

PUBLIC HEARING

On the

VICTORY GARDEN TASK FORCE

Verbatim Transcript

A Public Hearing of the Victory Garden Task Force was held at the Maxine S. Postal Legislative Auditorium, County Center, 300 Center Drive, Riverhead, New York, on March 3, 2010, at 3:00 p.m.

MEMBERS PRESENT:

Legislator Vivian Vilorio-Fisher - Chairperson
Tom Lyon
Caroline Kiang
Pamela Greene
Richard Meyer
Joe Gergela
Jane Corrarino
Susan Wilk

ALSO PRESENT:

Ginny Suhr, Aide to Legislator Vilorio-Fisher
Dale Moyer, Cornell Cooperative Extension
Herb Strobel
Jane Foster
Bryan Roesch
Michael W. Martin
Bryan Futerman

VERBATIM TRANSCRIPT TAKEN BY:

Lucia Braaten, Court Reporter

**[AFTER THE PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE, THE HEARING WAS CALLED TO ORDER
AT 3:05 P.M.]**

CHAIRPERSON VILORIA-FISHER:

Okay. This is the first Public Hearing of the Victory Garden Task Force. We've decided to have our first meeting in Riverhead, because we thought people who know about gardening and farming would be here, but I think they're exhausted from last night. So we have a couple of people in the audience, but they're not going to be speaking, so what -- we will wait for I think 15 minutes, and if nobody comes within 15 or 20 minutes, then we adjourn the Public Hearing. But what we could do is that the members of the Task Force can just speak among ourselves about what we've learned and where we're going and maybe just kind of have our own dialogue with one another. Okay? So we will wait a few minutes, and if the people who are in the audience would like to ask us any questions about what we're doing and what the Task Force is, we'd be happy to answer that. Okay?

MR. STROBEL:

Can we ask now?

CHAIRPERSON VILORIA-FISHER:

Can you come up to the table here? You're the public, this is your meeting. And can you please state your name?

MR. STROBEL:

Good afternoon. My name is Herb Strobel, S-T-R-O-B-E-L, and I am at Hallockville Museum Farm up in Sound Avenue here in Riverhead, as well as a farmer in Center Moriches.

And, first of all, I'd like to applaud the Legislature, as well as Legislature Viloria-Fisher, for pushing forward this initiative. I think it's long overdue. It has tremendous potential in terms of benefiting the residents of Suffolk County, both from a health standpoint, as well as from a cultural and even an economic standpoint, so I do appreciate the efforts of the Legislature in that regard.

I guess what I'd ask is, because I don't know a lot about the Joint Task Force, I guess I'd like to know what your exact charges are, and then, as well, what your goals are or what you see as your goals.

CHAIRPERSON VILORIA-FISHER:

Okay. I'm going to start us off, and anybody who is up here is -- you know, feel free to jump in, because we can give you a copy of the legislation, which spells it out, but I could tell you a little bit about the genesis of this.

I went to visit a classroom -- okay. I was going to ask you to hand it to Mr. Strobel, but we'll make a copy of it for you, Mr. Strobel. A child in a fourth grade class told me that if she could be a Legislator, she would make legislation wherein the County could help people afford food that's healthy. And as I looked around for what the County could do, one of the things that we thought of was raising food and helping people learn how to raise their own food. And Mr. Lyon and I were just talking about how we've moved farther and farther away from an agrarian culture and so many people are afraid to garden, don't know where to begin. And so we want to have outreach, education, networking of all of the different groups that are already doing something like this, and encouraging groups to begin their community gardens. So I don't -- I'm not reading from the legislation, but that was -- that's the Legislative intent. Would anyone like to come in and expand on that? Okay. So that's what we are trying to do.

MR. STROBEL:

If I may, I'll just put a little plug-in for Hallockville. We do have, as far as I'm concerned, the only -- at this point at least, the only community garden on the North Fork. We started about three years ago or so with two plots, a very modest number, obviously, expanded that out to 18 last year, and this year we have 30 plots. So there is obvious interest in the community, and so, again, we'd

certainly like to see that replicated across Suffolk County. I know there are a few community gardens scattered across the County here and there. They wax and wane, but, certainly, I think the sort of efforts that you folks are doing will bring more visibility to the issue and to the sorts of projects in a very positive way. So I do thank you again for these efforts.

CHAIRPERSON VILORIA-FISHER:

And how do you work the garden, the plots? Do people adopt plots, or do school children come? How does it work at Hallockville?

MR. STROBEL:

At Hallockville, as I said, we have 30 individual plots that community members rent --

*(*Timer Sounded*)*

CHAIRPERSON VILORIA-FISHER:

Sorry.

MR. STROBEL:

That's okay. That they essentially, if you will, lease those 400 square foot plots for a growing season, and they are then responsible for growing whatever they want to grow on those 400 square feet. But beyond the obvious benefit of growing your own food, what I find very positive about that particular project is the fact that people naturally want to engage with one another in sharing their frustrations, their successes and whatnot in growing the food. And it really is a very synergistic way of growing your own food and engaging others in that process. So that's the way we handle it.

We don't have any -- we've got some rules and regulations I -- rules and regulations that I'd be happy to share with you folks, and people generally abide by those. And so that's basically the way that we administer the garden plot program up at Hallockville.

CHAIRPERSON VILORIA-FISHER:

That's interesting, because that's the first question I was going to ask was about rules and regulations, because that's what we're seeing in the models that we've been looking at. But what you said before that we smiled at one another, because what we've also read is that an important piece of this is the community aspect, people sharing with one another and helping one another.

MR. STROBEL:

And something that I'd add to that would be it's very beneficial and very encouraging to see the intergenerational interactions that go on in the community garden. You've got, you know, kids in there running around, you know, with their grandparents, any -- you know, ranging literally from infants all the way up to 80-year-olds. So that is a very positive aspect I think, too, from a social perspective.

CHAIRPERSON VILORIA-FISHER:

Jane? Anybody can speak.

MS. CORRARINO:

Mr. Strobel, is the networking informal, you know, I just go down to tend my plot and I'm talking to my neighboring plot tender, or do you have any kind of garden club where people will find out, oh, in two weeks you should put in your sweet peas, or how does that work?

