

## Corbin Hill Food Project MI Food Hub Network Meeting Battle Creek Webinar

The Corbin Hill Food Project is a network of rural farms in urban communities in New York. We work with farmers from upstate New York and community groups in New York City to deliver fresh local produce to Harlem and the Bronx. The mission of Corbin Hill Food Project is to supply fresh vegetables and fruit to urban neighborhoods with restricted nutritional access. Since 2009, when a group of Harlem residents joined together to start the project we have brought together a dynamic network farmers, a broad range of deeply rooted community health, education, environmental and service groups and more than a thousand shareholders in Harlem, Washington Heights and the Bronx who care about access to good and ethically grown food. Built on trust and shared values we are working to rebuild the connections between upstate rural farms and urban food desert communities. The global food industry has neglected for decades. Through our farm share and community health partner programs our goal is to make broad and deep impacts on the health and well-being of families and communities of New York City while at the same time contributing to the economic and agricultural revitalization of New York State.

Corbin Hill Food Project directly partners food producers and processors with consumers providing a means of disengaging from the commercially driven global system. This form of hybrid food value chain greatly benefits community members, extending economic empowerment, and providing new markets for the small and midsize farm sector. Corbin Hill Food Project is made up of two core organizations, the Corbin Hill Road Farm LLC is our for-profit venture. The LLC owns our farm and other key assets. The farm serves as our connection to the upstate community allowing city residents to escape hectic city life and reconnect with the land. This organization backs our not-for-profit and allows the tract for other businesses' lines to develop. The Corbin Hill Food Project hub is our nonprofit venture. It involves more of our day-to-day operations. It serves as our aggregation and distribution point throughout the region. It facilitates our farm share or distributor managed weekly subscription CSA service, our community health partners or institutional purchasing, and our community box program. Prepacked shares designed with the client to meet the needs of the populations they serve.

The mission of the Corbin Hill Food Project is intended to empower shareholders through ownership by providing a voice in the food justice movement. We operate under the assumption that communities are already organized. We just need to connect the spare parts. When we first started we worked to identify communities within communities, subsurface levels of organization. We saw the values of these relationships and developed ways to connect to



these audiences. Using bottom-up, grassroots community engagement, we use narrative and storytelling to connect with individuals demonstrating neighborly values. And we are able to tailor our messages to different community groups and all these efforts are done bilingually, English and Spanish.

Our programs are intended to engage the communities we work in, engagement is active, it is sticky, it is fun, and builds buy-in. Food-related movie nights, canning classes, community chef demonstrations all contribute to cultivating our movement. Working with New York City communities is really about connecting urban culture with local agriculture. We have done this by developing strategic networks over the years. Connecting prominent members of the community along with local health and wellness centers with deep ties to the neighborhoods of Harlem and the South Bronx. Inviting these individuals to be on our board we being a network focused on healthy outcomes for neighbors while also striving for the overall improvement of local neighborhoods through healthy food access. Communities within communities are already in the neighborhoods we are looking to serve, already organized. We tap into these existing relationships. What you see here are two examples of the organizations that we partner with to reach these underserved populations. We leverage the strategic networks we have been weaving utilizing our various programs to fit both the needs of the organizations and the individuals we serve. You can begin to see the potential impact of our networked distribution approach through both of these examples.

These are examples of where we target distribution sites. We bring it down to the micro level of interaction to the local places where people gather within the neighborhoods we serve. These points of access to the neighborhoods give you an idea of the scope and scale of our influence throughout Harlem and the South Bronx. And offer multiple ways for people to connect with the Corbin Hill Food Project. What you're seeing here is actually what a farm share distribution looks like. And it's a sensorial experience, smell, sight, hearing the food cooking, tasting it and touching it. These distributions are designed to be interactive and immersive. All farm share distributions facilitated through our green bins. Not only are our bins our largest form of infrastructure, they also are representative of our logo and our branding. From left to right you'll see that the upstate inputs. This is Wellington dropping off some herbs ready for us to pack on our truck. In the middle you'll see a farm share distribution at the Urban Garden Center in Harlem and the diversity of the populations we serve. To the right you will see Roz Francis, one of our community chefs, demonstrating a recipe. We try as much as possible to make it non-cook recipes, more of an assemblage preparation and assemblage approach realizing that the populations we serve not all of them have homes to go to or stoves to cook on.

