

From the Ground Up

Planning & Zoning for Urban Agriculture
in Greater Kansas City

July 2021



**GREATER KC
FOOD POLICY
COALITION**
kchealthykids

About Us

The **Greater KC Food Policy Coalition** is a community-based initiative, functioning as a program within KC Healthy Kids, that engages leaders and stakeholders from all critical components of the regional food system to advocate for good food policies that positively impact the nutritional, economic, social and environmental health of the community.

The coalition established the **Urban Farm Zoning and Planning Task Force** in April 2020 to identify best practices and develop policy recommendations to ensure urban farmers are able to operate successfully.

KC Healthy Kids advances the health and well-being of children and families through community-driven initiatives and advocacy where they live, learn, work and play.

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Thank You

We would like to extend our deepest gratitude to task force members, interns, volunteers and stakeholders for sharing their time and expertise. This report was made possible by the generous financial support of Health Forward Foundation.

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Dig Into Urban Agriculture

About this Report

This report is the result of a year of work led by the Urban Farm Zoning and Planning Task Force, an initiative of the Greater KC Food Policy Coalition. It is a tool for urban planners, city staff, urban farmers and advocates to use to address the biggest barriers to urban agriculture in the Kansas City region. It will inform the coalition’s work to advocate for policy change.

Review the Agenda: [Greater KC Food Policy Coalition 2020-2023 Policy Agenda](#)

To better understand the barriers urban farmers face related to planning and zoning, the task force:

- Reviewed local plans and zoning ordinances.
- Surveyed local urban farmers and urban planners.
- Facilitated public meetings and expert interviews.
- Explored policies and resources for urban agriculture.

The first section of this report gives an overview of urban agriculture and its benefits. The second section provides best practices and resources to plan for urban agriculture. The third section outlines seven barriers and offers policy recommendations and case studies to support urban agriculture.

Project Timeline

- April 2020
Establish task force
- May 2020
Research and engagement
- June 2021
Present research
Select coalition priorities
- July 2021
Publish report
- August 2021
Develop advocacy plan
- September 2021
Advocate for change
Create policy resources

About Urban Agriculture

Urban agriculture, in general terms, is the production of food in urban and peri-urban areas.

Urban agriculture ranges in scale and intensity from community gardens to commercial urban farms. It encompasses a variety of production methods, like no-till farming and hydroponics. It includes keeping bees and raising fish, poultry and livestock.

Urban agriculture is not just production, but also the processing, distribution, sale and reuse of locally grown food. Products like produce, honey, eggs, dairy and meat are grown for personal consumption, donated to food banks, sold at markets and served at restaurants.



Valentine Community Garden



Splitlog Farm and Orchard



Woodland City KC



Talking Tree Urban

Reap the Benefits

Urban agriculture has been shown to improve overall wellbeing, foster community and generate social capital. It benefits our food system, health, climate and economy.

Learn the Benefits: [Urban Agriculture Impacts: Social, Health and Economic](#)

Stabilizes Food Systems

Recent disruptions like the COVID-19 pandemic and the effects of climate change have revealed just how fragile our global food system is. To strengthen our regional food system, mitigate the impact of future disruptions and ensure community food security, we must support local food production, including urban agriculture.

Cultivates Climate Resiliency

As noted in the Kansas City Regional Climate Action Plan, local and sustainable agriculture is one way to cultivate a resilient climate. Locally grown food travels fewer miles from farm to fork, reducing greenhouse gas emissions. Regenerative agriculture, based on Indigenous knowledge and practices, nurtures the soil, sequesters carbon and enhances biodiversity. Urban agriculture, as a form of green infrastructure, can also reduce stormwater runoff.

