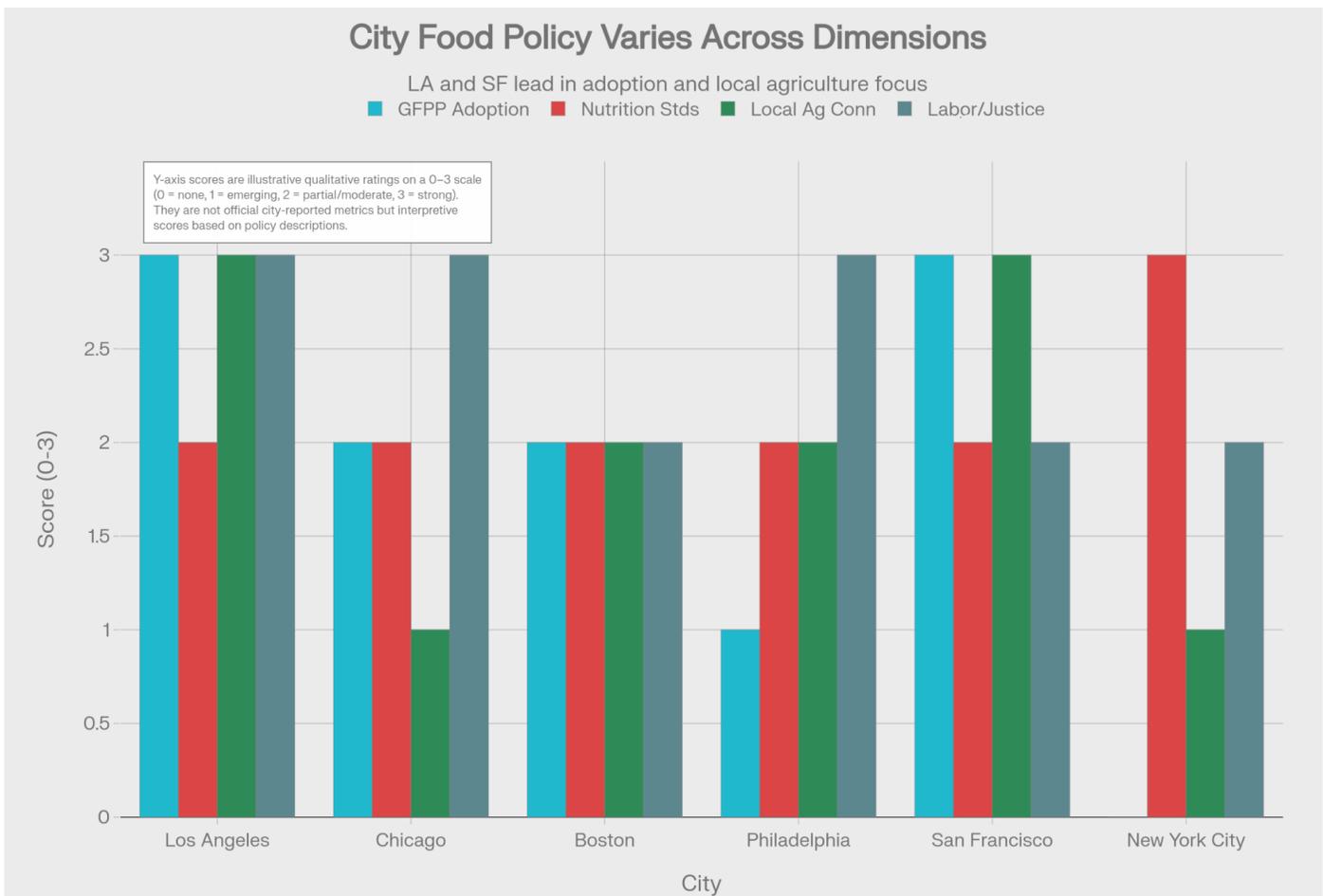
Across the United States, the Good Food Purchasing Program (GFPP) has emerged as a leading national model for public institutions that want their food dollars to advance five core values at once: nutrition, local economies, environmental sustainability, a valued workforce, and animal welfare. Cities such as Los Angeles, Chicago, Boston, Philadelphia, and San Francisco have adopted GFPP or closely aligned policies, using standardized benchmarks and scorecards to track progress over time. In contrast, New York City is pursuing a parallel “good food” path through Executive Order 8 and its updated Food Standards, using similar value categories but different metrics and enforcement tools.

