

Interview Date: July 28, 2020

Narrator: Martha Ma from Bushwick Grows Community Farm

Interviewer: Deborah Dickerson

Tech Support: Manon Vergerio

Manon: Okay. Great. So I'm Manon, I have been a member of the Anti Eviction Mapping Project for quite some years - I think since 2014. And I'm really excited to be here with you both today, and Martha, to learn more about the work you've been doing in Bushwick around food justice and access during COVID-19. So thank you so much for being here today.

Martha: Oh, you're welcome.

Deborah: And my name is Deborah Dickerson. I am a new member of the Anti-Eviction Mapping Project in New York City. And I'm just happy to interview this young lady to tell, to listen to the wonderful work that she's doing in the Bushwick area of Brooklyn, New York.

Martha: Okay, and I...

Deborah: Go ahead, I'm sorry.

Martha: Oh, I was gonna go ahead and introduce myself.

Deborah: Go ahead, I'm sorry.

Martha: Okay, so my name is Martha and I work for Riseboro Community Partnership. They're a very large nonprofit that's been here in Bushwick for many years, since 1973. We do a lot of different projects that support the community, and I am the Farm Manager and Educator at Bushwick Grows Community Farm. And we're in our third year - we turned the unused lot of grass into a pretty thriving little urban farm.

Deborah: Can you tell me, what are some of the things that you grow on that farm?

Martha: Oh boy. Well, we grow a lot of stuff. So we are a predominantly a demonstration educational community farm. So one of the things that is very important to me is biodiversity, and showing people what biodiversity means, especially in regards to fruits and vegetables, because we see the same stuff in the supermarket. And so we grow here many varieties - I think we grow upwards of 200 different types of plants and fruits and vegetables and flowers, and we grow several different types of the same families. Like right now, we have five different types of cucumbers, we have six different types of tomatoes, we have four different types of eggplant and etcetera, many different types of peppers. So we grow a lot of different varieties of plants to get people interested in different varieties, and understanding also, and explaining why biodiversity is so important. And in a culinary way, why it's more delicious because you have all

these different subtle tastes within the different varieties. So we grow a lot, a lot of different types of the same family plants. And so we see the similarities and the differences.

Deborah: How long have you lived in the Bushwick area, and how and what is it like to live in the Bushwick area?

Martha: Well, I don't actually live in the Bushwick area. I live in Queens - I'm a native of Queens. And I have been working in the Bushwick community for the last three years. And we are a community farm, so we're very connected to the community here. We're also located between a youth center that's also run by Riseboro and a school called Aqua that has a middle school and high school. So we get a lot of youth here. We do a lot of education with the youth here, in the summer we run a SYP program normally, although this year it's been reduced, and we're doing a Learn and Earn program with much less students. And we also have a lot of neighborhood people come and use the garden very often, because we do volunteer work days on Saturdays, and we do workshops as well for the community on Saturdays. So, I don't live here, but I feel quite connected to the community here.

Deborah: When you first learned about COVID-19, what were your thoughts about it?

Martha: Oh, wow. So the first thoughts were like, of very big alarm, because I knew that it was something serious. I didn't think it was going to be quite as serious as it is. But knowing about, that it was, you know, another type of H1N1 illness, we know that those things are spread around really quickly. And to be honest, I didn't think that it would hit New York City or the United States, the way it did... And now, you know, we've been following it from the beginning and just watching its trajectory along the way, it's spread... And it's quite frightening. And it's also quite disappointing the way our current administration has been handling the pandemic. So it's a little bit worrisome.

Deborah: That's true. How have your thoughts changed since then?

Martha: Since the beginning? Oh wow. Well, I definitely am more aware of how serious and dangerous it is. We have not just - I have a lot of family and friends here in New York City - but I've also traveled quite a bit and have many very close friends that are like family around the world, particularly in Peru, which was really badly hit. So we have a lot of very close people that we care for very much that are extremely suffering, really, really badly from COVID. And we're lucky that our friends and family here have not been as impacted because everyone's trying to be very safe, but in many places, especially in poor places, you just can't stay away from people, and you don't have the government support to allow you to, you know, stay inside without starving or not work without starving, so it's it's been really.... It's been very difficult. It's been really difficult. And here, I think it's a little frustrating hearing, for example, just a few weeks ago when people were protesting against masks and things, and it really has brought out the ugly side of America, the gross, incredibly gross inequality. The real, just disdain for people, like average American people, that this government just works for the super, super rich and they're continuing to make billions of dollars off of this. So, it's really highlighted the racial differences

and inequalities in people, and you really see that we're a broken system that really needs a huge overhaul.

