



# ATTRAnews

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## Producing Food in Town

As cities expand and the demand for local food increases, more and more people are farming in and near towns. This issue of ATTRAnews looks at some of the ways folks are producing and distributing food in an urban setting.

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## Urban Farms Cultivate Food and Community

*Lee Rinehart, Northeast Regional Director, National Center for Appropriate Technology (NCAT)*

Urban farming is not a new concept, but it is gaining new support among diverse citizen groups all over the country. Schools, colleges, churches, city councils, government agencies, parks departments, anti-hunger groups, healthcare providers, and nonprofit organizations are coming together to give a fresh new meaning to "greening the city." Large metropolitan regions like Philadelphia, Boston, New York, Seattle, and Toronto have initiated substantial programs to foster urban agriculture.

Good things are happening in smaller cities as well. One exciting example is the development of an urban entrepreneurial farm on the campus of Wilkes University in Wilkes-Barre, Pennsylvania. This demonstration farm was the site for a Small Plot Intensive (SPIN) Farming workshop co-sponsored by NCAT this past May. The 2,200 square-foot farm is worked by Wilkes students and



Residents of Wilkes-Barre, Pa. create a garden at an intersection on the edge of the Wilkes University campus. The project is co-sponsored by NCAT and SPIN (Small Plot Intensive) Farming.

faculty with advice from NCAT Agricultural Specialists Andy Pressman and Lee Rinehart. On a busy street corner at the edge of campus, the farm's 52 planting beds produce greens, herbs, tomatoes, and cut flowers.

*Photo: Lee Rinehart*

In addition to community gardens and farmers' markets, urban agriculture involves land use decisions, nutritious meals at schools, employment and job training, food processing and delivery, the creation of clean, green working spaces in urban areas, citywide systems of composting waste, and much more.

The new urban gardeners are anything but your typical tender of a few rows of tomatoes and sweet corn. Many of them grow tons of food on small plots, provisioning farmers' markets, restaurants, food banks, and community-supported agriculture share boxes.

The urban farmer is often a community-minded individual who is radically engaged in urban renewal and economic revitalization. Urban agriculture has the potential to relieve food insecurity and to bolster local and regional economies.

To learn more, contact: [lee@ncat.org](mailto:lee@ncat.org), phone: (570) 696-6706

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## Finding a Place to Sell Produce in the City

*Karen Van Epen, NCAT Agriculture Specialist*



Farmers are coming up with new and creative ways to get their produce to the city people who need it. When grower André Mathews wanted to expand the market for his crops, he took a unique approach. He rented a piece of property in Memphis, Tennessee. Now every week he packs his trailer with just-picked fruit and vegetables, then drives it into town and sets up his farm stand. The locals are pleased to have fresh produce, especially since most small neighborhood grocery stores have moved away from the urban center.

Many residents of urban Memphis participate in the USDA's Senior Farmers' Market Nutrition Program, which gives them coupons to redeem for fresh produce. The coupons can be used at farmers' markets or fruit stands, but they are only valid for one month. Since many seniors find it difficult to get to the downtown farmers' market, they are delighted to be able buy farm-fresh produce right in their neighborhood.

Mathews farms on both sides of the Mississippi-Tennessee border. He is a board member of the Mississippi Association of Cooperatives, where he represents the Family Farmers Cooperative. Members of the co-op grow greens, okra, squash, purple-hull peas, sweet potatoes, watermelons, cabbage, lettuce, celery, tomatoes, and other produce. The co-op is based in Waterford, about 60 miles from Memphis.

For more information, see [www.mississippiassociation.coop](http://www.mississippiassociation.coop)

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## Social Justice and Urban Agriculture

*Kristin Reynolds, University of California Davis*

Urban agriculture can create ownership and leadership in food production among low-income urban residents, many of whom are people of color. Members of social justice movements may have different views of food system problems, but urban agriculture projects motivated by community food security, food justice, and food sovereignty have at least one common goal. They are working to make it possible for city people to grow, harvest, and consume culturally appropriate, fresh, healthy foods.

