

Trading Metro Cards For Tractors

My journey starting 32 years ago. I saw an empty lot across the street from my home and decided to grow a garden. Ironically it was 1988, the same time that the NYBG was just starting its Bronx Green Up program. That empty lot would eventually become the Garden of Happiness, its first community garden project. This relationship would last for years, helping fellow neighbors turn empty lots into community gardens.

There was also a downside to forming community gardens at that time, as pressure from developers was always looming. Even more so, when in 1988, then Mayor Rudy Giuliani tried to auction off 100 community gardens. All of a sudden community gardens were no longer focusing on growing food and flowers, but focusing on power and resistance. We took our fight to the steps of city hall and won an injunction that eventually save those gardens. I found my voice that day and became an activist for garden preservation and social justice.

People started to realize the importance of community gardens. They saw them as greening outdoor classrooms educating children about food, plants and animals. Inspiring the next generations of future growers, botanists and soil scientists. Providing a safe haven for seniors and a natural habitat for pollinators.

Community gardens are spaces for celebrations, socializing and of course the best Barbeques. We even have chickens and bees. Did you know at one time the Health Department had bees designated as ferocious animals? Everyone knows that without bees you don't have food. For me growing collard greens would be a way to honor my African American culture.

In 2004 we started a community garden-based farmer's market in response to food apartheid, addressing food insecurity and limited access to healthy food. On a national level, we took our cause to address the inequities in the food system.

Throughout my gardening career I always wanted something more and that was to grow big. Even my friends dreamt about owning a farm together some day. So, in the spring of 2012 we decided to enroll in Grow NYC's Farm Beginnings program. This was a chance to plan out a farm and to dream big.

Each of us took the course seriously and drew what our farm would look like and in 2014 started following our dream. Of course, there were bumps along the way and decisions that had to be made, the first one was the fact we needed land.

After traveling up and down the Hudson valley we were able to secure 3 acres of land in the town of Chester. A new agricultural center was welcoming a new generation of farmers. Next decision was to come up with a name for this 3-acre farm. We turned to our community for

help and came up with the name Rise and Root Farm. Quite appropriate for women rising up to meet challenges while firmly rooted in community.

Next, with any business or enterprise, you need money to finance it. Again, we put our dream out to the universe and started a crowd funding campaign, enabling us to raise \$50,000 thanks to family, friends and supporters. We now had land, a name and money, next was the most important factor, a business model and the decision-making process.

We decided to be a for-profit farm rather than a nonprofit farm. We knew farming was going to be hard, but we were challenged to find a way to make our business profitable.

In the end we started with 6 people and ended up with four, Jane, Michaela Lorrie and me. We decided on an LLC as our business model and to work cooperatively each having an equal share in the business. We use consensus in the decision-making process and value each one's opinion.

Sharing the space with other farms at the Chester Ag Center, we had to make sure that all shared the same values which were align with our values of racial and food justice, food sovereignty and diversity.

Finally, getting ready to plant in the soil; a soil that was dark and rich with organic matter, we recognized the gift that had been placed in our hands to be stewards and caretakers of this land. The Land of the Lenape people.

Today we take pride in growing food and building community. We are still connected to our urban roots, only an hour away. We give back to our community and encourage our community come to visit the farm.

In the end, we have indeed given up our Metro Cards for Tractors but in return we have become bad ass WWF. We are Women Who Farm, we came up with a dream and a plan, now we own a farm and farm together; what more could you ask for..