



January 4, 2024

Thank you members of the House and Senate Agriculture and Rural Affairs Committees for inviting me to provide testimony this morning. Thank you to Secretary Redding for inviting me today as well. Thank you to the Department of Agriculture for the support of the Farm Bill and the guidance gardeners and farmers have received throughout the years. My name is Denele Hughson, I am the Executive Director of Grow Pittsburgh. Grow Pittsburgh is an urban agriculture non-profit and our mission is to teach people how to grow food and to promote the benefits that gardens bring to our neighborhoods. My organization provides technical, educational, and infrastructure support to over 100 community gardens, over 60 School Gardens and we run and operate four urban farms in Allegheny County. Grow Pittsburgh's current strategic plan focuses on cultivating the future of urban agriculture in the Greater Pittsburgh region by building sector-wide capacity. We work to increase financial sustainability, increase organizational Effectiveness and build autonomy in our communities by elevating our programs and quality of work in the urban agricultural sector. Grow Pittsburgh has committed to focus on ensuring that existing and future food growing projects continue to thrive as a central regional asset for generations to come.

Grow Pittsburgh and the Greater Pittsburgh region have benefited from investment in our area through the Pennsylvania Farm Bill. With support from the PA Farm Bill, Grow Pittsburgh is able to distribute resources, create an urban agricultural hub, and to provide sector-wide capacity building. Grow Pittsburgh first applied for the Urban Infrastructure Collaboration Grant in 2019. With the generous support of \$50,000, we were able to purchase and construct two new community greenhouses at our newest site, Garden Dreams Urban Farm and Nursery in Wilkesburg Pennsylvania. The greenhouses are a part of a larger redevelopment of this Urban agricultural space; are home to our youth workforce development programming, workshare program, and a retail seedling sale business, and a robust educational Workshop series that supports a strong network of gardeners and urban farmers throughout



our community. Our programming increases the quality of life for residents in the Greater Pittsburgh area. The new greenhouses allowed Grow Pittsburgh to centralize our seedling sale operations leading to an increase in our earned revenue. We are also able to employ local community members and train them in greenhouse management. In 2023 we were able to grow and distribute 37,200 seedlings from our Greenhouse while working with 31 Youth in our paid workforce development programming and providing 20 new farmers with paid hands-on training.

Grow Pittsburgh is committed to supporting grassroots and community driven food growing projects.. In 2021 and 2022 Grow Pittsburgh received additional PDA Urban Agriculture Infrastructure Collaboration Grants to support the purchasing and distribution of materials such as soil, soil amendments, seeds, plants, tools and necessary equipment for food growing at 50 community gardens and farms and more than 400 home gardens across Allegheny County. These collaborative efforts helped address the real need of local food by establishing new community gardens and supporting existing partners to move towards long-term sustainability. It is difficult for small grassroots organizations and projects to fundraise to meet all of their needs and Grow Pittsburgh provides the capacity to access funding such as this. One of the difficulties we faced in 2023 was that Grow Pittsburgh had reached the \$100,000 funding limit allowable to organizations within a 5-year period so were ineligible to apply again, even on behalf of other smaller agricultural groups. That meant the many grassroots organizations and food growing projects were not able to access Department of Agriculture funding in 2023.

Grow Pittsburgh is also the recipient of a Farm Vitality Grant, which we are using to adjust and evaluate our original business plan for our Garden Dreams site based on challenges we face during construction and staff reflections after our first couple growing seasons in a new greenhouse. We have contracted with The Center for Regional Agriculture, Food, and Transformation at Chatham University



to help us determine the potential of the site for educational programming, community engagement, developing additional earned revenue streams, and creating a multi-year actionable business plan to reach our full potential. Grow Pittsburgh would not have been able to start this project without the support of the Vitality Grant. It is our greatest hope that this will allow us to fulfill our mission while allowing us to better serve our staff, supporters, partners, and community members at our Garden Dreams Urban Agriculture Hub while improving the long-term sustainability and financial health of Grow Pittsburgh and Garden Dreams Urban Farm and Nursery.

Again thank you so much for supporting the PA Farm Bill and supporting urban agriculture in the state of Pennsylvania. Thank you for your time and thank you for inviting me and learning more about Grow Pittsburgh and our work to support urban agriculture in the Greater Pittsburgh region.

Sincerely,

Denele Hughson  
Executive Director