### Three Food System Movements

**Community food security (CFS)** refers to a condition in which all community residents obtain a safe, culturally acceptable, nutritionally adequate diet through a sustainable food system that maximizes community self-reliance and social justice. (Community Food Security Coalition: [www.foodsecurity.org](http://www.foodsecurity.org))



Urban food gardens bring multiple health benefits: fresh nutrient-dense produce, good exercise, stronger communities, and enhanced green spaces.

*Photo courtesy of KKCUA*

**Food justice** reframes CFS and considers the social and economic inequities that give rise to food insecurity, emphasizing democracy and local community control. (Peoples' Grocery: [www.peoplesgrocery.org](http://www.peoplesgrocery.org))

**Food sovereignty** considers it a human right for people to be able to define their own food and agriculture systems and have access to healthy and culturally appropriate food produced through ecologically sound and sustainable methods. (Food First Institute for Food and Development Policy: [www.foodfirst.org](http://www.foodfirst.org))

Members of each of these movements who grow food in urban areas also cultivate leadership and community connections. While urban agriculture may not always be the central focus of food-system social justice movements, there is a possibility for urban food production to be a part of each movement's vision. Urban agriculture programs are diverse—ranging from youth development to food production and marketing—but they convey a common message that speaks to the relationship between agriculture and nutrition, food access, and community empowerment.

*The author would like to thank members of the Growing Food and Justice for All Initiative for providing comments on social justice and urban agriculture. GFJI is a national network aimed at dismantling racism and empowering low-income and communities of color through sustainable local agriculture.*

[www.growingfoodandjustice.org](http://www.growingfoodandjustice.org)

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### Urban Agriculture Resources

*These organizations provide extensive support and information on the general topic and specific urban programs.*

- **Alternative Farming Systems Information Center (AFSIC)** of the National Agricultural Library offers "Farms and Community: Urban Agriculture and Community Gardening." <http://afsic.nal.usda.gov>. Telephone 301-504-6559
- **American Community Gardening Association** provides information about all aspects of community gardening. [www.communitygarden.org](http://www.communitygarden.org)
- **City Farmer**—Canada's Office of Urban Agriculture—teaches city dwellers how to grow food and care for the urban landscape. [www.cityfarmer.info](http://www.cityfarmer.info); [www.cityfarmer.org](http://www.cityfarmer.org)
- **Community Food Security Coalition (CFSC)** is a North American organization with many publications and activities including an exciting and informative yearly conference. CFSC urban ag committee: [www.foodsecurity.org/ua\\_home.html](http://www.foodsecurity.org/ua_home.html)
- **North American Urban and Peri-Urban Ag Alliance** brings together a diverse range of stakeholders to share knowledge about urban agriculture. [www.foodsecurity.org/ua\\_alliance.html](http://www.foodsecurity.org/ua_alliance.html)
- **RUAF Foundation** (Resource Centres on Urban Agriculture & Food Security) publishes *Urban Agriculture Magazine* with issues in French, Spanish, Chinese, Portuguese, Turkish, and Arabic. [www.ruaf.org](http://www.ruaf.org)
- **World Hunger Year (WHY)** helps grassroots organizations and students fight hunger and poverty. [www.worldhungeryear.org](http://www.worldhungeryear.org)

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## ATTRA Publications Relevant to Urban Agriculture



[Alternative Soil Testing Laboratories](#) (IP105)  
[Bringing Local Food to Local Institutions](#) (IP242)  
[Community Supported Agriculture](#) (IP289)  
[Direct Marketing](#) (IP113)  
[Enterprise Budgets and Production Costs for Organic Production](#) (RL041)  
[Farmers' Markets](#) (IP146)  
[Organic IPM Field Guides](#) (online and to download only)  
[Keys to Success in Value-Added Agriculture](#) (IP172)  
[Market Gardening: A Start-Up Guide](#) (IP195)

