



The Farm on the Roof: What Brooklyn Grange Taught Us About Entrepreneurship, Community, and Growing a Sustainable Business

By Anastasia Cole Plakias

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The founders of Brooklyn Grange, the world’s largest green rooftop farm, share their inspirational story of changing the world through entrepreneurship.

In their effort to build the world’s first and largest commercial green rooftop farm, the founders of Brooklyn Grange learned a lot about building and sustaining a business while never losing sight of their mission—to serve their community by providing delicious organic food and changing the way people think about what they eat. But their story is about more than just farming. It serves as an inspirational and instructional guide for anyone looking to start a business that is successful while making a positive impact.

In *The Farm on the Roof*, the team behind Brooklyn Grange tell the complete story of how their “family” made their dream a reality. Along the way, they share valuable lessons about finding the right partners, seeking funding, expanding, and identifying potential sources of revenue without compromising your core values—lessons any socially conscious entrepreneur can apply toward his or her own venture. Filled with colorful anecdotes about the ups and downs of farming in the middle of New York City, this story is not just about rooftop farming; it’s about utilizing whatever resources you have to turn your backyard idea into a sky-high success.

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Editorial Review

Review

“This is a sweet and inspiring story about what can be accomplished by a group of smart, idealistic young people dedicated to environmental and business goals...”

—*Publishers Weekly*

“Brooklyn Grange is the incredible rooftop farm I dream of seeing in every city across the country.”

—Alice Waters, Owner Chez Panisse Restaurant, Founder the Edible Schoolyard Project

“Brooklyn Grange represents the best of passion and purity, and every page of this book oozes the sweet nectar of creativity, community, and commercial wisdom. That the story reads like a fast-paced novel simply confirms the power of visionary sustainable businesses.”

—Joel Salatin, author, farmer, and owner of Polyface Farm

“The Farm on the Roof tells an unvarnished and gritty tale about what it takes to build a business with purpose and profit. This book is jammed with inspirational stories of overcoming entrepreneurial challenges and provides endless lessons that can be applied to any organization.”

—Eric Ryan, cofounder of Method and Olly

“The remarkable tale of how a bunch of savvy do-gooders turned their socially conscious dreams into an innovative and economically thriving reality. The Farm on the Roof is an engrossing story of how hard work, ingenuity and an utter refusal to settle for the status quo led to the largest for profit green roof farm in the world.”

—Joe Bastianich, author of *Restaurant Man*, restaurateur, and TV personality

“This book answers the big, tormenting question: how can a small, organic, local farm become financially independent? It's a blue print for sustainable agriculture, which requires not only that we don't pollute Mother Earth, but that we find ways to make farming work financially in order to perpetuate and sustain it.”

—Isabella Rossellini, actress, filmmaker, and conservationist

“The Farm on the Roof is not just a heartwarming success story about how a group of young people with a shared dream faced every challenge head on to reach their goal. It's also the story of the search for a new way of living, one that makes the reader reflect on the endless opportunities sprouting in the streets of our cities.”

—Carlo Petrini, founder of the international Slow Food movement

About the Author

Anastasia Cole Plakias is a published writer, photographer, and veteran of the NYC restaurant industry. As co-founder and vice president of Brooklyn Grange, the world's largest green rooftop farm, Anastasia focuses on creating strong and meaningful connections between the farm and the communities it serves. A born-and-raised New Yorker, Anastasia is dedicated to making her native city a greener and more sustainable place to live.

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It's hard to say exactly what it was that drove us to band together and start a business. Perhaps it had

something to do with the radical climate fomenting as the depth of Wall Street's fraud became clear; it galvanized us. None of us wanted to feel complicit in the greed of the financial industry, of course, but it was more than that: we were compelled to prove that there was an alternative. At the very least, we had been stripped of the idealism that goodwill and humanity held more sway in our economy than the power of the dollar. More and more, when we got together to catch up over a coffee that autumn, the conversation turned to numbers. We found ourselves asking not whether urban agriculture could feed cities of the future—we knew it couldn't—but, rather, whether an urban agriculture business, which was inherently committed to environmental stewardship and community engagement, could be fiscally sustainable as well. We never explicitly articulated it to one another, or even to ourselves, but each of us was driven to dispel the notion that business and greed were intrinsically linked. We were determined to prove there was space for compassion in commerce.

It didn't hurt that urban agriculture seemed like an endeavor perfectly suited to each of us and, moreover, that our personalities complemented one another's. Chris loves to launch projects—like a shark, he seems to thrive only when moving forward. Ben needs a challenge, and writing a business plan for a fiscally solvent rooftop farm was certainly challenging. Gwen doesn't like theorizing about things for longer than thirty seconds. Once she's decided an idea is good, she wants to act on it. Brandon can rally support better than a mascot during the final seconds of a championship game—if he's rallying for something he believes in.

We all agreed that our hometown needed more agriculture practiced within its borders, but having practiced it ourselves, we realized there was a reason the existing urban agriculture projects relied on grant funding to sustain themselves. Farming is a humble business, and New York City has little room for humble businesses. Yet we also knew that one only has so much power *advocating* for things. We all shared the belief that running a project profitably was the only way to *prove* possibility. That mutually held conviction was ultimately what propelled those early conversations about our nascent company from passionate lip service about a hypothetical model to the early brainstormings of a business-to-be.

Ben was being approached left and right by candidates who wanted to work with him on a variety of local food projects, but it was our shared goal of creating a business that could grow over time and be replicated in cities all over the world that led him to consider leaving behind the rooftop farm he'd built to work with us. The more time Ben, Gwen, myself, and our friends at Roberta's spent together, the more we realized we had a special kind of chemistry, diverse skills, and shared ambitions. It would take years for us to realize just how special our chemistry was as a team, and even longer to grow that team into what it is today. But back then, in the fall of 2009, it was just beginning to dawn on each of us that we had met the people with whom we wanted to start a business.

Users Review

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Phyllis Baudoin:

What do you regarding book? It is not important to you? Or just adding material when you really need something to explain what you problem? How about your free time? Or are you busy individual? If you don't have spare time to try and do others business, it is give you a sense of feeling bored faster. And you have time? What did you do? Every person has many questions above. They should answer that question mainly because just their can do in which. It said that about publication. Book is familiar in each person. Yes, it is appropriate. Because start from on pre-school until university need this The Farm on the Roof: What Brooklyn Grange Taught Us About Entrepreneurship, Community, and Growing a Sustainable Business to read.

William Ullrich:

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