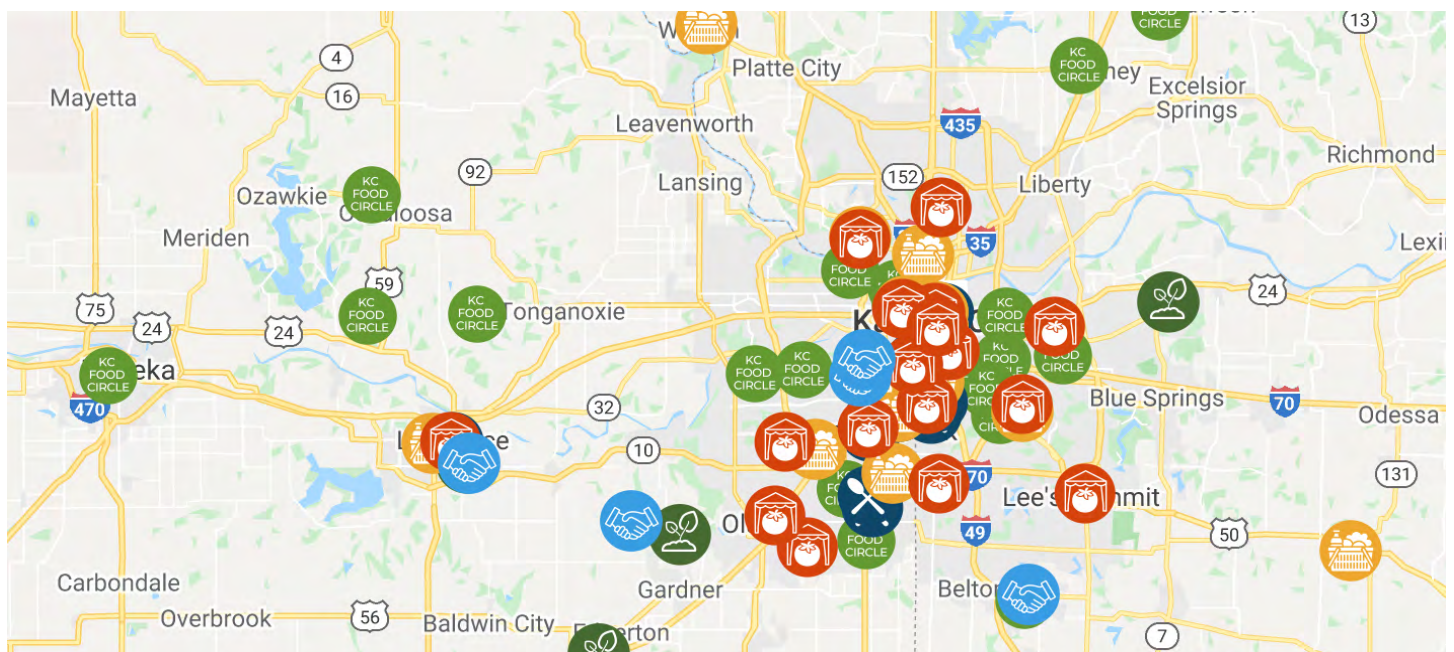


Read the Plan: [KC Regional Climate Action Plan](#)

Grows Local Economies

From farm stands to farm-to-table restaurants, food and farm businesses keep money in our local economy. Community food projects such as incubator farms, community kitchens and farmers markets provide training, create jobs, grow small businesses and expand markets for farmers.

Explore the Map: [Eat Local KC Map](#)



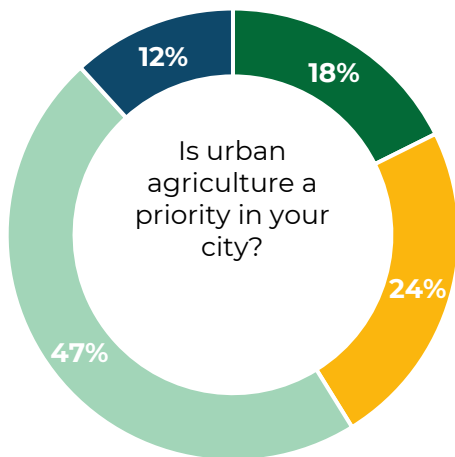


Plan for Urban Agriculture

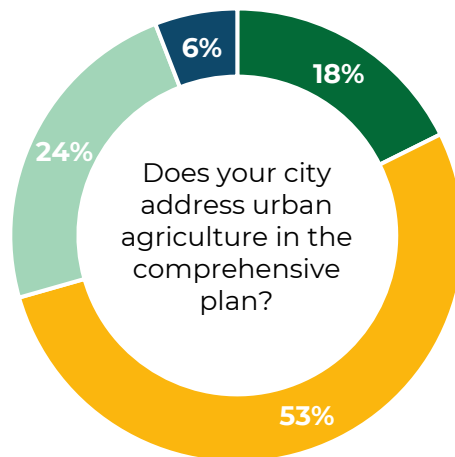
Urban agriculture tends to be an afterthought for planning and zoning. A statement about community gardens may appear in a parks master plan and regulations for farmers markets may get added to a zoning ordinance, but comprehensive planning for urban agriculture is lacking in the Kansas City region.

In our survey, 47% percent of urban planners thought urban agriculture was a moderate priority for their city. But 53% of urban planners said that efforts to address urban agriculture in their city's long-range plan had been unsuccessful. Seventy-seven percent reported that their city didn't have an urban agriculture ordinance. Currently, the City of Kansas City, Missouri is the only municipality in the region that has adopted an urban agriculture ordinance, but it hasn't been updated in a decade. It is no surprise that urban farmers continue to encounter barriers.

