

# GREEN NEW YORK REPORT

**INSIDE Greenwashing** Certifying 'green' businesses: How legit is it?

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**The List** New York area's largest engineering firms PAGE 17



**BRANCHING OUT:** ABC Home CEO Paulette Cole plans to add two eateries dedicated to local sustainable foods.

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## Retailers stepping up green push

Businesses find ecofriendly initiatives can provide boost to bottom line

BY ADRIANNE PASQUARELLI

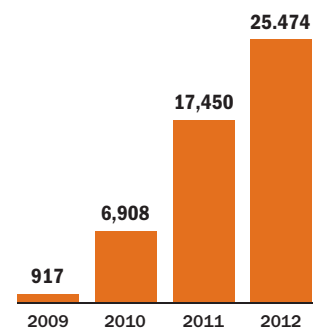
These days, retailers are finding that green might be the most flattering trend out there. And while many local businesses have long incorporated sustainability into their corporate DNA, some are taking things a step further.

Companies such as women's clothier Eileen Fisher, furniture seller ABC Home and food maker Greyston Bakery are imbuing their operating practices with ever deeper shades of green. ABC, for example, is sharing the environmental origins of products with shoppers. Eileen Fisher is considering opening an apparel-making factory stateside, and Greyston is installing solar panels to help bake its brownies.

The three companies have also joined the American Sustainable Business Council, a four-year-old national association of more than 165,000 firms that have pledged

### RAPID RISE

NY member businesses in American Sustainable Business Council



Source: American Sustainable Business Council

sustainability and a business approach called "triple bottom line"—people, profit and planet. About 25,000 members are in the New York area, a number that has grown by 15% in the past year, according to David Levine, chief executive and co-founder of the council.

"These aren't just nice things to do," he said. "The reason there's such an uptick [in membership] across the country—and in New York in particular—is because there's a recognition that this has tremendous value for businesses."

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## Farm School NYC: a different kind of urban growth

Program teaches ag biz—from bees to peas—to city slickers

BY DAVID KOEPEL

A typical week finds Petula Gay planting seedlings for fresh fruits and vegetables and canning hot peppers and sweet dumpling squash—not exactly the usual activities of higher-education students in the city.

Ms. Gay, 52, is one of 15 certifi-

cate candidates in the inaugural class of Farm School NYC, a hands-on program that trains its students in urban agriculture. She hopes to attain her certificate later this year.

In an apprenticeship at the Snug Harbor Heritage Farm on Staten Island and in academic classes including animal husbandry, she learns about beekeeping and raising chickens, skills that she hopes will translate into a career that involves teaching urban farming to low-income women. Ms. Gay lives in the West Sayville section of Staten Island, and for many years has worked as a lactation consultant. She said her focus on nutritional health for women

makes for a natural transition to farming.

Farm School NYC sees itself as more than just a training ground for New York City residents like Ms. Gay to grow food. The school's ambitious agenda is to "build self-reliant communities and inspire positive local action around food access and social-, economic- and racial-justice issues."

It's been an auspicious first two years, according to the head of the school. "We've succeeded beyond our expectations," said Jacquie Berger, the executive director of Just Food Inc.,

the nonprofit founded in 1995 that manages Farm School NYC. "We have more applications than we can accommodate, and we've enrolled a diverse group of students. We have a strong, clear vision of Farm School as a regional resource for anyone who wants to learn how to grow food in the city."

In its submission to the USDA, the school cited the three-year objectives of teaching 3,000 to 3,600 students about sustainable urban agriculture, and to have between 1,600 and 2,400 students applying their new skills "by growing,

preparing, distributing and/or marketing food." Its goal is to have 60 to 120 students "securing income streams related to Farm School skills and training."

Ms. Berger said that while Farm School NYC has so far enrolled about 200 paying students, the nonprofit also runs a program called City Farms that has offered 2,300 students free agriculture-related workshops.

In its second year, Farm School had 127 applicants for 15 slots in the certificate program and 272 applicants for 171 individual class slots. So far, eight students have graduated.

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**127**  
APPLICANTS  
for 15 slots in  
Farm School  
NYC's certificate  
program

# Farm School teaches city slickers

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ed from the certificate program.