Deborah: Since you're mentioning about a broken system, and you said something about how it has affected people around you in the pandemic, I would like for you to talk about, to talk a little more about, how the pandemic was there in Bushwick, in the Bushwick section of Brooklyn.

Martha: Well, here in Bushwick. I, I have seen.... Well, we've shut down the farm, for example. The farm was closed to the public. And I'm used to working with a lot of people on the farm, because we have the community that helps us a lot. And so this year was very strange working by myself and luckily, I had a lot of neighborhood people stop by, but it was like talking to them through the gate. And most people I found of the people that I'm connected within the neighborhood was practicing social distancing, wearing masks and being very careful. A lot of families come with their kids and they talk about how they miss the farm, because they can't go to the park because they found the parks were packed, and a lot of people also wanting to come back to the farm, because they were stuck at home and bored out of their minds. Few people were so used to also getting their exercise from, you know, working on the farm, because it's a lot of physical work and also, and especially recently, being very frustrated with not being able to have their lives back. Fortunately, I have not known any people that are associated with the farm in the community that I connect with here who have been sick. I have a co-worker who has had COVID and he's 20 years younger than I am and very healthy and he said it was the worst illness he ever had. And he had this like two months ago and he still hasn't regained his sense of smell. So we're also seeing that it's affecting people in really different ways, and that even if you don't die from it, you can have existing consequences that last for a really long time.

Deborah: Since you mentioned the community, I would like to know what are the community strategies emerging in response to the crisis.

Martha: Well, I know, for example, we have an office, that is our main office that we share with the Wellness Division of Riseboro Community Partnership, and they turned it basically into a food pantry. So they used to have a food box, a subsidized food box program, where they had about 30 people who signed up regularly for a heavily subsidized box of fresh food, fresh farm food. And that, they then switch to giving these boxes away for free. And it started from 30 people to like now, they get an average of like 150 people. And they are now receiving donations from many, many different agencies and at the beginning actually, we were inundated with tons of food from a lot of businesses that shut down. And so they were giving away, like we got tons of cheese from Murray's, we got lots of frozen patties from a restaurant, and so it was a lot of food. So the food comes in waves. You know, it comes and goes, but it's been this big distribution and everybody has shifted kind of focusing on food distribution. And now the food distribution has shifted across the street to a senior center that is also run by Riseboro. And since then, because I was also working on my own and not having people here, because usually all our harvests are given straight to the community - the volunteer program is in exchange for free food - we give free food to anyone who passes by. We have a lot of neighborhood people who know that we have food and they come and ask for things. And

nobody really ever walks out of the farm empty handed. And so, I shifted to production mode and we really tried to get an early start and most of the early harvests all went to the food distribution to help supplement, whatever, you know, they were able to get a hold of and hand it out there. So that was a little bit of a different shift for the farm to to be more in production mode. And I have been keeping record. But we were.... I mean, we're also not so huge, but we were able to for sure to donate a few hundred pounds of food. And now that we're getting into the summer vegetables that are just coming in, we're going to - once it gets to a volume that we can actually make it worth delivering - will probably be delivering things like tomatoes, and beans, and cucumbers, and summer vegetables to the distribution site. As long as they keep running. I know they're kind of out of money right now. Yeah.

Deborah: What communication modes or methods are you or organizers and the community members, using at this particular time?