City Comparisons							
City	Year Adopted / Formalized	Core Values in Policy (headline)	Real Food Connection (what changes on the plate)	Real Agriculture Connection (farm / regional link)	Real Policy Levers (how it's enforced)	Real Partners / Coalitions	Observed Ironies / Contradictions
Los Angeles	2012 (city + LAUSD)	Nutrition, Local Economies, Valued Workforce, Environment, Animal Welfare	Big reduction in processed foods; more fresh produce and whole foods in schools and city meals	Contracts shifted toward regional producers; creation of produce aggregation and processing capacity	City executive order plus formal adoption of GFPP; performance scored against Center's Standards	LA Food Policy Council, unions, Good Food Purchasing Center	Gold-standard transparency; LA publishes scores publicly, unlike NYC's more internal-facing reporting.
Chicago	2016 onward (Metro GFPI)	Workforce, Equity, Local Economies, Health, Environment	Menu changes tied to worker justice and “healthy school food” standards	Some local and regional sourcing, but still limited engagement with downstate/rural producers	Good Food Purchasing Initiative (GFPI) resolutions and contracts; GFPP-aligned goals and scorecards	Chicago Food Policy Action Council, SEIU, community groups	Strong integration of labor and food justice (e.g., connecting procurement to worker organizing), a link NYC has only begun to make.
Boston	2018 onward (GFPP participation)	Climate Resilience, Nutrition, Racial Equity, Local Economies	More plant-forward menus in schools and city programs; local seafood featured in institutional meals	Strong ties to New England fisheries and regional farms through GFPP value targets	Mayoral direction and food access office; use of GFPP tools and city sustainability plans	City of Boston, Office of Food Access, universities and hospitals	Climate framing is strong, but Boston has not always branded itself as a formal “GFPP city” the way LA and SF have.
Philadelphia	2019 onward (values-based purchasing + food justice)	Food Justice, Equity, Health, Local Economies	Support for corner store conversions, healthy retail, and community-based meals initiatives	Emphasis on urban agriculture, community gardens, and small local producers in food justice grants	City nutrition standards plus grantmaking (Philadelphia Food Justice Initiative) and values-based guidance	Health Department, Reinvestment Fund, community organizations	Strong equity rhetoric and funding for community projects, but institutional food contracts have moved more slowly.
San Francisco	2016 (SFUSD), 2020 (city & county ordinance)	Local Economies, Environmental Sustainability, Valued Workforce, Animal Welfare, Nutrition	SFUSD shifted toward scratch cooking, reduced ultra-processed items, and improved student meal quality	Bay Area Good Food Collaborative leverages regional farms and producers through pooled purchasing	SFUSD Board resolution adopting GFPP; 2020 city-county ordinance requiring hospitals and jails to meet GFPP standards	SPUR, Center for Good Food Purchasing, Bay Area Local Food Purchasing Collaborative	City ordinance sets ambitious GFPP expectations for hospitals and jails, but implementation has been uneven and slower than the policy language suggests.
New York City	Ongoing (EO 8, Food Standards, GFP initiative)	Nutrition, Environment, Equity, Local Economies, Valued Workforce	Strong nutrition and processing rules (processed meat ban, plant-protein requirements) in city standards	Some pilot purchasing from regional farms and M/WBE suppliers, but limited direct farm sourcing at scale	Executive Order 8, updated Food Standards, and reporting/dashboard tools - but no formal adoption of GFPP scorecard	DCAS, DOE, MOFP, Mayor's Office of Urban Agriculture, C40 partners	NYC has some of the strictest nutrition/processing standards in the group, yet still lacks a formal GFPP adoption and has modest shifts so far in local farm purchasing.



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Los Angeles pioneered the effort with a large-scale school district rollout (LAUSD) emphasizing transparent nutrition and labor standards, Chicago integrated strong labor union involvement and vendor oversight, Boston foregrounded climate resilience within local seafood procurement, and Philadelphia centered food justice in community-driven [urban agriculture initiatives](#). Each city’s unique policy mechanisms, institutional partnerships, and ground-level practices create valuable lessons for NYC to consider values-aligned policy and leveraging the actual Good Food Purchasing framework and reporting. The following table compares these cities side-by-side to highlight similarities, differences, and notable inconsistencies, such as NYC’s advanced rhetoric contrasted with a lack of formal program adoption.



City food policy comparison of 5 similar major cities since officially implementing GFP principles (NYC has yet to do so.)

Compared to other cities, NYC stands alone in classifying mandated numbered targets for plant-based proteins and strict beef/processed meat limits. Los Angeles and Chicago



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emphasize plant-forward defaults and healthy option requirements, but do not universally cap beef intake or mandate servings. Other cities, such as Boston and Philadelphia, strongly prioritize culturally appropriate foods and local procurement, but numeric requirements or processed meat bans are rare outside NYC. M/WBE certified businesses is a prevailing equity indicator in food procurement. The city has used M/WBE spend as an indicator to track impact in the local economies category. In fiscal year 2022, out of total food spending analyzed by the city (215.04M), the total spend for New York State was 122.81M, yet only 11.37M (5.29%) was spent on NYS M/WBE businesses. The following fiscal year, with the NYC good food initiative (EO 8) introduced, that number decreased to 3.4% in the following year to 11.22M<sup>3</sup>.

