

PLOW TO PLATE FILM SERIES

November 7, 2023

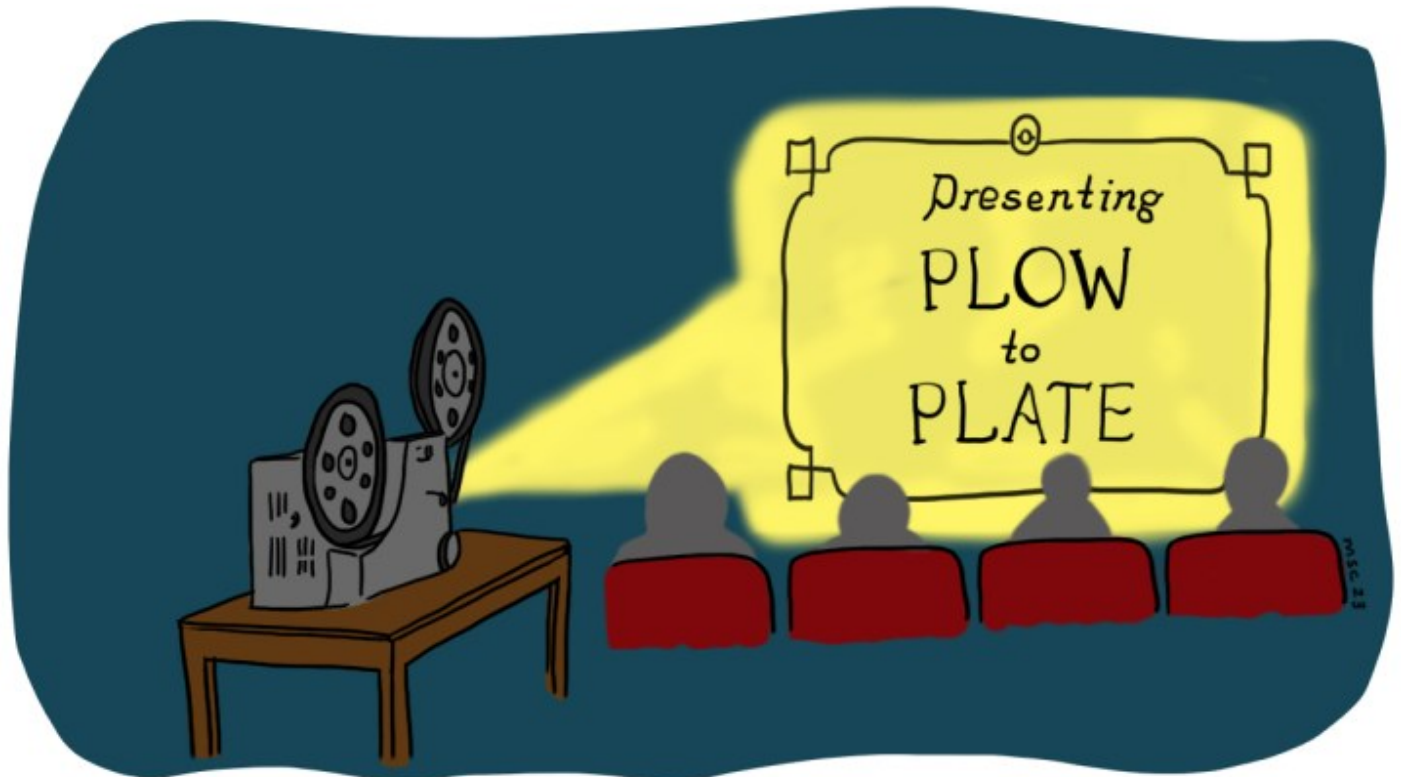


Illustration by Maggie Carson

Urban Farmers

By Adam Rabiner

It is relatively easy for those of us who live in the hustle and bustle of New York City to forget that only a little over a hundred years ago much of it was farmland. In 1900, a *Brooklyn Daily Eagle* article, "Haying in Brooklyn Borough," describes a reporter who "began to leave civilization and saw farms fighting with brownstone lots to maintain their struggling dominance." But scattered vestiges of that original period remain. For example, the 47-acre landmark Queens County Farm Museum—dating from 1697 and featured prominently in the 2017 documentary, *Urban Farmers*—is one of the longest continually farmed places in New York State. Composed almost entirely of young women farmers, the historic site educates the local community about regenerative agriculture through its fields and gardens, livestock, farm stand, composting program, apiary, monarch waystation and teaching gardens.

Another historical farm, built in 1810, is the 11-acre New York City landmarked Decker Farm located in Historic Richmond Town on Staten Island. Unlike its Queens counterpart, whose director spoke freely with the filmmakers about their mission and thoughts on urban agriculture, Decker refuses to allow filming or grant interviews. We do learn that Staten Island has the most open land of all five boroughs, but fewer Community Supported Agriculture (CSA) locations than its rival boroughs. Ironically, Decker Farm has allocated a single acre of land to an individual who uses it to supply a CSA located in Brooklyn.

Yet most of New York City's urban farms are much more modest. Many are former vacant lots, dating back to the 1960s and 70s, that were claimed by their local communities and turned into community gardens. One example is East New York Farms! which has been working with youth, gardeners, farmers and entrepreneurs since 1998. *Urban Farmers* shows some of these young school kids, and their instructors, tending their plants, composting, discussing the importance of discovering where their food comes from, learning about food justice and food deserts and creating a viable market for their fruits and vegetables. The program does not necessarily aim to create urban farmers, but rather to teach leadership skills to youth that can be carried down any future path its interns and volunteers embark on.

Urban Farmers is not an in-depth study of these three locations and what they have to offer. Rather, it uses the three different farms as a starting point for various discussions about the current food system. If you are not a member of a CSA, the spirited conversation about its benefits to both consumers and producers might just inspire you to join one. If you complement your Park Slope Food Coop shopping with occasional jaunts to a local farmers' market but are a bit shy interacting while you purchase okra, this film could prod you into asking a question or two. The farmers seem to love talking to curious customers.

Urban farming, even in a dense metropolis like New York City, is here to stay. Community gardens still have few legal protections but there are coalitions and even bills to preserve them in perpetuity, like the historic farms featured in the film. And as land

becomes scarcer, rooftop farms, like Brooklyn Grange, not featured in the film, may represent the future. What *Urban Farmers* demonstrates is that in 2023, just as in 1900, no matter where you go in this vast megacity, you can land upon a place where you can smell the roses—and perhaps even some manure.

“Urban Farmers,” November 14, 2023 @ 7:00 p.m.

Screening link: <http://www.plowtoplatefilms.com/events/>

To be added to our mailing list for future screening announcements, please email a request to plowtoplate@mail.com.

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