

A Pioneering Rooftop Farm with a Successful Business Model

With three locations atop industrial buildings in New York City, Brooklyn Grange has created a revolutionary rooftop farming model

With three locations covering 2.3 hectares (5.7 acres) across New York City, Brooklyn Grange is a cutting-edge commercial rooftop farm, considered one of the largest in the world. Founded in 2010, this innovative business has paved the way for others who aspire to establish successful for-profit farming ventures in prime urban locations.

“Our goals for Brooklyn Grange are to grow food, increase urban green space, and build community through urban farming education and programming,” says Anastasia Cole Plakias, co-founder and chief operating officer at Brooklyn Grange. “We want to make a strong case that social enterprise and good business can be powerful drivers of positive change.”

Together with Ben Flanner and Gwen Schantz, Plakias founded the first Brooklyn Grange farm in Queens over a decade ago. Today, she is well versed in the complex process that setting up each farm entails: securing a number of permits, assessing each building’s structure to ensure it can hold the extra weight of a green roof, and having the materials, soil included, lifted via a crane

or blower truck. “It was the support of people around the world and here in New York City that kept us going,” explains Plakias. “What we realized was that people wanted to believe that this model was possible, to create flourishing urban green spaces that produce food in the hearts of dense urban centers.”

All three Brooklyn Grange rooftop farms are situated atop colossal industrial buildings: their first location was the historic Standard Motors Building in Queens, followed two years later by a rooftop farm at the Brooklyn Navy Yard, and most recently, a site in Brooklyn’s Sunset Park neighborhood, inaugurated in 2019.

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The soils used across the three rooftop farms are made from different blends. These include mushroom compost combined with additional organic inputs and lightweight, porous stones to ensure correct drainage and provide the trace minerals that vegetables need. Varying between 20 to 30 centimeters (8 to 12 inches) deep depending on the farm, the soil is part of a green roof system that