[Organic Greenhouse Vegetable Production](#) (IP078)  
[Resource Guide to Organic and Sustainable Vegetable Production](#) (IP188)  
[Scheduling Vegetable Plantings for Continuous Harvest](#) (IP323)  
[Selling to Restaurants](#) (IP255)  
[Sustainable Small-Scale Nursery Production](#) (IP104)  
[Sustainable Soil Management](#) (IP027)  
[Worms for Composting: Vermiculture](#) (IP110)

*Coming Soon:* Urban Ag Start-Up Guide

ATTRA also offers hundreds of free publications about specific crops, livestock, pest management, energy, marketing, and other agriculture-related topics. All of these are available to download for free from ATTRA's Web site: [www.attra.ncat.org](http://www.attra.ncat.org). Or you can call 1-800-346-9140 to order a free paper copy.

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## Urban Agriculture Grows in Popularity

Holly Michels, NCAT Editor

All across the nation, people involved in urban agriculture are noticing what they call a growing interest in growing.

Katherine Kelly, executive director and farmer with the **Kansas City Center for Urban Agriculture** (KCCUA) in Kansas, said urban agriculture—the practice of cultivating, processing and distributing food in a town or city—is experiencing a boom in her area.

"Our organization has been up and running about three and a half years and every year we've seen an increase in the numbers of farmers and the amount of land they have in production," Kelly said. "It is just a growing interest in growing."

Kelly said no group keeps specific numbers tallying urban farms across the nation, but plenty of anecdotal evidence points to an increase in growers.

"We have a farmer who started out as a home gardener six or seven years ago, gardening in her side lot. Then she borrowed the neighbor's back lot, started selling, bought a lot across the street, borrowed a lot at church, and last year bought two or three more lots," Kelly said. "And there are plenty of people like her."

Kelly attributes the interest in farming to people being more concerned about the food they eat and where that food comes from. KCCUA focuses on helping commercial producers start and maintain their urban lots. Farms can be small or large, netting from \$50 a week to hundreds of thousands of dollars.

"More people are aware of the positive benefits of growing food and feeding



Immigrants and other residents of the inner cities welcome the opportunity to farm in community gardens such as this one in Kansas City, Kan. There they can grow food



themselves and other people," Kelly said. "People want to eat healthier, want to taste real food versus food sitting on the shelf three weeks. They are aware of obesity, diabetes, all those health epidemics."

that is unavailable in most produce stores. These crops represent potential new markets.  
*Photo courtesy of KCCUA.*

Kelly is an urban farmer herself, starting her own farm 11 years ago. KCCUA eventually took over her lease on the land, two certified-organic acres in the Argentine neighborhood of Kansas City.

The nonprofit now uses the farm as educational and research space for urban farmers. Produce from the farm, which includes beans, cucumbers, edible flowers, fingerling potatoes, hot peppers, melons, pumpkins, and tomatoes, among many other things, is available through a community-supported agriculture program and farmers' markets.

### Creating Urban Farms

Colin McCrate, owner of Seattle Urban Farm Company, said he's seen a jump in urban agriculture in his area, too.

"It's beyond question whether interest is going up," said McCrate, who builds backyard vegetable gardens. "I don't know what that means in the long term, but it's really, really crazy right now."

Seattle Urban Farm Company establishes organic vegetable plots in private backyards and lots. McCrate, who started the company last year, now runs the business with Brad Halm, a former community-supported agriculture manager of Village Acres Farm in Mifflintown, Pa. McCrate said he wasn't sure the business could support him financially, but "right off the bat" interest was high enough he stayed busy all year. So far, he has installed about 100 gardens.

"People are kind of freaking out about the economy and fuel and their carbon footprints," he said. "People are calling us every day (to inquire about an urban, food-producing garden)."



Colin McCrate and his employees install food gardens for home-owners in Seattle, Washington. Business is booming as high fuel and food prices spur interest in local and homegrown food.

*Photo courtesy of Seattle Urban Farm Company.*

McCrate's gardens are extremely varied in size, from a few pots on a patio to a 50-foot by 100-foot lot. The typical size is between 200 and 300 square feet. People request a variety of fruits and vegetables that usually includes broccoli, carrots and salad greens.