MR. STROBEL:

One and both. I mean, certainly, folks can come by any time they want and do the solitary gardening that some individuals are interested in doing. At other times, we do have scheduled -- they call them coketails. In other words, around 6:30 in the evening, about every three weeks or so, a number of the gardeners get together for, you know, light refreshments and a picnic, or whatnot, to kind of just shoot the breeze and just to interact with each other. And, basically, that's

one of the nice things about the way we have things set up. There's no strict rigid format, you can do whatever you want and feel comfortable doing. Most people actually do enjoy occasionally, a couple, every three weeks, getting together with other gardeners and talking about gardening, or talking about anything else. So, in that -- in that sense, there is that sort of networking going on.

MS. CORRARINO:

And do you have a volunteer leading the cocktails? That's very nice, by the way?

MR. STROBEL:

Yeah. I can't take credit for that. One of your board members, one of the Hallockville Board members, Jim Romansky, has taken this under his wing and basically shepherds that process along.

MS. CORRARINO:

And how do most people hear about it?

MR. STROBEL:

Word of mouth, and then we also do press releases in the early spring, actually just going out this week, and it's basically word of mouth.

CHAIRPERSON VILORIA-FISHER:

Tom.

MR. LYON:

Just a comment, Herb.

MS. CORRARINO:

You have to push the button.

CHAIRPERSON VILORIA-FISHER:

Keep your finger on it.

MR. LYON:

Oh. Yeah, just a comment, Herb. I think one of the things we're looking for -- I'm from an educational background and we're trying to get schools and stuff to do it. It seems that almost everybody we talk to about promoting gardening, there's some kind of constraint. It may be very small, or maybe we don't have shade, you know, we have too much shade, or we don't have insurance, whatever, but if you have any experience with particular obstacles that you overcame successfully and could advise people, I think -- I hope we're going to be able to, you know, make a list of those kinds of things. That's really what victory gardens did in World War II, they created garden boards and just gave out advice and help for people, and addressed issues that might -- you know, might be the one sticking point to prevent people from doing something.

MR. STROBEL:

Well, in response to that, Tom, I guess I'd say, first of all, that each potential site has its own possibilities and potential limitations, and so I don't think you could necessarily say that any one thing is at the top of the list for any particular site. That being said, I mean, the Task Force here is very fortunate to have a horticultural professional like Ms. Kiang on it, and, certainly, the -- there are other experts at Cornell Cooperative who could help and evaluate a potential site. And I think I -- I think I -- I think it's important to point out that not every site that a particular community member or community group who might be interested in might -- it might not turn out to be the most -- best site for that particular community for a variety of reasons.

The other thing that I think is important to point out, and I hate bringing it up, but there is -- there are certain legalities in terms of liability issues and whatnot. And so to the extent that whatever group initiates and promotes the community garden is thinking about, you know, hold harmless agreements and things like that, I think that's important to consider as well. Because as much as

you'd like to think that people are doing this with the best intentions in mind, you do have to worry about those sorts of things, especially, obviously, if you're considering using County-owned properties, as I think you are in some respects.

CHAIRPERSON VILORIA-FISHER:

Joe? You have to keep your finger on the button.

MR. GERGELA:

Hey, Herb. There we go. As far as, you know, what you do from Hallockville to, you know, get the garden started, do you guys actually do the field work and stuff, do you do it?

MR. STROBEL:

That's a good question. Initially, we did to -- because we were dealing with basically sod, and so we did the initial plowing and the initial field prep. But since the gardens have been established, what happens, and this goes back to the question that was raised before about how is this organized, the community garden organizer, if you will, Jim Romansky, he organizes a spring ground prep where folks bring their own rototillers in some cases, in some cases we get rototillers -- rototiller use donated for the morning and they prepare the ground that way. So, basically, once the plots are established, you know, the next year it pretty much takes care of itself in terms of no it heavy equipment is needed.

MR. GERGELA:

What about materials like fertilizer and things like that? You mentioned your rules and regs and all that. Are people prohibited from using chemicals? Is it strictly organic?

MR. STROBEL:

I wouldn't call it strictly organic, and we certainly don't use the big "O" word because it is not certified. However, in our rules and regs we do have a sentence or two in there talking about we prohibit the use of synthetic chemicals and fertilizers, and things like that. To be honest with you, that is not strictly enforced. But, that being said, it is more or less self-policing, because we have a small enough group of people who are looking out for each other and that hasn't been an issue. We provide -- as you know, we have some animals up at Hallockville, so we're able to provide some compost. We also get compost donations from some other organizations as well, as well as donation of materials such as fencing and things like that, that has really helped out the garden.

MR. GERGELA:

Thanks, Herb, I appreciate that. I'm just trying to find out a little bit more about, you know, what you guys put up front and get it started. We've been talking about it for a couple of years now as far as -- you know, I'm glad that Vivian did this because it really is time.

One of the things that we wanted to do, too, is to get these started in underserved communities. Sustainable Long Island is also working with me on forming farmers markets with community groups kind of hosting them, and then, hopefully, utilize high school or college kids to get the -- get some markets going, too.

MR. STROBEL:

I think that's a great point, Joe. And then I'd add to that as well, especially, and not only, but I think to a certain degree, highlighting it in the underserved communities is another piece of this puzzle, and at least in my mind would be providing those sorts of individuals and families with some training or some expertise in terms of how -- what to actually do with the vegetables they grow, because, unfortunately, as probably a lot of the folks around the horseshoe here already know, there's a certain lack of understanding of people of under a certain age, let's put it that way, in terms of how to actually utilize fresh vegetables and fruits. And so to the extent that some nutritional, some dietetic, some food preparation expertise can be lent to the folks who participate in some of these community gardens, I think that would enhance and benefit those folks as well as the effectiveness of the program moving forward.

MR. GERGELA:

Absolutely. And one more point on that, and something I -- Dale is here, but something I want to collaborate with him on is maybe trying to get some retired farmers in communities to maybe help out and teach some of the people about how to garden and, you know, most of the people don't even know how to plant a seed.

MR. STROBEL:

I think that would be a great idea.

CHAIRPERSON VILORIA-FISHER:

Thank you so much. It's really terrific that you're -- oh, I pressed the wrong -- mine stays on because I'm the Chair, so, if I press the button, I turn it off. Thank you for being here. You've given us a lot of information. You're going to hang around a little while, right?

MR. STROBEL:

A little while.

