

THE SECRETS BEHIND THE COOP'S BIGGEST PRODUCE PARTNER

March 24, 2026



LANCASTER FARM FRESH CO-OP.

March 24, 2026

By Dan Bergsagel

Supplier Spotlight aims to showcase where the Coop's food comes from: like-minded organizations that value workers' rights and sustainable, ethical practices, and produce healthy, delicious and fairly priced products.

Many members start their shop in the Coop's overflowing produce aisle—jammed with laden U-boats and members inspecting fruit and vegetables. In the local growing season an incredible third of what you see on the shelves comes from one very trusted supplier: Lancaster Farm Fresh Co-op (LFF Co-op).

WHY SO MUCH FROM LANCASTER FARM FRESH?



A member chooses carrots from Lancaster Farm Fresh

A third of produce at any one time is obviously a significant proportion to be sourced from one supplier. “They are very important,” said John Horsman, a produce buyer at the Coop. “They are very consistent, and the quality is just amazing.” Even outside of the local growing season, Lancaster provides 5-10% of the Coop’s fresh produce, mainly carrots and other root vegetables.

“The number one requirement for the Coop is quality. After quality, we will look at pricing. LFF has very good prices and has extremely good quality,” Horsman explained.

This crucial mix of quality and price reflects in part the values of the communities that comprise the majority of farmers in the LFF Co-op—Amish and Mennonite. Their traditional agricultural and labor practices eschew modern technology, farm equip-

ment and chemical treatment, and instead adopt organic principles that ensure quality products and healthy soil. This traditional practice goes beyond complying with the minimum requirements of the USDA Certified Organic system.

The produce from Lancaster is comparatively local—less than 200 miles from the Coop, although not quite as local as Gotham Greens—which means it is very fresh.

“Their shelf life is just amazing,” said Horsman.

The geographical advantage can best be understood when you consider the shipping challenges for a large-scale farm in the growing regions of California.

A head of lettuce in California will be harvested and the cases will be packed in the field. They will then be stacked on pallets and collected every two hours to be placed in chilled storage.

“It maybe gets out in two days, is driven across the country in four days, and by the time it’s on the shelf it’s maybe five to seven days old,” Horsman said.

Because LFF Co-op is so close, you can hold a head of lettuce in Brooklyn on a Monday and be confident that it was picked on Saturday, or “worst-case Friday,” Horsman said.

“We go through thousands of cases a week of produce, and we look through them all and return stuff if it is not top quality,” he said. “It is a very rare day that we return anything to LFF. I can’t say that about anybody else.”

Often this high-quality traditional farming practice is associated with small farms, and this comes at a financial cost as they compete with larger organizations. “The smaller the farm, the higher the price,” noted Horsman.

However, the growers of LFF Co-op have overcome many of these financial barriers

by realizing the benefits of operating as a cooperative.

AN UNLIKELY START



LFF growing fields

LFF Co-op's alignment with the Coop's tagline "Good Food at Low Prices" reflects the unlikely alliance between Amish and Mennonite farmers and a self-confessed "punk rock skateboarder," Casey Spacht, a founder and the executive director of Lancaster Farm Fresh Co-op.

Spacht has a do-it-yourself ethos and a background in eco-activism, natural food coops and nonprofits. Spacht spoke with the *Gazette* soon after returning from his annual ice fishing trip, on which he caught 15 fish. "I'm a big proponent of clean, healthy foods," he said. "I don't eat any meat except for the fish I catch myself from the clean pristine lakes I find in the north woods of Maine. That stocks my freezer and I'm good for the year."

The farmers and Spacht came together to fill a shared need in their communities: “The farmers were not being taken care of,” said Spacht.

There were several neighboring certified organic farmers growing high-quality vegetables and competing in the same markets.

“They would be delivering to the same restaurant in Philadelphia, and they would see their neighbor’s car there.”

There was a clear opportunity to coordinate to share in costs and avoid duplication. So Spacht said, “Let’s reduce the work for ourselves so we can stay on the farm more and do what we do best: stay with our families, take care of the land and soil and farm these valued products for our community.”

GROWING A FARMING COOPERATIVE



Golden beets from LFF

Spacht and six other farmers first met in 2005 by kerosene lamp-light, sitting on straw bales in the basement of one of their barns, and outlined their visions for a farming cooperative. While the shared need was already there, the shared trust had to be built. “The Amish and Mennonite cultures really keep to themselves, and like anyone would, I had to prove myself to them,” said Spacht.

Since then, LFF Co-op has seen significant growth. Today, it encompasses around 120 farmers spread over more than 1,000 acres—approaching double the area of Prospect Park.

COOPERATING ORGANICALLY, MORE THAN JUST SALAD



LFF lettuce in the produce aisle

In the early days, Spacht took on multiple roles at LFF Co-op, but now the Co-op services are provided by five staff teams: quality, sales, warehousing, transportation and finance.

Spacht oversees the staff teams and in turn reports to a seven-member Board of Directors made up of member-farmers, who are themselves elected by the LFF Co-op members. “We’re not experts in anything; we’re just ordinary farmers filling a niche for our community,” said Spacht.