Martha: I think most people are online. I know, most of... I'm the only person in my Division, who was actually working outside, everybody else switched to working from home. So a lot of zooming, all the meetings turned to Zoom, and phone calls and Zoom meetings, there's been very - I mean as far as the office goes - not any face-to-face meetings, but since we've gone into Phase Four, I have, usually I host an SYP program, a summer youth employment program. And in the last two years, we've had eight students that come and work with us for six weeks over the summer. And the city had canceled that program, that there was so much backlash and complaints about that to cut all opportunities for us over the summer that they replaced SYP with a much, much, much smaller program, about 10% of the size, called Learn and Earn. And I was lucky enough actually to get three students this year instead of eight. So for the last two weeks I've had three students work with me on the farm and of course we're face-to-face, and we're social distancing and wearing masks and, you know, following all the safety protocols as best as we can. And I've also been able to start getting volunteers back, but usually we host ... We'll have anywhere from like five to twelve volunteers on a Saturday, and now we can only have three at a time. And we're not doing workshops anymore, which was a big part of our Saturdays. Because workshops are really hard to avoid, you know, being close together, because you're teaching and learning together. But at least for the volunteer days, and even the students, we can work separately and of course we're wearing masks. And I feel that it's totally worth it because it gives these young people an opportunity to learn and do something productive because they've been cooped up for months, and also earn money. Which is, you know, it's been a huge financial impact negatively for so many people.

Deborah: I'm glad you mentioned the youth because that's so important in this pandemic that the young people are having something positive to do, and that you have been kind of a vanguard in doing that. So I commend you quite on that. Two key ideas have emerged during the pandemic, which are self isolation and flattening the curve. How have you, your family, friends, and the community responded to the request to self-isolate and flatten the curve?

Martha: Well, I have to say, I'm quite proud of New York. I'm proud of my city, I'm proud of my fellow New Yorkers, that we did a really good job. Especially seeing what's happened in the rest

of the country. I mean, I didn't see my mother for months! Everybody in my family was very, very like hardcore with the social distancing. Like the few times I would go visit them, we totally couldn't even hug, you know, we were like really, really like to the letter of all the recommendations. And I think most of my friends as well. I have friends that I have not seen in months. And we, you know, we talk on the phone and we're sometimes Facetiming, but still I have not seen them. And a big reason is I live in Queens, a lot of my friends live in Brooklyn and also in Manhattan, and of course I have a car, but most of my friends don't drive and a lot of my friends are not ready to ride the trains and subways. I also have a lot of older people in my life, that are very close. And I don't... unless I go and pick them up, I have not seen them because they're still afraid to use the public transportation. And I think we've... everybody that I know has been super safe and really strict with the self-isolation and only just now starting to step out a little bit more, and like I don't... I have not had a meal out since March, and we went out for our first meal outdoors just this past week (*laughs*). And it was like, wow, this feels weird, you know. But we also realize like, wow, this is something that we missed, but it's also not so worth it to get sick. And also because, I think most of the friends I know are native New Yorkers and they have family here, so they're not like I think a lot of the younger folks that are from out of town, that you see a lot in Bushwick, with a lot of gentrification, are folks from out of town, and they don't have family here. So they don't risk infecting their mothers and grandmothers and aunts and you know, any family members because they come here on their own, and they work and you know they want to maintain their social life, which I totally get. But I think for a lot of people who are born and raised and they have two or three generations here. You want to be able to see your parents and you want to be able to see your nieces and nephews and cousins and aunts and uncles without the risk of infecting them. And so I think it also has a lot to do with just your personal situation. If you don't have any loved one that you can possibly infect, you're probably less likely to self-isolate and be a little more risky but if you do have family members that you don't want to affect that you want to see and be around then, for sure. I know that for us, that's like a driving force to be as safe as we can be, because we don't want to infect other people. I mean, we don't want to get sick, either. But really the motivation is not infecting others. And I think flattening the curve is going to get a little tougher because you have all this movement and it was a time where everybody didn't want New Yorkers around and now it's the opposite! The tables have turned. So I think this is just going to keep happening and people, of course, are always going to try to escape to the place where COVID is.... Well if COVID is high in your area, you're going to try to go somewhere where it's lower. I have friends that skipped town, that just left. And a lot of people I know are scrambling. We go on the weekend, instead of hanging around the city like usual, we go upstate and we go camping, we go to the woods. Just to get out and about and not be at risk. So that's I think that's been one really positive thing.

Deborah: Are there any discussions on housing issues, and if so, can you please explain?

