

Urban Agriculture

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Urban agriculture is defined as the growing of plants and raising of animals for food and other uses within and around cities and towns. It includes related activities such as production and delivery of inputs and processing and marketing of products.

Urban agriculture activities are usually located within a city and comprise of a variety of production systems ranging from small-scale subsistence production and processing at house-hold level to fully commercialized agriculture. It is generally characterized by closeness to markets, high competition for land, limited space, and use of urban resources, such as organic solid wastes and wastewater.



An urban farm in Richmond, Virginia

By supplying perishable products such as vegetables, fresh milk and poultry products, urban agriculture to a large extent complements rural agriculture and increases

the efficiency of national food systems.

Urban agriculture entails the production of food for personal consumption, education, and includes associated physical and organizational infrastructure, policies, and programs within urban and suburban environments. The operations range from commercial farms in suburbs to rooftop gardens and beekeeping in built-out cities.

While it is a small component of the larger community-based food system, urban agriculture is important to the overall health and resilience of communities and regions. It can contribute significantly to the development of social connections, capacity building, and community empowerment in urban neighborhoods, most commonly through community gardening. In addition, it offers links to community development practice as a viable means of workforce development, youth development, supplementing food budgets, and generating modest levels of revenue for urban farmers who sell their products. When combined with other efforts to improve access to healthy, affordable food, urban agriculture can become a valuable tool in promoting community food security, particularly in low-income, urban neighborhoods.

Examples of Urban Agriculture include:

- community gardens;
- small urban farms; farmer's markets;
- home vegetable gardens;
- hydroponic/aquaponics gardening;
- school gardens;
- roof top gardening;
- backyard poultry rearing;
- beekeeping;
- community supported agriculture (CSA);
- fish farming/aquaculture;
- farm to school, etc.

Importance of urban agriculture

Urban agriculture provides a complementary strategy to reduce urban poverty and food insecurity and enhance urban environmental management. It plays an important role in enhancing urban food security since the costs of supplying and distributing food to urban areas based on rural production and imports continue to increase, and do not satisfy the demand, especially of the poorer sectors of the population.

Contributions to urban food security

The contribution of urban agriculture to food security and healthy nutrition is probably its most important asset. Food production in the city is in many cases a response of the urban poor to inadequate, unreliable and irregular access to food, and the lack of purchasing power. Urban agriculture to a large extent complements rural agriculture and increases the efficiency of the national food system in that it provides products that rural agriculture cannot supply easily (e.g. perishable products, products that require rapid delivery upon harvest), that can substitute for food imports

and can release rural lands for export production of commodities.

Contributions to urban ecology

Urban agriculture is part of the urban ecological system and can play an important role in the urban environmental management system.

A growing city will produce more and more wastewater and organic wastes. For most cities the disposal of wastes has become a serious problem.

Urban agriculture can help to solve such problems by turning urban wastes into a productive resource. In many cities household waste can be converted to compost which can be used by urban farmers to reduce or eliminate the need to use chemical fertilizers. This is important as it minimizes the problems related to the contamination of groundwater. In addition, compost making initiatives can create employment and provide income for low income urban dwellers.

Economic impacts

Growing your own food saves household expenditures on food; low income families generally spend a substantial part of their income (50 – 70%) on food. Selling produce (fresh or processed) brings in cash. Many urban agriculture set ups can provide skills training and jobs. Many urban agriculture programs employ youth to run gardens and farms or provide paid stipends in addition to skills training. In addition, many of the food justice projects are located in neighborhoods where unemployment is high and serve as viable employment.

Social impacts

Urban agriculture may function as an important strategy for poverty alleviation and social integration. Degraded open spaces and vacant land are often used as informal waste dumpsites and are a source of crime and health problems. When such zones are turned into

productive green spaces, not only is an unhealthy situation eliminated, but neighbors will enjoy the green area. Such activities may also enhance community self-esteem in the neighborhood and stimulate other actions for improving the community's livelihood.

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