**Minneapolis Urban Farmers Collaborative Candidate Questionnaire: 2013**

**Candidate Name: Chris Lautenschlager**
**Office Sought: Minneapolis City Council, Ward 12**

***1: The current MPLS chicken ordinance only allows chickens in residential backyards. Many urban residents would like to purchase eggs and chicken from urban farms, and urban farmers could use the proceeds from chicken farming to support their urban farms in the winter months. Do you as a candidate support allowing chickens as livestock at urban farms?***

Yes.

Chicken farming can help keep soil fertile (or assist in rendering its fertility after years of depletion); chickens can also help loosen compacted soil that may be found due to prior land use. I would support allowing chickens as livestock so long as animal welfare standards are met, minimum distances between neighboring properties can be established and respected, and there is an organized plan for composting the manure generated by the coop.

I believe that proceeds from chicken farms would help farmers in the lean winter months, and I believe that many of our residents would appreciate the advantages of finding fresh eggs at an affordable price within their own communities. These transactions benefit our residents, keep our dollars local, and strengthen farms that would like to grow, diversify, and flourish.

As consumers, we often buy locally not only because it supports our communities, but because it rewards individuals who we believe are, quite simply, doing things right. Still, we need to be certain that farming standards are met, and that the animals producing these eggs are being well cared for. I would support having organizations like Animal Welfare Approved carry out this much needed service. Unless there is a dangerous predatory animal involved, Minneapolis Animal Care & Control should not be part of any monitoring or regulating of chicken farming.

I would not advocate for the live slaughter of chickens within our city limits.

***2: Urban farm sites often don't have water spigots and in most cases urban farmers purchase water from neighbors to water their plots. Will you as a candidate work to build affordable access to city water hydrants and support city cost assistance for water for urban farmers and community gardens?***

Yes, definitely.

While supportive neighbors should be commended for offering free or affordable access to their water, these often-informal arrangements are not a reliable long-term solution for the success of urban farms. These neighbors can move elsewhere, and since there are usually no covenants that run with the land (a covenant is said to "run with the land" when it cannot be separated from the land or the land transferred without it), there is no legal obligation for a new homeowner to honor the previous water access arrangement. Other times, unfortunately, neighbors can simply change their minds about their commitments to supply water to nearby urban farms.

Tapping into a water main is an alternative, but is cost-prohibitive for most if not all urban farmers. The cost to have structured access to water range in the tens of thousands of dollars; since land is often leased and not owned, this level of investment by urban farmers remains highly unlikely. If the city of Minneapolis were to set up access to fire hydrants on a permanent basis it could set water usage rates at a per growing season fee, the precise amount of the fee would be based on either parcel size or crop type (considering watermelon requires an incredible amount of water compared to green pepper or zucchini).

The city could also reduce these water fees to promote sound, environmentally friendly farming practices.

Another possible idea is to subsidize—or offer at affordable rates—rain barrels and cisterns for the neighbors of urban farms (with the agreement that the equipment would remain with the home in the event of a sale). These rain barrels and cisterns would not only provide water for the nearby farms, but could also decrease the amount of city water used by homeowners for maintenance of their own landscaping or private garden.

***3: Urban land is priced too high for urban farming to be financially sustainable. Most urban farms are leasing land without any guarantee that they'll be able to continue leasing year to year. Urban farm sites need years of fertility building before they become highly productive. Do you as a candidate support creating a city pilot program for leasing public lands for urban farming?***

Yes, I am in favor of a city pilot program, with minimum lease durations of at least 3 to 5 years because of the lack of guarantees described above. Soil fertility is not something that can be achieved within the course of one growing season—farmers need reasonable time, and space, to build their small business.

With the assistance of the city of Cleveland, a nonprofit called **Neighborhood Progress** created a pilot program like this just a few years ago. Today there are over 30 projects throughout the city that have taken vacant land and transformed them into either urban farms or community gardens. Still, it would be a misjudgment to believe that most vacant land is already owned—or can be easily procured—by the city of Minneapolis.

***4: Urban farmers and family owned businesses rely on their work vehicles to run their local businesses. It is currently illegal by city code to park work vehicles on the street in Minneapolis, resulting in hundreds of family owned businesses being fined for parking in front of their homes. Will you as a candidate support small businesses by removing barriers to on street and off street parking of contractor work vehicles and trailers?***

Yes, I believe the city needs to ease the parking restrictions it has imposed, but I believe there needs to be a larger discussion of what the new rules should look like. These restrictions were put in place in order to not only maximize on-street parking for typical motor vehicles (non-commercial cars, trucks, and vans), but to ensure clear sight lines at intersections (it would be hard to cross an intersection when your view of traffic is obstructed by a concrete truck parked near a corner every day).