Martha: Well I... luckily, do not know anyone personally who's getting evicted from their houses but I mean I think it's very clear that there's going to be a humongous wave of evictions because people are out of work and cannot pay their rent. They can't pay for anything. And so, I know that there are millions of people all across America struggling for, you know, just feeding themselves and then getting their basic necessities and then being able to pay their rent. And

here in New York City, where the rents are so high, and already, people are spending 50% more of their income on rent, that has become impossible. I mean, I'm lucky I'm still working, my husband's been laid off but had I been laid off, we would probably be facing eviction as well. And I am I, I know that here in the city and, in particular, there's going to be... there's already a really major homeless problem, even before COVID, and home insecurity problem. And I think that has been absolutely like... I don't know what the numbers are exactly, but I know that there's a lot of people losing their homes and a lot of people are going to be evicted. And I don't know what the plan the city has for this huge wave of eviction that's coming. It's really coming, especially now that this supplementary unemployment is going to end, and they have nothing in place for that, it's going to put a lot of families in a hard, hard struggle. And... Yeah, it's heartbreaking. I don't know how that's going to affect the city as a whole because you're going to see a lot of people... I have one student who I work with whose families already living in a shelter. So I know that this is happening to just ordinary people who otherwise want to pay rent and want to, you know, do the right thing, but unfortunately the job market has just plummeted. And here in New York City where tourism is such a big, big moneymaker and you have so many people in theater and the arts and the museums and, just, you have lots of actors and musicians, and you have a huge food industry that everybody is just gone bottom up. So... there's just no jobs available to replace that right now. And I don't think that it's viable to open up either just for the sake of the economy. It's... I think it's really terrifying. I feel for these people that cannot pay their rent. What are they going to do and where they're going to go? I am really a little, like, frightened, like are there just going to be all these homeless people in the street or the shelters going to go just be full of people, and where are these people, who are not just individuals but families, like people with children... You know, it's a hard situation.

Deborah: Yeah you explain that very, very, very excellent. You mentioned the student that is working with you. How is he doing?

Martha: I think he's, he's doing well. He is very open about, you know, having to be in a shelter and the ups and downs, and they're right now, you know, waiting to find housing and his parents are not working right now. So it's very difficult. And I think that is something that is not really clear. I mean, I just read this morning that you know, they're having a really hard time figuring out what the next step of a stimulus plan is, and people not and people saying, I mean our politicians saying, "well, if we extend this extra money, it's going to incentivize not working". And I find that to be the most ridiculous argument, because there are no jobs! Like what?! And I don't know, I think, there might be a tiny, tiny, tiny percentage of people who are glad to just live off the state, but it's temporary. This is not forever. And I know that you know my husband, we're grateful for that extra money, but he is desperate to go back to work, but he actually works in the food industry. And in fact, he worked in the catering industry, which is not opening up anytime soon. And there, he can go and get a job in a restaurant, but that's only going to last until the weather turns cold and they have to shut everything down again. So these are not these are like little band aid solutions and they're not viable, they're not going to last for a long time and we have been studying COVID a lot and not listening to mainstream news, but we've been really doing a lot of research and looking at what the scientists and epidemiologists say. And they say unanimously that this is not going away anytime soon. And these curves are going

up and down and up and down and will be with us for several years. And so we're trying to figure out how, what's this going to look like? And I think nobody's come up with a really good solution. And it's difficult. This is new. This is like super brand new - this world pandemic. It's a first in so many levels, but I think that the positive thing is that, you know, in chaos, you have opportunity and it's really hopefully, an opportunity for our government to, and and and the people to really, really relook at what America is about and what we mean, and look at our Constitution, look at our laws, look at just the system that are in place that feed all the inequality that we're seeing and really make some bold changes. Unfortunately, that's kind of fantasy... I don't see anybody stepping up to that. The people are demanding it, but unfortunately the politicians have stopped listening and representing the people, a long time ago here. But perhaps it's time to switch that up. I don't really know. It's like such a certain time. A lot of questions.

Deborah: You touched on a lot about re-looking at our systems and how we need to bring about change. So, um, being that you are doing the food coop, how has that really helped the community Bushwick?