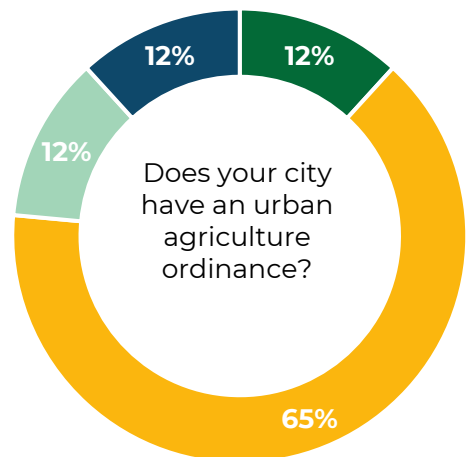
Read the Ordinance: [City of Kansas City, Missouri Urban Agriculture Ordinance](#)



- Not a priority
- Low priority
- Moderate priority
- High priority



- No, and no efforts
- No, but efforts made
- Yes, but no goals
- Yes, and includes goals



- I don't know
- No, and no efforts
- No, but efforts made
- Yes

Planning Practice

Urban planners have the professional skills as well as access to a variety of tools to help eliminate some of the challenges urban farmers face or make them more manageable to overcome. Here are some best practices to use when planning for urban agriculture.

Conduct an Inventory

Map urban agriculture assets and activity in your city. Almost 40% of urban planners said they weren't very aware of urban agriculture going on in their city. Having this information will help plan for urban agriculture.

- Identify school and community gardens, urban farms and orchards, farmers markets and food hubs.
- Review land use maps, long-range plans and zoning ordinances to identify barriers to urban agriculture.
- Locate suitable vacant lots, public land or prime farmland for urban agriculture.

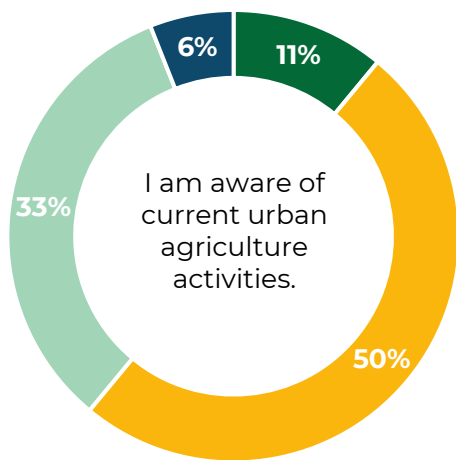


Farm Tour at Woodland City KC

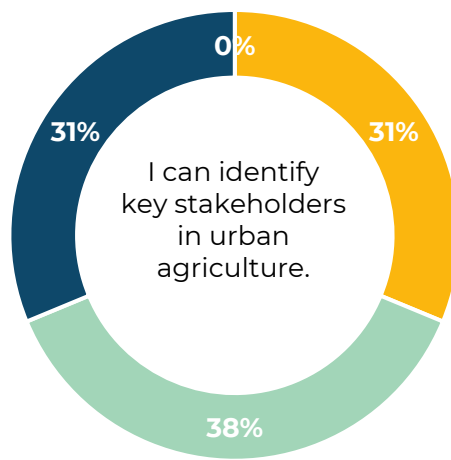
Engage Urban Farmers

Community engagement is vital to long-range planning. Just 31% of urban planners said they could identify urban agriculture stakeholders in their community. About 40% said they don't engage urban farmers in long-range planning, and 30% weren't sure. Here are some organizations across the region that work to bring urban farmers to the table and get urban planners to the farm:

- Cultivate KC
- Growing Growers
- Kansas City Community Gardens
- National Young Farmers Coalition
- University Extension Services



- Strongly agree
- Somewhat agree
- Somewhat disagree
- Strongly disagree



- Strongly agree
- Somewhat agree
- Somewhat disagree
- Strongly disagree



- Yes
- No
- I don't know

Communicate Clearly

Urban agriculture and urban planning each have their own professional jargon, and clear communication between stakeholders is fundamental to all other planning goals. Without consensus on terms, it's difficult to clearly develop, follow and enforce policies.

- Define technical urban planning and urban farming terms in plain language.
- Make information about plans, policies and processes easy to find and understand.

Foster Collaboration

Urban agriculture spans multiple departments and agencies at various levels of government that are frequently siloed from one another. An urban farmer may apply for a local building permit, pay property taxes to the county, follow state food safety regulations and receive federal grant funding. It's important these departments are in communication with one another.

- Collaborate across local departments to ensure policies are consistent in their implementation and enforcement.
- Connect with state and federal departments and agencies that research, regulate and fund urban agriculture.



Center Equity

Consider social and racial disparities in both the access to resources for urban farmers and the impact of urban agriculture on the community. Urban agriculture, like any form of development, can support and stabilize under-resourced neighborhoods or perpetuate the displacement of residents.

- Use inclusive engagement strategies and tools that empower communities.
- Plan for urban agriculture as a long-term priority, not a temporary placeholder for future development.
- Target resources and incentives towards community-led urban agriculture initiatives in under-resourced areas.

Educate Yourself: [Feeding or Starving Gentrification: The Role of Food Policy](#)

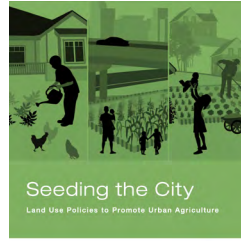
Planning Resources

Check out these policy guides, toolkits and databases to plan for urban agriculture.