The cooperative is a community. It has big meetings for all the farmers and gives out awards for things like best quality and best food safety.

“We’re always helping educate our farmers, but it’s not a one-way street. We’ll have a meeting about who will grow what each year, and sit down in a room all day and plan this out for each crop,” said Spacht. These meetings are opportunities for inter-generational discussion and learning, with the age of LFF Co-op farmers stretching from their late 60s to their early 20s.”

“We have a very diverse and cultured group of farmers,” explained Spacht. This farming group has moved beyond traditional Amish farm staples—potato, cabbage, carrots—to meet requests for vegetables and newer varieties that they may not have grown, like red leeks, fennel and Asian vegetables. And more is going on behind the scenes. The Coop may request ten cases of dinosaur kale from LFF Co-op, but this may well be fulfilled by three different farms.

LFF Co-op does more than just produce; some of the eggs, dairy, honey, medicinal herbs, flour and even grains (think the pivotal Harrison Ford scene in Peter Weir’s 1985 film “Witness”) on the Coop’s shelves come from their fields, barns and apiaries.

TRADITIONAL AND COOPERATIVE PRACTICE MEETS THE MOMENT



PHOTO BY ZACHARY SCHULMANN

“One of the founding principles for cooperatives is: coops supporting coops,” said Spacht, “and when that is invoked that is a powerful thing.”

Park Slope Food Coop has been with Lancaster since the very beginning, in 2006, sharing the first ever shipments it delivered to Brooklyn with other early adopters like the restaurateur Andrew Tarlow (of Diner and Roman’s).

“Without Andrew and the Coop, we wouldn’t have what we have,” Spacht said. The relationship goes both ways—during the recent blizzard, Lancaster offered to push forward deliveries to the Coop to ensure that stock disruption was minimal.

Spacht wanted to leave the *Gazette* with a note for our current times, when regulations that limit the harm of conventional agricultural practices are under threat.

Lancaster Farm Fresh Co-op is “not just organic, it is beyond organic,” he said. “We are at the highest echelon—not just a certificate—we really take the highest care of the soil.”

Dan Bergsagel is often mistaken for someone else.

SUPPLIER SPOTLIGHT: GOTHAM GREENS

March 24, 2026



December 30, 2025

By Dan Bergsagel

In July, the Gazette reported on the important role that one of our distributors, the worker-owned cooperative and Fair Trade advocates Equal Exchange, plays at the Coop.

This conversation with a like-minded distributor and our Coop buyers highlighted the stories of many Coop suppliers in our carefully curated supply chain. But it also underscored how most members don't know about these suppliers.

"I wish members knew more about what is going on behind the scenes at this lovely grocery store," said Britt Henriksson, one of the Coop's receiving coordinators.

This supplier spotlight aims to showcase where the Coop's food comes from: like--

minded organizations that value workers' rights and sustainable, ethical practices, and produce healthy, delicious and fairly-priced products.



Gotham Greens is among the most local of the Coop's suppliers. The company grows leafy greens at farms in Gowanus (1 mile), Greenpoint (6 miles) and Jamaica (13 miles).

(Fun fact: the honor of the most local supplier appears to go to a beekeeper on Union Street, a block away, whose honey is sold at the Coop.)

Unlike a traditional farm, Gotham Greens grows lettuce in hydroponic, climate-controlled greenhouses that nourish plants with nutrient-rich water regardless of the season.

Gotham Greens utilizes regenerated former industrial buildings like the Greenpoint Wood Exchange and the Edward Langer Printing Company factory.

Hydroponics has historically struggled to shed its sci-fi connotations or—as the *New York Times* highlighted in a piece in 2011, when Gotham Greens’ launched—its association with illicit marijuana farming or a lack of flavor.

But Jodi Genshaft, a vice president at Gotham Greens, said the company has become a sought-after supplier to grocery stores and restaurants across the five boroughs “including Whole Foods Market, FreshDirect, Amazon Fresh, Wegmans, ShopRite, Union Market, and of course, Park Slope Food Coop!”



FRESH AND LOCAL

The Coop strives to source food locally. This prioritizes fresh food and reduces carbon emissions associated with transporting the food.

At the Coop, “local” is defined as a one-day truck drive (approximately 500 miles).

Transporting fresh lettuce from Gotham Greens' first Greenpoint facility should take about 20 minutes (of course, depending on the traffic on the BQE).

"It's pretty impressive that they grow within just a few miles of the Coop. You don't get that pretty much anywhere," said John Horsman, one of the produce buyers at the Coop.

The Coop has been buying from Gotham Greens since 2013. While Gotham Greens is certainly the closest "farm" to the Coop, it remains relatively small.

"Gotham Greens are basically salads in a clam shell. So they don't factor against the cases upon cases of loose salad greens that we sell. I would say it is under five percent of the total leafy greens we sell," Horsman said.

Freshness is at the core of Gotham Greens' business model, whether selling to the Coop or anyone else. "We harvest in the morning and it's in the store in the afternoon," cofounder and CEO Viraj Puri told Fast Company back in 2011. "Literally, they get it the same day. And we can do that year-round."

