Farming in the City: Urban Agriculture in Hartford

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What is Urban Agriculture?

Neighbors turning a vacant lot into a community garden

An apartment dweller growing cherry tomatoes in their window

Children planting a vegetable garden at school.

Greenhouses filled with gourmet herbs to be sold to restaurants

A rooftop filled with plants

A community gardener selling her peppers at the farmer's market.

City families buying food that was grown less than a mile away

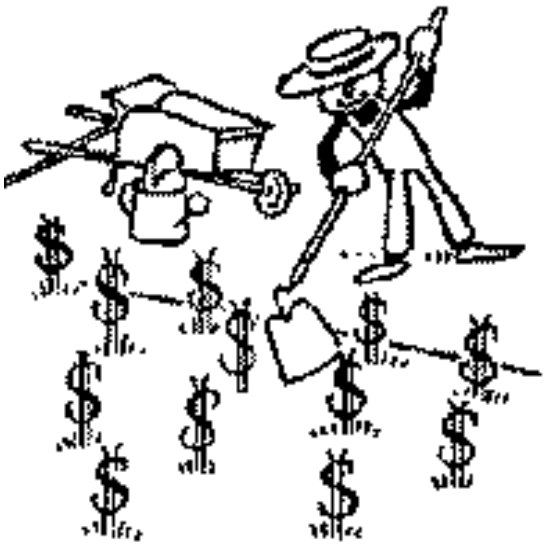
What is Urban Agriculture?

- ✓ **Growing food and other plant and animal products in or around a city**
- ✓ **Producing, processing and marketing food in response to the demand of urban consumers**
- ✓ **Agriculture that uses intensive production methods and recycles urban wastes and resources**

Added Value's Red Hook Farmer's Market

What Can Urban Agriculture Do for Hartford?

- **Provide jobs, job training and economic development.**
- **Increase access to fresh vegetables and fruits in a city with few supermarkets.**
- **Enable low-income families to grow their own food for a minimal cost.**
- **Increase local food production**
- **Encourage community pride, provide space for outdoor community gatherings, and revitalize neighborhoods**
- **Provide a safe place to exercise and play.**



What Else Can Urban Agriculture Do for Hartford?

- **Make Hartford a more beautiful and livable Community**
- **Recycle waste and foster environmentalism**
- **Prevent Crime and provide community service opportunities for non-violent offenders**
- **Bring new residents and visitors to the City.**
- **Reduce urban blight and contaminated vacant lots**

Nuestras Raices gardeners bringing crops to market

Why Urban Agriculture in Hartford?

Urban Agriculture builds on Hartford's strengths while helping to solve many of Hartford's challenges.

Hartford's Assets:

- **Active, well-defined neighborhoods**
- **Ethnic diversity**
- **The Park and Connecticut Rivers**
- **Residents and immigrants with agricultural knowledge & experience**
- **A wealth of past and present Open Space**
- **Innovative nature programs at Annie Fisher and Mary Hooker Schools**

Why Urban Agriculture? More Assets!

- **Existing Community Gardens**
- **Dynamic, experienced community organizations**
- **Some remaining regional agriculture infrastructure**
- **Hartford's focus on youth development**
- **Momentum around Urban Renewal**

Nuestras Raices' greenhouse in Holyoke

Why Urban Agriculture in Hartford?

Hartford residents are impacted by numerous social and economic factors that affect the quality of life and discourage positive community change. These factors are compounded by serious health risks related to diet, inactive lifestyles, and the environment.

Hartford's Challenges:

- **Urban blight, abandoned buildings and vacant and contaminated lots.**
- **Lack of access to fresh produce. Hartford currently has only one supermarket in a city of over 120,000 people.**
- **Job loss and Low-paying jobs. In 2000, 29.1% of Hartford families had annual incomes of less than $15,000. 19.3% had incomes of less than 10,000.**
- **Obesity: In 2000 34% of Hartford adults were obese, double the state average of 16.9%.**
- **Poverty: 68.8% of students in the Hartford's school district live at or below the poverty line.**

More Challenges in Hartford

- **Residents' negative perceptions of their neighborhood. In one survey, Residents identified their main neighborhood concerns as illegal drugs, unemployment, poverty, crime and litter.**

- **Food Insecurity. In one survey, 52% of Hartford households experienced some level of food insecurity in 1999-2000.**

- **Low rates of physical activity and limited safe ways to exercise.**

- **High rates of air pollution related diseases like asthma and respiratory disease.**

- **Some of the highest rates of unproductive land in Connecticut.**

- **High Rates of weight and nutrition related diseases like hypertension and diabetes**

What Could Urban Agriculture Look Like in Hartford?

