

PO Box 2327, New York, NY
10272 212-788-7900
info@grownyc.org
grownyc.org

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MEMORANDUM

From: Marcel Van Ooyen

Date: May 1, 2025

Subject: Launching the GrowNYC Emergency Fund – Standing Between Farmers and Families

Dear Friends,

As we are all well aware, nonprofits across the country are facing unprecedented attacks on their work, and GrowNYC has not been exempt from this.

Today, we are launching the GrowNYC Emergency Fund to respond to the most severe funding crisis in our organization's 50+ year history. Due to sweeping federal cuts, frozen reimbursements, and canceled grant programs, GrowNYC is facing a \$2.3 million shortfall this fiscal year. Without immediate action, the infrastructure that connects our regional farms to New Yorkers who rely on them will begin to unravel.

Let's be clear: this is not a supply chain issue—our farmers have food. What's missing is the funding to keep that food flowing into high-need communities.

We Are the Bridge—And That Bridge Is in Danger

Just two weeks ago, we visited one of our free food distribution partners at the Chinese-American Planning Council (CPC) in Sunset Park. Volunteers packed hundreds of bags of apples, spinach, tomatoes, and other local produce, all sourced through GrowNYC's Food Hub and distributed to elders, caregivers, and families living paycheck to paycheck.

That program, and 19 others like it across the city, was made possible by the New York Food for New York Families (NYFNFF) grant. These grants allow GrowNYC to purchase directly from small and mid-sized farms and deliver 1.5 million pounds of free, fresh food each year to trusted community-based partners. Unless new funding is secured, these critical services will shut down when the grant ends in August.

The people we met at CPC depend on this food, and the farmers we source from depend on these sales. If we let this infrastructure collapse, the damage will reach both city neighborhoods and rural farms, and it will not be easy to rebuild.

GrowNYC's Unique Role

What sets GrowNYC apart is that unlike traditional wholesalers or national chains, GrowNYC is mission-driven, not profit-driven. While others source globally, we double down on our regional farms, especially BIPOC, immigrant, and women-led operations. Our model strengthens food access and farm viability at the same time. We are a regional food anchor in the process to build a food system built on equity, sustainability, and local resilience. In 2024, GrowNYC:

- Distributed millions of pounds of local food through our Food Hub. 90% of which went to food security organizations.

- Operated 66 food access sites across NYC, sourcing from 207 regional farms.
- Redeemed \$4.3 million in nutrition benefits, putting federal dollars into the pockets of local farmers.
- Provided nearly 3,000 market days, opportunities for New Yorkers to access fresh food directly from the people who grow it.

Every dollar that moves through our Greenmarkets, Farmstands and Food Hub supports local economies, healthy communities, and a more resilient city. But our farmers are being squeezed. Rising input costs, escalating tariffs, climate shocks, and the loss of federal funding are threatening their survival. These are not large agribusinesses. They are small, family-run operations without corporate buffers. GrowNYC may be the only consistent buyer keeping them in business.

What the Emergency Fund Will Do

The GrowNYC Emergency Fund is a lifeline. It will:

- Keep Greenmarkets and Farmstands open, especially in neighborhoods that rely on SNAP, WIC, and Health Bucks.
- Sustain our free food distribution partnerships, including with organizations like CPC, that serve low-income and immigrant communities.
- Purchase directly from our regional farmers, keeping them afloat during a volatile growing season.
- Expand the reach of our new Regional Food Hub, increasing distribution to emergency food providers, senior centers, hospitals, and schools.

What We're Doing Internally

We've taken aggressive steps to reduce expenses and preserve core services:

- A hiring freeze is in place across all departments.
- Non-essential spending is paused, particularly for programs relying on uncertain federal reimbursements.
- Departmental budgets are being reassessed, with expected 10% reductions in FY26.

We've also made the hard decision to pivot our Farmer Assistance Program. While we've long supported beginning and emerging growers, our current capacity demands that we focus inward. We are now prioritizing technical and market support for the Greenmarket and Wholesale producers who are actively feeding New Yorkers and who stand to lose the most. This move is about focus, stewardship, and protecting the farmers and communities we are most accountable to.

This is not a retreat. It's a strategic realignment to protect the backbone of our food system.

We've Done This Before—We Can Do It Again

During the pandemic, GrowNYC proved its ability to adapt quickly and act boldly. We were a stabilizing force when the city needed it most. With your partnership, we can do it again.

This time, we don't need to invent a new system—we just need to invest in and keep the one we've built from collapsing. GrowNYC is the bridge between the people who grow food and the people who need it. Let's keep that bridge standing.

Visit grownyc.org/emergencyfund to donate, learn more, or share our story.

With gratitude and determination,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, reading "Marcel Van Ooyen". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name "Marcel" being the most prominent.

Marcel Van Ooyen
President and CEO
mvanooyen@grownyc.org