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Yonkers' Science Barge grows fresh produce for communities in need amid coronavirus crisis

Tiffany Cusaac-Smith, Rockland/Westchester Journal News Published 6:00 a.m. ET June 2, 2020 | Updated 7:22 a.m. ET June 2, 2020

YONKERS - The Science Barge, a floating greenhouse on the Hudson River, is growing fresh produce for food-insecure residents amid the coronavirus pandemic.

Before the virus took hold, the sustainable urban farm and agricultural center typically focused on growing small numbers of various types of produce for educational purposes.

But since May 15, the barge started growing a larger scale of organic varieties of greens, cucumbers and tomatoes that are increasingly difficult to source locally as the country deals with food shortages.



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Groundwork Hudson Valley, owner of the barge, hopes that by providing food to groups such as YWCA Yonkers it can help fill gaps in the strained American food chain.

“We’re seeing the whole food chain transport system break down as a result of the coronavirus, which means locally sourced produce is going to be increasingly important to serve our local residents,” said Brigitte Griswold, executive director of Groundwork Hudson Valley.

To help meet the demand, the barge uses hydroponic and other systems to grow the food faster than soil-based farming.

Griswold expects to produce up to an acre of food within a six to eight-week growing season. The organization wants to deliver the first major shipment to YWCA Yonkers by late June.

YWCA Yonkers Executive Director Charlie Knight said having the organic foods from the barge will be a tremendous help in the organization’s efforts to help people during the pandemic.

A good deal of the food given to YWCA Yonkers will go to efforts to shelter and feed the dozens of women who come to the facility for critical services every day.

If there is an abundance of produce, Knight said, she would start using the food for the rapidly used food pantry.

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“What I am seeing is the number of people that’s utilizing our pantry, or our food distribution has really gone up,” Knight said. “And, I attribute it to people being out of work, no income and not being able to purchase food at the local supermarkets.”

Even after more coronavirus restrictions are lifted, both YWCA and Groundwork Hudson Valley are hoping to continue producing food on the barge to address long-standing issues around procuring affordable and adequate food in Yonkers.

“We still got a lot of food-insecure people in our community,” Griswold said. “It’s going to take them a longer time to get back into the workplace, so they’re going to need support with fresh foods even after the virus subsides.”

Tiffany covers Yonkers. Click [here](https://www.lohud.com/staff/4388268002/tiffany-cusaac-smith/) (<https://www.lohud.com/staff/4388268002/tiffany-cusaac-smith/>) for her latest stories. Follow her on Twitter [@T_Cusaac](https://twitter.com/T_Cusaac) (https://twitter.com/T_Cusaac). [Sign up today for a digital subscription](http://offers.lohud.com/) (<http://offers.lohud.com/>).

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