CHAIRPERSON VILORIA-FISHER:

Just in case we need to pick your brain a little bit more.

MR. STROBEL:

Okay.

CHAIRPERSON VILORIA-FISHER:

Thank you.

MR. STROBEL:

Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON VILORIA-FISHER:

I saw a few other people come in. Would you like to come up and speak? We need you to fill out a card. Come up and talk to us. We are here to learn.

MR. ROESCH:

Me, too.

CHAIRPERSON VILORIA-FISHER:

Good. Symbiosis is a wonderful thing.

MR. ROESCH:

Yeah. It's a great idea. I just heard about it recently. Yeah. I want to be involved with gardening things and encouraging people to garden and gardening myself. So I just wanted to find out what was going on here and find out how I could help in any way. I have quite a lot of experience in gardening. I've been doing it since I was a kid, you know, and I've worked on different farms and things. And I'm presently employed at a CSA, Community Supported Agriculture, in Brookhaven Hamlet. So, yeah, I wanted to do something around here. I'm glad to see this is happening, and I'm glad to do whatever I can to help.

CHAIRPERSON VILORIA-FISHER:

Can you state your name again? I'm sorry.

MR. ROESCH:

Oh, yeah.

CHAIRPERSON VILORIA-FISHER:

I might have missed it.

MR. ROESCH:

I didn't say what it was.

CHAIRPERSON VILORIA-FISHER:

Okay.

MR. ROESCH:

It's Bryan Roesch, R-O-E-S-C-H, if you're typing that down.

CHAIRPERSON VILORIA-FISHER:

Mr. Roesch, how do you see the relationship between CSAs and community gardens?

MR. ROESCH:

Well, the CSAs, the members can participate some, you know. They can -- at least in ours, they can work off part of their share, you know, only a certain amount. They can volunteer if they'd like, you know, but whereas at the community garden, I think the members do more of the work themselves, you know. We have a few farmers and workers that grow most of the food, do most of the work.

CHAIRPERSON VILORIA-FISHER:

Anybody else have a question for Mr. Roesch? Okay.

MR. GERGELA:

You're in -- I'm sorry.

CHAIRPERSON VILORIA-FISHER:

Oh, I'm sorry. Go ahead, Joe.

MR. GERGELA:

You're in the Brookhaven area, Brookhaven Hamlet?

MR. ROESCH:

Yes, yes, yeah, down on Beaver Dam Road. It's called the Hamlet Organic Gardens. It's been going for about --

CHAIRPERSON VILORIA-FISHER:

Oh, the HOG, yeah.

MR. ROESCH:

Yeah, the HOG, yeah, about 15 years now.

MR. GERGELA:

Is there additional land available in your area?

MR. ROESCH:

There is. We're adding five acres this year. We had it fenced, and it will be under cultivation this year. And there is other land available. The Post-Morrow Foundation has been letting us use some of their land. They preserve land so it can't be built and we're working in coordination with them. So there is land available, yeah.

MR. GERGELA:

Well, that would be a good spot for people not too far from the Bellport area. Maybe Tom Williams, who is retired from Cornell Extension, he's involved with Post-Morrow. Maybe that's something that we could talk to Tom about.

MR. ROESCH:

Tom is, yeah, also a member of the HOG. There is a community garden in North Bellport at Saint Joseph's Church, which is coming along pretty well. A lady by the name of Betty Gundlach is in charge of that pretty much, and, yeah, it's growing. There's a number of people and they have a nice area. It's not fenced in or anything, I don't know if that's ever going to be a problem, but it is growing and there's an opportunity there for people in that area.

CHAIRPERSON VILORIA-FISHER:

Ginny, is she still there? Is that the parish that we --

MS. SUHR:

No. We had spoken with -- actually, maybe. It may be Saint Joseph's in Patchogue?

CHAIRPERSON VILORIA-FISHER:

Yeah, Saint Joseph's in Patchogue?

MR. ROESCH:

Is it East Patchogue, maybe it would be?

CHAIRPERSON VILORIA-FISHER:

Right, yeah.

MR. ROESCH:

Okay. Yeah, okay, right.

CHAIRPERSON VILORIA-FISHER:

Is she still there? I thought she was leaving.

MS. SUHR:

No, it was the priest who was leaving.

CHAIRPERSON VILORIA-FISHER:

Oh, the priest was leaving. Okay.

MR. ROESCH:

Yes. Yeah, he did, yeah. Father -- I forget -- I never met him, but he was from Cornell, I believe, right? He had studied at Cornell, but, yeah.

MS. CORRARINO:

You know, that's an interesting idea to use a church as a community anchor for a garden, you know, because I was just thinking, as Mr. Strobel was speaking, as you were speaking, that you really need to have some organization in, or organizations in the community that are interested in doing something for the community, right? You know, he was talking about the board member who's taken this on. So, you know, churches and other community organizations, those are probably the ones that we need to reach to be able to have an anchor -- anchors across the County.

MS. SUHR:

We were concerned about --

CHAIRPERSON VILORIA-FISHER:

Take the mic, because Lucia's going to want to hear you.

MS. SUHR:

We were concerned about when you had a school garden, that during the summer you don't have the students there to do it. Basically, or theoretically, churches are year-round, so it would make --

you know, perhaps they could even take over the running of a school garden during this summer using the children from the church to work on it.

CHAIRPERSON VILORIA-FISHER:

All those kids at bible school, right?

MS. SUHR:

Get them down there.

MR. LYON:

Yeah, Bryan, I wanted to ask you about work with young people there. Do you have field trips coming in at all or any school groups, things like that; any internships with high school or college age kids?

MR. ROESCH:

There are -- we have two interns each year. We have been having them. We do have kindergartens come in sometimes, and Eileen Heatley brought her class from Quogue in a couple of times and they really enjoyed it. She made a little film about it. And other than that, I mean, we're open to it, you know. We -- if people wanted to do it, it could be arranged. But so far, just the one kindergarten -- well two different kindergarten classes have come. But it could be older people, you know, it could be older students, too. I mean, it could be arranged, you know, we're open to it.

MR. LYON:

Are most CSAs pretty open to that kind of stuff?

MR. ROESCH:

I think they would be. There are five or six around, you know. There's one in Jamesport and one in Riverhead here. I think they'd be amenable to having people learn more about farming and gardening.

