

Agriculture

DEFINITION/DESCRIPTION

Urban agriculture occurs in backyards, community and school gardens, and on for- and non-profit farms. It encompasses aquaponics, aquaculture, small animal husbandry, edible landscapes, and non-food agriculture such as flowers. Its benefits include social cohesion, neighborhood vitality, economic benefits and jobs, environmental services, increased knowledge around food, and more.

CURRENT STATUS

There are over 200 community gardens and approximately 17 urban farms in Baltimore. The City is a national leader in supporting urban agriculture through policy, with emphasis on production farming. This includes the Homegrown Baltimore: Grow Local Urban Agriculture Plan, an urban agriculture tax credit, the Land Leasing Initiative, and improved regulations for animal husbandry and hoop houses.

EQUITY INDICATORS

Urban agriculture offers opportunities for employment and/or self-sufficiency for populations that face challenges such as low educational attainment, criminal records, limited language proficiency or other barriers to entering the traditional workforce. Long-term access to and/or ownership of land for urban agriculture provides opportunities to create more equitable food systems and food sovereignty in communities that have historically been excluded from equal access to fresh healthy foods. Simply providing access to land is not enough to create equity. It requires support through education, infrastructure and community buy-in.

STRATEGIES

1. Ensure Baltimore City creates a productive landscape by protecting land for agricultural purposes and creating a policy environment that encourages food and farm production.

Action 1: Prioritize land use for agriculture and growing. **Public:** Develop site criteria to more readily identify vacant or underutilized parcels of City-owned land that is suitable for urban agriculture, including vacant lots and parkland. **Private:** Encourage private landholders and new development to include space for agricultural activities. Consider incentives to support these efforts. **Institutional:** Encourage schools, universities, religious organizations and other institutions to devote land to agricultural activities and incorporate growing into curriculum and programming.

Action 2 Create better defined and supported pathways and offer incremental opportunities to guarantee long-term land tenure and ownership of agricultural spaces. Consider models such as a “rent to purchase”, and support the expansion of community-based land trusts specifically with the intention of creating food sovereignty in marginalized communities.

2. Ensure that growers of are connected to educational and training resources to guarantee that urban food production is grown in safe, environmentally- and socially-responsible ways.

Action 1: Provide training opportunities to growers by strengthening partnerships and programs that provide growing space; consider educational or experiential requirements and opportunities in conjunction with leasing land; and/or create a farm incubator.

Action 2: Create a centralized database of urban agricultural sites and projects to connect growers to share/trade skills, expertise and equipment, and to create a collection point for data on food and farm production to better understand the impacts of urban agriculture. Use regional approaches where necessary and appropriate.

3. Support growers of all scales in building capacity by investing in agricultural infrastructure.

Action 1: Create, expand and connect more growers to local, state and federal programs and/or incentives for increased and improved production, as well as economic sustainability. This could include on-site water, equipment, hoop houses, compost, transportation, or aquaculture infrastructure.

Action 2: Amend or create local and state policies that “scale down” existing requirements or qualifications of state programs, incentives and/or policies to make them more appropriate to urban settings. For example, nutrient management plans and organic or sustainable management certification procedures and requirements can be overly onerous or may not be appropriate for smaller scale sites, whereas some tax credits or easements require acreage that is impossible in an urban setting.

Action 3: Develop multiple scales of agricultural aggregation for diverse growers and markets. This should include: direct markets such as farmers markets and CSA’s; institutional markets such as schools, hospitals and universities; and retail markets such as corners and public markets.

4. Increase availability and resident knowledge of urban agricultural activities and products to increase participation in activities, as well as to foster informed consumers that will support purchasing local foods and products at markets of various kinds.

Action 1: Create stronger procedures for engaging communities around urban agriculture projects and initiatives in order to foster shared buy-in. Consider protocols for community engagement for all projects on City-owned land, and encourage engagement on private projects. Develop a public awareness campaign to inform residents of urban agriculture opportunities and resources, and encourage local food and farm product purchase and consumption. Allow public access to grower database mentioned above, in order to make residents more aware of urban agriculture projects, opportunities to get involved, and/or to purchase or obtain food.

Action 2: Adapt or create policies and programs that facilitate the sale of urban-produced food and products at markets that provide additional social, cultural or economic benefits to underserved communities. This may include farmers markets, farmstands, CSAs, public markets, or corner stores.

METRICS FOR SUCCESS

Strategy 1: Demonstrate an increase in the acreage of urban agriculture

Strategy 2: Demonstrate increased participation in educational or experiential opportunities for growers representing all scales of urban agriculture.

Strategy 3: Demonstrate improved agricultural infrastructure for urban growers.

Strategy 4: Demonstrate an increase in the amount of fresh food sold locally at direct farm-to-consumer activities