

# (SUB)URBAN AGRICULTURE



## A BRIEF HISTORY

The history of urban gardening begins with school gardens and vacant-lot cultivation efforts during the recession of the late 1800s, which were followed by the school garden movement and civic improvement gardens inspired by the City Beautiful movement. Citizens groups, which were sometimes supported by city governments, typically organized these early efforts in urban farming. During the turmoil of World War I, the Great Depression, and World War II, urban agriculture was largely a tool of food security. Relief and victory gardens were legitimized and supported by federal government education campaigns, and they provided nutrition and psychological support in hard times.

As the role of government faded, urban gardening became a niche activity until revived by concerns in the 1960s and '70s over the energy crisis, food quality and price, environmental problems, and urban decline. Unlike in the past, however, government was largely uninvolved in this reemergence. Instead, gardens were part of community organizing efforts that spurred many local and national organizations devoted to community greening in a broad sense.

In the 1990s and 2000s, urban agriculture was marginalized and occasionally imperiled by the development boom and gentrification. However, responsive cities began formulating policy to protect and encourage urban agriculture in response to community pressure, but also from the recognition that urban agriculture has myriad benefits.



## Benefits

As sustainability has moved up the public policy agenda, cities have begun to take an interest in urban agriculture as a way to promote health, to support economic and community development, and to improve the urban environment.

In addition to providing fresh food in areas that are short on grocery stores, urban agriculture can be a source of culturally significant foods that are not available in typical grocery stores.

Some cities actively promote urban agriculture through funding, land donations, or protective zoning. Unfortunately, local policies can also present barriers to urban agriculture, particularly when restrictive zoning makes urban agriculture difficult. Frequently, these policy barriers are unintentional. For example, landscaping rules that require all lawn vegetation to be below a certain height stymie urban agriculture.

When properly sited, urban agriculture projects provide neighborhood amenities and can contribute to a positive community image.

*“Local governments can use urban agriculture as a tool to address many financial, health, and environmental issues. For example, urban agriculture can help the environment by, among other things, reducing the distances food travels. Community gardens can keep people active while providing them with natural, locally grown food. Municipal policies can help community gardeners make money by allowing them to sell excess produce. Moreover, community gardens can beautify neighborhoods and serve as a focal point that promotes resident interaction.”*

- Sustainable Cities Initiative



# REGULATING (SUB)URBAN AG

## Cleveland, OH Welcomes Urban Agriculture

Cleveland is in the process of updating its ordinances to be more supportive of urban agriculture, including bee and animal keeping on residential property. In order to keep farm animals or bees residents must apply for a two-year license from the Cleveland Department of Public Health (\$50). The applicant must provide the location, size, and ownership or management of the intended property (and if the applicant does not own the property they must provide proof of the owner's consent). They must also include the number of animals to be kept with a description and scaled drawing of any cages, hives or enclosures. A description of how sanitary and nuisance-free conditions will be maintained is also required, as is the addresses of adjoining neighbors (for notification by the Department of Public Health). After notification of neighbors, the plan is directed to the Department of Building and Housing for review.

Restrictions in the revised zoning code include: One animal (ex. chicken, duck, rabbit) is allowed per 800 square feet of lot area—i.e. for a standard residential lot of 4,800 square feet, no more than six animals would be permitted. However, roosters, turkeys and geese are not permitted on lots less than one acre. Other restrictions include standards for enclosures and fences, including access to the outdoors, setbacks, and noise prohibitions.



### Questions to Consider

- ◆ What are the possible urban agriculture activities in your municipality?
- ◆ What can be allowed in a widespread way with little controversy?
- ◆ What can be allowed, but controlled?
- ◆ What can be allowed, but only in some places?
- ◆ Are there some places where specific activities should be particularly encouraged?
- ◆ Who are the likely participants and how can positive relationships be fostered?

*"Cities can be squeamish about permitting livestock, but a limited number of chickens or bees rarely causes a nuisance."*  
- Mukherji and Morales, *APA Zoning Practice*

- ◆ Portland, OR residents may keep up to three chickens, ducks, doves, pigeons, pygmy goats, or rabbits without a permit.
- ◆ Denver, CO allows beekeeping on residential lots.
- ◆ Madison, WI allows up to four chickens on residential lots

Sources: APA—Zoning Practice, Seedstock, Sustainable Cities Initiative, Cleveland Cuyahoga County Food Policy Coalition

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