Martha: Well I, I, I've always felt that from the beginning of the, when we built this farm, that the vision was to have open community space, a meeting space, a safe space, a green space, and learning space, and a place where people can freely exchange ideas, and also to learn about closed loop systems - because I built the farm on permaculture design basis, which is basically just sustainable design and design that's meant to be regenerative and lasting. And to show in the different system, we have on the farm what a closed loop system could look like. Because we are in a linear kind of system of just extraction, and then trash. And that's pretty much destroying the world. So it was trying to create a tiny little microcosm in Bushwick, of what it can look like on a small model scale and perhaps get people to think on a larger scale. And I think that this is also the time that's ripe for this kind of thinking because we see how the system of food, for example, we've known for years that the food issue, and food insecurity has nothing to do with the lack of food production - but has everything to do with food distribution. Which has a lot to do with who owns the money and who could afford it and how this distribution is worked out in the system. And part of the problem that we saw immediately when we saw farmers like mowing in all their food, while people are food insecure and being horrified. But we then saw clearly too, and I hope the public saw clearly too, the big flaws in our agricultural system and how we get food which is huge monoculture on a tiny handful of farms with all centralized. And we need to decentralize.... and we need to decentralize, and we also need to get more localized. And I was so happy to see people turning their yards into gardens, I mean, we couldn't order seeds, for like two months! Because the seed companies were overwhelmed. And I've seen down I think it's on Dekalb, one of the NYCHA housings turned their huge lawn into a farm and it was gorgeous. I've had so many people ask me for seeds, I have given away tons of plants. I always, you know, seed more than I need, and we gave a lot of plants and herbs to people actually as part of the pantry because it made, it just made people really happy. And I think people are reconnecting and having more time to do gardening and to grow food and seeing what it really takes, that it's difficult, but it's also extremely pleasurable and being more connected to the soil and the earth, which is another big thing. We want people to reconnect to

nature. And I think that... and sharing a lot of information against so many people asking me, like, how do you grow this and what do you do this, then how do you do that and... And so it's been really great to share this information with the community and people who are really interested in growing. And also just being able to supply people with whatever they need, the plants they need. I mean, I've dug stuff out of the ground. I've given away seeds, have given away lots of plants, and I'm just happy that people are recognizing that this is a real need and food security is a serious issue - and I think that's, this COVID has really put that on the map as well and made people much more aware of how important it is to have access to fresh food, And how, how you can do it here. Like, you can do it in New York! We have great soil and you know, seeds are pretty easy, if you have a little space, you can do it. So I know for a fact I've seen all over the place, people turning their yards into like little gardens, and huge plots that had nothing or now bursting with vegetables, and it's so beautiful.

Deborah: I'm going to... you mentioned about the government. What are your thoughts on how the city, the state and federal leaders are responding to the pandemic, and what is different?

Martha: Oh my god, Deborah. You don't want to get me started on that. *[both burst out laughing]*

Deborah: I kind of, I kind of feel you because....Just name one thing for the city, One thing for the state, and one thing for the federal government.

Martha: Well, I think the city has done an okay job. I think part of the big problems at the beginning was petty squabbles between city government and state government that really got in the way of getting things done. And those petty political squabbles really cost a lot of human lives. I think the city's doing a little better now with the COVID response. But it really was a little too little, too late. And I think the State government as well - I understood the, the hesitation of shutting everything down. It should have been earlier and I understand that hesitation. But the problem is we are in a society right now that does not pay attention, attention to science. We've just lost any interest in science. And so I think if the state and city officials had really, really listened to the scientists and epidemiologist and people who have been studying this stuff for years who understood more about how viruses spread and also about why a lockdown before anybody or anyone shows any signs is the most important thing to do and they just didn't get it. And it was just a lack of, you know, foresight. And then, after you know once it happened, Cuomo is this hero, but it's like, but you're the one who didn't shut down what you were supposed to. But I did like how he, you know, handled it later, informing the public and getting a little sober. And getting past the ego and and really caring about public health. On a federal level, it's just a hot mess. And I really believe that unless we have a national, unified response that we're not going to get over COVID and we're going to stay one of the highest rates of COVID in the world for a really long time. Because there's no national response. And it's not just a lack of a national response. It also has to do with this divisive politics that has really split people like the country in two. That you have a whole bunch of people who really don't even believe that this is real and, and others who are like, no, this is real and the response is too like

