WHO GIVES A CRAP? THESE GUYS, PROUDLY.

July 28, 2026



July 28, 2026

By Emmett Lindner

In July 2012, Simon Griffiths had been on the toilet for a while. Like, 50 hours a while. By the time he finished doing his business, he had earned $50,000.

Griffiths did not need to seek medical attention—the feat of immobility was part of a crowdsourcing effort to fund a venture he cofounded: Who Gives A Crap, a mission-driven toilet paper company. The Coop recently began selling this brand, which is more than just your average roll of squares: Who Gives A Crap, it turns out, actually gives a s—.

Its two toilet paper varieties are made from 100 percent recycled fibers or bamboo. The company donates half of its profits to sanitation initiatives around the world. According to the Who Gives A Crap website, to date, the company has raised more than $14 million for water, sanitation and hygiene partners who work to give access to clean water and toilets for people globally. The company verifies the donations through an external auditor.

> REPRESENTATIVES FOR WHO GIVES A CRAP DECLINED TO BE INTERVIEWED FOR THIS ARTICLE. PERHAPS THE ONLY THING THEY DO NOT GIVE A CRAP ABOUT IS LOCAL PUBLICITY.

“We take something that everybody needs and use the proceeds to help people in need,” Griffiths said in a 2012 YouTube video that introduced the company. He added, “And that feels really, really good.”

But it’s not only the mission that gives comfort—reviews of the product have been good, too. While some users have noted the bamboo version holds up better than the recycled, the brand has received positive feedback from professional testers.

“I happened to get an Instagram ad for Who Gives A Crap,” one review said of the toilet paper brand in Wirecutter. “I’ve had a subscription to Who Gives A Crap ever since. And I’m never going back.”

Representatives for Who Gives A Crap declined to be interviewed for this article. (Perhaps the only thing they do not give a crap about is local publicity.)

As the company’s founders tell it, the mission of Who Gives A Crap came before its push to bring consistent wipes to the masses.

Who Gives A Crap was founded in Melbourne, Australia, by Simon Griffiths, Danny Alexander and Jehan Ratnatunga. After the success of Mr. Griffith’s Indiegogo fundraising campaign (the test of toilet endurance), Who Gives A Crap delivered its first products for sale in March 2013.

“We never wanted to be toilet paper moguls when we were kids—it was the sanitation problem that brought us to this,” Griffiths said in a 2020 profile in *Financial Review.*

According to the Who Gives A Crap’s website: To meet the global demand for toilet paper, nearly 2 million trees a day would need to be cut down.

There are other products on the market that also use alternative sources but, based on conservative estimates by Who Gives a Crap studies, more than half the world’s population still uses traditional toilet paper.

Griffiths grew up in Perth, Australia, and backpacked through developed countries while he was studying engineering and commerce at the University of Melbourne.

AS SUPERMARKETS HAD TROUBLE KEEPING TOILET PAPER IN STOCK, WHO GIVES A CRAP BEGAN TO POP UP ON THREADS AROUND THE INTERNET FOR ITS ONLINE ACCESSIBILITY AND ALTRUISM.

“We spent a lot of time in Malaysia, and as a young kid all you want to do is play with other young kids. It didn’t matter if you did not speak the same language, you could still have fun,” he said in the *Financial Review* profile.

“I became really interested in social mobility and how being born on one side of the border versus the other would ultimately result in a very different course of life for those people,” he added. “Why is that, and then how can you shift it?”

He later found a statistic stating that 40 percent of the world’s population did not have access to a toilet, and he began to map out his mission.

Who Gives A Crap took off in earnest during the pandemic. During that time when sanitary products like toilet paper were flying off shelves, causing shortages and inspiring frenzied searches for more, Who Gives A Crap experienced a boon. As supermarkets had trouble keeping toilet paper in stock, Who Gives A Crap began to pop up on threads around the internet for its online accessibility and altruism.

“Our customers essentially sent us viral when people were sharing photos of empty supermarket shelves, and they were saying: ‘Why are you buying from the supermarket? You should be buying from Who Gives A Crap,” Griffiths shared in *Financial Review*.

The company began to sell in a day what it would usually sell in a month, and at its pandemic peak, it was selling 28 rolls of toilet paper a second.

At that time, Griffiths said, his company was “not able to deal with fluctuations in volume that big, so we had to turn the website off to make sure we’ve got enough stock for our subscribers and business customers.”

Who Gives A Crap sold out around the world, and the company’s waitlist quickly reached more than half a million people.

Once the logistics were settled, that meant more resources for its mission, too. By July 2020, Who Gives A Crap was able to donate nearly $6 million from its global sales—its largest donation at the time.

By 2020, the company had a staff of about 100 and began to ship its rolls to 36 countries, with warehouses in Australia, the United Kingdom, the United States and the Netherlands. The company received about $50 million in investments in 2021, according to *Financial Review*.

