

CATEGORY: LANDSCAPES FOR HEALTH: DESIGNED LANDSCAPES

Urban Farms

Recent research on urban farms has expanded the literature substantially. Academic papers delve into two types of urban farms, though not often expressed this way – urban farms with a social gathering function and food production (similar to community farms), and ones with an emphasis on commercial production of food often referred to as urban agriculture. The distinctions are nuanced, the terminology and clarifications evolving.

Urban farms grow and produce food in a city or heavily populated town or municipality. The terms urban farms, urban farming and urban agriculture are related though may have slightly different applications. For some, urban farms and community gardens are similar, and some community gardens may be urban farms. The primary distinction is that urban farm(ing) have a commercial side – growing products to be sold (plant-based and livestock). Urban farms have seen a dramatic increase in numbers in the last decade (Palmer, 2018), and can take any number of forms including gardens at private residential properties, CSAs, hydroponic greenhouses, indoor vertical farms, rooftop/park/school and community gardens. Each urban farm has particular goals, and may include education, environmental stewardship, sustainable practices, food access/food literacy/food security/food advocacy, along with food production and a physical location used as a community gathering spot. COVID-19 has revealed some developments re: urban farms, food security, home gardening and health benefits. (Refer to section Horticulture for Health - subcategory Pandemic Gardening.)

Research with a focus on commercial production at urban farms has expanded to include USDA's expanding role in urban agriculture, zoning, and funding (Caracciola, 2022; [USDA Urban Agriculture website](#), [USDA Farm Service Agency services](#)). Commercial production topics include: hoverfly assemblages in urban farms (Heiniger et al., 2025); emerging and disruptive technologies for urban farming (Ng & Mahkeswaran, 2021); yields from vertical farms (O'Sullivan et al., 2020); urban organic waste for urban farming food production using vermicompost and thermophilic compost (Schröder et al., 2021); and business models for peri-urban and urban farms (Sroka et al., 2023). Themes related to sustainability continue to be part of the urban farm paradigm (Manikas et al., 2020; Petrovics et al., 2022; Nowysz et al., 2022).

Research on social aspects of urban farms is not as robust; Gosh (2023) investigated health initiatives and urban farm connections. Models of urban farms are more readily available online with an apparent increase in these: *Sprout NOLA Farm*, *Patchwork City Farm*, and *Woods Creek Sustainability Center and Food Forest* for example. Growing support for urban farming and urban agriculture by some city governments is evident in Pittsburg, Atlanta and communities in Washington state (refer to examples identified below). And of note, according to a [2024 article](#): “Recently, higher education institutions across the country, including the University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign (UIUC), the University of California (UC) system, and the City University of New York Graduate School of Public Health and Health Policy (CUNY SPH) have expanded their research, education, and outreach efforts to support urban agriculture, particularly in ways that benefit underserved and marginalized communities” (Chiburn).

For related resources refer to category: Landscapes for Health: [Designed Landscapes](#), [Community Gardens](#), and category: Food, Nutrition, and Food Action; category: Horticultural Practices Impacting Health: [Horticulture Best Practices](#), [Technology Tools](#).

Key Organizations

(global) [Urban Farming](#)

(local) [Cooperative Extension offices: USDA National Institute of Food and Agriculture](#)

(local) [Community Supported Agriculture](#) (CSA listing by USDA Agricultural Marketing Service)

Resource Centers on Urban Agriculture and Forestry [RUAF](#)

The American Association for Agricultural Education

[USDA Alternative Farming Systems](#)

[USDA Office of Urban Agriculture and Innovative Production](#)

Books, journals & epublications on urban farms

American Public Gardens Association. (2018). [The role of public gardens in American urban agriculture programming.](#)

[Blue-Green Systems journal](#)

Chatterjee, A., Debnath, S., & Pal, H. (2020). Implication of urban agriculture and vertical farming for future sustainability. In *Urban horticulture - Necessity of the future*. IntechOpen.

Chicago Botanic Garden & US Botanic Garden. (n.d.). [Building capacity for urban agriculture programs: Tools from the Windy City Harvest Model.](#) (downloadable).