MR. LYON:

I'm just wondering if there's any particular problems you might see that, you know, might prevent them, that -- I don't know, that the County could help out with, or anything like that, prevent trips or --

MR. ROESCH:

I don't know. Farmers are pretty busy in the summer, you know, but could give somebody to kind of guide them around, I guess, and take the time to do it, and usually happy to, you know, show the farm and what's going on there.

MR. LYON:

Yeah. Maybe some of your members who might be teachers or something, or retirees, could take on that role. That could be interesting. I'm hearing from a lot of schools that just -- from your area west that there's no farms around, there's no place to take the kids. They have a very limited window of three hours or three-and-a-half hours where they can go on the field trips, so they're not going to Yaphank to the County Farm as much, and they're not going out east where the farms are. So I'm just, you know, wondering if, you know, that's certainly -- my sister is in Patchogue-Medford School District and the only field trip they take now is -- in the elementary schools is to supermarkets. And that's not too far from you guys, so I hope we can work something out about that.

MR. ROESCH:

There is something in Bethpage. There's -- at the Restoration Village, they have, I think, an acre plot which they're doing. I'm not sure if it's a CSA, but they're doing it organically and has some -- I think they're definitely open to having people come in and see what's going on.

CHAIRPERSON VILORIA-FISHER:

I live right near Benner's Farm in Setauket and this weekend, although the weather wasn't that cooperative, it was very busy because it was the mapling, you know, so the sap was being cooked down and the maple syrup is out there. And people are fascinated by that, it's always very crowded. We don't have enough places for people to go, so that's a really good idea to get people out there.

MR. ROESCH:

I've heard of that place and I've never been there. I know it's great, they have a lot of activities, and music, and gatherings and things, and I'd definitely like to get up there some time. Sounds like a good --

CHAIRPERSON VILORIA-FISHER:

May Day is a lot of fun there.

MR. ROESCH:

Uh-huh, good. Thanks.

CHAIRPERSON VILORIA-FISHER:

And they're not even communists. A little joke.

MS. CORRARINO:

Vivian.

CHAIRPERSON VILORIA-FISHER:

Go ahead.

MS. CORRARINO:

I won't say what I was going to stay. Perhaps -- it just made me think about engaging students. Perhaps, rather than try and get students to go on field trips, because that may not be possible, involve Girl Scouts and Boy Scouts. They're always looking for activities, and badges to earn, and things for the kids to do. At the other end of the spectrum, I was thinking perhaps involving RSVP and OLLI at the University, the Older Learning -- Older Learners.

CHAIRPERSON VILORIA-FISHER:

And the senior citizen centers.

MS. CORRARINO:

Yes. Oh, that's a good idea. That's a good idea.

CHAIRPERSON VILORIA-FISHER:

They have a lot of people. Thank you so much for coming.

MR. ROESCH:

Okay.

CHAIRPERSON VILORIA-FISHER:

By the way, I've seen some of the interns man a booth over at Wolfstock at Stony Brook University to talk about the HOG and other CSAs. Some of the kids come back and talk about what it is to work at a farm. Did you want to add something?

MR. STROBEL:

Yeah. I'd just like to follow up real quick on --

CHAIRPERSON VILORIA-FISHER:

Just say your name again because of the record.

MR. STROBEL:

Sure, not a problem. Herb Strobel, Hallockville Museum Farm. I'd just like to follow up very quickly on a couple of points that Mr. Roesch raised, which I think are important. And I'm speaking from the perspective of someone at Hallockville who's seen school trip attendance decrease over the last number of years for a variety of reasons, you know. And this Task Force here is not -- certainly not going to perhaps have a direct influence on school budgets and transportation budgets and whatnot, as well as State learning curriculum, which apparently over the last few years has really motivated teachers to keep their students in the classroom, as opposed to getting out and experience the real world to a certain degree. But what I can offer is simply an example I think that really touched me when I first got to Hallockville a few years back.

We had a school visit from -- I believe it was the Tuckahoe School District in the North -- South Fork here, and what we had the kids do is we dug up a row of potatoes, and Joe can relate to this certainly directly from his past experiences. We dug up a row of potatoes and those kids -- these were first and second graders. They absolutely went crazy in terms of picking up potatoes. They didn't -- you know, half of them didn't know where potatoes came from, and they really enjoyed themselves. And it's wonderful for them to enjoy themselves, that's certainly an important aspect of the visit, but just as, if not more importantly, is the fact that that's -- I would argue that's an experience that they'll take away and remember for many, many, many years. And, as we all know, different children and different people have different learning styles, and that's one type of learning style that reaches out and touches especially the younger folks.

And so to the extent that this particular group can network, influence and prod school districts to engage places like Hallockville, places like HOG farm, places like Hobbs Farm in Centereach that Tom is so importantly involved with, I think that's very important. That's not to minimize some of the suggestions that you've just made in the last couple of minutes regarding senior groups and things like that, but in terms of affecting the school districts and influencing some of the decisions they make and how they administer their curriculum, I think that's very important to keep in mind. And this is -- again that's one place perhaps that this particular -- that this particular group here can have some input on. Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON VILORIA-FISHER:

Thanks. And, unfortunately, economics have a lot to do with field trips. Jane Foster.

MS. FOSTER:

I want to thank you for doing this. Fortunately, I get the Master Gardener newsletter that Caroline sends out, and I saw this and immediately said, "Oh, I've got to go to this." I have to thank her for -- I took the Master Gardener course in 2008, and ever since that time, I have been looking for vegetables, so -- and she said why? But I -- and, again, thank you for doing this.

Let me explain. Hallockville. After I finished, you had to do -- give some community service. I was still into vegetables, so I went to Hallockville, but it was more of a historical garden in the small section, different from what he's talking about, so I did that for a year. This whole past summer, from May through November, I went 45 miles away to Bay Shore, because that's the one place I could find, whereby I had the experience of a CSA at Saint Peter's, where I spent about 90 hours there working on the farm, learning how to do it, and just for the pure enjoyment, because unlike -- you bring out the idea that the kids are thrilled by picking potatoes. Well, I was using my pitchfork quite a lot and doing the potatoes. So, again, adults can have a great deal of fun, too. But, besides that -- so that was my main experience. But I've also had quite a bit of insight because I volunteer at two other places. I volunteer at Yaphank Farm, and there is the herbs and also some other -- one other garden. But what I find interesting is you have all the kids go by and have their tours, and everybody is saying, "Oh, what beautiful flowers." There's no conception of herbs. And I'm thinking, that's it, I say, "Oh, they're herbs," but it's sort of like, yes, the education about the herbs.

