By electronic and overnight mail

June 9, 2015

Commissioner Richard A. Ball
New York State Department of Agriculture and Markets
10B Airline Drive
Albany, New York 12205

Barbara Turk, Director of Food Policy
Office of the Deputy Mayor for Health and Human Services
City Hall
New York, NY 10007

Dear Chairpersons Ball and Turk:

We are writing to you in your capacities as co-chairs of the New York Regional Food Hub Task Force to reiterate our strong support for the creation of a long-delayed wholesale farmers’ market in the Hunts Point area of the South Bronx. As you know, the Task Force is charged with presenting a report to Governor Cuomo this month that offers recommendations on how to expand regional food hubs across New York State.

Almost three years ago, many of us wrote to your state and city colleagues who at that time were seeking to finalize a large-scale modernization plan for the Hunts Point Produce Market that would have also included a new wholesale market for regional farmers. We noted in our 2012 letter that although the current Hunts Point Produce Market provides roughly 22 million people with fruit and vegetables every day, only an estimated 4% of the $2.3 billion in annual sales comes from New York farms.

This 4% figure is staggeringly low given that, according to a 2005 study, there is as much as $900 million in unmet demand for local food here in New York City – a number that is likely significantly higher today given the huge growth in interest for such fresh food over the past decade. Indeed, even over the past three years, we have witnessed an increased demand for local food by restaurants, schools, emergency food groups and other large regional buyers. At the same time, it is estimated that we are losing one farm every three and a half days across the state. This is why we believe building a permanent wholesale farmers’ market in the Bronx is a vital piece to unlocking the full potential of our regional food economy.

As Governor Cuomo stated this past December when the Task Force was created, a regional wholesale farmers’ market “will enable the upstate agricultural industry to increase access to metropolitan markets for producers, while providing an array of healthy, affordable food for communities. It will also serve as an aggregation hub and processing facility to assist upstate producers and processors in targeting institutional and private sector procurement.” And in March of this year, Mayor de Blasio offered similarly strong support for a dedicated hub in Hunts Point “to better link us to food that is grown and produced in Upstate New York – strengthening our city’s partnership with Upstate communities, farms, and businesses.”
To be sure, this new market in Hunts Point is just one piece of larger infrastructure investments and policy changes necessary to create a robust regional food system and improve food equity for all communities. Among other reforms, additional wholesale food hubs should also be expanded or created in both the upstate and downstate regions. And any new markets should be advanced with full input from the local community and other key stakeholders. It is also important that these regional food hubs are developed in a way to help drive local economic development so that everyone in our communities can afford to buy fresh local food.

In sum, establishing a permanent regional wholesale farmers’ market in Hunts Point is one of the most important actions New York officials can take to strengthen our regional food system. Accordingly, we respectfully call on the Task Force to include in its final report to the Governor a top recommendation to finally make this Bronx wholesale market a reality. We continue to stand ready to assist your offices in any way we can to help advance this crucial project.

Sincerely,

Saara Nafici  
Added Value

Teri Ptacek  
Agricultural Stewardship Association

David Haight  
American Farmland Trust

Tamara Dawson  
Bed-Stuy Campaign Against Hunger

Ben Flanner & Anastasia Cole  
Brooklyn Grange

Ramsay Adams  
Catskill Mountainkeeper

Ken Jaffe  
Center for Agricultural Development & Entrepreneurship

Beth Shapiro  
City Meals

Mary Cleaver  
Cleaver Company & The Green Table

Shannon Mason  
Cowbella Dairy

Robert Morgenthau  
Fishkill Farms

Christina Taylor  
Friends of Van Cortlandt Park

Kathleen Frith  
Glynwood

Josh Morgenthau  
Good Eggs

Liz Neumark  
Great Performances

Diana Nelson  
The Hope Center Development Corporation
Todd Erling
Hudson Valley AgriBusiness Development Corp.

Susan Zimet
Hunger Action Network New York State

Maryann Hedaa
Hunts Point Alliance for Children

Richard Giles
Lucky Dog Farm
Lucky Dog Local Food Hub

Wanda Salaman
Mothers on the Move

Lindsey Lusher Shute
National Young Farmers Coalition

Mark Izeman & Margaret Brown
Natural Resources Defense Council

Christina Grace
New Territories, LLC

Nevin Cohen, Nicholas Freudenberg
& Jan Poppendieck
New York City Food Policy Center at Hunter College

Dean Norton
New York Farm Bureau

Anne Ruflin
Northeast Organic Farming Association of New York

Stephen Davies
Project for Public Spaces

Kellie Terry
The Point

Bennett Haynes
Ralston Farm

Steve Rosenberg
Scenic Hudson

Michael Brotchner
Sustainable South Bronx

Mark Ruffalo
Water Defense

Greg Swartz
Willow Wisp Farm