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1. INTRODUCTION: URBAN REMOVAL OF AGRICULTURE

Brooklyn of all great cities . . . is provincial as a land of rich earth and of this earth an enormous farm, whose crop is . . . human flesh and being.

— James Agee, "Brooklyn Is," 1968

Someone standing on the highest hill in Flatbush in the 1860s, to the east and south of Prospect Park and to the southwest of a large primeval forest, would have taken in "a vista of the finest farmlands in America, almost treeless for 6 miles and beyond, in full view of the Atlantic Ocean." To the south lay the village of Flatbush with its one thoroughfare, Brooklyn and Flatbush Turnpike, "winding its way through the most magnificent growth of ornamental trees in the country, the dwellings of the comfortable Dutch owners peeping through an occasional opening in the trees, giving evidence of thrift and competency." ¹

Looking out from the same crest of the ridge in early 1873, the editor of the Kings County Rural Gazette, the new Flatbush weekly, rhapsodized about "one of the loveliest landscapes ever mortal vision was permitted to gaze upon... the rich farmlands of the southern slope with their ancient homesteads standing out here and there in quiet rural beauty." But H. J. Egleston's absorption in the "beauties of nature and art as displayed in the proximity of city and county" did not blind him to the fact that the "palatial residences of the merchant princes of the cities have now attained to the very summit of our dividing ridge." In an editorial titled "Development," he predicted that hundreds of dwellings would be built for the thousands of new residents following in the wake of rapid transit: "Already does the far-seeing eye of the speculator in real estate cast its keen penetrating gaze upon this



beautiful southern slope, and soon with ruthless hand, the golden king will sway his potential scepter over our rural district, and perhaps entice our own staid citizens into a participation of the spoils which may accrue in a more full development of the advantages our village possesses as a place of abode."²

Egleston's vision of creeping development was prescient indeed. Because the process had been so gradual as to be "almost unawares" to contemporaries in the 1870s, while "the city of Brooklyn experienced a building boom . . . , some three miles away" the village of Flatbush seemed to remain "essentially the same, and eighteenth-century houses . . . evoked daily memories of the early Dutch settlers." Yet, being so "stunningly close to the nation's financial, commercial, and industrial center . . . created a kind of time warp" that was intolerable during the Gilded Age and called forth dramatic change. And so by the end of the 1890s, the fields had vanished and someone standing on that same hill in Flatbush would have seen mainly dense residential settlements.³

American urban history conventionally traces the growth of cities, focusing in particular on the internal dynamics of expansion. Rarely have historians paid attention to what was lost, treating the landscape surrounding the core settlement as merely a city-waiting-to-happen. The dichotomy between agriculture and cities (definitionally "made up of persons who do not cultivate the soil") was so self-explanatory to Adna Weber's turn-of-thecentury international comparative study of urbanization that he declared it "conceivable that transportation . . . might be so perfected as to permit the cultivator of the soil to reside in a city, but . . . very unlikely." This book explores a question that has largely remained a black box of urban history: exactly how did a major city embrace, enclose, and finally obliterate its surrounding farms? This study considers what the city destroyed and the opportunities that were lost. By melding analysis of the rise and decline of intensive vegetable farming with the study of (sub)urbanization, this book seeks to add a new dimension to agricultural history and urban history instead of perpetuating their disciplinary separation or mutual ignorance.4

Kings County, New York, as the vegetable capital of America? If *The WPA Guide to New York City* found that people in 1939 were startled by Brooklyn's rank as the country's fifth largest manufacturing center, credulity today must snap under the revelation that as late as 1880, this icon of city life sustained enough farms to rank as the nation's biggest producer of vegetables after neighboring Queens County: "The numerous Flatbush farm trucks that rolled into the New York City markets in the 'Eighties' gave





FIGURE 1. William Schenck (1839–1913) driving his market wagon in rural Kings County. Courtesy of Lola Schenck Cheney.

ample proof of this." Kings County vegetable farmers in the 1880s were "doing a thriving business" and "reaping enormous crops." Flatbush and the other rural Dutch towns in Kings County were still known as the "Market Garden of America." An article on market gardens in the popular press in 1888 noted that while "all of arable Long Island" produced vegetables for New York and Brooklyn, it was particularly "on the cityward end" of the island, between Brooklyn and Jamaica Bay, that "'truck farming' is to be seen in all its picturesqueness." ⁵