### V. People, Power, and NYC's Food System

The NYC food system comprises multiple interconnected actors—labor forces including unionized and non-unionized workers in urban agriculture, food distribution, and institutional food services; small and local farmers seeking access to city contracts; and policymakers balancing competing priorities. Currently, worker voices remain underrepresented in policy discussions, particularly for custodial and cafeteria staff critical to public food environments. Small farmers face structural barriers such as bid processes favoring large suppliers and inconsistent demand volumes. Future efforts include fostering inclusive platforms where workers co-design procurement policies and establishing cooperative or regional distribution systems to bolster farmer participation. These power dynamics significantly influence conditions of food access, pricing, and local economic vitality.

One of the largest stakeholders is at the federal level, the Dietary Guidelines for Americans (DGA) spearheaded by RFK Jr. The new 2025–2030 federal Dietary Guidelines were developed after the administration largely rejected the independent Dietary Guidelines Advisory Committee (DGAC) report and instead commissioned a separate "Scientific Foundation" report by nine hand-picked researchers with significant conflicts of interest (beef, dairy, and supplement funding), using less rigorous methods without public meetings or comment. The resulting guidelines keep the general advice to eat fruits, vegetables, grains, dairy, and protein foods and to limit saturated fat, added sugars, and sodium, but they raise recommended protein intakes and visually elevate red meat, full-fat dairy, and butter in the new food pyramid while de-emphasizing grains. They also soften the advisory committee's push for stronger limits on added sugars and clear ultra-processed food guidance, instead offering more vague language about avoiding "highly processed" and artificially sweetened foods.

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<sup>3</sup> [NYC Gov Food Policy](#)



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The new federal nutrition guidelines will mostly reshape what NYC buys through federal program rules, but they will not, by themselves, fix the state-level legal barriers that limit how NYC can prioritize values-aligned vendors in big contracts. Federal programs that must follow the Dietary Guidelines (such as the National School Lunch Program, USDA Child and Adult Care Food Program, and the New York State Women, Infants, and Children Program) will likely tighten rules on added sugars, adjust allowed fats and dairy, and potentially add more processing-related restrictions, which will flow into NYC specifications for school meals and other federally reimbursed programs and give the city a stronger basis to require less added sugar, more nutrient-dense foods, and potentially limits on some ultra-processed items. However, the guidelines do not change New York’s “lowest responsible bidder” framework or the vetoed Good Food NY bill, so NYC still lacks clear authority to systematically pay more or score bids for local, climate, labor, or racial-equity criteria beyond narrow price preferences, meaning NYC can use DGA-driven nutrition standards to shape product specs but still cannot easily require local or BIPOC-owned suppliers in large contracts without broader state-level procurement reform.

## VI. Systems Impact on Daily Life in NYC

Municipal procurement decisions have direct and tangible effects on many New Yorkers’ daily experiences—from the quality of school meals and hospital food to offerings at senior centers and community institutions. These purchasing policies shape what’s available, what’s affordable, and whose livelihoods are supported across the city.

The city uses NYC’s Food Standards – first launched in 2008 with updates in 2011, 2014, 2017, 2022, and [most recently in August 2025](#) – to guide what can be purchased and served through city agencies. The 2025 update, which will take effect July 1, 2026, further strengthens nutrition by restricting artificial colors and tightening limits on low- and no-calorie sweeteners, while increasing weekly offerings of minimally processed plant proteins across the roughly 219 million meals and snacks served annually by 11 city agencies. These standards aim to reduce diet-related chronic disease and address structural inequities in access to healthy food.

NYC’s 2025 Food Standards marked a major shift toward plant-based nutrition while also attempting to restrict ultra-processed foods. Under these new rules, sites must offer a minimum number of plant-based protein servings, limit beef/ruminant meals to just two per week (for facilities serving three daily meals), and phase out processed meats altogether by 2025. High-sugar cereals, sugary and high-fat dairy, and certain plant-based milk alternatives are also more tightly restricted. NYC’s 2025 Food Standards brought major changes, with an emphasis on plant-forward nutrition and reducing ultra-



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processed foods. [To learn more about the changes, check out the recent article by Hunter College Food Policy Center.](#)

**Plant-Protein and Meat Limits:** Sites must now offer minimum servings of plant-based proteins and are limited to just two beef/ruminant meat servings per week for facilities providing three daily meals. Processed meats are phased out altogether by 2025.

**Sugar, Dairy, and UPF Restrictions:** New rules ban high-sugar cereals and tighten limits on added sugars and fat in dairy, with closer scrutiny on plant-based milks and processed alternatives.

