



THE CITY OF NEW YORK  
OFFICE OF THE MAYOR  
NEW YORK, NY 10007

**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE:** June 26, 2018

**CONTACT:** [pressoffice@cityhall.nyc.gov](mailto:pressoffice@cityhall.nyc.gov), (212) 788-2958

**BUILDING HEALTHY COMMUNITIES: DE BLASIO ADMINISTRATION UNVEILS  
NEW URBAN FARM AT NYCHA'S MARINERS HARBOR HOUSES AS PART OF  
PUBLIC-PRIVATE PARTNERSHIP TO IMPROVE HEALTH AND SAFETY IN  
NEIGHBORHOODS**

*Staten Island Foundation joins Building Healthy Communities as new philanthropic partner*

**NEW YORK** – Senior Advisor to the Mayor Gabrielle Fialkoff, the New York City Housing Authority and the Fund for Public Health in New York City today unveiled a new Farms at NYCHA urban farm at Mariners Harbor Houses, Staten Island, the sixth farm constructed as part of the Building Healthy Communities Initiative. The community-based, public-private partnership is designed to improve public health and public safety outcomes in 12 New York City neighborhoods that bear the burden of longstanding public disinvestment.

Through a citywide partnership with Green City Force, which employs young public housing residents ages 18-24 through an AmeriCorps program, the Farms at NYCHA initiative has distributed over 32,000 pounds of fresh produce, diverted 8,600 pounds of food scraps from landfills and incinerators through composting and engaged NYCHA residents in 800 volunteer shifts since the launch of the program in 2015.

"The neighborhood you live in should not determine your health or the health of your family," said **Mayor de Blasio**. "Building Healthy Communities is breaking down the barriers many face to maintaining a healthy lifestyle. With each new farm built at a NYCHA development, more New Yorkers will have access to healthy food, job training, and educational opportunities – investments that will bear fruit for years to come."

"The de Blasio Administration believes that every New Yorker, no matter their zip code, has a right to good health. Building Healthy Communities is a public-private partnership that seeks to improve health and wellness outcomes in neighborhoods that have all too often been overlooked, underinvested in, and disconnected from the possibilities New York City has to offer. We are thrilled to launch the farm at Mariners Harbor and bring job training to young NYCHA residents, fresh and healthy food, and create vibrant open spaces—all through a process of community engagement," said **Gabrielle Fialkoff, Senior Advisor to the Mayor and Director of the Office of Strategic Partnerships**.

”The Fund for Public Health in NYC is delighted to see a project that addresses health and the social determinants of health – safe and beautiful environments, job training and community engagement – extended to additional boroughs,” said **Sara Gardner, executive director, Fund for Public Health in NYC.**

“Having urban farms and agricultural opportunities, such as this new Mariners Harbor’s Farms at NYCHA farm, can be a great resource for the community at-large – while also providing residents with access to fresh produce,” said **Interim NYCHA Chair Stanley Brezenoff.**

“Farms at NYCHA, part of Building Healthy Communities, is a program with boundless potential that can offer jobs and volunteering options to our youth through Green City Force, as well as promote healthy eating and sustainability for all NYCHA communities.”

Farms at NYCHA, part of Building Healthy Communities, is a first of its kind initiative in the United States, activating underutilized space on public housing property to provide residents and community members access to fresh local foods. In addition, the farms provide youth workforce and leadership development, and promote sustainability and engagement in public housing communities.

Each site works with local nonprofit partners to create and maintain the farmland, build resident engagement through community programming and train young NYCHA adults in urban agriculture. At today’s unveiling, the Staten Island Foundation was announced as a new philanthropic partner for the Mariners Harbor site. Support from the Staten Island Foundation will increase workforce training opportunities for more Staten Island young adult NYCHA residents, and create partnership opportunities with local Staten Island community based organizations and agriculturists.

“GCF is proud to partner with The Mayor’s Office, NYCHA, the Fund for Public Health in NYC, and local organizations to launch the sixth Farms at NYCHA site on Staten Island. We appreciate the Staten Island Foundation’s investment in this important work alongside our citywide partners. Their support provides opportunities for NYCHA residents to access thriving community spaces, breaks barriers to healthy food access, and arms underemployed NYCHA young adults with sustainable workforce skills and job placements that can lead to family supporting career opportunities,” said **Lisbeth Shepherd, Founder and Executive Director of Green City Force.**

**Tamara Greenfield, Director of Building Health Communities,** said, “Healthy fruits and vegetables are not the only harvest that the seeds planted today will yield. Across the City community farms are reinvigorating shared space and producing strong, healthy and safe communities.”