[Community Gardening: Policy Reference Guide](#)

Public Health Law Center



[Seeding the City: Land Use Policies to Promote Urban Agriculture](#)

ChangeLab Solutions



[Growing Urban Agriculture: Equitable Strategies and Policies for Improving Access to Healthy Food and Revitalizing Communities](#)

PolicyLink



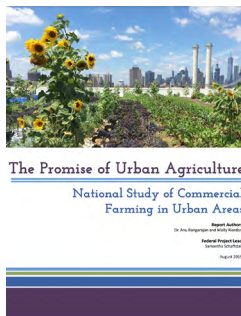
[Best Practices for Food Security and Sovereignty](#)

Sustainable Development Code



[Research, Education and Planning and Policy](#)

Growing Food Connections



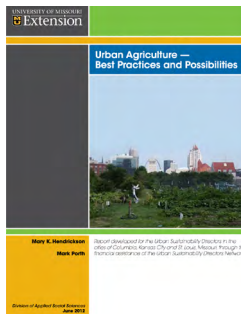
[The Promise of Urban Agriculture: A National Study of Commercial Farming in Urban Areas](#)

Cornell Small Farms Program



[Zoning for Urban Agriculture: A Guide for Updating Your City's Laws to Support Healthy Food Production and Access](#)

Healthy Food Policy Project



[Urban Agriculture: Best Practices and Possibilities](#)

University of Missouri Extension



[Municipal Strategies for Supporting Local Food Systems](#)

Chicago Metropolitan Agency for Planning



[Urban Agriculture KnowledgeBase Collection](#)

American Planning Association



Overcome Barriers

Throughout our research and engagement, these seven challenges emerged as major barriers to urban agriculture in the Kansas City region:

- Unreliable access to vacant lots
- Development of prime farmland
- Access to affordable, clean water
- Restrictive land use regulations
- Limited accessory structures
- Prohibited sales and markets
- Complicated policies and processes

In this section, we explore these barriers in depth and offer policy recommendations along with case studies demonstrating how other cities have implemented similar policies.

The task force, with input from stakeholders, prioritized four barriers for the coalition to advocate for as part of its 2020-2023 policy agenda. These four barriers are specifically related to zoning and fit with the coalition's expertise in policy advocacy.

Land and water access were not selected because other community organizations are better suited to take on those barriers and rally the community around the policy recommendations.

Navigation Icons

Use these icons to navigate each barrier.



Coalition Priority



Community Priority



Policy Recommendations



Case Studies



Cultivate Vacant Lots

Leasing vacant lots through a land bank is an affordable option when buying land isn't feasible. It also allows urban farmers to start small and then scale up production or expand their operation. However, land bank lease agreements tend to be short-term. A one-year lease doesn't provide urban farmers with the certainty needed to make long-term plans or investments, like building a fence or remediating the soil. In addition, urban agriculture isn't deemed the highest and best land use, so it's treated as a placeholder until a better development opportunity comes along, further eroding land security for urban farmers.

Affordable vacant lots are often the result of decades of disinvestment due to structural racism, like redlining. To avoid displacing residents and urban farmers, strong housing policy is needed alongside urban agriculture policy. While the need for affordable, infill housing and land for urban agriculture can be seen as competing community needs, there are examples of collaborative projects where they come together to build vibrant communities.



Young Family Farm KC



Policy Recommendations

- Establish long-term lease agreements (5 years or more) or rent-to-own land bank programs that give urban farmers more land security.
- Support community land trusts to acquire land for urban agriculture.
- Incorporate urban agriculture in the design of new developments, including affordable housing.

Case Studies

NeighborSpace

Chicago, Illinois

As a community land trust in Chicago, NeighborSpace supports community gardens by providing land, insurance, water, tools, education, fundraising support and more.



NeighborSpace

Dudley Neighbors

Boston, Massachusetts

The Dudley Neighbors, Inc. community land trust stewards 30 acres in Boston. It includes urban farms sites, parks and open space, commercial properties for small businesses and nonprofits plus nearly 100 affordable homes.

The East Village

Kansas City, Missouri

The 2021 Urban Land Institute Hines Competition winners created a food-based design and development plan for a site in downtown Kansas City that included food production and distribution.



