

June 6, 2023

Thank you for the opportunity to speak in support of Agenda Item #92, the adoption of the Farmland Preservation Task Force's final report. I am the executive director of Rooted, Madison's largest urban agriculture and food systems organization, and a member of the Dane County Food Council. For the past 7 months I have been privileged to serve as a member of the City of Madison Farmland Preservation Task Force and helped draft the final report.

For decades, housing (especially affordable housing) and urban agriculture have been pitted against one another as competing (and incompatible) uses for the same parcels of land. However, housing and farmland preserved for food production can co-exist quite harmoniously, as Madison's Troy Gardens and countless other agri-communities around the United States have demonstrated—and at even higher densities than what was achieved at Troy Gardens. Urban agriculture also contributes ecosystem services such as stormwater management, reduction in the urban heat island effect, habitat preservation, and fostering biodiversity. In addition to their food production capabilities, urban farms (like Troy Gardens and Farm on Madison's Northside) can be community gathering spaces that bring people together and provide social outlets for underrepresented groups.

For urban farmers—and prospective urban farmers, many of whom are growers of color—certainty about access to productive land, permanence of growing sites, and clarity about where growing conditions are safe, are especially important. For market growers, food production is part of their livelihoods, and contributes to better access to affordable, nutritious, and culturally specific fresh foods in Madison's food access improvement areas. Dollars spent locally recirculate many times over in a city's local economy and support those growers, food entrepreneurs, and local businesses.

The Task Force's extensive report contains 47 recommendations in the key areas of land use planning, staffing & task forces, land leasing & soil contamination, and zoning & land use. I urge you to vote in favor of adoption of this report. It will set the stage for city agencies and departments, the nonprofit sector, and other community groups to further pursue recommendations that create a more favorable and certain environment for food production in Madison.

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