

Urban Agriculture



Livestock, Crops Aren't Just for the Country Any More

Urban agriculture is the growing of plants, raising of animals and food processing and distribution in or around a town or city.

For example, it can involve the growing of fruits, vegetables and herbs in community and market gardens – in the ground, above ground in raised beds or hydroponically. Growers often use modern environmental modification techniques such as mulches, row covers, high tunnels (primitive greenhouses) or greenhouses for production.

In addition to plants, urban growers are involved in raising livestock such as poultry for meat and eggs, bees and other small animals such as rabbits. But the list doesn't stop there. Urban growers also participate in agroforestry and raising aquatic animals, as well as the melding of aquaculture and hydroponic horticulture in a process called aquaponics.

Many of the products from urban agriculture are sold directly to consumers and chefs through roadside stands and farmers markets or through traditional outlets such as grocery stores.

Urban agriculture is practiced for several reasons. The most important of those are income generation and food production. Some people, such as hobby gardeners, also take part in urban agriculture simply for recreation.

Urban agriculture increases food security in urban areas by increasing the amount of food available to city dwellers. It also generates a source of fresh products such as fruits, vegetables and meat products for urban consumers. Urban agriculture often is considered a "sustainable" practice because local food production requires less energy for transportation, storage and production while using local natural resources such as composts and other inputs.



In addition to plants, urban growers are involved in raising livestock such as poultry for eggs and sometimes for meat (Slow Food Baton Rouge Urban Farm).

Urban Agriculture

- Is increasingly important in urban centers around the world by providing increased access to healthy, nutritious, fresh food.
- Provides income for urban populations.
- Involves modern techniques in the production of plant and animal products.
- Uses vacant land and "greens" cities.
- Uses natural resources such as green waste that normally would be discarded.

Urban agriculture is becoming increasingly important since the majority of the world's population resides in urban areas. While there are similarities, urban agriculture is different from rural agriculture in that urban agriculture is rooted in the urban economic and environmental system.

Urban residents often are laborers for urban agricultural enterprises, and urban natural resources are used – such as turning organic waste into compost and using wastewater or stormwater/runoff for irrigation. Urban agricultural projects create direct links between producers and urban consumers and are part of the urban community food system. Urban agriculture often competes for land with other uses such as development and is often restricted and influenced by urban policies and zoning. Urban agriculture also can negatively or positively affect the urban environment and ecology.

In Louisiana, there are a few urban agricultural projects, and the majority of them are in the metropolitan New Orleans area. A good example of an urban agricultural project is the Hollygrove Market and Farm (hollygrovemarket.com) in New Orleans. The Hollygrove Market operates a community-supported-agriculture style cooperative and retail market as well as community gardens and a training center. Some food is grown on site. Other food comes from farmers across the state and southern Mississippi for the market that's open twice per week.



Many universities have student farms that provide fresh, local food on a seasonal basis at direct marketing venues like farmer's markets (LSU campus).

The New Orleans Food and Farm Network (noffn.org) is involved in policy advocacy. It also provides educational training and workshops in urban agriculture, infrastructure support and materials, such as tools and soil and irrigation supplies for garden beds for local market gardeners.

EarthShare Gardens (earthsharegardens.org) in Lafayette operates a community supported agriculture cooperative as well as a community garden and a donation garden with fresh produce donated to local soup kitchens and local food banks.

Those are just a few examples of successful urban agricultural projects in Louisiana.

Benefits of Urban Agriculture

There are many benefits of urban agriculture to cities and urban dwellers. Changing cities from being importers of food to producers of agricultural products significantly improves health, helps to alleviate poverty and contributes to sustainability.

Some of the benefits of urban agriculture are:

- Vacant urban land can be used for agricultural production.
- Energy is saved by less transportation of food from rural to urban areas and reduced shipping of green waste out of the cities to landfills.
- Organic solid waste (grass clippings, vegetable scraps and peelings, leaves, etc.) can be transformed into resources such as compost that can be used for agricultural production.
- Wastewater and runoff can be used for irrigation and thus increase the availability of fresh water for drinking, household consumption and other uses.
- Increasing production in urban areas will decrease the demand for expansion of land devoted to agricultural production in rural areas and better protect natural habitats.
- Local production in urban areas reduces transportation, storage and product losses and also results in reduced food costs.
- Urban agriculture improves the quality of life in urban environments through "greening" and creation of more natural landscapes.

- Growing food in urban areas can facilitate access to healthful, nutritious food by a segment of the urban population that is considered impoverished.
- Reduced household expenditures result from increased access to food, and the savings means an increase in purchasing power for other necessities.
- Excess food from urban agricultural projects can be sold in local markets and can generate income for low-income producers.

Obstacles for Urban Agriculture

There are a number of issues that complicate the development of urban agriculture. A major consideration is that land often is at a premium in cities, so it can be expensive or even impossible to secure. Not owning land can reduce the incentives for farming or making the necessary soil or property improvements to be successful.

In addition, land that is contaminated with heavy metals or other pollutants and the use of wastewater for irrigation without proper treatment also can pose health hazards for consumers. Other issues include urbanization and development and competition for resources and available space. It is generally understood, however, that there is available space in most urban areas.

Another aspect that impedes urban agriculture can be urban “greening” initiatives that promote

Prepared by:

Carl Motsenbocker and Robert Williams

School of Plant, Environmental and Soil Sciences

The LSU AgCenter supports urban agricultural projects across Louisiana. Its county agents and Louisiana Master Gardeners volunteers are involved in food projects in many cities. These agents and volunteers also provide direct support through educational activities, face-to-face visits and other means to producers conducting urban agricultural projects. In addition, the Louisiana Sustainable Agriculture Research Education Professional Development Program (a joint program between the LSU AgCenter and Southern University) provides support and trains agricultural professionals in urban agriculture.



Urban agriculture projects often involve training young people in gardening (Baton Rouge Youth Coalition garden).

tree canopies to the detriment of urban market gardens. Philosophical differences also exist because of those who believe the current industrial food system can produce enough food more efficiently than urban agriculture. Others question whether urban farming alone – intensive production on small plots in urban areas – could supplant the current agricultural production system.

What we do know, however, is that urban agriculture is a viable enterprise in most cities and that it is becoming more and more important in terms of food security in the United States and other parts of the world.



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Louisiana State University Agricultural Center

William B. Richardson, Chancellor

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Paul D. Coreil, Vice Chancellor and Director

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