I also notice that -- I've done this for the last two years -- they had young people doing a very large farm garden there, but after the first little while, the whole thing went into disarray, and I felt, well,

there must be a better way related to this. And I know this year they did it someplace else, but I'm not too sure where on the farm, I never saw them.

The other thing is, the other place I volunteer at is Long Island Horticulture and Research Center. And, you know, Meg McGrath says to me, "Oh, I hear that in Shoreham they're going to have some empty space. What about some kind of a garden for the community?" I said, "Oh, that" -- "If you have any ideas or anything gets developed, let me know." But there's a lot of desire. Right now, how I'm managing it with these -- oh, with these things, but I just signed up for a CSA at Saint Peter's. So there's a lot of people who are interested.

I want to say you have been bringing up education. When I was at Saint Peter's, which has changed the -- the person who was in charge there has now left and they have a new group, but what's interesting is they have the students from the school at Saint Peter's come every week with a structured activity. And, you know, you can read the newsletter and you say right now, very soon they're going to be in the hoop house. Caroline can give you a great deal of information about all these others. At Yaphank they have a garden and the children's garden, and how do they get people? But they've told me, you know, they've had not as much success getting the Boy Scouts out and all these to do that.

The other thing is, you know, I read with great interest Hobbs Farm, and I went to there before I went to Saint Peter's to see if I could find it. Unfortunately, I couldn't, but that was my problem. I also lived in Connecticut and in other states and what I noticed is that in Connecticut, I remember in Uniondale they had a whole -- acres that were for -- that people could get shares by having -- by putting in their bids very early. It didn't -- you know, it wasn't charged. But, as my friends say who had those, there was problems with irrigation, there was problems with mulch. It was in a low field, so if they had flooding, you had problems there.

So I just wanted to commend you, because I don't think it's any -- every age is very interested in this. And I think this was -- this is and was a great farming community and it should be continued, and, yes, getting the people interested. And I see a great difference between CSAs and these victory gardens. To me, CSAs is you put in your money and you maybe give some -- now, this is an opinion, please, people might tear this down, but you give in your money and then you get your crops. But, again, what about the wastage from all the crops that are not used that I see around?

CHAIRPERSON VILORIA-FISHER:

Wow. Don't go away, we may have some questions, because you have a lot of experience.

MS. FOSTER:

No, I wouldn't say that. As I say, I started as a --

CHAIRPERSON VILORIA-FISHER:

A varied experience.

MS. FOSTER:

Varied and for the last two years.

CHAIRPERSON VILORIA-FISHER:

That's terrific.

MR. GERGELA:

Excuse me. Some of the farmers do a lot of gleaning.

MS. FOSTER:

Leaning?

MR. GERGELA:

Gleaning it's called. When they're done with their harvest, they allow groups to come in and clean up what's left in the field. Years ago, when I was a potato farmer, at the end of the year, we would have some people come in, poor people, and they'd go out and pick up what was left behind. So we do have, you know, quite a bit of generosity in the farm community, most people may not be aware of.

The other thing is that Long Island farmers last year donated 500,000 pounds of food to Long Island Cares, and we work very closely with them. So part of this -- you know, what we're talking about here is to get the victory gardens going, try to also get farmers markets where people don't have access to fresh fruit and vegetables, you know, down west. So it is a -- it is a goal of this group is to try and spread the word and try to help communities.

CHAIRPERSON VILORIA-FISHER:

Somebody else wanted to say something?

MR. LYON:

Well, wait. I might comment --

CHAIRPERSON VILORIA-FISHER:

Give her directions to Hobbs Farm.

MR. LYON:

I might comment on the wastage, because I'm one of the Co-Directors at Hobbs Farm, two miles south of Stony Brook University, right off Nicolls Road. I'll talk to you later. We'd love to have you over there. And we do --

MS. FOSTER:

I read your newsletter with interest, and I know two of the Master Gardeners in 2008 --

MR. LYON:

Oh, Elizabeth, sure, yeah.

MS. FOSTER:

-- who were so involved.

MR. LYON:

Yeah. And that's definitely an issue. I mean, we really want to see this -- you know, agrarians think cyclicly, and cycles mean everything doesn't -- nothing goes to waste. And a large part of the Task Force is also talking with Long Island Cares and Jean Kelly from Interfaith Nutrition Network, and, you know, their ideas on how do we facilitate moving of produce and stuff so it doesn't get wasted. That's another real issue that we want to continue to address.

Personally, my experience with working with young people is they're "McDonalized" already kind of, and they're not crazy about going out, most of them, in going out and growing food for the sake of growing food. But if you can motivate them to grow food for the hungry people on Long Island, because they know there are a lot of them, there's a difference. We've had a lot of kids that are ready to go and go out and help and work for that goal. They're not necessarily ready to go out and stop eating, you know, McMuffins, or whatever you call them, Big Macs, and start eating vegetables, but down the road that could happen as well. So it's also, you know, use of our resources, our children, and our volunteers as well. Thanks.

MS. FOSTER:

I think you have a lot of altruism around.

CHAIRPERSON VILORIA-FISHER:

Jane, I just have a question for you. You mentioned that when you were working at Saint Peter's in

Bay Shore, there were kids who came. Now, were they from the public school, were they a 4-H group? Who were the kids and how were they getting there?

MS. FOSTER:

The person in charge then welcomed anyone. She, you know, welcomed any groups, but it was mainly Saint Peter's. It's their land and I'm thinking -- and it's a matter of they had a systematic program whereby once a week the students in the -- during the school year --

CHAIRPERSON VILORIA-FISHER:

Oh, in the parochial school at Saint Peter's school itself?

MS. FOSTER:

In the -- yes.

CHAIRPERSON VILORIA-FISHER:

Oh, I see.

MS. FOSTER:

At the school itself, right.

CHAIRPERSON VILORIA-FISHER:

I see. Okay. I didn't realize they had their own school. Is there another question at all? Thank you. Thank you very much.

MS. FOSTER:

You're welcome.