It is important to note here, that currently the definition and overall quality benefits of ultra-processed plant-based foods are still under debate. Some research on ultra-processed plant-based foods finds that many plant-based meat alternatives are high in protein, provide fiber, and are generally lower in saturated fat than the processed meats they replace, and can improve cardiometabolic risk when used as swaps. Several reviews and policy analyses argue that lumping all these products into a “do not count” category because of processing level risks overlooking their health and climate benefits relative to conventional meat. There is also other research that highlights concerns regarding sodium, sugar, and fat content as well as other additives in ultra processed plant-based foods.

In practice, that means a fortified plant-based burger or sausage that is high in protein, low in saturated fat, and comparatively heart-healthy can still fail NYC’s “whole/minimally processed” test and not count toward the plant-protein requirement, even though it may be a strong choice from a harm-reduction perspective.

On a local note, initial research and partner feedback received by MOUA indicates that while many hyperlocal to mid-size food and farm businesses in New York meet the food category requirements (most are fresh vegetable and/or fruit growers that sell or donate whole food products, have integrated pest management practices, and practice regenerative agriculture), they are often excluded from larger city food purchasing programs, serving two hundred or more meals a day. Most food purchasing contracts in the city remain geared towards large vendors. Outside of MOUA’s efforts to create pathways to small and micro procurement contracts, current municipal policies do not facilitate direct procurement opportunities for a sizable portion of our agriculture landscape, consisting of urban and regional growers, food co-ops, and other food-based businesses.

Purchasing with Purpose engagement provides a way for stakeholders to participate in an ongoing conversation intended to encourage policy ideas that can address the



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challenges outlined in this document and contribute to a comprehensive vision for how values aligned procurement can be operationalized in New York City today.

### Hyperlinks for reference:

- [NYC's 2025 Food Standards summary](#)
- [Meals & Snacks Standards pdf](#)
- [NYC Food Policy Standards landing page](#)

## VII. Recommendations and Forward Strategy

The Mamdani administration's leadership and commitment to making New York more food affordable for New Yorkers, fruitful for micro-small businesses - including “mom and pops” businesses, and greening neighborhoods, represents an important opportunity to connect to values-aligned food supply chain development for city-owned grocery stores and other food procurement throughout the city. Creating feasible pathways for climate smart farmers, producers, and logistical partners also contributes to healthier natural and built environments throughout the city and state.

Based on MOUA's research and stakeholder informed feedback compiled from the Purchasing with Purpose series, we have comprised the following recommendations:

- Don't wait for state law to take a local approach to values-aligned food and agriculture policy. Focus on approaches that create opportunities for the micro-mid-size food/farm businesses and hyperlocal growers such as:
  - Food policy that is framed not just as nutrition security but designed to increase climate resiliency and food sovereignty. Comprehensive food and agriculture policy can be a tool to shift resources to communities and small businesses in order to increase economic empowerment, environmental sustainability, and address persistent food insecurity.
  - Support MOUA's efforts to increase small and micro purchasing contracts for local farmers, co-ops, and aggregators in city agency food procurement
  - Improve the visibility of vendor opportunities and critical certifications like M/WBE for micro and small farmers and/or minority-owned businesses
  - Explore new revenue-based opportunities that can include urban growers interested in growing to scale in local procurement within their current license agreements



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- Increasing awareness of local sourcing opportunities for small farm businesses can be leveraged to grow neighborhood and BIPOC-owned food businesses, embedding worker as well as community voices in food procurement decisions
- MOUA will continue to build values aligned principles and priorities with hyperlocal and regional food and agriculture stakeholders through our Purchasing with Purpose Series
- Develop new interoffice collaborations with the Offices of Economic Justice and Civic Engagement to support more advocacy and awareness of food and agriculture policy and connections to the public and business communities
- Advocate for more transparency in food procurement through data collection and metrics relevant to small and micro-contracts in the city.
- Support increased reporting and data transparency among city agencies and externally to the public on procurement.

Together, these steps can begin to embed equity and sustainability into the city's vast institutional food procurement system.

### *A Call to Action for All Readers*

- **Join and share** at the MOUA Purchasing with Purpose Series!
- **Develop** food and action groups/councils to organize in the community and help to shape future city and state values aligned priorities and collaborate with the city. Community based research activities can include ideas such as:
  - Conduct your own values-alignment audit of an institution such as a school, senior center, community-based organization, or hospital partner's menu and/or contract against the 2025 NYC Food Standards and assess whether it is meeting your values and consider developing concrete improvements.
  - Build feedback loops with workers and eaters (cafeteria staff, students, patients, families) so their experiences inform future procurement and menu decisions.
- Community stakeholders can **submit their legislative ideas to MOUA as well as advocate independently to their city and state elected officials** for potential legislative changes that would enable value-driven purchasing decisions in future food procurement contracts.