Yet already by 1905 the New York Times found it quaint that someone was "Teaching City Children How to Become Farmers." When the park commissioner permitted a park in Manhattan to be used to teach children to raise cabbage, lettuce, and spinach, the newspaper asked rhetorically: "Farms, farmhouses, and farmers in the heart of New York City seem an anomaly, don't they?" The same year, A Home Geography of New York City, a textbook for elementary schools, was indoctrinating in children the axiom that: "The inhabitants of New York are not miners, not farmers, not lumbermen, not quarrymen, not fishermen. They are manufacturers and dis-

tributers." And by 1913, the Brooklyn Botanic Garden in Flatbush found it necessary to initiate those too young to remember into what had become the mystery of where vegetables came from: "It would indeed seem absurd in a village or small city to offer the public as an educational exhibit, specimens of . . . cabbages, but in a city the size of Greater New York there are innumerable children and young people who have never seen . . . beans and peas growing on the plants that produce them." 6

This vanishing of the agrarian past is not limited to popular consciousness. The sudden disappearance of the agricultural sector of Kings County remains a missing page in urban historiography as well. Historians have paid scant attention to the fact that Kings County thrived as a leading agricultural center in the United States for 250 years and then, in the surprisingly short period of 20 years, semiarbitrarily registered between the decennial censuses of 1890 and 1910, was almost entirely converted into an urban residential community. This discontinuous development is also missing from the pages of the New York region's histories and the related historical literatures about Dutch Americans, the principal farming group during the earlier period. It is also absent from works on U.S. agricultural development in general. Even excellent social histories of urban growth either totally ignore the process of deagriculturalization or, where they discuss the incorporation of the rural land base, treat the demise of farming as a quasi-natural process not in need of elucidation. This book is the first work to examine the historical formation of a major city in the United States from the perspective of the economics of the disappearing agricultural sector while fully appreciating the political-economic agency of the (self-)displaced farmers.⁷

If, as the author of the only dissertation on nineteenth-century rural Kings County observed, "Brooklyn has been almost totally ignored by historians," such neglect has been even more intensely the fate of farming, the economic mainstay of the county's nonurban southern half. When the director of the Long Island Historical Society said of a catalog of paintings that they "trac[e] the evolution of Brooklyn from a collection of rural agrarian villages to a modern industrial metropolis," he was speaking only metaphorically. This agricultural amnesia has been widespread. The *Brooklyn Eagle*— itself destined to disappear a few years later as the borough's last remaining daily newspaper— reported in 1949 on the "last farmer," who produced such vegetables as broccoli, squash, and Italian dandelions on a three-acre rented farm, which was yielding to a housing project. Pictured against the frame of the rising apartment houses, the "weather-beaten toiler and his two helpers...looked like people in a stage setting." The only hint that agri-



culture had once been a way of life in this eastern section of Flatbush was the farmer's story that when he had begun vegetable farming 23 years earlier, "he could rent as much land as he could handle, and there were many other farmers around him." 8

The inevitability of agricultural dissolution in the face of urban expansion was taken for granted for much of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. This view surfaced in connection with the earlier history of Manhattan, then again just past midcentury when Brooklyn's population boomed, and once more when Queens, which as late as 1905 was still largely "a region of farms . . . mostly devoted to the production of vegetables for sale in the city markets," underwent urbanization. At the turn of the century, it seemed "certain" to a historian of Long Island that the future of this "purely agricultural community . . . where the ground [was] tilled by its owners" was "not to lie in agriculture. It will be by the growth of its manufactures," the prerequisite for which was "cheap and adequate communication with the rest of the continent," which was "promised in the fullest measure in the near future." It was no everyday event when in 1928 a front-page headline of the New York Times Sunday real-estate section waxed nostalgic: "Farms Disappear in Dyckman Area: Apartment Building Has Wiped Out Vestiges of Early Rural Life." Although the remaining farms in northern Manhattan were only miniature, they were "laid out with considerable artistic taste, and the crops of vegetables and succulent greens for tasty salads provided several hundred families in neighboring apartment houses with appetizing food and doubtless curtailed household expenses." This "partnership with nature," which included "the joy of seeing things worth while grow," reminded the Times of "the extensive market garden acres in Queens which seem to have disappeared from sight almost overnight."9