wishy washy jagat and there's still governors and and politicians in in many countries where COVID is going up and they're still opening. And COVID is going up and they're still wanna have ball games, and they still want to open Disney and they still want to have parties and you know, and even the crazy, crazy nutcase governors who are like, oh I'll die for my country and people protesting mask wearing, people getting killed because they're asking you to wear a mask. That to me is the most disturbing phenomenon that I've, I've witnessed. And you know people acting violently over this mask question which I find very ridiculous. I think it is really challenged America's culture of "me, me, me" and individualism, to an extent that it's just harmful to society and you cannot have a society totally ignore the fact that yeah, you can be your rugged individualism, but you are ultimately part of a larger society and that selfishness is is really has been astounding to me, and also the degree of ignorance has been astounding to me and very disappointing and that the government has really fed and fueled the ignorance and the division and the just the lack of of any kind of care about the people around you. And, and we see the result of that very clearly. And so, I really believe that unless we have a strong national response where all the governors and all the city local officials on every level instate some kind of control across the nation, it's just going to keep happening and popping up here and there and inflaming and... I mean it's not going to go away. Our numbers are embarrassing, really. They're up there with Oman and, and these developing countries that don't have money, and don't have the infrastructure, and don't have education and we're supposed to be this big world leader and it's it's it's it's really embarrassing. And it's sad. Because there are people... the, the, the numbers. I mean over 4 million people is, it's really I think it's kind of pathetic. And very worrisome.

Deborah: Yeah. What do you wish. Well you already said, what do you wish that our government would do?

Martha: Oh, what I really, really wish? [*chuckles*] I wish the government. I wish, like all these, most of these politicians would just quit and go away. And let themselves, especially the old, this huge old white government we have that that are are leading from a place from the 1950s, they all need to retire and make way for young people. They need to retire and make way for progressive people and we need a government that looks like America and not like an old golf Country Club. That's what we really need. And we really need to get rid of this president because he is... He's like an actor disguising himself as a president in a reality show. That is the real life of many people, and we also need to overturn a lot of regulation. Like stop treating corporations like people and we really need to.... I mean, I'm, I'm really against capitalism and we need to change, change, we need to have a new, updated 21st century Constitutional Convention like they did way back when, and rewrite the Constitution. Not the whole thing, but make it for the 21st century, and for 21st century people, and 21st century America and include 21st century inventions like technology, and our privacy and freedoms in privacy. And we just need a revamp. And that's what I think.

Deborah: From you talking about a revamping of America and capitalism... Being in Bushwick, do you know any of their, when they had crises, how did they, in the past, how did they navigate it?

Martha: You know, I'm really not sure, but I know that for example Bushwick is really rich with a lot of local community organizations that are really grassroots-based. Riseboro has been around for a really long time and they actually started out helping advocate for senior housing. And they became more of a developer of senior housing and a developer of low-income housing and we have very close like around the corner from the farm, we have Make the Road that really advocates for workers rights. There's Mayday which advocates for workers rights. I think there's a lot of, and I didn't mention this before, but I know that there's a neighbor here who has a bookstore and her bookstore is closed and she started to help with these pantries and refrigerators on the street with food that people can just access. So I think there's always been this kind of very grassroots effort of the community to fill those needs of the community, in whatever way they can and very creatively, which is wonderful. And I think Bushwick is going to be really difficult in the future of Bushwick, because even in the three years that I've been in Bushwick, I see this huge change in Bushwick with gentrification. Around the across the street from the farm on two streets, there are huge developments going up for buildings and we know that all these buildings end up being pseudo luxury buildings, that are going to be higher price than what the neighborhood could afford, which brings in a lot of other people and fuels gentrification. Across the street from our office on Bushwick Avenue, they built this hu-mon-gous, enormous building, the Rhinegold Gardens or something, with a private garden in the middle and a gym downstairs and, you know, the whole nine yards. And then they build all these other buildings. So there's all this new construction that's changing the face of Brooklyn physically. And I think it's going to change the economic status of Brooklyn and eventually do what happened to many other parts of Brooklyn, where it starts to push out the, the people who have been here for many years, and who have had generations raised in Brooklyn and be pushed out through gentrification. And we already see it in certain parts of Bushwick - and where I am at the garden is in Brooklyn, it's not yet there, but with these new constructions and there's little constructions in between, I think it's slowly going to change a lot especially the building cross the street that they're building because it's quite big and this this street is all small buildings and two, three family houses and three, four story building and they're building this a very, very large structure. On both sides. So it's going to be interesting to see what happens, and what what happens to the neighborhood. And also, I know the biggest problem with gentrification is you have these young people come in who are not usually from the city and they don't really support the neighborhood. Because they work in Manhattan or they work elsewhere. And then they spend all their money elsewhere because, you know, they don't feel so part of the neighborhood until neighborhood businesses, then go out of business. And I mean, I'm sure you guys know how it works and it's, you know, there's... I could see that happening, it's, it's happening here. And I see that happening. And I know that there's in times of COVID, especially when people are losing their jobs and losing their business, it's going to be... the turnover is going to be even quicker. And I really hope that I'm wrong about that but I think it's it's very easy to to kind of see the writing on the wall. And again, I hope that doesn't happen. But if we can get support with all these people keep them in the communities. It might be a little slower and might not happen, and hopefully in places like the farm. For example, we get a lot of local community, people who are born and raised in Bushwick. And then we also get a lot of newcomers who are new to the neighborhood and are attracted by the farm. So it's also a place where these people

