

A Call to Revolution

Taking Houston to the Cutting Edge of the Local Food Movement

AT ITS MARCH 9, 2011 GALA, THE NON-PROFIT URBAN HARVEST HONORED LAURA SPANJIAN. MAYOR ANNISE PARKER RECRUITED HER FROM SAN FRANCISCO ONE YEAR AGO TO SERVE AS THE SUSTAINABILITY DIRECTOR FOR THE CITY OF HOUSTON. SPANJIAN MOBILIZED HOUSTONIANS AROUND NUMEROUS INITIATIVES. BELOW IS AN EXCERPT FROM THE ROUSING SPEECH SHE DELIVERED ON RECEIVING THE HONOR.

On first glance, what we did in the past year does not necessarily seem difficult to accomplish: build some vegetable gardens downtown, open a new mid-week farmers market, help out some food trucks ... What's hard about that?

What made our efforts hard is that most people thought we were crazy, that it wouldn't work, that the gardens wouldn't grow, that they would be graffitied, that plants would be stolen and vandalized, or even that people would start growing "pot" in our "pots."

They thought the farmers market could never work downtown because of the parking, the culture, and the tunnels. My favorite question about the site was, "City Hall? Where is that?"

And they thought Houston wasn't ready for a burgeoning food truck and food cart movement.

But of course, we have been successful building vegetable gardens, starting new farmers markets, and supporting food trucks. Most importantly, we created community and inspired people of diverse backgrounds to grow food in the city.

Urban Harvest does not give up. They have a vision. They not only want to build more vegetable gardens and open more farmers markets, they want to start a revolution ... a local food revolution, a livable city revolution, a community revolution. Their work is not just about vegetables or gardening or urban farms. It's about bringing people together, creating community, sparking economic development, working together, partnering to make Houston not just a green city or a city that is on the cutting edge of the local food movement, but a great city.

This is just the beginning. We don't just want vegetable gardens downtown, we want them everywhere. We don't just want a few farmers markets around town, we want big, vibrant, successful farmers markets in beautiful locations. We want to partner with Recipe for Success to put vegetable gardens in every school, community gardens on big lots accessible to many neighborhoods and chefs, and mobile trucks that sell fresh

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produce to areas of the city that need it. We want to partner with Neighborhood Centers to create kitchen incubators to encourage more microbusinesses to succeed. We want to work with the Food Trust and major supermarkets to minimize the food deserts in Houston. We want to work with the Health Department on policies to decrease childhood obesity. We want to work with the Mayor's Council on Health and the Environment to create a sustainable food policy for Houston. We want to partner with food trucks and carts to support their success. We want to work with chefs and restaurants to encourage them to buy and sell local food. And, of course, we want to partner with all of you to promote, buy, grow, and eat local and organic food.

We need you to be ambassadors, opinion leaders, community leaders, and spread the word. Make a commitment tonight to bring one downtown employee to the City Hall farmers market next week. Bring one new family member to one of the markets over the weekend at Eastside, Discovery Green, or Highland Village. Talk to public officials about how important local food is. Support your local microbusinesses, food trucks, and carts. Talk to your children about healthy eating. Write letters, show up, be seen, talk to people. That is how our city will become great. You can all make a difference with some action and activism.

LAURA SPANJIAN



Food truck H-Town Streets with artist Lane Hagood.