August 14, 2012

Commissioner Darrel J. Aubertine
NYS Department of Agriculture & Markets
10B Airline Drive
Albany, NY 12235

President Seth W. Pinsky
NYC Economic Development Corporation
110 William Street
New York, NY 10038

President Kenneth Adams
NYS Empire State Development
95 Perry Street, Suite 500
Buffalo, NY 14203

Dear Commissioner Aubertine, President Pinsky and President Adams:

We are writing to offer our strong support for the creation of a wholesale farmers’ market in the Hunts Point area of the South Bronx and to offer our assistance to make this project a reality.

As you know, your agencies are currently involved in negotiations to finalize a $350 million modernization plan for Hunts Point Produce Market. This 45-year-old food hub, the largest in the nation, supplies an estimated 22 million people in the region with fruit and vegetables – including 60% of New York City’s produce supply. At the same time, however, only about 4 percent of the $2.3 billion in annual sales at the Produce Market comes from food grown on New York State farms.

Recognizing the need to create better markets for locally grown food, Governor Cuomo stated in his 2011 State of the State address that the Hunts Point revitalization should follow a “two-pronged approach.” In addition to renovating the Market’s existing infrastructure, he called for the creation of a “major wholesale ‘farmers' market’” in Hunts Point that would “provide an avenue for local farmers to market their produce directly to the New York City metropolitan area.” The Governor added: “This project will further enhance the Upstate economy by completing the cycle of production to consumption all within a few hundred miles.”

It is estimated that such a wholesale farmers’ market in Hunts Point could draw almost $900 million in sales for locally grown food, thus providing an immediate economic boost to both upstate growers and downstate suppliers. Supporting regional farming can also have a significant economic multiplier effect in rural communities, supporting farm-dependent services such as feed and seed stores, veterinarians, and equipment dealers.

Building a new wholesale farmers’ market in Hunts Point can also be a national model that helps to protect valuable state agricultural lands. Indeed, over the last 25 years, New York has lost almost 70 acres of farmland per day. Thus, supporting local farms through a new Hunts Point outlet would also prove environmentally beneficial by preserving farmland and aiding small and medium-sized regional growers.
Additionally, a wholesale farmers’ market – with critical input from the community – could also directly benefit the surrounding Hunts Point neighborhood by providing a new outlet for fresh fruit and vegetables from local growers. Ironically, the Hunts Point community, which sits adjacent to a vast supply of food, is one of the hungriest in the United States. And given that this neighborhood has some of the city’s highest per capita rates of diabetes and obesity, gaining access to fresher and more nutritious produce is an urgent public health need. Additionally, it is important that the overall Produce Market’s renovation meets the highest green standards, which would yield additional environmental and public health gains for the community and the city at large.

In sum, we respectfully request that any final agreement to modernize the Produce Market include the creation of a wholesale farmers’ market in Hunts Point where regional growers can sell their produce to schools, supermarkets, restaurants and other large buyers. As the New York Times recently editorialized, the Governor and the Mayor should make sure this final deal incorporates “a central place for local farmers.” We stand ready to assist your offices in advancing this crucial project for the health of the state’s economy, environment and people.

Sincerely,*

David Haight
American Farmland Trust

Hilary Baum
Baum Forum

Sonia Janiszewski
Catskills Collaborative Regional Alliance for Farmer Training

Ramsay Adams
Catskill Mountainkeeper

Sonia Janiszewski
Catskills FarmLink

Rebecca Morgan
Center for Agricultural Development and Entrepreneurship

Hilary Baum
Chefs for the Marcellus

Stefania Patinella
The Children’s Aid Society

Peter R. Paden
Columbia Land Conservancy, Inc.

Shannon Mason
Cowbella Fine Farmstead Dairy Products

Amy Miller
Early Bird Cookery

James T. B. Tripp
Environmental Defense Fund

Lynn Fredericks
FamilyCook Productions

Sonia Janiszewski
Farm Catskills

Jill Wiener
Farmhearts
Kristin Pederson & Ed Yowell
Food Systems Network NYC

Joel Berg
NYC Coalition Against Hunger

Kathleen Frith & Judith LaBelle
Glynwood Center

Raymond Figueroa
NYC Community Garden Coalition

Marcel Van Ooyen
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Steve Rosenberg
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Hunts Point Alliance for Children

Ken Jaffe
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Stony Creek Farm

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Mi Kitchen es Su Kitchen

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Wanda Salaman
Mothers on the Move

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Sustainable South Bronx

Danielle Gaebel
Natural Contents

Anna Hammond
The Sylvia Center

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Natural Resources Defense Council

Mary Tonjes & Jim Tonjes
Tonjes Farm Dairy

Ana Garcia
New York Academy of Medicine

Craig Cashman
Watershed Agricultural Council
Cecil D. Corbin-Mark
WEACT for Environmental Justice

Greg Swartz
Willow Wisp Organic Farm

*Signatories as of August 14, 2012.

Cc: The Honorable Andrew M. Cuomo
    The Honorable Michael R. Bloomberg
    The Honorable Christine C. Quinn