At almost the same time, the chief apologist for the expulsion of agriculture from Queens, dispensing with the nostalgia, could argue simply that the "home of six families has grown into the home of 2,000 families, or more than 6,000 persons." In a formal democracy, no matter how corrupt or dominated by "machines," numbers count; and when the relative numbers are as disproportional as these, the perseverance of the countermajority is not likely to find much favor. Another observer suggested that the merging of city and country was not "a compromise of equals. The original movement was, and the major movement is the city's. The suburb is a footnote to urban civilization affecting the countryside." ¹⁰

Curiously, even late-nineteenth-century contemporaries — policymakers and urban planners among them — took little note of the rapid market-



Generated for guest (University of Iowa) on 2012-04-19 14:48 GMT / http://hdl.handle.net/2027/mdp.39015048772597 Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-NoDerivatives / http://www.hathitrust.org/access_use#cc-by-nc-nd forced conversion into residential real estate of virtually the entire sector of profitable potato, vegetable, and dairy farms, which had been a vital component of the provisioning of the explosively growing populations of the cities of New York and Brooklyn. As late as 1884, Henry Stiles's history of Kings County could still call it "one immense garden" catering to the "vast and increasing demand of the city of New York for vegetables and fruits of a perishable nature." At this relatively early period in U.S. economic growth, when agriculture still accounted for half of total employment nationally and was adding one to two million persons to its rolls each decade, the disappearance of a territorially discrete way of life should have been a sufficiently uncommon experience to have merited comment. Yet if the largely completed process of deagriculturalization in Manhattan was viewed as the archetype, inevitabilist attitudes rendered discussion moot.¹¹

In the event, within a few years of the formation of Greater New York in 1898, the second-largest city in the world (after London) was quickly becoming an international financial center without losing its status as the country's largest manufacturing center and entrepôt. These linked economic functions forged "a complex assemblage of building types set within a diversified metropolis: a vast array of skyscrapers, department stores, and hotels juxtaposed with residential quarters both lavish and squalid, warehouses and port facilities, factories and sweatshops" — but not an acre for farms.¹²

This story is not an uncommon one in the United States or other industrialized societies. Already by the beginning of the seventeenth century, "the relentless spread of building had pushed market gardens into the suburbs and surrounding countryside" of London, employing thousands and "contriv[ing] a minor revolution in the ordinary citizen's diet." Before the middle of the nineteenth century, Boston's growth had converted some close-in market gardens in Brookline, Roxbury, and Jamaica Plain into house lots, inducing vegetable farmers to push outward to Arlington, Watertown, and Newton. Chicago and other cities grew at even faster rates in the nineteenth century, displacing substantial and fertile farmlands with the signposts of urban geography. Now known as (sub)urban sprawl, the process has been repeated many times since the 1890s and on a much larger scale. In the northeastern United States, for example, 85 percent of rural land urbanized between 1950 and 1960 was converted to residential use. Socioeconomic and political conflicts over agricultural land are said to have been generally muted because: "With its abundance of high-quality farmland, the United



States has never had to work out a way for agriculture to coexist with metropolitan expansion. The sharp increase in land prices accompanying commercial or residential development, leaving the land much too expensive for farming, has never threatened the food supply; cheaper land has always been available elsewhere." 13

The force of capitalist development can be so profound that it propels the conversion of farmland even where "the nightmare of food shortages" for hundreds of millions may result. In China in the 1990s, land in Guangdong province "is prized by farmers for its fertility, but real-estate developers say that its value to farmers cannot compare to its value as the site of" the luxury hotels or soda bottling plants that have ousted farmers. Despite orders from the central government to preserve the little remaining farmland, "the huge profits from land sales tend to overwhelm any fear of the central Government." Regarding the outskirts of the provincial capital, Guangzhou, a city of several million inhabitants, the *New York Times* finds it difficult to imagine how the farmers can survive — "the land is just too valuable to permit it to be used for farming much longer." ¹⁴