Who Gives A Crap has, by all accounts, used its popularity to bolster its charitable mission. A letter of donation confirmations signed by Pitcher Partners, an independent accounting and tax agency, said that the donations for the fiscal year 2025 were greater than 50 percent of the profits before donations during that same period.

Who Gives A Crap has moved beyond the toilet paper roll business.

In May of 2025, the company partnered with Erewhon, the food store that gained notoriety for its celebrity shoppers and jaw-dropping price tags. Example: Less than 13 ounces of olive oil for $43, a price point antithetical to that of the Coop. Even at Erewhon, a four-pack of Who Gives A Crap remains relatively well-priced, coming in at $9.99, according to the store's website.

The partnership resulted in limited-edition digestive smoothies, named C.R.A.P. (Coconut, Raspberry, Aloe Vera and Probiotics—Who Gives a Crap, if you couldn't tell, sticks to a theme.)

The company has diversified, now selling disposable tissues, "Dream Cloths" (hyper--absorbent Swedish dishcloths made from plant-based materials), scrub sponges (also fully from plant-based inputs) and trash bags (made from 100% recycled materials). It also sells fully recycled bags for when your dog gives a you-know-what on the streets of New York.

Emmett Lindner works on the breaking and trending news desk at The New York Times.

SUPPLIER SPOTLIGHT: STARRLIGHT BAKERY, LA BICYCLETTE BAKERY, AND CREATURE BREAD

July 28, 2026



May 5, 2026

By Liz Yap

The Coop’s food often comes from like-minded vendors and organizations that value workers’ rights, have sustainable, ethical practices and produce healthy, delicious and fairly priced products. In this issue, we’re highlighting three of the Coop’s newest bakery suppliers that embody this ethos.

STARRLIGHT BAKERY



Founder of Starrlight Bakery Emanuel Ruffler. Photograph by ©Hot Bread Kitchen.

Emanuel Ruffler, the founder of Starrlight Bakery, describes the act of making bread as “a little magic that happens every day.” He elaborated, “You start with flour, which looks almost like dust from Mars. You don’t know how that can ever become food. Once you mix it with the water, it still doesn’t look like anything you could ever eat.” He continued, “The fermentation starts, all the flavors come out, and you can shape it. That other element of heat comes in, and all of a sudden, you have this amazing food. It’s a crazy process. It’s magic.”

THE TWIN PRINCIPLES OF COMMUNITY AND SUSTAINABILITY HAVE BEEN BAKED INTO STARRLIGHT'S PHILOSOPHY FROM ITS INCEPTION.

Ruffler has always been fascinated by the idea of fermentation and culinary transformation—the art of turning raw ingredients into something else entirely. He's made jam, tried his hand at ice cream, even dabbled in making wine. Since 2021, when he started his microbakery, breadmaking has been at the center of that exploration.

What began as a hobby in his home kitchen became a fervent passion, and eventually a business, when Ruffler began selling homemade bread at his neighborhood farmers market in Bushwick's Maria Hernandez Park. For Ruffler, it was incredibly special to be part of the market they've always frequented as a family, to be further woven into the fabric of the neighborhood through something made with his own hands.

The twin principles of community and sustainability have been baked into Starrlight's philosophy from its inception. Like fermentation itself, the bakery's work is rooted in attunement—a constant process of calibrating with care and responding to what's needed. That same sensibility extends beyond the loaf, from partnering with food pantries across the city to running on 100 percent solar energy. Their bakery generates some of its own power through rooftop solar panels, and they're also part of a community solar project. They're right at home at the Coop, Ruffler says, because it is a community that values active participation and the natural development of their craft.



Baguette work by Clementine at Starrlight Bakery. Courtesy of Starrlight Bakery.

This April, Starrlight opened a pickup window on Bushwick's Starr Street, where the bakery is headquartered and after which it is named. If you find yourself in the neighborhood, they're open every day with a revolving menu of breads and cakes, with freshly made pizza on offer from Tuesday to Sunday. Meanwhile, at the Coop, you'll find their cinnamon raisin bread, sourdough batard, pfister loaf, sourdough focaccia and Earl Grey tea cake on our shelves. Take it as an invitation to participate in their exploration of culinary transformation—a little magic, from the Starrlight kitchen to yours.

LA BICYCLETTE BAKERY



The $2 baguette from La Bicyclette Bakery. Courtesy of La Bicyclette Bakery.

In 2019, Florent Andreytchenko opened his artisanal bakery in Williamsburg, driven by a singular vision: to bring the breads and pastries of his native France to this corner of Brooklyn. He named it La Bicyclette, after the two-wheeler he'd ride to the French bakery where he learned to bake as a young man. Made using French tech-

niques, French flours and French butter, La Bicyclette's croissants and loaves quickly earned a loyal following. Seven years later, they've expanded to three other locations and a network of wholesale partners, including the Coop.