CHAIRPERSON VILORIA-FISHER:

Bryan Futerman. And I'm not turning the timer on because we don't have that many people.

MR. FUTERMAN:

Good afternoon.

CHAIRPERSON VILORIA-FISHER:

Thanks for coming down. Make sure your mic is on. Please press the button. You have to keep your finger on it.

MR. FUTERMAN:

Thank you. My name is Brian Futerman. I just heard about this meeting today. Thank you very much for taking the time to focus on this issue.

I am a parent in the Springs School District of East Hampton, and I'd like to tell you about a project we have going in our school where we created a greenhouse space as a learning environment for the children. I'm also involved as a leader of the Slow Food East End organization, which is affiliated with Slow Food International and Slow Food USA, and we focus on good, clean and fair food system. And I'd like to applaud your group as a Task Force for trying to reinforce the community food system, which would be victory gardens particularly.

Our program is an after school program which is linked to the school through the science program. We just constructed the greenhouse this year and we're looking to create our outdoor gardening space for the children. I'm also involved with the Hayground School, which has a -- it's a private school in Bridgehampton which has a self-sustainable garden concept and they bring that into their school lunch program as well. They're completely, I should say, self-sufficient in that area. They don't have any food service program, per se, but they do it all in-house. The Springs School is also trying to create a food service program, currently does not have a cafeteria, and does not comply with a lot of the requirements of schools that do have food service programs. And we're trying to

create that type of a program within our school, and it's deeply needed, I feel, to have a lunch program in the school, but that's kind of a different topic, but related as well.

I feel getting children involved is very important, and I think you should continue in that direction, whereas the lessons learned within these gardens are taken as a hands-on type of learning, which is very suitable for a lot of the children.

I can continue on a lot of different topics, but I really, you know, just wanted to support you on that and offer the resources of Slow Food and what we're doing out in Springs, as well as other schools, which are trying to create these greenhouse and garden concepts within the schools. I also encourage the CSAs. We have Quail Hill Farm, which we have partnered with, which is in Amagansett, as part of the -- I think they are a CSA, and a lot of the farmers have been very receptive and willing to offer their expertise on our program.

I'm also a restaurateur, so I buy a lot from the local farms, and I really feel that's really important in terms of sustaining the East End of Long Island. The Peconic Land Trust has been saving this land and I think we need to teach people how to farm it, so I think these programs are really important in that way.

CHAIRPERSON VILORIA-FISHER:

I thought Springs was part of the East Hampton School District. How big a district is Springs?

MR. FUTERMAN:

Springs is approximately 600-plus students and it's a sending district. We pay a tuition to the East Hampton School District for our High School students. The Springs School is an independent union-free school district, and it is pre-K through eighth grade.

CHAIRPERSON VILORIA-FISHER:

I see.

MR. FUTERMAN:

It is a very diverse community, and the tax implications of this arrangement are onerous, I feel, for the Springs community. I live there and it's a very difficult situation, and apart from that, that's an issue. I feel the County should look into the situation as far as its school lunch programs in the Springs School and within the East End. We have quite a few groups that are forming to try and create these edible school yards --

CHAIRPERSON VILORIA-FISHER:

Yes.

MR. FUTERMAN:

-- is basically the concept, and that's what we're trying to do in Springs.

CHAIRPERSON VILORIA-FISHER:

Now, are you associated at all, or do you have any connection with the -- isn't there a community garden in East Hampton?

MS. KIANG:

EECO Farm.

MR. FUTERMAN:

There is EECO Farm in East Hampton, and quite a few of their members are members in Slow Food. And that is a community organic garden, which is -- I think plots are purchased or used by different individuals to grow their own gardens. And they do a lot of work within the community. They donate quite a bit of produce, they have their own farm stand, and they're very supportive of other gardening programs. They've offered quite a bit of advice to us as well.

CHAIRPERSON VILORIA-FISHER:

Okay. So you have an association with them as well as Quail Run?

MR. FUTERMAN:

Yes. Slow Food acts as kind of a liaison for a lot of these types of groups, and we want to act as a resource for creating an educational environment, and we are open to anybody who wants to join as members, and we basically promote the educational aspects. There's a lot of different -- advocacy access issues, as well as preserving historical food ways and promoting diversity.

CHAIRPERSON VILORIA-FISHER:

Any other questions?

MR. LYON:

Hi, Bryan. I'm sorry, just one.

CHAIRPERSON VILORIA-FISHER:

Everybody.

MR. LYON:

I guess there's just one, because I've been talking to Mary Morgan quite a bit, your partner there, and she said a number to me that maybe you know. I can't recall it, but she talked about the mailing list for East End Slow Food. Do you have any idea how big that is? I know it's quite large.

MR. FUTERMAN:

Our mailing list is over a thousand, for sure.

MR. LYON:

So there's obviously a lot of interest.

MR. FUTERMAN:

I'm actually a new leader for the group, but it's probably around twelve hundred, something that like that.

MR. LYON:

Okay. Thanks.

CHAIRPERSON VILORIA-FISHER:

So, Bryan, when we're having our next public meeting, if we let you know, will you shoot out an E-mail to that group?

MR. FUTERMAN:

I will. The E-mail came through the group to me today.

CHAIRPERSON VILORIA-FISHER:

Oh, it did.

MR. FUTERMAN:

So they were --

CHAIRPERSON VILORIA-FISHER:

So the group did have it.

MR. FUTERMAN:

But I got an E-mail about it, so that why I'm here.

CHAIRPERSON VILORIA-FISHER:

Okay. We just want to make sure everybody who has input and can help us know what's going on out there, you know, gets in touch with us.

MR. MEYER:

Bryan, you mentioned you were getting ready to look at going from the greenhouse to the actual garden. In looking at that, have you explored the issue of sustaining the garden when school is not in session?

MR. FUTERMAN:

Yeah. One of the internal funding -- we're trying to create a program that is sustainable, and financing is a huge component of that. We've been doing a lot of fundraisers throughout the year and whatnot, and to have a concept through the summer is we're looking at creating a small camp environment. We're partners with Project Most, which is an after-school program. And they're a 501(C)3, so we've been able to partner with them in terms of fundraising in creating this sustainable concept, and they've already had that linkage with the school because they're functioning there. So they kind of treated the Spring Seedlings as if we were an art -- an artist or a photographer, somebody else coming and giving these after-school classes, and we were able to set up at the school. So the idea would be to set up a camp for the children within the community. And perhaps 25 students, two-week sessions, just to go through the summer to immerse them in growing and maintaining the gardens, weeding, harvesting, and this way the gardens are going when the students arrive in September as well, as well as community members. We have a lot of volunteers within the community that are checking the greenhouse at night, making sure it's properly maintained during vacation times, things like that.