The result of urban sprawl has been a renewed rigidification of the historical division of labor between city and countryside, dichotomizing farmers and urban residents in both geography and attitude: "The widening gap in physical distance between the point of production and the point of consumption has its counterpart in the attenuation and mutual understanding between producers and consumers." The physical deterioration associated with mutually reinforcing urban overcrowding and rural depopulation that early-twentieth-century planners identified as the legacy of industrialization has scarcely abated.¹⁵

All along, explanations and rationalizations for what took place have emphasized variations on the-market-knows-best theme. Many economists believe that "no process can take into account all of the relevant variables as fully as do bid and asked prices in a competitive market, since the market process harnesses nearly all available information. . . . [T]he only market failure that could justify social intervention in the land market is the provision of open space as a collective public good." With regard to all other uses, however, the "equilibrium market price for agricultural land" is allegedly so perfect that it even represents "the interests of future generations . . . since speculative bids are based on what future users are expected to be willing to pay." This unerring accuracy does not presuppose omniscience; on the contrary, even a short-sighted speculator in agricultural land can drive



Generated for guest (University of Iowa) on 2012-04-19 14:48 GMT / http://hdl.handle.net/2027/mdp.39015048772597 Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-NoDerivatives / http://www.hathitrust.org/access_use#cc-by-nc-nd this machine — provided that he is "motivated by profits." For even if his view of the land's future value is wrong, "if potential bidders begin to realize this, he will suffer a loss as the land's value rises less rapidly than other assets that could have been purchased. Whatever happens, the farmland is preserved." ¹⁶

Yet at the same time, troublesome questions linger that few have chosen to address. One way of formulating the question for discussion here is whether this apotheosis of the market fits the urbanization of rural Kings County at the end of the nineteenth century — that is, whether "the private market will normally guide developers to use land that is less suited for crops when it is in society's best interest to do so," or, conversely, whether the market made a mistake, as it were, because there were no institutional means by which the collective-good character of the land on which a diverse selection of local fresh vegetables could be produced for New York City's population could be reflected in land prices. Was the conversion of Kings County at the turn of the century, in other words, an early American illustration of "the irrational spread of cities into farmlands"? After all, even some who concede that utilization of "farmland by urbanization is often justifiable as the highest and best use of land at current land values," note that "the range of market values of farmlands does not reflect the long term value or the irreplaceable nature of these living soils." 17

The nineteenth-century case study embodies crucial twentieth-century dilemmas, for these troublesome issues have come full circle in the context of land-use planning and urban environments. Perhaps the most spectacular recent site of irrational deagriculturalization is Los Angeles-Orange County, where as late as the postwar 1940s, farms within a fifty-mile radius of the Los Angeles civic center met most of the city population's demand for produce, dairy, and poultry and most of the nation's demand for citrus. Yet within fifteen years, even this "exceptionally scarce . . . land that can grow high quality citrus and other fruits and winter vegetables at high yields with a minimum amount of crop failure" had largely made way for metropolitan expansion: by 1960, the City of Los Angeles had taken over nine-tenths of Los Angeles County's best farmland. Unlike the transformation of Kings County in the 1890s, however, the conversion of California land has engendered a high-profile and contentious public dispute. In Los Angeles, the conflict erupted over the fact that private benefits created at public cost were not reflected in market transactions: "Perhaps it makes sense to pave over farmlands that are in production, and then spend millions to make arid lands suitable for farming. In somebody's reckoning it must pay off to build



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Some economic geographers believe that "population growth of urban nucleations, and the transport innovations accompanying the industrial revolution . . . precipitated and facilitated an orderly change of agricultural land-use patterns and the spatial extension of agricultural hinterlands." Yet others were still confirming the rationality of close-in vegetable farming as late as the 1960s: "For a radius of forty or fifty miles around New York City land not already occupied by urban functions frequently can best be used for truck crops. This intensive use helps satisfy the almost insatiable demand for these products by the city and at the same time results in enough production from a given acre to warrant the longest possible continuation of the land in agricultural use." The reasons for the demise of Kings County farming are, in any event, not adequately stated by those that geographers use to explain why almost two-thirds of all New York State farmers went out of business from 1875 to 1960: noncompetitiveness based on poor soil, small size, unfavorable location with respect to transportation and markets, and unenlightened management.19

On the other hand, a thoroughly plausible argument is that selling off farmland in the 1880s and 1890s and cutting coupons financed by the proceeds appeared more lucrative to Kings County Dutch farmers than continuing to cultivate cabbages or extracting rents from those who did. It is regrettable that archival research turned up no contemporaneous document—not even the back of an envelope—in which some ninth-generation Bergen, Kouwenhoven, or Vanderveer made the relevant calculations. But this book does present an analysis of a mass of unpublished data, distilled from manuscript schedules of the censuses of population and agriculture, assessment rolls, tax records, and newspapers, which not only quantifies how lucrative the sell-off was, but also explains why the abandonment of farming was not purely "market driven," if that term is taken to mean that Kings County vegetable producers could not compete with distant market gardeners who shipped their produce to New York.

