**Food Advocates Envision Rooftop Gardens and Vertical Farms**

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Viraj Puri/Gotham Greens This lettuce-producing greenhouse in Maryland is a model for the organic rooftop farm planned in Jamaica, Queens.

New Yorkers flock to one of the city’s Greenmarkets or upscale grocery stores when they want to buy ripe heirloom tomatoes or crisp heads of lettuce. But for proponents of urban farming, local food from upstate or even just miles into New Jersey is too far. (City dwellers can relate.)

Urban farming may seem improbable in a metropolis where real estate is at a premium and green space is virtually nonexistent outside Central Park. But as Americans grow increasingly interested in where their food comes from and how it is grown in this [Michael Pollan](http://www.michaelpollan.com/)-inflected era, small plots of farms dotting New York’s rooftops could be the new wave of agriculture, according to urban planning experts and farmers.

“People care deeply about being green,” said Jennifer Nelkin, a greenhouse director and one of the founders of a small company called [Gotham Greens](http://gothamgreens.com/). “Whether it’s the food, environment, renewable energy or any other issue, people want to do something to help out.”

In 2006, Ms. Nelkin helped run a sustainable farm that sat on a barge in the Hudson River. The 5,000-square-feet hydroponic greenhouse was powered by wind turbines, solar panels and used vegetable oil to grow peppers, squash, herbs, strawberries and more for restaurants and organizations like [City Harvest](http://www.cityharvest.org/).

Now she and her partners at Gotham Greens plan to build a 10,000-square-foot greenhouse atop a church in Jamaica, Queens, before the end of the year, and to harvest the first crops they will sell in early spring.

“It’s more than local food — everything from creating green jobs to creating green space. It’s really something people are looking for, ” Ms. Nelkin said. “Ultra-local food would be from urban farms.”

New York is not the only city building urban farms. Cities like Detroit and Chicago have done everything from giving tax breaks to city farmers to converting empty lots into acres of farmland.

In 2008, [Green Roofs for Healthy Cities](http://www.greenroofs.org/), a nonprofit industry association, surveyed its members — companies that build green roofs — and reported that the number of projects had grown by more than 35 percent from the year before. That is a total of about 6 million to 10 million square feet of green roofs, according to the association.

But it could be tougher proposition in New York’s cramped quarters.

[Dickson D. Despommier](http://www.mailman.columbia.edu/our-faculty/profile?uni=ddd1), a professor of public health at Columbia University, believes [vertical farms](http://www.verticalfarm.com/) are an answer. He imagines that growing crops in towering buildings could popularize urban farming: it is local, produces crops year-round and can rely on renewable energy to operate.

“People will get a place where they know their food comes from,” he said.

The Manhattan borough president, [Scott M. Stringer](http://topics.nytimes.com/topics/reference/timestopics/people/s/scott_m_stringer/index.html), has expressed support for the idea, said Dr. Despommier, who added that vertical farms would help Mayor [Michael R. Bloomberg’s](http://topics.nytimes.com/top/reference/timestopics/people/b/michael_r_bloomberg/index.html) goal of improving the city’s environmental sustainability by 2030.

Whether it is vertical farms, rooftop green houses or community gardens, any project in New York faces heaps of paperwork for zoning issues or permits, said Lisa Kersavage, the [Municipal Art Society of New York](http://mas.org/)’s director of advocacy and policy. Making the process easier for urban farmers is key, she said.

“Is this something we New Yorkers see as important?” Ms. Kersavage asked. “I think that’s going to be the biggest fundamental challenge.”

Still, New Yorkers have pushed ahead with urban farms, said Colin Cathcart, an architect with [Kiss & Cathcart](http://www.kisscathcart.com/) in Brooklyn. His firm is working on a putting a greenhouse on top of the [Manhattan School for Children](http://www.manhattanschool.org/) on the Upper West Side.

“In a way, we’re just connecting with a long tradition,” Mr. Cathcart said. “We used to all eat local.”