Woodland City KC

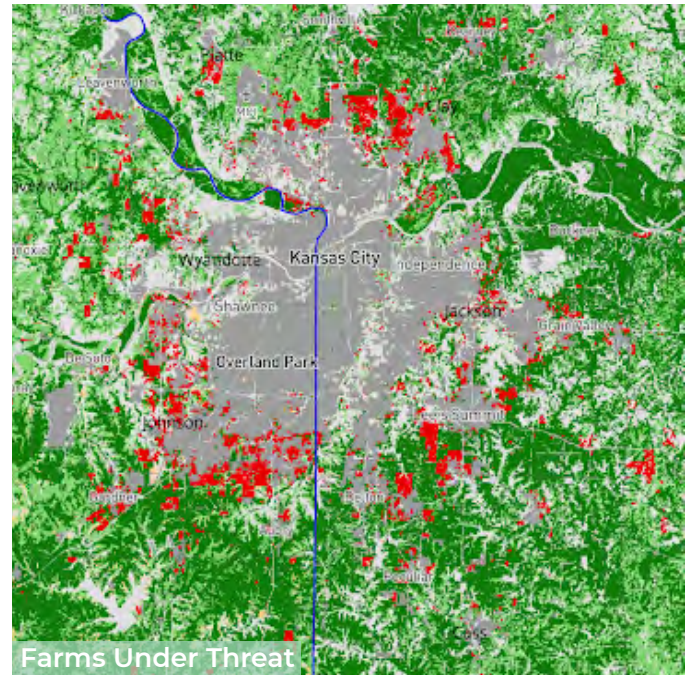


Conserve Agricultural Land

The Kansas City region is losing agricultural land to low and high-density development at an alarming rate. According to American

Farmland Trust, Kansas developed 123,100 acres of agricultural land between 2001 and 2016. Of that, 67% was nationally significant land, the best land for crop production in the nation. In Missouri, 325,300 acres of agricultural land was developed between 2001 and 2016, and 42% was nationally significant land.

Both Kansas and Missouri landed in the bottom 25% of states for agricultural land protection policies and programs. However, local planners can help ensure urban farmers have access to prime farmland for generations to come.



Explore the Map: [Farms Under Threat](#)

Read this Report: [Land Policy: Towards a More Equitable Farming Future](#)



Red Ridge Farms



Policy Recommendations

- Establish preservation or conservation districts to ensure agricultural land stays in production.
- Adopt subdivision regulations that preserve agricultural land, such as requiring cluster development with set-asides of land for urban agriculture.
- Allow urban agriculture to meet open space requirements.
- Develop a program to connect urban farmers with available agricultural land.



Case Studies

Southside Community Land Trust

Providence, Rhode Island

The Southside Community Land Trust owns or manages nearly 60 community gardens and land used by 25 urban farmers around Providence. The community land trust also operates several urban farms, including a 50-acre state-owned property used as an incubator farm.



Find a Local Land Trust: [Land Trust Alliance](#)

Franklin County, Missouri

To preserve agricultural land, Franklin County, just southwest of Saint Louis, permits residential cluster development. It is permitted in several zoning districts. Cluster developments must set aside 40% of the site as open space, which is preserved through a deed restriction or a conservation easement.

Austin, Texas

In Austin, development is prohibited in the critical water quality zones of all watersheds. Open space, including sustainable urban agriculture, is permitted with some restrictions and approvals.

Land Stewardship Project

Minnesota

The Land Stewardship Project, based in Minnesota, connects established farmers or landowners who have land to rent or sell with beginning farmers looking for land to rent or buy through the Seeking Farmers-Seeking Land Clearinghouse.



Tap into Water Access

Access to clean water is vital for urban agriculture not only to irrigate crops, but also to meet food safety regulations so urban farmers can sell their produce. Land banks frequently disconnect water lines on their properties, but installing a new water line is prohibitively expensive for urban farmers. Programs that subsidize water access for urban agriculture are often temporary due to staff turnover or limited funding streams. In addition, many programs only support nonprofit urban agriculture, rather than commercial.

Rain barrels or other water catchment systems are an affordable way to provide water while also reducing stormwater runoff, but rainwater must be treated before irrigating edible crops or washing produce. Another option is to establish a memorandum of understanding with a nearby neighbor to run a hose from their house to the garden or farm, but this isn't a reliable long-term solution. To make clean water more accessible to urban farmers, there are a few things urban planners can do in collaboration with other departments.



Policy Recommendations

- Align local departments around common goals for water access for urban agriculture.
- Set an agricultural water rate and create incentives for stormwater retention for urban agriculture.
- Establish programs to provide financial assistance to improve water access for urban agriculture.
- Provide information educating urban farmers about sustainable irrigation and soil management practices to reduce water usage.

Case Studies

Zero Interest Loans

Philadelphia, Pennsylvania

The water department in Philadelphia offers interest-free loans for new water line installation for urban farms. It also provides hydrant use permits, reduced water and stormwater rates and free rain barrels for residents.

Hydrant Use Permit

Chicago, Illinois

The City of Chicago recently established a Hydrant Use Permit for urban agriculture when no other water access is available. The seasonal permit is much more affordable than installing a new water line and includes a flat water rate based on square footage of the garden or farm.

KC Grow Water Access Program

Kansas City, Missouri

KC Grow provides technical assistance and grant funding to urban farmers in Kansas City, Missouri to improve water access and affordability. The program is sponsored by the City of Kansas City, Missouri. Kansas City Community Gardens manages the program and provides technical assistance with Cultivate KC.