mix and get to know each other and talk to each other. So I find that the more public spaces where you have opportunities to get to know your neighbors are really important because otherwise that you never meet your neighbors, you don't know who they are.

Deborah: I just got, maybe two more questions. How would you like to describe the role of the city aid network in responding to the crisis?

Martha: Um, I think the city has done a decent job in Emergency Food release. For example, a lot of pantries have stepped up. City Harvest has really stepped up. And I think it they have been pretty good at filling the nutritional need, although it's not always the most nutritional food, but at least to keep people from starving. I think they've done a really poor job of eviction relief and rent relief. Because we know they talk about rent relief. But that's only for buildings and houses that are financed with mortgages federal mortgages and if they are from somewhere else, or if you have a small landlord, who's also relying on your rent to pay their bills, they've done very little to support that. I'm also really disappointed in how the City did not get enough small businesses money that they needed from the trillions of dollars. The government gave away two businesses and really needed to advocate for the smaller businesses which New York is like it's, it's what makes New York interesting. Is that there are all these small independent business businesses. And they, I don't feel like the city has been very supportive of those businesses. And I know a lot of places have shut down that have been around for a really long time. Which also, you know, affects the identity of the city. And I really fear that we're going to lose a lot of the city identity which we have already the last few years just turning ourselves into a big, big shopping mall. And I think those kinds of things are really important that have been totally neglected. I believe the city could have done and could still do so much more to support, New York, New Yorkers.

Deborah: What is your hope for the future. And how do, how would you like for it to be accomplished?

Martha: Oh, wow. My hope for the future, in what sense? Like, in general?

Debora: You mentioned about capitalism and looking at things differently, you mentioned the science, paying more attention to science. Would you say that we need to have more strategic planning so that we can be prepared for pandemics, epidemics of whatever you want to call it, like what we have now, or anything else.

Martha: I definitely believe that we need to shift away from, just... Well, we need to shift towards let's put it that way, of listening more to scientists, I think we have a lot of systemic issues that that really made that of course COVID brought up. But a big part of it too, and I want to go back to food, because people talk about, you know, COVID being raised in a laboratory, which is totally bogus. And one of the issues that I have not seen really brought up in the mainstream media at all, is that the way we raise animals, for example, the way we treat animals, the way we treat our relationship with wild animals and domesticated animals is atrocious. And I think it's natural that many of like H1 N1 strains come from animals, are related to animals in some way.