[Journal of Agricultural Education and Extension](#)

Kellogg, Scott T., et al. (2008). *Toolbox for sustainable city living: A do-it-ourselves guide*. South End Press.

Healthy Food Policy Project. (2024). [Zoning for urban agriculture: A guide for updating your community's laws to support healthy food production and access.](#)

Local zoning bylaws

Urban Agriculture Magazine

[Urban farm business plan handbook](#)

[U.S. Farm Bill](#)

USDA National Agricultural Library (n.d.). [Urban agriculture.](#)

Research & articles on urban farms

Recently published selected research & articles:

Arnold, J.E. (2022). On-farm spatial composition, management practices and estimated productivity of urban farms in the San Francisco Bay Area. *Processes*, 10(3), 558.

Audate, P.P., Fernandez, M.A., Cloutier, G., & Lebel, A.S. (2019). Scoping review of the impacts of urban agriculture on the determinants of health. *BMC Public Health*, 19(1), 672.

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Caraccciola, J. (2022). [USDA's efforts to promote and support urban agriculture.](#) National Agricultural Law Center.

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Chiburn, E. (2024). [Urban agriculture is 'growing'.](#) Insight Into Diversity.

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Examples of urban farms

Acta Non Verba Youth Urban Farm Project (ANV) Oakland CA is a safe outdoor space for children, youth and families focused on nutrition, food production and healthy living, founded & led mainly by women of color.

<https://anvfarm.org/mission/>

Atlanta GA has realized significant tree canopy loss in the city which has empowered numerous urban farms (50) to be established as well as 150 community gardens.

<https://atlanta.eater.com/2024/10/23/24269862/atlantas-urban-farms>

Bonton Farms in Dallas, TX operates a farm, Farmer's Market, Café, and Coffee House on a lot in South Dallas with a mission to transform lives by disrupting systems of inequality, laying a foundation where change yields health, wholeness, and opportunity is the norm.

<https://bontonfarms.org/>

Boston Medical Center's rooftop farm provides local produce for the hospital, Demonstration Kitchen, Preventative Food Pantry, with a commitment to go green.

<https://www.bmc.org/nourishing-our-community/rooftop-farm>

Cerasee Farm and *Urban GreenWorks* in Miami, FL offers accessible local produce.

<https://ediblesouthflorida.ediblecommunities.com/things-do/cerasee-farm-horticultural-therapy-inner-city>

Chicago Botanic Garden's education and jobs-training program focusing on food, health and jobs, called *Windy City Harvest*, is delivered at 13 farms, with nutrition classes, 5 health partners and development/support for 30 small farm businesses.

<https://www.chicagobotanic.org/urbanagriculture>

Common Roots Bi-Hi urban farm in Halifax, NS began as a partnership with the local/provincial health agency with a mission of combating food insecurity, provision of community gardening space and therapeutic services with a horticulture theme.

<https://commonrootsurbanfarm.ca/bi-hi/>

Deep Blue Greens AgriTech start-up in Canada developed indoor farming products and systems (Voltapoinics) that significantly increase crop yields.

<https://www.deepbluegreensag.com/>

Gaia Gardens, part of Love is Love cooperative farm with 5 acres in Atlanta neighborhood of East Lake Commons uses communal farm equipment to grow food and educate participants. A second location has been established in Mansfield, GA.

<https://www.loveislovefarm.com/>

HRVSTS model created a platform for pre-purchasing produce from indoor urban vertical farms, with oversight of crop order to harvest and delivery. Based in Germany.

HRVSTS

[Master Urban Farmer Training Program](#) through University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign (UIUC) Illinois Extension in Cook County offers programs that support equitable urban farming in addition to this 12-week program.

McCormick Place, a partner with *Windy City Harvest Program* through Chicago Botanic Garden IL., is a soil-based rooftop garden on top of McCormick Place, the largest convention center in North America.