It's still unusual for people to think of New York as a potential haven for agriculture. But the city does have more than 1,000 community gardens and about 35 working farms, according to a report last year by the Urban Design Lab at Columbia University's Earth Institute.

In 2011, Farm School NYC began offering its highly competitive certificate program, which teaches production, preparation, distribution, marketing and advocacy to urban-agriculture students and can be completed in two to five years. It also offers individual classes for the less committed. Tuition is based on household size and annual income, and the cost for a certificate program can range from \$420 to \$5,670.

The certificate program consists of 15 core courses, advanced coursework in a specialized area, an apprenticeship and 40 hours of volunteer work. Classes are offered by season; this spring includes an introductory class on carpentry and building, and another on propagation.

The school received seed money of \$426,921 in 2010 from the U.S. Department of Agriculture's Beginning Farmer and Rancher Development Program, which has as its mission to "develop and offer education and mentoring programs" for the "next generation of farmers." Multinational Dutch bank Rabobank



**HANDS FULL:** Just Food Inc. Executive Director Jacquie Berger said Farm School has more applicants than it can accommodate.

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pitched in with a grant as well, as part of its corporate social responsibility program.

The school also raised \$106,730 on its own, according to its report to the USDA.

#### Loss of federal funding

"In recent years, demand for locally grown food has increased tremendously, creating new entrepreneurial opportunities—even in urban areas," said Siva Sureshwaran, national head of the farmer and rancher program, in a statement.

"Through this grant, Just Food Inc. has hired new teachers and trained beginning farmers in many poor communities in New York City. This project has not only created jobs, but it also has the potential to generate additional income and enhance access to locally grown food."

But after a previous \$75 million outlay, Congress did not reauthorize the program's grants last year, and no new money will be distributed, according to the USDA.

Ms. Berger acknowledged that the loss of federal funding poses a fi-

nancial challenge to Farm School NYC, but said that it plans to compensate by diversifying its fundraising and doubling its enrollment.

School officials have also decided not to pursue academic accreditation—at least not yet. An advisory committee determined that it would be too expensive, according to Ms. Berger.

For indoor classrooms, the school has relied heavily on the offices of Manhattan Borough President Scott Stringer. Outdoor classes are held at a rotating roster of the five boroughs' urban farms, community gardens and botanical gardens.

Karen Washington, an instructor for Farm School and a co-founder of La Finca del Sur, an urban farm in the South Bronx, said that the 10 certificate students who graduated at the end of last year are mostly going into a variety of farming-related businesses, including canning and animal husbandry. Others are gravitating to jobs in social-justice activism and organization.

Three recent certificate graduates were offered temporary jobs building a garden on a barge that houses the offices of World Yacht, a private charter company located at Pier 81 in Manhattan. Last year, the school reported to the USDA that two students had taken on farming-related employment, and three had started farming in rural areas.

Farm School NYC has been "extremely successful, with little bumps along the way," Ms. Washington said, citing several students who dropped out because they lacked babysitters for sick children. She wants the school to provide afford-

able child care for students and to offer classes in Spanish.

The biggest challenge, though, is to have graduates find jobs and generate sustainable incomes in their new field.

#### Opportune time

"There are careers in urban farming, but there are not many, and they are not well paid," said Kubi Ackerman, project manager at the Urban Design Lab. "There is a high demand for agricultural workers, but they are among the most poorly paid and some of the worst jobs in the country."

Mr. Ackerman said that there is a need for Farm School NYC graduates to do food-justice work, food-access research, nonprofit policy work in the municipal sector and urban rooftop farming.

Susan Chin, executive director of the Design Trust for Public Space in New York, said Farm School NYC has arrived at an opportune time for the urban-farming movement. Ms. Chin sees opportunities for Farm School graduates to create new food hubs—networks that "manage the aggregation, storage, processing, distributing or marketing of locally and regionally produced food," according to the USDA—and find jobs in composting, a growing industry.

"They're coming at a good moment because there's so much interest in urban agriculture," said Ms. Chin. "It can be a catalyst for revitalizing cities. There's a need for food hubs, a need for people in the compost industry. Getting folks plugged into these areas can be a bridge for so many grads." ■

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