New York State’s hemp production plan was approved by the USDA. But there is no mention of industrial hemp production in the Draft Scoping Plan. As of January 1, 2022, the Department of Agriculture and Markets has been accepting applications to grow hemp. Hemp is a product that grows well in New York State. And it is a plant that has innumerable uses, including for food. It is a soil protector, putting nutrients back into the soil that other plants remove. It is much more sustainable and climate friendly than raising cows for milk production. New York is a big dairy state, but we should be helping dairy farmers transition away from so much dairy; they could be shifting toward growing more hemp, and encouraging growing the hemp industry, including as a dairy substitute. This should be emphasized in the Draft Scoping Plan.

Regarding environmental justice and agriculture, the cost of our food is going up. We attribute most of this to the war in Ukraine, “supply chain issues” and the cost of fuel and fertilizer. We often fail to include the changing climate and the depletion of our water supply as causes of the rising price of food so that cost is unlikely to stabilize, especially since we have done so little about adapting our agricultural system to climate change on the national level. And we are already seeing growing food insecurity in this country, which is mentioned in the Draft Scoping Plan.

In order to mitigate this and better adapt to the changing climate, we should be allocating funding and encouraging residents of NYS to grow more food ourselves. We in the Northeast of the US are not yet seeing as much of the devastation the changing climate and water shortages are reaping on other parts of the world. We should be buying locally-grown food, grown in New York State, yes, but we could also be growing some of it ourselves.

The state-wide response would take the form of encouraging the growth of community gardens, rooftop gardens, community orchards, and the conversion of lawns to food production, especially in cities and suburban areas around the state. This would require a new program through Cornell and/or the Department of Agriculture and Markets that assisted with education as well as start-up funding for land, fencing, water access, soil testing, and support.