And that relationship that we have with animals and also our really broken relationship in general to nature, to the environment, the, the, just disowning climate, ignoring climate change, and all the ways that we feed ourselves, which really impact climate change, really impact the environment, pollution and contamination and the things we do to these animals that we have domesticated for our food - which is kind of disgusting and a horribly cruel and unsanitary - and I believe I honestly believe that these diseases are going to get worse and worse because we just have this horrible relationship with nature and all we know how to do is keep adding more poison to the pot and all we do is create stronger strains and mutations and create this really bad biology, and I believe that that's a huge part of why COVID exists, and we need to really change that we need to change our relationship with the natural world and wake up a little bit because we have to start to realize that without plants without the natural world, we cannot survive! And we cannot dominate everything in the world and think that that's going to bring us to a better place. And we cannot also count on technology to solve all our problems because they are not technological, the problem did not start with technology. It's not going to end or be resolved with technology. And in fact, the more that we tried to do that, the more screwy we get. And it's really looking at our habits and looking at our needs and looking at what it is, what kind of relationship we want to our food and to nature and to the just the natural world and and and everything that's in the natural world and to see that we're part of it! We've really cut ourselves off as if it's like that thing that's over there, and not us, like as a whole. And I really think that this, that is really where all these viruses come from and all these illnesses come from is because we're so off balance. We're so contaminated. We're so contaminating, and dominating everything and destroying everything we're just so destructive. And they say this and scientists have said this for ages and we're facing these massive extinctions that, if all the insects and right now they're being there on a lot of them being endangered. If all the insects disappeared on the world, we would die! Everything would die. But if humans disappeared from the world, everything world thrive! And I wish people have that in mind, all the time, because it's absolutely true. And well, we have to just stop with the destruction and the dominance and try to be more gentle with how we treat everything else to live instead of manipulating them and thinking them as, just like non living things that we can just play around with toy around with a mess around with and trash. I really hope that that's the biggest change on a really large larger level.

Deborah: What is your message that you would like to say in regards to... you spoke about changes of connecting with nature, the political arena and people really.... one lady, you said she went out got a refrigerator and just having food and growing your food....What is the message that you would like to share with others.

Martha: I think the big message is to remain hopeful and active... To educate yourself, to study to observe.. .And to be... really... Think about what your relationship is with nature. Think about what your relationship is with other people and think about your relationship to the media and social media and to your, your thoughts and how that serves you to these ideas that you hold in your actions. Does it serve you? Does it serve others? Does it serve the earth? Does it serve the world? And to expand your world. I think our huge problem in America is that we live in this tiny bubble. And we live in such a global world that... We can't live in a bubble when you are living in a global world. And we cannot go back - not living in a global world, it's global, there's

no going back. And so we have to see things on a bigger scale. We have to be that frog that's in the well that just thinks the world is that circle above the well, and we need to get the hell out of the well. We need to sit on the edge of the well and look around us, because it's a big world and we need to look at what, where our place is in it and how we get to that place that we want to see, not just for ourselves or for our families or for our neighbors, but really for everybody and everything. And expand, just expand the thinking and look outside the well.

Deborah: I have enjoyed your, this interview. You gave me a lot to think about. You are very knowledgeable. And as a New Yorker - I grew up in Crown Heights - and as a New Yorker, it is important for us to.... It's not about us. It's about our community. And I will go so far, where you, I think you're in tune with our ancestors, where it says "it takes a village to raise a child". We have big children and we got a little children. So you keep doing what you're doing. And don't look, don't be surprised you look up and see me, I'm going to come over to your neck of the woods and I want to I want my feet to touch that to touch the earth because that's so important, and I thank you for what you're doing in the community and keep doing it and. That's so important. Keep doing it because we add.... We're not ready to go. We have a journey that we must do, and we got to tell the message. It's got to get better and you said about a global. Is so important, by having that globally. So thank you so much for this wonderful, wonderful interview.

Martha: Thank you Deborah and you are welcome to the farm anytime and please identify yourself because the first thing you're getting as a shovel. *[both laugh]*

Deborah: I can do that! My grandmother. My people are from the south, so I know about gardening. So, that ain't nothing new. And I love it. So thank you so much for what she's doing in our community.

Martha: Oh, you're very welcome. Deborah. It was very nice talking to you, Deborah.

Manon: I wanted to just say thank you so much for your time. Thank you for all your questions. I was nodding furiously during this whole interview - you said many things, so many things that really were so powerful. And everything you said about connecting to nature, I'm going to be thinking about. So thank you, so much.

Martha: Oh, you're welcome. And good luck with the rest of the project. I did look at the website and check it out. And I think what you guys doing is great. Wonderful.

Manon: And just in terms of next steps. We'll send you a copy of the recording which is yours to keep and also, we always give our narrators a chance to listen to their interview before we post it online. And that's part of our consent process so I'll send it to you today. And when you give it a listen, let us know what you think, and then we'll post it online with your consent.

Martha: Okay, great. Great. Fantastic. Thank you ladies so much. I really appreciate you reaching out and all the work that you're doing.

Everyone: Okay, take care. Take care. Bye. Bye. Okay, bye bye.