On the bottom you'll see our urban health plan site, a location I used to facilitate as the site leader and a health network illustrated earlier in our pre-organized community slide. This is an interesting site because it has transitioned from having a site leader, me, to being fully



autonomous and managing almost all aspects of their farm share distribution internally. To the left of that picture you'll see cooking with Carla as she demos and samples a community chef recipe. To the right you will see Ruth Santana signing in shareholders, alerting them to the value-added items that might be there for them, and explain what the share selection is for the week. Also giving out recipes that align with the shares that we are distributing that week. But what does it really take to pull this off each week for 23 weeks of the growing season? A coordinated effort of marketing, logistics, communication, and a little TLC from Mother Nature. Aggregation is about filling up trucks, sourcing smart, strategically, planning and purchasing, putting it all together. Human capital, to affect people on the granular level it takes boots on the ground and people that buy into the values of our organization. We look to recruit residents and place them in the communities they are from for a deeper connection.

Roles include site leader and community chefs downstate and packers upstate. Cold chain and transportation, a reliable integrated network of trucking and cold chain links that ensures the freshness and quality of our product. Financial operations, having a distributed business model like we do spread across this New York State we have to coordinate large purchases while maintaining enough working capital to continue day-to-day operations, which can sometimes tie up funds. Our service, our number one resource. It goes back to recruiting people from the areas we serve. We are more than a bodega and leveraging our customer first approach to encourage buy-in and return customers. Marketing communications and online services. Using Farmigo is our backend ordering software and feeding shareholders into that system while being flexible enough to accommodate varying degrees in social, economic and technological hurdles. Putting all these together each week and making it happen is how you execute a farm share.

This is a snapshot of our weekly distribution and the various trucking companies we work with the coordinate our farm share and community connect programs. Our hub is based in Schoharie County, New York dubbed the carrot barn and it was actually built by the Beechnut Baby Food Company as a pre-aggregation facility for their plant in Canajoharie New York. Our green bins are packed and labeled, brought downstate and currently distributed throughout four city boroughs. And it looks like next year we will be in Staten Island completing the five boroughs of that makeup New York City. We have grown and iterated on our model each year of our existence. We have had to be agile and flexible enough to change as the seasons do.

Through this mindset we have scaled up and adapted to meet the dynamic needs of the communities we serve. We used to do things very differently in 2010, when we were serving just 250 shares per week. As the success of our organization evolved so too did the ways we do business. What was necessary was to create a simple modular system that was scalable. These are the basics of our upstate operation, distribution and cold chain. The space we have upstate is borrowed from Schoharie Valley Farm. When we source we must be sensitive to



budgeting our inventory, trying to source just what we need for that way and not step on the toes of our host. Spoilage is always a spoilage in the summer, you must manage these factors and when sourcing. As you can see, we operate on a light and flexible infrastructure. Last-minute access to produce is crucial to our services, especially because we order produce a week in advance. Having last-minute access ensures that we can fill last minute orders we receive. Trust between consumer and producer. Create an open, legible and transparent service. So quality and flexibility. Produce must always be better than what can currently be found in these neighborhoods. We are developing a model that can scale and is flexible and modular enough to do so. Best in infrastructure, best tangible and intangible. We have gotten to a scale that requires custom software solutions. Buy-in is a process achieved through commitment to our organizational values and our community engagement practices. Respect is earned and best achieved when openly demonstrated. Don't treat the poor poorly. Leads back into our quality and neighborliness. Nobody will pay for subpar service no matter how low the barriers to entry are. Provide resources to community partners. Develop metrics for successful sites based on a profit and loss statement. Weekly handouts, building relationships with account managers. Giving the client access and tools they need to facilitate their own farm share distributions. Community engagement is fun, it's sticky, it's getting the green out there and working in the locations and third spaces our shareholders frequent.

Examples of the way we connect to our communities are soup sessions. All season feedback and planning sessions with downstate residents. Farm trips where individuals will carpool up to our Corbin Hill Road farm and participate in planting sessions. Farm preschool cooking demonstrations. Community chef tasting, canning classes and workshops, as well as food-related movie nights where we pop fresh popcorn for our shareholders and moviegoers. Our farmer network now has over 50 farms and includes vegetables, fruits, dairy, egg, bread and value-added producers.

This is a picture of our 2013 farm share meeting at the Cornell Cooperative extension in Schoharie County. In the center you see our President, Dennis Derryck, surrounded by him are investors and farmers from the Schoharie Valley region. The Cornell Cooperative extension hosts this meeting annually and as a result of our close relationship with the extension program. Though we are in the business of feeding people what we are really doing is creating access and building and connecting communities. We develop local markets and bridge the gap between upstate and downstate, between urban and rural, between consumer and producer. Shortening the distance between the two providing access to markets that previously didn't exist and uplifting these newly bridged communities at the same time. Thank you for listening.