Valentine Community Garden



Advocates for Urban Agriculture



Permit Urban Agriculture

In our survey, 74% of urban farmers said the land they cultivate is zoned residential and 11% cultivate commercially zoned land. Because urban agriculture is rarely explicitly permitted as a land use in non-agricultural zoning districts, urban farmers are required to apply for a special or conditional use permit.

The process to acquire a permit is lengthy and may cut into the growing season. Between the application fee, producing a site plan and conducting a public hearing, the cost quickly adds up for nonprofit organizations or urban farmers operating on thin profit margins. Permitting urban agriculture, including commercial urban farming, at an appropriate scale for the density and character of the community will help eliminate this barrier for urban farmers.

Policy Recommendation

- Permit urban agriculture as a principal and accessory use as-of-right in a majority of zoning districts, including residentially-zoned vacant lots.
- Permit urban agriculture as a special or conditional use in zoning districts where it is not permitted as-of-right.

Case Studies

[Detroit, Michigan](#)

In Detroit, urban farms are permitted as-of-right or conditional use in all residential, business and industrial districts. Aquaculture, aquaponics and hydroponics are restricted to industrial and business districts.

[Philadelphia, Pennsylvania](#)

The City of Philadelphia developed a land use category specifically for urban agriculture. Urban farms are permitted as-of-right in most residential and commercial districts. Urban farms, including animal husbandry, are permitted as-of-right or special use in most industrial districts.



Michigan Urban Farming Initiative



Sankofa Community Farm



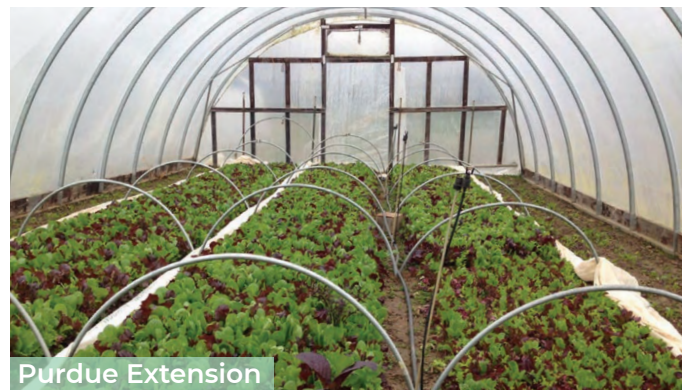
Allow Accessory Structures

Unlike most land uses, urban farming doesn't need a primary structure or building, but in many zoning ordinances a primary structure must be present before an accessory structure can be built. Accessory structures are further restricted by number, type and design. This creates a big barrier for urban

farmers who rely on a variety of accessory structures, including equipment sheds, season extension, compost bins, washing stations, cold storage, season extension and more.

Season extension presents a unique challenge. It is used by urban farmers to extend the growing season thereby increasing sales. Season extension also protects crops from weeds, pests and extreme weather, increasing the yield and quality of crops. Non-structural coverings, like row coverings, are usually considered landscaping. Depending on the materials and attachment method, semi-permanent coverings, like high tunnels, may be considered an accessory structure and require a building permit.

Some urban agriculture accessory structures will exceed height and area restrictions, especially in residential districts. In this case, urban farmers must apply for a variance. This process is similar to a special or conditional use permit process and comes with the same challenges. Accommodating accessory structures for urban agriculture will allow urban farmers to grow to their fullest potential.



Extend the Season: [Season Extension Activities in Kansas: Legal Issues and Local Policy Options](#)

Policy Recommendations

- Allow urban agriculture accessory structures on lots without a primary structure.
- Permit a variety of accessory structures for urban agriculture and allow multiple structures on a single lot when appropriate.
- Increase maximum height and area standards for urban agriculture accessory structures.
- Allow temporary, moveable season extension without permits. Clearly define what does and does not qualify.

Case Studies

Cleveland, Ohio

Cleveland established an Urban Garden District, which permits different kinds of accessory structures with larger area and height allowances. In residential districts, agricultural accessory structures have flexible standards for height, materials and location. The zoning ordinance clearly states when an accessory structure requires a building permit.



Detroit, Michigan

Detroit explicitly allows a wide variety of accessory structures for urban gardens and expands that list for urban farms to include different production methods, cold storage and processing. Accessory structures must comply with the height, area and setback restrictions of the zoning district.



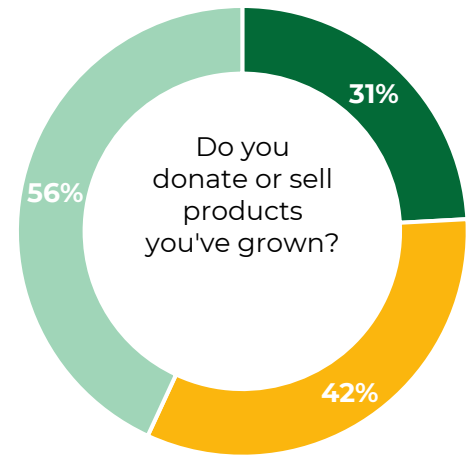


Support Farm-to-Market

As pandemic emergency orders went into place in the spring of 2020, many urban farmers urgently pivoted from restaurant sales to direct sales. But on-site sales or pickup may not be allowed on urban farms, depending on the zoning district.