An axiom of orthodox land economics that has been applied to understand the conversion of farmland to other economic uses in the New York City area is that: "Under urban regimes as various as the Dutch, British, Tammany Hall, and others... the real estate consistently followed two 'iron laws.' The first was that when strategic moments arrived and decisions had to be made, almost every owner put his land to whatever use would make him the most money. The second iron law was that, once committed, land



remained in that use until the land by itself was worth more for other purposes than for any use the land could sustain in combination with the building on it." ²⁰

Although even "Times Square could be returned to farming," because "the expense is utterly beyond anything economically sustainable . . . the transfer of land away from agriculture has been irreversible." Two startling examples illustrate the laws of commercial highest use. Ground at the corner of Wall and Broad Streets in Manhattan was sold in 1882 for the equivalent of \$14 million per acre. In 1916 the annual rental income from 22 square feet — the size of two desks — situated in Wall Street exceeded the annual income of the average farmer with a 100-acre farm. If that average farmer had owned 100 acres of land around Wall Street, his income would have been \$6,000,000.²¹

Underlying these "laws" is the process by which a sphere of consumption (housing) can outbid agriculture for its land. This process is mediated by the "professional land dealer, who looks upon the land as a commodity to be traded in, rather than as a factor of production to be used in a production process." To be sure, it was true in Kings County in the nineteenth century, as it has been in the post—World War II period nationally, that: "With rare exceptions, undeveloped suburban land that conceivably could be developed within twenty years has a price far above its price for any alternative use. There are exceptions: good citrus-growing land in California and Florida, where the agricultural value may be several thousand dollars an acre.... But the vast majority of undeveloped suburban land with any prospect for development within two decades is held at prices ranging upward from ten times its agricultural income." 22

Nevertheless, the overexpansion of the older cities and their eventual supersession by more modern, convenient versions — more manageable, better planned, and technologically more adaptable cities — seem as inevitable as the original impetus toward expansion, and are accompanied by endless cycles of poverty, intractable ghettoes, and a massive waste of social resources. The ultimate question thus becomes: Should these planlessly cumulated, market-registered profit aspirations of speculators, developers, and builders as well as individual consumer preferences for residential locations be considered an adequate proxy for a set of consciously articulated community preferences — let alone be taken for granted as the superior method of making quasi-irrevocable spatial realignment land-use decisions of massive proportions? Or are there reasons to seek and maintain a bal-



ance, where possible, to plan, allocate, and to set more manageable goals and boundaries for urbanization?²³

Urban sprawl may have been a necessary condition of industrialization in the United States in the sense that the agricultural base that preceded and surrounded the city could not have survived the onrush of residential realestate speculation without foresight and public policies that the politically outnumbered farmers could not have implemented on their own. As this book acknowledges, however, it would have been politically implausible in late-nineteenth-century New York to justify a public sector urban-planning process since municipal planning was minimalist and regional planning authorities nonexistent. Indeed, New York may have been in the worst possible position to carry out such planning: as late as 1913 the National Conference on City Planning heard that New York City had "less power . . . than any other city in the United States. In New York you cannot alter the plan of a single street . . . without having to go to Albany for an act of the legislature." Moreover, governmental authorities were so restrained in their provision of infrastructure of any kind that an interventionist location or preservation strategy on behalf of agricultural land would have been virtually unthinkable. Development in the New York region "occurred mostly through the accretive results of market forces or political deals." If opposition to the introduction of zoning (even without general planning) in New York City in 1916 was rooted in the laissez-faire notion that "if a man paid money for a piece of land he was entitled to use it as he saw fit," such antistatist views were even more pronounced in the Gilded Age. After all, since the early nineteenth century the city had been "treated not as a public institution, but a private commercial venture to be carved up in any fashion that might increase the turnover and further the rise in land values." 24

