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Chairman Roberts and Ranking Member Stabenow, thank you for the opportunity to testify at today's 2018 Farm Bill field hearing and share my perspective on urban farming.

I am a native Detroiter, product of the Detroit Public School System and have two years at Wayne State University. Detroit was once the capitol of the U.S. auto industry, which almost single handedly helped to create the American middle-class but Detroit has been crippled, by closing factories, falling home prices, the exodus of tens of thousands of residents, and lots of vacant land.

The great recession started early in Detroit and can still be felt in some quarters. When the nation's unemployment rate was hovering around 9.0 percent in '09, '10, or '11, the jobless rate in the metro Detroit metropolitan area was over 11.5 percent. In the city proper the unemployment rate was 20 percent – although, unofficially, that figure was much higher for those of us viewing things on the ground floor. In fact a December 2009, article in the Detroit News suggested the true unemployment figure in the city might be as high as an astounding 50 percent. Couple that with the estimated 80,000 residential housing units needing demolition, and the city's 20 square miles of total vacant land (roughly equal to the size of Manhattan). What you get is the need for creative paths forward like Oakland Farm Way.

This is how I started our farm, the Oakland Avenue Urban Farm which is located in the Historical North End Community and a commitment to growing food, educating our community, and creating opportunities for economic development. At one point in history we had businesses owned by African Americans, a dense population with quality housing and great schools.

After the housing market crash in 2008, I left my job in real estate because it became financially difficult to keep my office open. Rev. Bertha Carter, Senior, Pastor of the St. John Evangelist Temple of Truth and School of Wisdom asked me to be the Executive Director for the Northend Christian CDC. My initial instructions were to figure out how the CDC can engage people in the community and find out the needs of the community. I was familiar with the neighborhood since I lived there as a child so my approach was to go where the people are. I talked to people in stores, on the street, door to door, food pantry, etc. I heard the same thing over and over again, we need jobs, quality homes and good food.

I made it a point to attend as many community meetings on various subjects as possible and it was through these meetings that I learned about the Greening of Detroit's work in the east side of Oakland. The Greening of Detroit was helping groups/people with gardens, landscaping and technical assistance. I reached out to them immediately to help us address the need for quality food in the Oakland community. Together, we planted a new garden on one of the 10 vacant lots adjacent to the church. We worked with a designed landscape artist, forestry specialist, soil specialist and residents to plan what

the garden would look like, what we would grow and who would do the work breaking ground the next year in 2009.

When we started farming in 2009 the neighborhood was not safe. It was filled with vacant lots and houses, poor quality grocery stores, a liquor store on every corner selling greasy food and pizza slices. These bridge card SNAP eligible stores offered poor quality and limited amounts of fruit, bread, milk, and some canned goods, which were often on the shelf with expired date labels. People in our community were shopping at the liquor stores for the unhealthy food choices because there was no other options. To respond to this, we started growing a variety of vegetables that were culturally appropriate for our community (green beans, collards, tomatoes, peas, spinach, squash, cabbage, cucumbers, mustard greens, turnip greens, sweet potatoes, okra, onions, garlic and a variety of herbs.

In 2011, we started adding fruit: strawberries, raspberries and pears. In the same year, we opened our farmers market on the farm and started selling at six Chrysler Plants. In order to meet the demand of these farmers market, we had to increase our production so we purchased more land for production. We are now planting more fruit trees to increase our fruit production. We have included apple, peach, more pears and cherry. This fruit production will add to our food consumption and increase the opportunities for value-added production, including our line of AFRO Jams, so we can increase sales. We can use USDA Value-Added Producer grants but need additional access to other financing tools to help us get these products to the shelf.

In 2013, Detroit passed the Urban Agriculture Ordinance, making it legal to purchase vacant land for food production. The passing of the ordinance created an opportunity for urban farmers to sustain their work in food production through land ownership. Over the last three years, we purchased over 30 properties surrounding our farm and have created the Oakland Farm Way which includes a working farm, incubator space for food related businesses, educational programming around food and nutrition and green spaces that improve the environment.