Mobile markets, or farmers markets on wheels, are generally not allowed to park and operate in residential districts. The display and sale of agricultural products on public sidewalks is not always permitted. Farmers markets tend to have more flexibility in terms of location, but some cities don't allow farmers markets in residential districts.

Based on our survey, only 31% of urban farmers are growing food for personal consumption. Forty-two percent sell products they have grown, and 56% donate it. Urban planners can make it easier for urban farmers to get their products to local consumers.



- Personal consumption only
- Sell products
- Donate products



Beverlin's Little Piece of Paradise at KCK Farmers Market



Policy Recommendations

- Allow on-site sales of produce, plants and value-added products.
- Allow mobile markets and farmers markets in residential districts.
- Allow the display and sale of agricultural products on public sidewalks.

Case Studies

Atlanta, Georgia

For urban farms in Atlanta, on-site sales and curbside pickup are allowed from 7:00 a.m. to 9:00 p.m. for produce grown on-site.

Charlotte, North Carolina

In Charlotte, mobile markets are allowed in many districts as a primary use and in all districts as an accessory use, but must be accessory to a church, school or hospital in residential districts.

Detroit, Michigan

Farmers markets are permitted as an accessory use in residential districts on the same lot as a church, school, outdoor recreation facility and nonprofit neighborhood center in Detroit. In addition, the sale of products grown or produced on-site at an urban farm are allowed as an accessory use.

Minneapolis, Minnesota

In Minneapolis, sidewalk sales of fresh, uncut produce and prepackaged non-potentially hazardous food is allowed outside of a licensed food business from 8:00 a.m. to 10:00 p.m. within compliance of regulations.

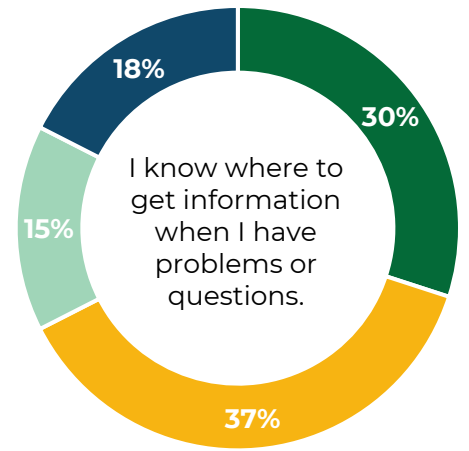




Clarify Policies and Processes

The Kansas City region spans two states, nine counties and over 90 municipalities. Urban farmers who grow or sell food in different places throughout the region will encounter different planning processes and zoning regulations. For example, the process to apply for a building permit to install a high tunnel will vary. In one city, an urban farmer may need to provide site plans from a licensed architect or engineer. In another city, the schematic diagram of the high tunnel may suffice.

Resources available on urban agriculture policies come from a variety of sources, potentially causing confusion on what is the most correct, up-to-date information. Urban farmers need easily accessible, easy-to-understand information about planning processes and zoning policies. When problems and questions inevitably arise, urban farmers aren't always sure where to go to get information and assistance.



- Agree
- Somewhat agree
- Somewhat disagree
- Disagree

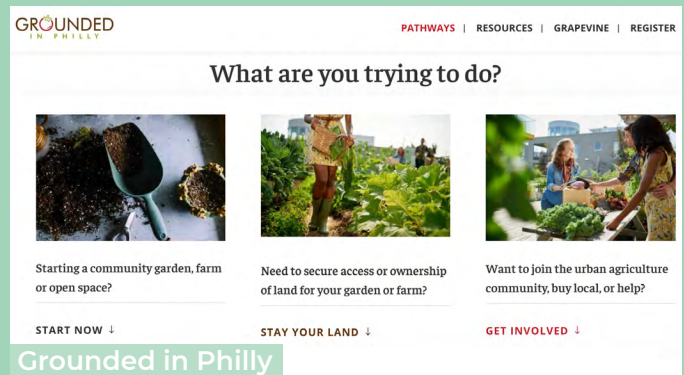
Policy Recommendations

- Establish a designated, long-term source for up-to-date policy information.
- Use a pathways user experience design to create a digital resource for urban farmers to navigate planning processes.

Case Studies

Grounded in Philly Guide

Grounded Philly, part of the Garden Justice Legal Initiative of The Public Interest Law Center, is a pathway guide with information and resources for starting a farm, securing land, accessing water and more.