Even later on, in 1929, the Regional Plan of New York and Its Environs, predicting that to "acquire land for 'lung' space and to use it for farms might not be regarded by the courts as legitimate county or city uses and purposes," opined that legislative enactment would be required to legitimate such actions. Indeed, several generations later, the enormously expanded powers of the various New York City metropolitan area planning agencies were not used to bring country and city closer together. For example, the same "public [that] built the Verrazano-Narrows Bridge from Brooklyn to Staten Island . . . that has suddenly opened up the last rural part of New York City to massive residential development by private persons . . . neglected to regulate the planless, headlong rush to subdivide, to buildoze and to build



badly designed houses that are . . . scarring the Staten Island landscape." As a result, New Yorkers are no longer "permitted the refreshing contrast of escaping to . . . a swath of open country whose isolation from urban traffic makes it possible to still engage in farming." The contemporaneous dumping onto Long Island's potato fields of "a population the size of Philadelphia" without any provision for mass transit is another example of how undemocratically structured, publicly built infrastructure can perpetuate urban congestion.²⁵

Nevertheless, historians and urban planners have noted counterexamples of public sector intervention, even for the earlier period. For example, Stockholm's turn-of-the-century acquisition of agricultural land outside of the city limits for eventual residential development was designed to avoid the unplanned sprawl of working-class suburbs. In the second half of the twentieth century, too, Stockholm has been credited with having preserved rural space for its metropolitan area.²⁶

Commonly ignored in the free-market celebration of historically evolved urban configurations is that the claim that "Americans have 'voted with their feet' in favor of the great cities is . . . nonsense. . . . [F]reedom of individual choice . . . is largely an illusion. In the aggregate the nation's . . . workers must distribute themselves according to where the jobs are. And workers do not decide where jobs are located; employers do. . . . The United States, alone among advanced industrial democracies, has made it a matter of practice . . . to uphold the freedom of corporate choice." ²⁷

If governments in the United States in the latter half of the twentieth century have largely refrained from interfering with the industrial location decisions flowing from the anarchic demands of capital accumulation, their hands-off stance in the late nineteenth century is self-explanatory. The irreversible conversion of the bulk of Kings County farmland within the relatively short time from the middle 1880s to the end of the 1890s was facilitated by the inevitabilist attitude of landowners, policymakers, and commentators. As early as 1873, the Kings County Rural Gazette discerned that the "steady, onward, irresistable march of improvements . . . has fairly commenced to plow its way through the quiet meadows of the beautiful rural districts of our incomparable Southern slope." It did not hesitate to predict that within a few years the rural district's "manifest destiny" to become part of one of the world's largest cities would be realized. The newspaper even analogized the forces pushing toward (sub)urbanization of Flatbush to gravity: "when the rapid transit route shall have been completed the full tide of city emigration will flow onto our beautiful southern slope just as naturally



as water flows down hill." To the extent that judgments about the destiny of farming may have been shortsighted, the decision process lacked the kinds of features that might have shielded an appropriate amount of land from conversion.²⁸

Against this inevitabilism, the aim of this book is to identify the gray areas situated deep within what many contemporaries deemed a sphere of the inexorable, driven as it was by the supposed wisdom of market price. How, for example, did Kings County farmers come to recognize and confront changes in agricultural markets? How did real-estate developers come to understand at what point farmland became ripe for residential consumption? Furthermore, in light of these constraints, what conclusions can be reached regarding whether agriculture in Kings County had to disappear altogether? What might have been required by way of intervention to preserve more balanced land use in the area? In short, to address these questions it is necessary to know more about what actually did happen that caused farming to disappear and why.

Understanding the modern world by reference to the market has a certain appeal: without knowing why things changed it is impossible to speak of the "margins" that mark the moments at which actors changed course or of the "forces" that shaped individual choices into larger social movements. But economic analysis is necessarily static, concerned with specific constraints at specific times. And if markets make history, so, too, does history make markets, for history provides insight into the ways in which the margins materialized, into the ways individuals' choices were contoured and tempered over time.