Six years after starting as a community garden, we are growing food at the Oakland Avenue Urban Farm on over 4.8 acres of land. In addition, we have two green houses, one funded through USDA's Environmental Quality Incentive Program, have purchased and renovated an abandoned house which is now used as our community house for meetings, food preparation, youth meeting space and a shared kitchen.

What is needed now to grow these businesses is access to more USDA funding for crop insurance, low interest loans for equipment and integrated farm business development, and infrastructure improvements for water.

Urban Agriculture is a great environment to work and grow skilled workers who traditionally have been denied employment because of a background check or drug problem. On our farm we work with people where they are and what we find is our environment is one in which we are able to train people basic employment skills. We have been able use our production sales to hire people in the community as seasonal workers at minimum wage and we recently started a tree fruit growing initiative to train our farm workers on how to grow fruit trees and manage largescale farm equipment, giving them specialty

skills and machine training. The farm work is transformative spiritually, environmentally and skillfully. People are learning how to plan, how to grow food which results in them eating better, how to deal with plant pests using organic practices and professional development opportunities.

On our farm, we have also partnered with the “Grow Detroit Talent” program in Detroit which is targeted to hire 8000 kids across the city. We are employing 25 youth this summer, teaching them how to grow food, business and marketing skills at the farmers market, and getting them in the kitchen to learn how to cook and safely prepare food. For the past three years, I have been working on the MI State Fair Steering Committee as the Urban Agriculture Scholarship coordinator to help award continuing education scholarships for urban kids who are interested in pursuing career opportunities in farming and agriculture.

Urban agriculture creates new opportunities to get kids and communities interested in food and farming and helps strengthen relationships between urban and rural communities.

Urban Agriculture in Detroit involves approximately 1,500 urban gardens, farms, community gardens, school gardens, church gardens and family gardens. Of these there are about 100 growers who are selling fruits and vegetables at farmers markets, restaurants and chefs earning minimally over \$1,000,000 in Detroit. This money is sustaining families, communities and employment opportunities. The growers in this network are growing food where the soil is tested and is free of chemicals. Only one or two are certified organic, however, all are growing according to organic standards and methods.

The 2018 Farm Bill is important to Urban Agriculture because it could create opportunities for urban growers that we currently do not have. For example, 2016 we experienced a drought which resulted in crop loss, but urban growers do not currently have crop insurance to cover that loss. When we lose crop, it results not only in loss of food but income and jobs.

The 2018 Farm Bill is also important to USDA Programs like the Farmers Market Promotion, Environmental Quality Incentive Program, SNAP, WIC, the Senior’s Farmers Market Nutrition Program and the Food Insecurity Nutrition Incentive program – in Michigan we call it “Double Up Food Bucks”.

I am a member of the Detroit Community Markets which operates under the Detroit Eastern Market. The Oakland Avenue Farmers Market is one of 16 members operating farmers markets in communities across Detroit. All of these markets are able to process transactions for families receiving food assistance and use “Double Up Food Bucks”. They also offer a variety of educational programming regarding nutrition, food preparation and food safety. The Oakland Avenue Farmers Market in partnership with the Detroit Community Markets received funding through the USDA Farmers Market Promotion Grant for two years 2017-2018 to support outreach, growth, vendor support and programming in community. The community markets are located in neighborhoods which are experiencing high unemployment, transportation issues, health issues and are food deserts. The farmers market promotion grant funding will make it possible to continue increasing food access, education, opportunities for farmers and employment opportunities.

Transitioning into urban farming and working in a community environment has proved to be the best thing I could have done in that I look at basic needs in community differently. When I started my work in the North End Community in Detroit I came in direct contact with people living in poverty without basic needs like quality food, water, heat, etc. I much happier and healthier working in an environment that choose me to do something to help others. I have been able to do that by our food production working to increase employment opportunities through our farm through Urban Agriculture.