For-profit Urban Farms

Non-profit Urban Farms and Gardens

Prison Gardens

Community and Apartment Gardens

Greenhouse Gardens

Backyard and Container Gardens

Park Gardens

Rooftop Gardens

Added Value in Brooklyn, NY

What Other Cities in the Area Have Urban Agriculture?

Most cities! Here are some examples:

New Haven, CT

New Britain, CT

Springfield, MA

Providence, RI

Holyoke, MA

Worcester, MA

Boston, MA

Brooklyn, NY

What Actions Can Hartford take to Support Urban Agriculture?

- Many urban growers do not own the land they grow on. Preserve land for agricultural use through land trusts and long-term leases and agreements. Give urban growers the title to land.

- Establish a process for people or organizations to gain access to land. Urban growers should be able to use land as long as they maintain it.

- Educate backyard gardeners about possible toxics in urban soil and how to remediate them. Provide free soil testing for contaminants such as lead.

- Create a community “tool bank” where gardeners can share, borrow, or rent tools.

- Link urban farmers with farm-related services and opportunities

More Actions to Take

- Encourage agriculture-based training and food-systems curriculum at schools and youth programs.
- Allow urban farms to process food products locally. Provide access to community kitchens
- Organize/Sponsor trainings in urban farming practices
- Initiate a “buy local” campaign to educate consumers about the benefits to purchasing locally grown produce. Increase access to markets for urban farmers.
- Secure a commitment from city policymakers to support urban agriculture.

What Can the City Do at a Policy Level?

- Promote urban agriculture as an economic and community development tool.
- Establish policies to determine how people and organizations can gain access to land for urban agriculture.
- Change City zoning to allow land to be used to agricultural purposes. Increase the amount of land zoned for agricultural use.
- Develop a comprehensive municipal composting project that will divert at least 50% of the waste stream.
- Add an Urban Planner to the Hartford Food Policy Commission
- Include community gardens in the land use plans for Hartford and include urban agriculture in city planning decisions and development projects.

A Few More Policy Suggestions

- List community gardens as a permitted and/or potential use for vacant lots. Change zoning laws to facilitate the creation of gardens.

- Solicit recommendations from the Food Policy Commission on how to encourage urban agriculture and ensure its sustainability

- Identify policy-level obstacles to locally grown purchasing in institutions, including schools.

- Encourage agriculture in non-development friendly areas such as floodplains.

What can Hartford Residents Do?

- Start a community garden with your neighbors. Knox Parks Foundation can help you get started.

- Buy locally grown fruits and vegetables to support urban farming projects, like GROW Hartford. Ask your local grocer to carry locally grown produce.

- Start a garden at your child's school. School gardens can be used to teach children about every subject.

- Support a local farm and make fresh fruits and vegetables a part of your school. Speak to your food service director about purchasing locally grown fruits or vegetables at your child's school.

- Volunteer at an urban garden project. Senior centers, schools and community organizations need your help.

What Else Can You Do?

- Low-income individuals may be eligible for food stamps. Food Stamps can be used to purchase food-producing plants and seeds and may be accepted at some farmer's markets.

- Donate gardening tools, seeds, and equipment.

- Donate money or time to community land trusts which preserve land by buying development rights.

- Contact your elected officials and ask them to implement policies that support urban agriculture.

What have other Cities done?
A few examples:

New Haven, CT

The **New Haven Ecology Project** High School has a garden project and youth-operated farmer's market stand. The school is a collaborative charter school with 115 kids, 68% of whom are African-American. They grow all types of eggplants, tomatoes, flowers, strawberries and standard crops such as kale, okra, and lettuce. The garden is integrated into the standard curriculum and children from the school maintain it. The New Haven Ecology Project also operates a 5 week summer program where youth receive stipends for their work.

New Britain, CT

Urban Oaks is a 3 acre organic urban farm with 10 paid farm staff during peak season and a youth employment program in the summer. They deliver vegetables and herbs wholesale to restaurants and retail stores and run a farmstand with organic produce from regional farms. They grow a wide variety of heirloom and unusual crops including lettuces and salad greens, tomatoes, fresh herbs and eggplant and have 40,000 square feet of greenhouse space.

Springfield, MA

The Department of Corrections has operated **Metro Farm** for 5 years as a collaboration initiated by the Northeast Organic Farming Association. At Metro Farm., one of many garden projects in the area, Inmates tend organic vegetable gardens at two senior apartment complexes. The produce is provided for free to senior citizens and handicapped residents in the North End community. Inmates also work on organic farms in the area in return for job training from farmers.