Moreover, just as policymakers readily draw on economic analysis to rationalize what in fact has taken place, they also quickly forget the history that can serve as a repository of creative alternatives. Thus a principal objective of this book is historical — to retrieve a piece of the past. The richly detailed accounts of farms, farmers, farming, and farmworkers in part I and of the process by which those farms became suburbs in part II could stand alone, and many readers may find them absorbing in their own right. But the discussion progresses to analyze how these changes fit into larger patterns of urbanization, and to speculate on the meaning of the widely perceived inevitability of the disappearance of urban farming.²⁹

How market gardening became such a dynamic and dominant politicaleconomic phenomenon in the southern half of Kings County is the subject of part I. Chapter 2's description and analysis of the Kings County agricultural sector in the latter half of the nineteenth century reveals how Kings



County advanced to the pinnacle of national vegetable production. Special attention is given to the transition from extensive to intensive agriculture and to the interaction between the fuel inputs and excremental outputs of urban horse-drawn transportation of New York City and Brooklyn and the manure needs of fertilizer-intensive cultivation in Kings County. Chapter 3 describes vegetable markets in New York and Brooklyn and the consequences of the rise of southern competition in the last quarter of the nineteenth century. The farm sector's decline at the end of the nineteenth century is shown not to have resulted from a collapse of competitiveness or profitability. Chapter 4 provides an overview of the farm sector's labor requirements, laborers, and labor relations. It begins by examining the labor force that was available to mid-nineteenth-century farmers by virtue of the fact that Dutch farmers had made the county first-ranked in the North in terms of slaves and slaveowners as a proportion of the population well into the nineteenth century. The origins of agricultural labor in slavery left their imprint on labor relations in the sense that Dutch farmers continued to exercise paternalistic powers over their wage laborers. The streams of rural immigrants, especially from Germany and Ireland, to the New York City area from the 1840s on ensured an adequate supply of labor. Thus urbanization proved to be not an obstacle, but a boon to the growth of vegetable farming.30

Once the viability and profitability of Kings County market gardening has been established in part I, the focus in part II shifts to how, when, and why Dutch farmers closed out a quarter-millennium of agriculture in Kings County, and developers bought those farms in order to convert them into middle- and upper-middle-class residential suburbs. Chapter 5 contrasts the demographic and economic development of the city of Brooklyn and the rural towns to shed light on the difficulties standing in the way of and opportunities beckoning to annexation. Chapter 6 presents the prehistory of the conversion of farmland into real estate and an account of the private and public provision of the infrastructure that was a prerequisite of suburbanization. Dutch farmers' temporary success in thwarting the modernizers is the focus of chapter 7, which delves into the arguments that undergirded the rich annexation debate in 1873.

Chapter 8 subjects to empirical scrutiny the view that the imposition of higher, city-lot, taxes on farmland "forced" farmers to sell their farms because they were not sufficiently profitable to sustain a customary standard of living and to finance tax payments. A significant element in this account is the discovery that, contrary to the received wisdom, New York State, like



a number of other states in the nineteenth century, enacted laws to protect Kings County farmers from such taxes in the wake of annexation. The trend toward tenancy and the associated ethnic heterogeneity that characterized the farm sector by the 1880s forms the germ of chapter 9, which investigates the consequences of this farm-tenure structure for the longevity of vegetable cultivation and the specific patterns shaping the eventual land sell-off. The intertwined "push-pull" processes of agricultural self-dissolution and developers' creation of middle-income residential suburbias are illustrated in chapters 10 and 11. Chapter 10 reconstructs the agricultural cost-profit calculations that undergirded farm owners' decision to abandon operating farms or taking rents from tenants who farmed. Chapter 11 shifts the focus to the mobilization of the land and environment for suburbanization, taking the perspective of developers, who enabled sellers to receive high enough prices to abandon cabbage-cultivating for coupon-clipping.

Finally, chapter 12 explores the effects of the disappearance of urban market-gardening for twentieth-century land-use patterns in Kings County and New York City. Based on the insights of New York City and regional planners in the years before the depression of the 1930s, who perceived the untoward consequences flowing from the complete loss of greenbelts and local fresh vegetables, as well as the more recent state and county initiatives to preserve agricultural land and production, the argument contrasts the inevitabilist, laissez-faire approach in the United States with the more flexible intervention of European societies in the twentieth century.



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