



PUBLIC INTEREST LAW CENTER OF PHILADELPHIA

AFFILIATED WITH THE LAWYERS COMMITTEE FOR CIVIL RIGHTS UNDER LAW

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE – October 12, 2011

Urban Farm Initiative Launches to Provide Legal Aid to Philly's Urban Farmers

PHILADELPHIA – This fall, attorney and long-time community organizer **Amy Laura Cahn** will launch the **Urban Farm Advancement Initiative** to provide pro bono legal support, advocacy, and policy research to urban farmers in high-poverty communities and communities of color in Philadelphia. The initiative is sponsored by the Public Interest Law Center of Philadelphia and supported by a Skadden Fellowship.

Urban farming can have substantial and immediate benefits for Philadelphia, where **a quarter of all people live in poverty**, more than **40,000 plots of land lie vacant**, and **over 900,000 people face hunger and malnutrition**. Community farms encourage economic independence, provide healthy, reliable food sources, and help communities reclaim their neighborhoods from blight. Many of Philadelphia's communities have benefitted from urban agriculture for decades, as neighbors farm together across generation and ethnicity.

But even established sites of urban agriculture face legal difficulties that can make them difficult to sustain. Nonprofit legal assistance is needed to ensure that community groups and individuals seeking to access public and vacant lands for farming have the guidance and representation they need to fully access these resources.

“With twin crises of restricted food access and of vacant and abandoned lots doing incalculable harm to Philadelphia's low-wealth communities, **we must act now to ensure that new and threatened gardens can find stability and flourish**,” says Ms. Cahn.

Ms. Cahn will engage with communities, develop partnerships with nonprofit and community-based organizations, and foster beneficial relationships between urban farmers and municipal authorities in order to help build an urban agriculture movement in Philadelphia that can provide reliable access to healthy food for all Philadelphians, and give communities greater control over the future of their neighborhoods as they work to transform them.

Philadelphia's Director of Sustainability **Katherine Gajewski** and City Parks and Recreations Commissioner **Mike DeBerardinis** both endorsed Ms. Cahn's project in its planning stages, offering the support and cooperation of their offices, and Ms. Cahn plans to work closely with Philadelphia's **Food Organizing Collaborative (FORC)** as well as other community groups.

Ms. Cahn's work will include:

- Direct legal and technical assistance, including support for small business and nonprofit development; zoning and land use concerns; and title, tax, and other land acquisition issues;
- Assisting farmers and gardeners to stay in compliance with relevant laws and regulations;
- Promoting self-representation through community education;



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- Establishing community land trusts; and
- Encouraging mobilization of an urban farm network.

Please contact Ms. Cahn for more information about the project, to find out how you can get involved in Philadelphia's food justice movement, or if you are an urban farmer in need of assistance.

Contact

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About Amy Laura Cahn

Amy Laura is a 2009 *magna cum laude* graduate of the University of Pennsylvania Law School, where she co-founded Penn Law's Environmental Law Project. While at Penn Law, Amy Laura interned at Advocates for Environmental Human Rights and the Natural Resources Defense Counsel. Amy Laura graduated summa cum laude from Hunter College with a B.A. in urban studies.

Amy Laura served as a law clerk to the Honorable Michael M. Baylson of the United States District Court for the Eastern District of Pennsylvania, and prior to that served as a law clerk to the Honorable Stephen Skillman, P.J.A.D., of the Superior Court of New Jersey. Prior to law school, Amy Laura was a theatrical lighting designer, a community organizer, and a co-founder of New York City's Bluestockings Women's Bookstore. Her community-based study on childhood lead paint poisoning, written with Gabriel Thompson, helped overturn New York City's lead laws in 2004. In 2002 and 2003, Amy Laura traveled to the West Bank and Gaza to support non-violent civil resistance movements in support of land and resource sovereignty.

About the Public Interest Law Center of Philadelphia

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