**Betsy Dubovsky, Executive Director of The Staten Island Foundation** stated, “We are pleased to partner with New York City and its Building Health Communities efforts. The Urban Farm Corps and Farms at NYCHA Mariners Harbor is a project that benefits residents with fresh healthy food and benefits our NYCHA youth with work experience, professional certifications and jobs. That’s a real win win!”

To design the Farms at NYCHA farm, Green City Force corps members and NYCHA staff attended community meetings at the development to get residents' input on the farm's plans and design. Residents were surveyed about location, size, and the crops they would like to be grown. NYCHA residents receive free produce in exchange for volunteering on the farm or bringing household food scraps to the farm stand each week for composting.

The Mariners Harbor's Farms at NYCHA farm joins five others citywide, located at Bay View Houses (Canarsie, Brooklyn), Howard Houses (Brownsville, Brooklyn), Red Hook Houses (Red Hook, Brooklyn), Wagner Houses (East Harlem, Manhattan), and Forest Houses (Morrisania, Bronx).

"Growing up in the Bronx, I realized that most urban communities are not supported when it comes to living a healthy life due to the conditions and the limited resources available in the environment of these communities. Thankfully, I have never felt that being limited by my surroundings should or would define me. That's one major reason why I joined GCF. At only twenty-three years old, working on farms with GCF has taught me not only how to be self-sustainable, but how to improve my surroundings by educating and promoting the feasibility of healthy living. GCF has provided me with the knowledge and empowerment to be confident and reach out to others who also want to learn about healthy living. The best experience during my time with GCF was building and maintaining a farm in the very development I grew up in. Working on Forest Houses Farm filled me with pride. I am honored to support my home in this way. The most important thing I've learned in GCF is to not only expand my knowledge, but take ownership of it and spread it to everyone around me. I joined GCF to make a difference in my community, and every community I touch. With the help of my Cohort and leaders, GCF has helped me discover my hidden potential in areas of life I will take with me well after my experience here ends," said **Tyrone Robinson GCF Cohort 14 graduate, Assistant Farm Manager at Forest Houses Farm, and intern at Kelly Street Gardens.**

Launched in 2015, the Building Healthy Communities Initiative leverages \$318 million in public investments and an additional \$12 million in private funding to take a place-based approach to health equity and public safety, focusing on three key goals: 1) increasing opportunities for physical activity; 2) expanding access to healthy and affordable food; and 3) promoting safe and vibrant spaces. In addition to Farms at NYCHA, the partnership has made improvements to school playgrounds and gardens, expanded culturally appropriate and language-specific health and fitness instruction in low-income communities, provided 30 small grants to community-based organizations and is building 50 new mini soccer pitches to provide free programming to 10,000 youth.

The multi-agency initiative is led by the Office of Strategic Partnerships and the Fund for Public Health in New York City, with support from the City's Department of Health and Mental Hygiene, Parks Department, Mayor's Office of Criminal Justice, NYCHA, Department of Transportation and the Mayor's Office of Food Policy. Private funding has been contributed by the Laurie M. Tisch Illumination Fund, Merck Family Fund, The New York Community Trust, The Scherman Foundation, The Staten Island Foundation, Target, Unilever, and Wakefern Food Corporation.

“I want to thank NYCHA and their partners for embarking on this project, as well as the tenants for their commitment to making their communities better,” said **State Senator Diane Savino**.

“All too often fresh vegetables are not readily available and are too expensive, forcing people in these neighborhoods to make poor food choices. We also know that those choices can lead to horrible diseases such as diabetes and obesity. With this partnership we will be able to offer people fresh choices and give them the tools they need to have healthier options.”

“It is excellent to see NYCHA investing in building healthy communities by providing individuals living in public housing complexes access to healthy food options. It is a known fact that Mariners Harbor lacks healthy food selections for residents in the area. Mariners Harbor NYCHA Housing residents will not only benefit from the urban farm by having access to healthy food options, but this program will also bring community members together for a cause. Thank you to NYCHA for taking charge to provide Mariners Harbor Houses with this program to increase the quality of life in the area,” said **State Assemblyman Michael Cusick**.

**Council Member Debi Rose** said, “Urban farms have been found to provide nutritious produce to city dwellers while at the same time improving neighborhood aesthetics, boosting sustainability and building bonds within social communities. With few sources of fresh produce in close proximity, Mariners Harbor is a food desert, and so the establishment of an urban farm at the Mariners Harbor Houses is especially welcome. The Green City Force model brings added benefits to the community, with opportunities for job training for local residents here and at sites citywide. I thank all who have made this project a reality, and I look forward to meeting residents at the farm’s food stand in the coming months.”

###