

Advocates for Urban Agriculture

Plan for Sustainable Urban Agriculture in Chicago

Advocates for Urban Agriculture (AUA) is a coalition of organizations and individuals open to all interested in networking and advocating for urban agriculture in the Chicago area.

Urban Agriculture is the growing, processing, and distributing of food and other products through plant cultivation and animal husbandry in and around cities.

Urban Agriculture Rationale

With a strong, integrated plan for urban agriculture, the City of Chicago could reap the broadest community, economic, nutritional and environmental benefits. Such a plan would help Mayor Daley and Chicago residents realize a vision for Chicago as the “greenest city in the world.”

Urban Agriculture Improves the Environment and Enhances Quality of Life by:

- Turning unused vacant lots into attractive, safe urban farms.
- Improving storm water collection.
- Increasing biodiversity.
- Reducing air pollution.
- Composting the 30% of the waste stream that is organic waste.
- Cleaning up the 70% of Chicago soil that is contaminated.
- Reducing fuel consumption by not transporting agricultural products long distances.
- Reducing urban cooling energy requirements as a result of adding plants to the environment.

Urban Agriculture Brings About Community Economic Development By:

- Providing employment and supplemental income opportunities.
- Increasing overall economic activity in local communities.
- Increasing green open space and the property values and tax revenues near them.
- Allowing residents to save money growing and/or buying locally.
- Reducing the costs of health care through the health and environmental benefits of gardening and eating fresh produce.

Urban Agriculture Enhances Food Security By:

- Increasing the availability of healthy, affordable food for all.
- Teaching people how to grow their own food.
- Reducing the reliance on emergency food systems.
- Increasing residents’ income and access to local food.

Urban Agriculture is a Proven Benefit to Urban Areas:

- 40% of Toronto, Canada, residents grow some of their food in home or community gardens.
- Residents in Havana Cuba, produced 8500 tons of agricultural produce including 7.5 million eggs and 3,650 tons of meat in 1996 alone.
- The United Nations Development Program estimates that 15-20% of food is produced in urban areas world-wide.
- Salem, Oregon, reports that urban land next to a “greenbelt” was worth \$1,200.00 more per acre than land only 1000 feet away.

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Urban Agriculture Models

Home Gardens

Home gardens are usually smaller than a city lot and adjacent to a house or apartment. They are managed by residents and production is primarily for home use. Small scale income generation from produce or value-added products is possible.

Community-Based Gardens

Community-based gardens range in size from a portion of a city lot to several lots. They are located at schools, churches, community centers, food pantries, housing developments, or on other city or community-owned land. They are managed by constituents of the community entity, and production is for use by constituents, by the organization, or for income generation.

Commercial Gardens and Small Farms

Commercial gardens and small farms range in size from one city lot to 10 acres. They are usually located in vacant lots in commercial or residential areas either owned or leased by the producer. Management is often by an entrepreneur or employee of a restaurant, and production is primarily for income generation.

Policy Recommendations as of 2006

Land Use

Goal: Make land available for urban farming in the Chicago metropolitan area. Recommendations include the following:

1. Establish an urban agriculture incubator area in which a large tract of city land allows new farmers to gain experience.
2. Develop tenure schemes including land trusts and long term leases.
3. Creation of urban agriculture zoning with land identified in neighborhoods for food cultivation and animal husbandry.
4. Tax incentives and discounted sale of city land for urban agriculture.

Soil and Compost

Goal: Create an adequate supply of clean, safe, affordable soil, compost and other amendments for urban farming. Recommendations include the following:

1. Establish city-wide source-separated commercial, restaurant and residential collection of organic materials for compost production.
2. Use tax incentives and/or discounted sale or lease of land for commercial or community composting enterprises.
3. Assistance with soil testing, remediation and soil removal and replacement.
4. Establish home composting bin distribution and education program.

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Training and Education

Goal: Support existing urban farmers and train new urban farmers. Recommendations include the following:

1. Establish training centers partially funded by the city that include incubator growing plots for entrepreneurs
2. Foster community involvement in education and training program development.
3. Support programs in schools that grow food and teach land stewardship and healthy eating habits while supporting city and state learning standards.
4. Foster apprenticeship programs on local farms.
5. Redesign the summer youth employment program and other employment programs to incorporate urban agriculture.

Marketing and Distribution

Goal: Insure local, sustainably-grown produce is available and affordable throughout Chicago, especially in low income communities. Recommendations include the following:

1. Improve food stamp service at farmer's markets.
2. Provide grants, subsidies, support or other incentives for urban farmers who sell below market rate in low income communities.
3. Establish preferences for purchase of locally produced food by city agencies.
4. Establish year 'round green markets and strengthened farmer's market program, with community input in farmer's market policies.

For more information, please visit

<http://auachicago.wordpress.com>

<http://advocates-for-urban-agriculture.googlegroups.com> (sign up here to join AUA's Google group)