Determining what commercial vehicles could be parked on-street should be based on the overall size or weight capacity of the vehicle, as opposed to restricting vehicles based solely on business type. For instance, I believe that one licensed taxicab or limousine per home would be perfectly reasonable for on-street parking, but a bus (school, coach, or "party") would most likely exceed acceptable limits for any neighborhood. It is my personal belief that many other commercial vehicles (including those used in urban farming) should be allowed to park on our city streets during the day and overnight, but again, it comes down to vehicle size.

I also think it is reasonable to suggest that we actively pursue an overall reduction in vehicles on our streets (not just commercial). For urban farmers, this could mean more aggressively implementing truck/equipment sharing programs. It has already shown great results in Missoula, Montana with a program called **MUD** (the Missoula Urban Demonstration Project) – a low-impact resource-sharing program that allows residents to borrow a truck (and other equipment) for a wide variety of uses at affordable hourly/mileage rates.

***5: Urban gardeners and farmers who wish to sell produce to neighbors now have to apply for a costly permit to sell vegetables. This permit only allows for 15 days of on-site sales per year, and when seeking a permit, farmers must pre-schedule their sales days. Since weather, climate, and variations in growing seasons affect production of vegetables it is almost impossible to predict when will be the best days to sell vegetables. Additionally if one farmer runs multiple sites, that farmer must apply for multiple permits to have sales from each site. These restrictions mean that valuable produce is going to waste even while there is a high demand for purchasing it within the neighborhoods. Will you as a candidate support the local food system by easing the permitting process for on-site vegetable sales, by reducing permit fees, increasing the amount of days farmers can sell, and allowing produce sales from multiple farm sites?***

Yes, definitely.

I'm fully aware that last year's restrictions were the best possible outcomes from a series of compromises that had to be made in order to get urban agriculture off the ground (no pun intended). If these restrictions are not eased this year (as they should), then I'm certain they would be next year with the help of a new City Council.

Changes I would support: No restrictions on the number of days a farmer can sell, no temporary use permit required for operating a farm stand, a farm stand should be a permitted accessory use for an urban farm, and farmers can sell their goods at multiple sites. I would reduce, but not entirely eliminate permit fees. Fees could work on a sliding scale (perhaps based on parcel size), or could be determined by number of sites that the farmer operates (two sites shouldn't necessarily mean two permit fees).

**Broad vision question:**
***As a candidate for public office, what would you like the food economy of Minneapolis to look like in 2017?***

I would like the food economy of Minneapolis to be many things by 2017, but they can be summed up fairly succinctly: I would like our food to be accessible and affordable, and I would like our overall local food economy to be sustainable. I believe that the rapid, but thoughtful expansion of our urban agriculture initiatives will make these ideas a reality.

In order for any of this to be possible, however, we not only need to build stronger, more sustainable farms, we need to make a concerted effort to build broad acceptance of the urban agriculture movement. By now we are acquainted with the arguments against urban farming, and we are somewhat familiar with the people who have actively fought against it. Urban farming advocates will never win over the staunchest of opponents, but they need to wage a thoughtful, fact-based campaign that helps to win over people, turn them into dedicated customers, and make them into strong allies.

How do we get to my 2017 goal of a sustainable food economy that widely offers accessible and affordable food to all of our residents? First, the city must relax the restrictions that I've described elsewhere in this questionnaire: allow farmers to sell their goods at any time and from anywhere, offer land and water access at affordable rates, and reduce and simplify fees.

Then, for the next 4 years we work on 3 key areas: Job Creation, Expanding Payment & Market Options, and developing Programs, Partnerships, and Promotions.

**Job Creation**

When farmers choose appropriate crops and responsibly increase production, they can increase their farms' overall capacity. This can lead to more jobs.

Adding environmentally friendly packing and processing opportunities at larger farms—or combinations of smaller farms—can foster job growth.

Positive gains in urban farming can spawn other related business opportunities, businesses that specialize in truck and equipment sharing, food delivery, or non-food plant production/sales.

**Payment & Market Options**

We need to make it possible for farm stands to accept Electronic Benefit Transfer (EBT) cards and food stamps.

Farmers should be willing to operate farm stand pricing on a sliding scale, with a tiered pricing structure for various groups.

It would be great to reclaim abandoned stores, even former grocery stores, for the purposes of selling produce for multiple farmers' goods. We cannot have outdoor markets everywhere, and reusing old spaces might bring new life to properties currently in decline.

**Programs & Partnerships & Promotions**

Training programs should be created for new urban farmers, programs that teach practical lessons, offer technical assistance, and develop small business skills.

Training programs should also be created for the community, where urban farmers teach best practices to individuals, families, or neighborhood groups starting a community garden.

Relationships should be built between urban farmers and schools, giving students of all ages, hands-on educational experiences with the multiple benefits of growing food.

We can promote urban farming through group tours of several local farms growing diverse crops. Tours promote acceptance to urban farming, help sell goods to diverse audiences, and if the tours are paid or open to donations, the money raised can help offset some maintenance or other costs of the farms included on the tour.