McCrate offers a maintenance service on the garden, but a majority of people want to work the plots themselves. "I would say we do maintenance on less than half the gardens we put in," McCrate said. "People want to be pretty involved in learning what we're doing."

McCrate said he used to hear clients explain that they wanted a garden to help their kids learn about growing food or for better-tasting produce, but now he hears people worried about the cost of food and gas.

"(Food security), especially now, is a big thing," McCrate said. "I'll hear people say 'I'm just freaking out about the cost of fuel.' Everywhere you look you hear about it. It's definitely an interesting social climate right now."

**On the Net:** [www.kccua.org](http://www.kccua.org) and [www.seattleurbanfarmco.com](http://www.seattleurbanfarmco.com)

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## Urban Agriculture Publications

- MetroFarm online magazine of metropolitan agriculture, and MetroFarm: The Guide to Growing for Big Profit on a Small Parcel of Land by Michael Olson. These and other publications are available at [www.metrofarm.com](http://www.metrofarm.com).
- Urban Soil Primer for homeowners and renters, local planning boards, property managers, students, and educators, by J.M. Scheyer and K.W. Hipple, 2005. USDA-Natural Resources Conservation Service, National Soil Survey Center, Lincoln, Nebraska. [www.soils.usda.gov/use](http://www.soils.usda.gov/use)

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## Urban and Urban Edge Agriculture

*Kristin Reynolds, University of California Small Farm Program*

In today's landscape, farms and ranches are likely to be located near at least one city. As urban areas grow, even farmers and ranchers who were once rural may find themselves producing on the edge of a city.

Meanwhile, urban farmers and gardeners are producing food within cities and towns, often on a small scale. Food production in cities today includes individual backyards and community gardens, new versions of urban homesteads and "victory gardens," mini-farming for community food security or food justice, and farming in vacant lots and public parks.



Growing one's own food in town is flourishing because of several trends. These include higher food prices, consumer interest in locally grown products, poor access to healthy food in the inner cities, and public recognition of ties between food production, distribution, and environmental degradation.

Being near markets is one advantage of urban food production, but this certainly does not translate directly to economic sustainability, especially for small-scale operations. In addition to agricultural problems like pests and costs of production, there are some formidable challenges to urban and urban-edge

food production, such as soil contamination, urban crime, and city government's lack of familiarity with agricultural issues.

As urban agriculture, the food justice movement, and the demand for local food continue to develop, more information and assistance will become available to integrate urban agriculture into a sustainable food system.

*To learn more, read "Examining urban agriculture in Alameda County and elsewhere" by K. Reynolds, Small Farm News Vol. 2, 2008, University of California Small Farm Program:*

[www.sfc.ucdavis.edu/pubs/SFNews/news.html](http://www.sfc.ucdavis.edu/pubs/SFNews/news.html).

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## A Small Sampling of Urban Agriculture Programs

- **Nuestras Raices** is a grass-roots organization promoting economic and community development in Holyoke, Mass. [www.nuestras-raices.org](http://www.nuestras-raices.org). Phone 413-535-1789
- **Mill Creek Farm** is a collectively run urban farm and ecological education project that uses vacant land in Philadelphia. [www.millcreekurbanfarm.org](http://www.millcreekurbanfarm.org)
- **The Food Project** successfully engages young people in growing food for communities around Boston. [www.thefoodproject.org](http://www.thefoodproject.org). Telephone 617-442-1322
- **Growing Power** works in Milwaukee and Chicago. Their Rainbow Farmer's Co-op supports small farmers. [www.growingpower.org](http://www.growingpower.org). Telephone 414-527-1546
- **SPIN Farming** (Small Plot Intensive) systems emphasize growing food and earning income from gardens of less than one acre. [www.spinfarming.com](http://www.spinfarming.com)

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## New and Updated Publications from ATTRA

[Organic Standards for All Organic Operations: Highlights of the USDA's National Organic Program Regulations \(IP325\)](#)



[Positive Practices in Farm Labor Management](#) (IP324)

[Scheduling Vegetable Plantings for Continuous Harvest](#) (IP323)

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