



**Request for Information
School Food Forest
Spring 2025**

This RFI seeks information and comments for review and consideration related to the potential of design, management, growth, and ongoing maintenance of school food forests.

A. Background

The New York City Mayor's Office of Urban Agriculture leads the city's efforts to increase access to and the production of fresh, healthy, locally grown food while strengthening climate resilience, and spurring economic activity across New York City. MOUA is releasing this RFI as part of an overall initiative to explore the potential of innovative urban agriculture infrastructure, increased food production, and experiential educational opportunities in the city.

In 2023, MOUA in collaboration with NYC Public Schools Office of Food and Nutrition Services (NYCPS OFNS) and Cornell Cooperative Extension Harvest NY, designed the Reimagining Farm to School in NYC initiative. Reimagining Farm to School in NYC represents a multifaceted approach to increasing agriculture education for students in the classroom and in community gardens, bolstering school garden spaces, and providing technical assistance to small food/farm businesses in the city's first institutional food procurement training. As the initiative continues, the goals of increasing the square footage of the vibrant and robust growing green spaces of school/learning gardens as well as creating agriculture-focused maintenance contracts will be further integrated in the program.

One innovative model that can be both an outdoor learning and food producing space is a food forest. Food forests, also known as forest gardens, are defined by the diverse planting of edible plants in a way that attempts to mimic the ecosystems and patterns found in nature¹. Food forests are designed to mimic these natural ecosystems and consist of trees that produce nuts and fruit, edible plants, fungi, and healthy soil. Food forests are known to

¹ <https://projectfoodforest.org/what-is-a-food-forest/>

improve air quality, generate food, shade, and retain water. For more background information on food forests, please see Exhibit A.

A food forest on or near public school sites would further provide a living educational hub for science-based learning of agriculture, science, and microclimates for multiple local schools as well as a space for respite and food access for the community at large. A school food forest could include fruit bearing orchards native and/or suited for the microclimate as well as herbs, vegetables, fruit, and mushrooms. Activities such as outdoor learning, cooking demos, soil testing, urban farming, foraging, and pruning can also occur on the site. School food forests are aligned with MOUA priorities such as:

- Increasing access to vibrant green spaces for all New Yorkers
- Cultivating future climate stewards
- Fostering economic development for agriculture and horticulture small businesses
- Leveraging underutilized land for scaled healthy food production

B. Purpose of the RFI

As MOUA continues to scale up the Reimagining Farm to School in NYC initiative, it is needed to better understand the feasibility and replicability of school food forests in the city. MOUA's aim is to develop and integrate innovative, nature-based urban models such as food forests that will provide increased food access and green infrastructure while strengthening environmental resilience in neighborhoods throughout the city.

MOUA is issuing this Request for Information (RFI) to seek knowledge in the agriculture and horticulture sectors to gauge the feasibility and interest in exploring the development of school food forests. Of particular interest are the potential costs, logistics, native plant and other agroforestry considerations, and labor capacity (e.g. paid, apprenticeship, and/or volunteers) to develop and sustain a school food forest. Gaining information on challenges and ideas for community and student engagement is also welcomed.

MOUA understands that it could potentially take multiple organizations to bring a school food forest to fruition. Through this RFI, we are looking to identify critical elements to developing a school food forest in the Bronx and identify organizations that meet these needs.

In general, MOUA seeks to:

- Gather information on components of a school food forest design and learn more about the native seed, plant, and tree options that could be included in the school food forest planning
- Gather basic design ideas for the school food forest and ways in which the model can support local food sovereignty, production, training/educational opportunities, climate resilience, and intergenerational engagement (e.g. for students as well as community members), and economic development (e.g. value-added products, farmers markets, etc.)
- Learn more about the logistics and maintenance of a school food forest, including ideas for food production
- Learn more about prospective costs of an initial phase of a school food forest (e.g. labor, seeds, plantings, etc.)

C. Submittal Contents

For this RFI, we selected a former tree orchard and garden located on a Bronx school campus to serve as a site to inform the responses to the questions below. For more site details and an aerial view of the site, please refer to Exhibit B.

