

Featured Innovator: Nicole Tucker



Nicole Tucker is the Program Coordinator of Fresh Food Box, a sister program of Greenmarket's Regional Grains Project. Since Fresh Food Box started in 2012 the program has grown to provide healthy local farm fresh food to over 1000 families at 12 sites in underserved areas. This month, Nicole gave us the run down on how the Grains Project has helped made those numbers possible.

GrowNYC's Fresh Food Box owes its start to the city of Toronto. The city's FoodShare program developed a CSA style food buying club they named the ["Good Food Box."](#) aimed at buying food directly from local farmers to increase affordable food access in the city. GrowNYC, partnering with the Manhattan Borough President's office, used the model Toronto FoodShare created to develop 2011s pilot "YumBox" program. The next year, YumBox became Fresh Food Box, and in the years since has continued growing on New Yorkers.

Though Fresh Food Box was a successful program from the start, one of the issues its early customers had was that food box distribution stopped in the winter and their supply of fresh local produce ran dry. With the Grains Project bringing in more and different grains and flours from the northeast into New York City, Nicole and the team saw a great opportunity to further the goals of both programs. Since starting to include regional beans, flour, and grain in the shares, 10 of the program's sites have been able to serve customers year round, meaning more customers are staying enrolled in the program from year to year, developing deeper relationships with local farmers and different foods.

For Nicole, this also means new discoveries for Fresh Food Box users. "Because what they get from week to week is always changing, customers love being surprised and getting to try something new." A study done in Queens showed that fresh food box participants had a significantly larger dietary diversity than their neighbors. This means that Food Box customers are getting a greater variety of nutrients and whole families are becoming more adventurous with what they like to eat. In adding Grains to the mix, Nicole has worked to acquaint customers with new and different grains: tucking in a recipe for chocolate spelt cake with a bag of Farmer Ground spelt flour and adding different varieties of wheat berries and beans throughout the winter. "People can't get enough of the Red Fife berries" Nicole says, "Even when people who can't eat wheat have to swap something out, they're always excited to see something new is included."