MR. MEYER:

Thank you.

MS. KIANG:

Hi, Brian.

MR. FUTERMAN:

How are you, Caroline? It's nice to see you.

MS. KIANG:

Good to see you. My question -- you answered my question. I have to hold it? Okay. It's about the Project Most, and I was very impressed. I went to a meeting a year ago, it was about a year ago. Bryan asked me to go to the meeting, and I realized that the Project Most is an after-school program, they are working with you, right? And there's a lot of parent support of the whole project. And I was very impressed at how much fund-raising they did. And I told -- I have you listed on this here. I just tried to put a list together of other gardens. I've been telling the Task Force that there's a lot going on already on Long Island. Of course, we want to move forward and get a lot more done. We want to see how we can work together and get more, you know, going on. So I tried to put a list together and I have you listed. It's on the back page, the Springs Seedling Project, and Project Most is the organization. Yeah, you have --

MR. FUTERMAN:

I have some information.

MR. KIANG:

Right, right.

MR. FUTERMAN:

Our latest --

MS. KIANG:

I just heard from one of your parents, the project's still going on. In fact, you just had your fund-raiser, fund-raising event last Sunday, right.

MR. FUTERMAN:

Yes, we had --

MS. KIANG:

The Soup Bowl.

MR. FUTERMAN:

Yes.

MS. KIANG:

The Empty Bowl.

MR. FUTERMAN:

We had a fund-raiser called "Empty Bowls" and that was on Sunday, and it was very well attended.

MS. KIANG:

Right. You and other chefs from restaurants, you bring soup there and people buy soup, and they raised quite a bit of money, right? Why I was so impressed is that parents support -- I mean, the community -- I mean, we're always talking about there's no money, the funding is a big problem, and I was very impressed how much money they can put together. You actually had what, two or three greenhouses built last year in schools, different schools?

MR. FUTERMAN:

We built our greenhouse. There's a greenhouse at the Sag Harbor School. There will be a greenhouse and there is a garden at the Bridgehampton School. They received a grant from KeySpan, several thousand dollars. Slow Food has given donations. They're a nonprofit organization as well, committed to these things, and they've given donations to the Hayground School to build their greenhouse and they've donated to the Spring Seedlings and the Bridgehampton School as well. And I think we're looking at Mattituck for another greenhouse as well.

The community support and putting these resources together is really a key to accomplishing these things and partnering with the right people. We're really fortunate to have that linkage with an existing group, which is an affordable after-school group within Springs and East Hampton. So I do have some more information about our program, and there are others out there.

MS. KIANG:

Yeah. There's another one I have on this list as well, it's called the Star Flower experiences. I don't know if anyone knew about it. The only connection I had with them, they need -- it's also after-school programs, and they are doing an after-school program in Wyandanch and bring one of the Master Gardeners to do worm composting with the kids. And I was so amazed that the kids, I mean, they are really -- it's -- I think it's second grade, maybe second grade or even younger. After 5 o'clock they're still full of energy, and they pay attention to the whole entire worm composting thing. They really touch the worms. Everybody takes one home, a bottle home to learn how to raise that. And, apparently, there's this -- I think it's a maybe everyday program as well. And I don't know if there's any other organization like this on Long Island, I'm sure we just don't know about it yet. The Task Force probably should explore more to find out who they are.

CHAIRPERSON VILORIA-FISHER:

Okay. Well, they always seem to reach out to you, Caroline.

MS. KIANG:

I know. Well, I still don't --

CHAIRPERSON VILORIA-FISHER:

You've trained so many of them.

MS. KIANG:

Yeah. And, see, actually, these two pages, mostly the contact. I got this. People ask me, you know, to get help from Extension or from Master Gardeners, and already I know I missed three or four just by sitting here today, so I'll keep revising this. I'm going to send Ginny -- I'll E-mail her the list. I'll revise it when I get home and then send it to you. Thanks, Bryan. It's good to see you. Good luck to your program.

MR. FUTERMAN:

Thank you, Caroline.

CHAIRPERSON VILORIA-FISHER:

Thank you very much, Mr. Futeran.

MR. FUTERMAN:

Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON VILORIA-FISHER:

And was there anybody else who had a question? Did I miss anyone? No. Thanks again.

MR. FUTERMAN:

Can I submit this for your information?

CHAIRPERSON VILORIA-FISHER:

Oh, yes. Thank you.

MR. FUTERMAN:

Thank you.

MS. CORRARINO:

Vivian?

CHAIRPERSON VILORIA-FISHER:

Yes.

MS. CORRARINO:

I just had a thought. It seems to me that there's a lot going on out there and there's no central coordinating clearinghouse --

CHAIRPERSON VILORIA-FISHER:

Right.

MS. CORRARINO:

-- body. And the thought that popped into my mind was to perhaps make an effort to work with the Middle Country Library to see that all this is catalogued in their community --

CHAIRPERSON VILORIA-FISHER:

Community resource database.

MS. CORRARINO:

Yeah.

CHAIRPERSON VILORIA-FISHER:

Yeah, that's a good idea.

MS. CORRARINO:

Yeah. Because, you know, Caroline's thinking about things as she's sits here, and instead of revising her database, to have something that's central for the whole County.

CHAIRPERSON VILORIA-FISHER:

I'm sure they'd welcome it, too, at Middle Country.

MS. CORRARINO:

Yeah, I bet they would.

CHAIRPERSON VILORIA-FISHER:

Michael Masen. I'm not certain if I'm reading your name correctly. Michael? Michael, I'm sorry.

MR. MARTIN:

Michael Martin.

CHAIRPERSON VILORIA-FISHER:

Martin. Oh, sorry.

MR. MARTIN:

M-A-R-T-I-N, yes, that's correct.

CHAIRPERSON VILORIA-FISHER:

If you could just press the button when -- Thank you.

MR. MARTIN:

And hold the button?

CHAIRPERSON VILORIA-FISHER:

Yes.