This shorter supply-chain also helps reduce food waste. Reducing the time in transportation can lead to significantly longer shelf lives for their products. "Our packaged salads typically offer three weeks of shelf life while lettuce from California and Arizona typically has less than a week before it goes out of date," Genshaft said.

GROWING CLIMATES

During warmer months, Gotham Greens lettuce is primarily competing with local loose salads from traditional organic farms in the Northeast, but during the colder seasons it becomes harder to source leafy greens locally.

Genshaft explained that "more than 90 percent of domestically grown leafy greens come from California and Arizona," 2,600 miles away from the Coop.

Approximately one third of the packaged salad sold at the Coop in winter—including arugula, spinach and supergreens—come from Lancaster Farm Fresh in Pennsylvania or Myer’s Produce in Massachusetts, where greenhouses and polytunnels allow for lettuce to continue to be grown in winter.



This is true beyond leafy greens. “Most of the produce grown in the United States comes out of Yuma, Arizona and the Bakersfield area of California,” said Horsman. “It’s an ideal growing region, and it’s not easy to replicate the geography and climate. They have it down to a science out there with consistent near-perfect temperatures all year round.”

However, the remaining two-thirds of lettuce sold at the Coop—particularly the organic salad greens—is trucked in from these growing regions in the West. At the moment at the Coop, this includes some specific varieties, such as iceberg lettuce and romaine hearts. Gotham Greens provide crisp alternatives to iceberg lettuce grown much closer to home, such as their Greenhouse Crunch mix.

There are local farms, like Lady Moon, that geographically move by the growing season: “They grow out of Pennsylvania in the regular season, and then move down to Georgia and Florida in the winter months,” explained Horsman.

HOLISTICALLY SUSTAINABLE

The Coop strives to source food not just locally, but also sustainably in the wider context. Sustainability is often evaluated using the triple-bottom-line principles of people, planet and profit.

From the people perspective, Gotham Greens is a local organization bringing employment to the neighborhoods where we live. Their community partnerships with organizations like Green Bronx Machine promote childhood education into healthier diets through donated seedlings, and they donate fresh produce to the well-established charity City Harvest, which distributes free food to food pantries and soup kitchens.

By making productive economic use of the roofs of existing underused industrial buildings—and adding additional functional space—Gotham Greens helps preserve urban landscapes, retaining character in communities.

From the profit perspective, Gotham Greens is a smartly run enterprise. Its product is available in stores far beyond the Coop, and its Gowanus facility, built on the roof of the Whole Foods Market development in 2013, is a long-term partnership. Its expansion from short-life span products like leafy greens into more shelf-stable offshoots like pesto or spinach dip (delicious and also available at the Coop) diversifies its business while still aligning with its core product: fresh leafy greens.

Unlike the Coop, Gotham Greens does not operate based on a worker-owner cooperative nonprofit model. It was founded as a public benefit corporation (PBC), “a for-profit company legally committed to creating a positive impact on society and the environment, alongside shareholder profits, by balancing stakeholder interests (shareholders, community, environment) and reporting on its social mission.” Genshaft said.



PHOTO BY ZACHARY SCHULMAN

However, its recent collaboration with Sesame Workshop—which brought beloved characters like Elmo and Oscar the Grouch to its leafy green packets—was perhaps a triumph of both people and profit: bringing genuine enthusiasm to salad-shy young kids (this reporter’s toddler included) and the associated benefits of healthier diets. Genshaft reported that Gotham Greens “saw this partnership drive sales, brand awareness and education about ways to enjoy fresh fruits and vegetables at every age.”

A MORE COMPLICATED ENVIRONMENTAL STORY?

The “planet” perspective initially seems straightforward. Aside from the clear reduction in transportation emissions from such local produce, Genshaft and Gotham Greens’ promotional materials highlight what they say are the benefits of the company’s urban hydroponic approaches:

- They use “up to 90 percent less water than traditional open-field farms” due to the contained hydroponics method and the filtering and recycling of water.
- They use “up to 97 percent less land than traditional farming.”
- They use natural pest control in their greenhouse environments instead of chemical pesticides.
- The facilities are energy-efficient and some of their energy supply is from renewable solar and wind electricity generation.

By continuing to use existing buildings and extending their life, Gotham Greens avoids demolition and construction of replacement structures, reducing carbon emissions and extending the utility of the resources and carbon emissions that went into the initial construction.

Gotham Greens is active in reducing waste in the food supply industry, and its Ugly Greens product—often on sale at the Coop—is an example of action on this topic. These are bags of leaves that are not up to the aesthetic standards shoppers are accustomed to because of pests or excessive light. But aside from cosmetic defects, these greens are good for eating.

It’s worth noting that it is not clear whether the carbon emissions of climate-controlled hydroponic growing are lower than those of traditional farming.

Climate-controlled greenhouses are energy intensive—how sustainable they are depends on whether the energy source is renewable or fossil. Gotham Greens relies on energy it purchases from the grid. This could mean that the carbon emissions from growing its greens are higher than those grown in a naturally warm and sunny climate.

Still, that does not take away from the many innovations of urban farming reflected in Gotham Green’s operation, which allow us to enjoy salads plucked from over our own heads that very day.