A CUSTOMER FAVORITE IS THEIR PAVÉ LOAF, MADE WITH A BLEND OF WHITE AND WHOLE WHEAT FLOURS, AND FERMENTED FOR 96 HOURS,

At the core of La Bicyclette is the belief that good bread should be available to everybody. Their stores are well known for their $2 baguettes. "From the get-go, one of our principles was to have at least one bread item that essentially anybody could afford," shared General Manager Tone Voke. "We made the decision very early that the baguette would cost $2 and would stay at $2, no matter what."

Hand in hand with this belief is the idea that it should be made with the best possible ingredients—and what's best is often the simplest. La Bicyclette works directly with Moulin Bourgeois, an independent family-owned mill in France, for the flours they use. "A loaf of bread essentially only has to have four ingredients—flour, water, yeast, salt—and not 22," said Voke. "What that means in terms of your health and what you're eating, it's good that there's growing awareness of that you can have healthy bread and very unhealthy bread."

A customer favorite is their pavé loaf, made with a blend of white and whole wheat flours and fermented for 96 hours, which the Coop carries. Its long period of fermentation makes it a good alternative for people with digestive sensitivities. "The number of people who have spoken to me about being able to eat bread for the first time in years and not experiencing negative health repercussions from it is amazing. And it's such a simple equation to be able to achieve that."

Like the $2 baguette, the pavé captures something central to the bakery's ethos: good bread should be something more people can enjoy. They're making it happen,

one loaf and one croissant at a time.

CREATURE BREAD


NEW
CREATURE BREAD
We are a tiny, family bakery in Berkshire County, Massachusetts.
We use only organic, East Coast flours, and make each slow-fermented, sourdough loaf by hand from start to finish, without the use of automation of any kind.
Baked fresh every morning!
www.creaturebread.com

Creature Bread on Coop shelf. Photograph by Caroline Mardok.

Ask Travis Brecher how he became a baker, and he'll tell you it wasn't exactly planned. "I got started, honestly, completely by mistake," Brecher said. Fresh off a seven-year stint as a journalist in Egypt, working for Reuters, he came home with a desire to do something different and to work with his hands.

> WHAT HE VALUES MOST IS NOT JUST THE PRODUCT ITSELF, BUT THE CARE THEY CAN EMBED IN IT.

He moved to the Berkshires, where his parents lived, and thought about starting a business that they could also be part of. At that time, breadmaking was a personal pursuit—he was teaching himself the basics through books, YouTube and, as he put it, "basically making every mistake possible until I got it nailed down."

He made his first loaf a year before he started selling at a local farmers market. When restaurants started calling, he took it as a sign to go all in. He named the business Creature Bread, after the little creatures he used to draw as a kid, the darkly whimsical world of illustrator Edward Gorey that he admired and the idea of sourdough starter as something alive.

What sets Creature Bread apart is its refusal to automate any part of the baking process. No machines. No mixers. All labor done by hand. For Brecher, this pace is the point. "It's what I needed after working in a newsroom at breakneck speed. I needed to slow down a bit," he said. Bread offered a different rhythm, a different life. What he values most is not just the product itself, but the care they can embed in it: "All of these little pieces are absolute intangibles, but these invisible things come together in ways that I find people really appreciate."



From left: Travis Brecher from Creature Bread in the Berkshires; Creature Bread open bag on the shelf of the coop; Louise, founder Travis Brecher's mother and partner in creating Creature Bread in the Berkshires. Left and right: Courtesy of Creature Bread. Center: Photograph by Caroline Mardok.

Just as Brecher envisioned, Creature Bread is a family effort. His parents, Ron and Louise, have learned the ropes of breadmaking alongside him, helping out with day-to-day operations; his mother handles deliveries to the Coop. "It's been rewarding, and I'm happy to be close to them. It's nice for them as well to have something to focus on and keep them young."

When he was starting out, Brecher says, people told him it was impossible to hand-mix bread at this scale. He took that less as a warning and more as a challenge. "It's really physical, but it's 100 percent possible," he said. "And that's part of the fun." It's a reminder that all good things take time—and it's worth taking the time to make them.

Liz Yap is an editor turned strategist with a focus on naming and verbal branding. She has been a member of the Coop since 2021. lizyap.com

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THE SECRETS BEHIND THE COOP'S BIGGEST PRODUCE PARTNER

July 28, 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 intergenerational 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


LANCASTER
farm fresh co-op
grown & packed by
LIBERTY ACRES
ORANGE CARROTS
(loose)
Sustainably Minded.
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lancasterfarmfresh.com
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

July 28, 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.



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.