MR. MARTIN:

I'm listening to you --

CHAIRPERSON VILORIA-FISHER:

I'm sorry, she's trying to --

MR. MARTIN:

There we go.

CHAIRPERSON VILORIA-FISHER:

There you go.

MR. MARTIN:

I don't mean to be offensive, but you guys are way behind.

CHAIRPERSON VILORIA-FISHER:

I think we know that.

MR. MARTIN:

Okay.

CHAIRPERSON VILORIA-FISHER:

We know there's a lot going on.

MR. MARTIN:

Okay. Let me bring you up to speed real quick. There are three volumes that you should have on your desk every single day. The first one is called Eating for Beauty. It has nothing to do with external beauty, it has to do with the internal parts of your body. I do not know the author's name. The second book you should have on your desk is The Food Doctor by two M.D.'s out of England. And the third book you should have is by a man by the name of Donnie Yantz, and it's titled Herbs, Healing and Cancer. The man is not only an M.D., but he is also a priest. He has developed a system of health that includes adaptogens and alternatives. You should read that book, it's very important. These books should be in every library and every school and mandatory reading.

I am an accountant, I work for landscapers. If you own the property, if the County owns the property, or anybody else owns the property, under New York State law, you cannot put fertilizer with pesticides on the property. That is a New York State law, and I'm surprised that none of you knew that. It shouldn't be an issue that when you have community gardens that people would put pesticides on the property. Now, as a potato farmer, I don't know where you had your potato farm, but there is a thing called temic that was sold by Dow Chemical. It doesn't go away. It infected a lot of land in Bridgehampton.

One of the things you have to concentrate on is elimination of pesticides. You have to educate people that all of the fruits and vegetables coming out of Chile have DDT in them. It's a product that the United States Government has allowed Dow Chemical -- or actually DuPont. I'm sorry. DuPont is the owner of DDT. They are allowed to sell that to every South American country, and South American countries are supplying us with a lot of vegetables and fruits in the wintertime.

There is a relationship between gardening and work. Gardening is very frustrating. I don't have to tell you that I got one tomato on 15 plants this year. Bryan behind me, his entire population of tomato plants was infected by the blight. I was lucky, I didn't get blight, but I got no tomatoes. I would -- if you're going to talk to kids about doing farming, it's frustrating. You're not going to always win. Bryan picks off potato bug -- potato bug larva off potato plants, he picks them by hand. They do not use pesticides on potato bugs. These are the things you have to work on.

I studied Chemistry at Syracuse University College of Forestry for two years; I left. There were no jobs in Chemistry. I am also a History major. I got a 98 on the New York State Regents, so it's not like I don't know farming, from the historical perspective, I know it, but what we're doing today is poisoning our people. There are a lot of books, and a lot of people have been doing organic farming for a long time. There are places in Virginia and Pennsylvania. There's Rodale Press. And for me to listen to people here today who have an interest in this and taking care of their citizens, and that's what I think you're trying to do, and maybe increasing their nutrition to a higher level than it is now, doesn't include convenience foods. There's a struggle right now to resupply the vending machines in school districts. And I just want you to know that if you're going to do this, you have to make sure that people do not use pesticides on the property that you either manage, control. And you probably want to send directives to any community gardens that they are not to use anything other than organic fertilizers, and maybe compost from either Brookhaven Town, or Islip Town, or Smithtown, who's ever making compost. But when you attend Cornell, they tell you make your own compost, because that's why you -- you know what's in it, because you don't know what other people are putting in their compost.

I don't know how else to address your issues, other than the fact that it seems to me that you're really far behind.

CHAIRPERSON VILORIA-FISHER:

That was just the timer.

MR. MARTIN:

That's all right. How else can I help you?

CHAIRPERSON VILORIA-FISHER:

No, thank you. That was fine. Anybody have any questions? Thank you for coming down.

MR. MARTIN:

You're welcome.

CHAIRPERSON VILORIA-FISHER:

Is there anyone else who has come in after the green cards have been collected and would like to speak? Okay. Is there any other comment from the Task Force? Well, I thank everybody for coming down and sharing your information with us. And just as a point of information, it's a County law that pesticides can't be used on County property. Yes?

MS. GREENE:

You want to announce the other meetings?

CHAIRPERSON VILORIA-FISHER:

Sure. I'll leave that to Ginny to announce the other meetings, okay? Ginny, if you could just announce the dates of the other meetings. Thank you, Pam.

MS. SUHR:

That would be next Wednesday.

CHAIRPERSON VILORIA-FISHER:

Make sure your mic's on, Ginny.

MS. SUHR:

Brentwood Public Library, Wednesday, March 10th, 7 to 9 p.m. Brookhaven Town Hall, Wednesday, March 24th, from 10 a.m. to 12 p.m.

MS. CORRARINO:

A.m.?

MS. SUHR:

A.m., 10 a.m. to 12 p.m.

MS. CORRARINO:

I thought you were keeping us out until midnight.

MS. SUHR:

You know --

*(*Laughter*)*

CHAIRPERSON VILORIA-FISHER:

Okay?

MS. SUHR:

Yeah, I'm thinking there's one more, but no.

MR. LYON:

Farmingdale.

CHAIRPERSON VILORIA-FISHER:

Yes, Farmingdale College.

MS. SUHR:

That's right. That's right at the College, and why don't --

CHAIRPERSON VILORIA-FISHER:

Because that wasn't on your first list. We had to get their approval. They were the hardest one to get a hold of.

MS. SUHR:

I think it's the following Wednesday.

CHAIRPERSON VILORIA-FISHER:

I don't have anything.

MR. LYON:

It's in the afternoon.

MS. SUHR:

I believe that one is 3 to 5, also.

CHAIRPERSON VILORIA-FISHER:

We also have the E-mail on that one with the dates. Just disseminate the information. Thank you. And the minutes -- sorry, Lucia, I forgot I had turned this off. The minutes will eventually be on the web on the Suffolk County website. So anybody who wants to go back and look at what was -- what we talked about today, if you forgot some of the names, some of you who were trying to rapidly take notes throughout the meeting, you don't have to worry about that, because Lucia's doing that for us. Thank you very much.

Motion to adjourn the meeting, seconded by Tom Lyon. Meeting adjourned.

[THE HEARING WAS ADJOURNED AT 4:02 P.M.]