



Farms at NYCHA

Final Evaluation Report
June, 2019



EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Farms at NYCHA (FAN) is a multi-site, multi-partner initiative to support the health and wellbeing of New Yorkers through an innovatively designed urban agriculture program. The initiative combines youth workforce development, healthy food production and distribution, resident engagement, and sustainable open space activation to contribute to positive community development.

The CUNY Urban Food Policy Institute has worked closely with the FAN implementing partners to evaluate the first three years of implementation (2016-2019), documenting and quantifying the many outcomes associated with the work, and assessing key elements of process and implementation that have been essential to sustaining the initiative and achieving its goals.

This evaluation summarizes the initiative's accomplishments in five domains core to its design: (1) youth development and workforce training; (2) landscape transformation; (3) environmental sustainability; (4) community engagement and cohesion; and (5) health and diet. The results demonstrate that FAN has produced substantial benefits to residents of public housing and to the greater New York City community, with measurable accomplishments in each domain.

As a result of having built and cultivated six large-scale urban farms at Mariner's Harbor in Staten Island, Forest Houses in the Bronx, Red Hook West, Bay View Houses and Howard Houses in Brooklyn, and Wagner Houses in East Harlem, the initiative has:

- Supported the recruitment and training of more than 111 young NYCHA residents as Service Corps Members (CMs). This is an innovative model of activating AmeriCorps service year requirements as a platform to address youth unemployment in public housing communities while enlisting young residents in improving the lives of public housing residents;
- Enabled Green City Force (GCF) CMs who have graduated from the program to attain educational opportunities or full-time employment in various sectors, including with FAN community-based partner organizations;
- Engaged residents of NYCHA housing in the FAN projects, involving 14,143 farm stand visitors, and 1,055 NYCHA resident volunteers in farm and food activities, as well as 2,490 young people in farm-based learning activities, generating a high level of interest and support within each development;
- Activated spaces within each development that residents perceived as significantly more pleasant and safer than prior to the construction of the farms;
- Cultivated and distributed 56,715 pounds of fresh, sustainably-grown produce, with a retail value of approximately \$118,975, to NYCHA residents, increasing self-reported consumption of fruits and vegetables and saving residents money;
- Created environmental benefits by diverting approximately 13,816 pounds of food scraps from landfills and preventing stormwater from inundating the city's sewer system, an estimated value of approximately \$300,000 in ecosystem services;

This final evaluation integrates and builds on two previous interim progress reports by providing cumulative metrics for FAN outcomes, and by identifying strategies and prompting questions for discussion to ensure the sustainability of the initiative in the coming years. Critical next steps for FAN include:

- Determining optimal roles and responsibilities of partners for sustainability and growth of the initiative;
- Codifying current FAN implementation strategies and plans for scale into an implementation plan that describes how and to what extent the farms should be scaled up, and outlines daily farm operations and responsible partners and their roles;
- Measuring the cost of service delivery and budgeting to adequately resource all aspects of the initiative;
- Considering a longer-term home for the initiative within the city administration, and pursuing partnerships with city agencies to secure additional resources;
- Rethinking the name and branding of the initiative so that it captures the goals and objectives of the work to build public support and potentially interest funders;
- Developing a plan for increasing resident engagement among current farms, including various options for activating the spaces for public use; and
- Developing an ongoing monitoring and evaluation plan for measuring initiative impact.

In 2017 GCF received the Project of the Year Award from The Corps Network, which serves over 35,000 young adults nationally.¹ This achievement is a notable credit to both FAN and GCF, and indicative of the broad potential of the FAN model as a public-private partnership that has invested in public housing at a time of federal government disinvestment. As FAN transitions from this first phase of implementation and considers its sustainability, this report highlights the success of the initiative in achieving a broad range of goals, including meeting ambitious targets for farm construction, workforce development, food production, and service to residents. This evaluation illustrates that beyond the specific accomplishments that we have tracked over three years, FAN's transformative power comes from its ability to challenge long-held expectations for what is possible for young people, for NYCHA communities, and for New York residents more broadly.

¹ <https://corpsnetwork.org/2017-project-of-the-year-green-city-force-farms-at-nycha/>