<https://rsna2016.rsna.org/dailybulletin/index.cfm?pg=16sun79>

Patchwork City Farm, originally located in Atlanta's historic west end and relocated to Oakland neighborhood includes connections with SWAG Coop centered around black urban farmers and transformative Atlanta food systems growing certified organic food sold at local farmers' markets and its weekly seasonal farm shop.

<https://www.patchworkcityfarms.com/>

Sprout NOLA Farm, Louisiana received USDA funding for food production, access for economically distressed communities, job training and education. It is one of several Sprout programs in Louisiana.

<https://www.sproutnolafarm.org/>

Urban Farm Park, in Olympia Washington's feasibility study is seeking to identify residents' interests in an urban farm park with farmer training, youth education, incubator farm for new businesses, demonstration garden, pop up market, and commissary kitchen used for commercial food product production.

<https://mrsc.org/stay-informed/mrsc-insight/may-2024/urban-agriculture>

Whitelock Community Farm in Baltimore, Maryland promotes gardening, composting and community activity.

<https://www.whitelockfarm.org/>

Woods Creek Sustainability Center and Food Forest, is an example where utility owned property in Washington state and structured with typical 7 layers for food forests focuses on food production, community engagement, education and reduction of food deserts.

<https://mrsc.org/stay-informed/mrsc-insight/may-2024/urban-agriculture>

Yisrael Family Urban Farm, Sacramento CA in underserved South Oak Park neighborhood, and now with multiple locations, cultivates fruits and vegetables on a half-acre sustainable farm, acting as community gathering spaces, providing workshops, with support from UC's Division of Agriculture and Natural Resources in communities of color.

<https://yisraelfamilyfarmshop.net/>

Videos, webinar & websites on urban farms

Community Supported Agriculture listing from Florida Department of Agriculture.

<https://www.fdacs.gov/Consumer-Resources/Buy-Fresh-From-Florida/Community-Supported-Agriculture-CSAs>

National Urban Farm Festival in Brandywine MD has existed for several years, with dates typically in May.

<https://nationalurbanfarmfest.com/>

Operation Better Block and its Junior Green corps initiative with Pittsburgh school students, seeks to teach urban farming, beautify vacant lots, install air quality monitors while growing food accessible to neighborhood residents.

<https://gba.org/blog/operation-better-blocks-junior-green-corps/>

People's Garden is a network of gardens nationwide, with one at USDA Washington headquarters, with a mission of empowering communities to grow and educate about sustainable resilient local food systems.

<https://www.usda.gov/about-usda/general-information/initiatives-and-highlighted-programs/peoples-garden>

Pittsburgh Urban Farm Tour (8th annual tour in 2024) is a self-guided experience highlighting 14 urban farms that educate on food cultivation, improving the environment, while providing access to local produce and transforming neglected areas into vibrant green spaces.

<https://www.pittsburghfoodpolicy.org/urban-farm-tour-1>

StartUs Insights Discovery's AI powered site identifies 345 urban farm start-ups with a spotlight on 20 to watch in 2023.

<https://www.startus-insights.com/innovators-guide/urban-farming-startups/>

The Garden (2008) documentary.

<https://www.imdb.com/title/tt1252486/>

USDA Urban Agriculture website has resources on urban agriculture toolkit, urban soil issues, CSAs, and urban farm business plan handbook.

<https://www.nal.usda.gov/afsic/urban-agriculture>

USDA *Community Supported Agriculture* website has resources on CSAs, Farm to School, Food Circles, and links to research.

<https://www.nal.usda.gov/afsic/community-supported-agriculture>

USDA Farm Service Agency has invested \$5.2 million in 17 urban agriculture and innovative production projects in 2024.

<https://www.fsa.usda.gov/news-events/news/07-01-2024/usda-invests-52-million-17-urban-agriculture-innovative-production>

You Can Dig This movie.

<https://www.imdb.com/title/tt4422656/>

Related organizations

[EcoWatch](#)

Local farmers' markets

[The Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations](#)

Written & compiled by Lesley Fleming, Daniela Perez Lugones Nov 2021; revised Jan 2023 by Lesley Fleming; revised in 2025 by Lesley Fleming, Katie Grimes & Joanna Brown.