1. Basic information - Responses should include contact information, including the organization's name, address, name of contact, email address, telephone number, and website address. Please also include the type of organization entity (e.g. non-profit organization, school, public organization, for-profit business, etc.) and if the organization possesses any certifications such as [M/WBE certification](#).
2. In your response to the RFI, please consider including the following:
 - a. An executive summary which briefly describes the respondent's organization and an overview of the RFI response it will provide.
 - b. A description of relevant work and related research (if applicable) the organization has operated in the past or currently operates.
 - c. Brief description of relevant community engagement, agriculture training, apprenticeship, and/or student educational experience.
 - d. A brief crop/orchard plan(s) or potential plant selection for the varied food forest layers that might be included in your design (e.g. tree layer, herbaceous layer, shrub layer, root layer, fungal layer, etc.)
 - e. A description of estimated cost, maintenance capacity, and materials in your proposed design. ADA and other ability considerations to make the food forest accessible to all New Yorkers are highly encouraged to include.

- f. Any challenges you forecast in developing a school food forest and ways of mitigating those challenges.
- g. Potential strategies to engage students and community in the planning process of the school food forest are welcomed.
- h. Any suggestions for MOUA to take into account as it learns more about food forests and maintenance/staffing considerations are welcomed.

D. Submissions

All submissions must utilize electronic mail and be sent as a Microsoft Word or PDF document by **April 30, 2025**, to Evan Burr at nycurbanag@cityhall.nyc.gov with the subject line **"School Food Forest RFI"**.

This document is not intended as a solicitation for the award of a contract or a prerequisite for participation in any future solicitation. This RFI is not intended as a procurement, nor does it guarantee that a procurement will be issued. This RFI is purely for informational purposes. No contract will be awarded as a result of this RFI, and response to this RFI is not required in order to respond to any subsequent solicitation or procurement opportunity.

MOUA reserves the right to cancel or postpone this RFI in whole or in part at any time and will not reimburse respondents for any costs in connection with their responses to this RFI. Each respondent is solely responsible for its own costs and expenses in preparing and submitting a response to this RFI, and participating in the RFI process, including the provision of any additional information or attendance at meetings or interviews. Participation/input in the RFI is entirely optional. Your response is greatly appreciated.

Exhibit A

The NYC urban agriculture landscape is a diverse tableau of community gardens, urban farms, commercial growing, controlled environment agriculture growing models such as hydroponics, aeroponics and aquaponics systems, and other green spaces. There are over 550 community gardens under city jurisdiction stewarded by thousands of volunteers² growing food, while 22% of New York City's land is covered by tree canopy which amounts to 42,654 acres of green³. From farmers markets to community supported agriculture, there are multiple food access models for locally or regionally grown food in New York City. Yet, many New Yorkers still face persistent food insecurity. According to the Robin Hood Poverty Tracker Report, nearly 40% of New York City families citywide experience some form of food insecurity. When families have children under 18 in the household, the number is as high as 47%⁴. With a lens towards NYC public schools, student breakfast and lunch meal participation is lower on an average day⁵ which means more students are facing their school day hungry. In New York City, the DOE Garden Census reported a total of 1,246 school gardens⁶ throughout the five boroughs; however, New Yorkers note that activity rates vary for school gardens and many are underutilized or not actively maintained.

The city has one food forest under NYC Parks Department jurisdiction - the Bronx River Foodway⁷. Since 2017, the Foodway has been a unique site filled with nut trees, native berries, herbs, and edible plants. The opportunity to scale up and increase the number of food forests by using critical and often underutilized land in or near school sites represents a prime opportunity to increase the acreage of growing greenspace accessible to New Yorkers, while increasing healthy food production and access, and strengthening the city's priorities for addressing the climate crisis.

² <https://www.nycgovparks.org/greenthumb>

³ <https://maps.nyc.gov/lidar/2017/>

⁴ chrome-extension://efaidnbmnnnibpcajpcglclefindmkaj/https://robinhood.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/07/POVERTY_TRACKER_REPORT29.pdf

⁵ <https://hungersolutionsny.org/federal-nutrition-programs/school-meals/school-breakfast-program/sb-report-2024/#:~:text=Nearly%20793%2C000%20children%20in%20New,eating%20school%20lunch%20each%20day.>

⁶ chrome-extension://efaidnbmnnnibpcajpcglclefindmkaj/https://infohub.nyced.org/docs/default-source/default-document-library/2021-22_sustainability-annual-report.pdf

⁷ <https://bronxriver.org/about/foodway>

Exhibit B

Site ranges from 40,000 square feet to 84,000 square feet or 1-2 acres. According to the NYC Food Policy Foodscape Report of the Parkchester/Soundview section, this community is facing a higher than NYC average of food insecurity (18.2% of residents vs citywide 15.4% of residents) and a lower percentage of land used for public parks and recreation (12.5% vs citywide 24.7%) and canopy coverage⁸.



⁸ <https://www.nycfoodpolicy.org/foodscape-parkchester-soundview/#references>