Providence, RI

City Farm is a certified organic farm in Providence operated by Southside Community Land Trust. The farm produces vegetables, herbs and flowers, and is home to chickens and an active beehive. They sell their produce at farmer's markets and plan on operating a Community Supported Agriculture (CSA) program in 2004. Volunteers help plant, cultivate, and harvest City Farm crops. The Farm is the primary site for visiting school children, youth summer programs, organic gardening classes, and internships through local colleges such as Brown University. SCLT's Education Program consists of lessons and activities on some of the urban environmental issues effecting Providence, such as solid waste management, air and water pollution, trees in the urban landscape, and vacant lots.

Holyoke, MA

Nuestras Raices is a youth garden project that currently manages 6 community gardens and two youth gardens. They sponsor economic development projects, including a organic bakery and restaurant and a youth development program. The organization focuses on building community and ethnic pride among the Puerto Ricans in Holyoke as well as building intergenerational connections between older immigrants, often from agricultural backgrounds, and youth with limited experience working on the land.

Worchester, MA

UGROW (Urban Garden Resources of Worcester) is a community gardens project operated by the Regional Environmental Council of Central Massachusetts. The program consists of 20 garden sites that are locally self-managed in neighborhoods, public housing and schools. Like Knox Parks Foundation in Hartford, UGROW supports and organizes community groups to reclaim, revitalize and transform derelict lots into public green space. In 2003, they ran their first youth summer program, YouthGROW with 10 youth. The youth transformed a vacant lot into the City of Worcester's first urban farm. Curriculum included environmental justice, food security, community organizing and soil remediation.

Boston, MA

Boston has several dynamic examples of urban agriculture, including the **Food Project**, a youth development program that operates a garden project in Roxbury, organizes and educates backyard gardeners, and runs a youth program that sends children out of the city to work on a farm. **Re-Vision House** is another inspiring example of how agriculture can be used to alleviate a number of social problems. Re-Vision House Urban Farm is an urban agriculture/aquaculture project based in a Dorchester shelter for homeless pregnant and parenting women. They grow a wide variety of vegetables, fruits and flowers in two greenhouses and on nearly 1/2 acre of land. The produce is used by shelter residents, distributed to community members through sales- and work-exchange programs, and sold at two neighborhood farmers' markets. Shelter residents are employed in the greenhouse and receive horticultural and aquaculture training through an employment and training program. The farm is governed by a community board consisting of six organizational members and six community members.

Brooklyn, NY

New York City has long been home to many urban agriculture advocates and organizations, such as Just Food and the Green Guerillas. There are currently more than **700 community gardens** in the city. **Added Value** is an urban gardening project in Brooklyn that grew out of a need for economic and educational opportunities for youth in the area. Added Value grows produce on urban lots, has a collaborative composting program with local schools and runs a farmers market in Red Hook. Youth get a stipend for their work in the garden and at the farmer's market and also receive training in business skills, desktop publishing, photojournalism, and environmental justice.

Where to Play in the Dirt:
A Hartford Farm Site Analysis

	Knox Parks	**Watkinson School**	**Chestnut St**	**Main St/Belden**
Location	Laurel St	Albany Ave, near garden	near House of Bread	near SAND
Neighborhood	NW Frog Hollow	S. Blue Hills	Clayhill	Clayhill/ Arsenal
Size	?	?	2.5 acres	?
H20 access	yes	yes (unitarian church)	no	no
Toxicity	none	low	possible in 1 lot	some contamination
Prep status	high	none	cleared	cleared
Expansion	limited	yes	yes	no
Community access	?	?	fair	excellent
proximity to youth	?	near school	fair	excellent
owner	City	Watkinson School	?	Hartford Redeveopment Agency?
on-site market	possible	difficult	possible	possible
parking	yes	yes	street parking	street parking
foot traffic	some	none	little	some
safety	good	?	fair	fair
public transportation	yes	yes, U route	yes, U, T, K1	yes, K route
area food insecurity rate	47%	59%	60%	60%
multiple site	no	no	yes, 2	no
best thing about site	readiness & collaboration	soil & near garden	marketing location	location in community
potential problems	possiblefure development	distance from low income	possible toxicity	contamination

Where to Play in the Dirt:
A Hartford Farm Site Analysis

	ONE CHANE	**Hawthorn St**	**Riverfront**	**Broad Park**
Location	Battles St, near Windsor	Hawthorn, near Hartford High	Brookfield St	Ward and Wolcott
Neighborhood	Clayhill/Arsenal	Asylum Hill	Behind the Rocks	Frog Hollow
Size	3.5 acres total	unknown	22 acres	1 single family lot
H20 access	yes	no	no	unknown
Toxicity	unknown	likely	some testing done	unknown
Prep status	cleared	none, would need soil amendment	none	none
Expansion	possible	yes, large site	yes	possible
Community access	good	good	poor	excellent
proximity to youth	good	excellent	Boys and Girls Club	near Quirk middle s
owner	American Legion	private owner	Housing Authority & others	Broad Park Dev Co
on-site market	possible	possible	difficult	possible
parking	street parking	gravel lot	need to create	street parking
foot traffic	little	some, mostly students	none	some
safety	good	near hazardous areas and violence	fair	fair
public transportation	yes, W Route	yes, E route	near A route	yes, K route
area food insecurity rate	60%	60%	22%	47%
multiple site	yes	no	if desired	no
best thing about site	attached to existing project	positive impact on neighborhood	potential for expansion	central location
potential problems	working w/ ONE CHANE	toxicity, long-term access to land	location	possible toxicity

Where to Play in the Dirt:
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Location	
Neighborhood	
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parking	
foot traffic	
safety	
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potential problems	

Lessons Learned from
Successful Urban Agriculture Projects

Program Planning:

- Have the community involved in every step of the process.
- Have youth involved in the design process of youth-oriented projects
- Keep the program in the City, rather than transporting kids outside the City.
- For CSA programs--have a demonstration garden at CSA drop-off sites so that organizations/clients can get a sense of what seasonality looks like.
- Collaborate with organizations that have a strong voice, clear identity, and many constituents.

Location:

- Start Small. Get a sizable piece of land and work a small portion at a time, building slowly.
- Start on land that is already established.
- Choose a location in a community where there is limited marketing competition (and therefore great need)—no supermarkets, few accessible local markets. Changing the purchasing patterns to a locally oriented food system is easier in areas where there are fewer alternatives.

Community:

- Involve marginalized groups in your project. Target populations with time on their hands and inspire them by using agriculture as a way to contribute positively to their community. Once your project gains momentum it will be easier to involve time-pressed populations.
- Build on existing assets. Use the farming experience and ethnic crop knowledge of immigrants as a farming and marketing resource. Showcase the diversity of the City by using gardening and food as an analogy.

Growing:

- Have soil tested every year to track the impact of your soil amendments. Improved soil health can be used as justification for organic methods.

- Offer specialty crops that would not be economically viable for a large scale operation—unusual varieties of well-known herbs, edible flowers, salad greens.

- Everyone wants to get involved in urban gardening projects. Use all of your volunteers and youth to full-advantage. Plant labor-intensive crops with a high price value.

- *Organize beds in such a way that it will be easy to see where to walk, and what to pick*--particularly if you will be using volunteers and youth who are unfamiliar with agriculture. Intercropping and Three Sisters plantings can be problematic. Both the Food Project and City Farms reported incidences of accidental crop destruction.

Funding:

- *Fund staff through collaborations with agencies, organizations, universities, etc*. (see staff). Use existing funds or staff if possible to lower staffing costs. For example, one farm uses work-study programs to hire University students; another used existing NOFA and Office of Corrections staff funded by other projects. It can be easier to get an organization to donate a percentage of one person's time than to pay for a whole new staff person.

- Charge per head for field trips.

Marketing:

- *Accept Senior and WIC FMNP coupons*. Seniors and WIC clients will provide free advertising for you by telling everyone they know

- Market to seniors, they may be more willing to go out of their way for produce similar to what they remember growing themselves or eating in their youth.

- Involve as many people as possible in some way with your project. Every person represents free advertising, a funding source, a new farmstand client, a volunteer and a community contact. *Dedicate significant time to maintaining contacts with people who express interest in your program.*

- View community gardeners as collaborations, not as produce competitors.

Programming:

- Use other youth programs in order to offer urban gardening to additional youth without running additional programs. Collaborate with groups looking to add a community service, science, nature or outdoor component: camps, youth development org, after-school programs, juvenile offender facility.

- Most successful youth programs incorporate skills, learning and fun into the curriculum.

Farmer's Market and Farmstand:

- Develop a business plan, before you start.

- Have community gardeners at your farmstand. Not only will they supply additional produce, but they can provide word-of-mouth advertising.

- At farmstands, work with farmers who are used to selling at farmers markets to increase to amount of produce you can offer to clients.

- Accept FMNP coupons and food stamps if possible.