Appendix A

Glossary of Terms

Accessory use: A structure or use that: (1) is subordinate in area, extent, and purpose to the principal use; (2) contributes to the comfort, convenience, or necessity of the principal use; and (3) is located on the same lot and in the same zoning district as the principal use. (1)

Community food security: The condition which exists when all of the members of a community have access, in close proximity, to adequate amounts of nutritious, culturally appropriate food at all times, from sources that are environmentally sound and just. (2)

Food system: All the growing, processing, distributing, retailing, consumption and waste disposal activities associated with food. (2)

Green infrastructure: The range of measures that use plant or soil systems, permeable pavement or other permeable surfaces or substrates, stormwater harvest and reuse, or landscaping to store, infiltrate, or evapotranspire stormwater and reduce flows to sewer systems or to surface waters. (3)

Land use: The occupation or use of land or water area for any human activity or any purpose. (1)

Peri-urban: Zones of transition from rural to urban land uses located between the outer limits of urban and regional centers and the rural environment. (4)

Redlining: A form of illegal disparate treatment in which a lender provides unequal access to credit, or unequal terms of credit, because of the race, color, national origin, or other prohibited characteristic(s) of the residents of the area. (5)

Regenerative agriculture: A practice of farming or ranching, based on ecological principles, that builds soil health and recaptures carbon emissions from the atmosphere while addressing the entire ecosystem in which a farm operates. (6)

Season extension: Farming methods and structures that allow a crop to be cultivated beyond its normal outdoor growing season. (7)

Special/conditional use: A use or occupancy of a structure, or a use of land, permitted only upon issuance of a conditional use permit and subject to the limitations and conditions specified therein. (1)

Urban agriculture: The growing, processing and distribution of plant and animal products — by and for the local community — within an urban environment. (1)

Value-added products: Any product processed by a producer from a farm product, such as baked goods, jams and jellies, canned vegetables, dried fruit, syrups, salsas, salad dressings, flours, coffee, smoked or canned meats or fish, sausages, or prepared foods. (2)
identical zoning. (1)

Variance: Permission to depart from the development code when, because of special circumstances applicable to the property, strict application of the provisions of the development code deprives such property of privileges enjoyed by other property in the vicinity that is under identical zoning. (1)

Zoning: The division of a city or county by legislative regulations into areas, or zones, which specify allowable uses for real property and size restrictions for buildings within these areas. Also, a program that implements policies of the general plan. (1)

Sources

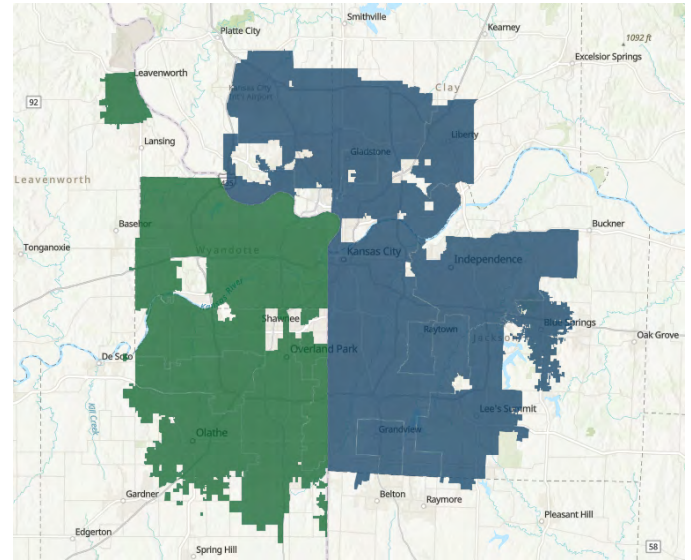
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2. [Healthy Food Policies Common Terms & Definitions](#). Health Food Policy Project.
3. [What is Green Infrastructure?](#) Environmental Protection Agency.
4. [Peri-Urban Landscapes: Water, Food and Environmental Security](#). United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization.
5. [Fair Lending Laws and Regulations](#). Federal Deposit Insurance Corporation.
6. [Regenerative Agriculture: Benefits, Barriers and Call to Action for Companies with Agricultural Value Chains and Ag Retailers](#). IPM Institute of North America.
7. [Season Extension: Introduction and Basic Principles](#). North Carolina Cooperative Extension.

Appendix B

Research and Engagement

Study Area

The Kansas City region spans two states, nine counties and over 90 municipalities. The task force narrowed the focus of our exploratory research to a smaller, more manageable study area. Nineteen cities were selected based on land area, population, density and the number of low-income low-access census tracts. These cities also represent a mix of urban, inner suburb and outer suburb characteristics.



Document Analysis

The task force analyzed planning and zoning documents from the study area to assess the policy landscape for urban agriculture in the Kansas City region. We used a scorecard adapted from “Is Your Town Farm Friendly? A Checklist for Sustaining Rural Character” by Gary Matteson from New Hampshire Coalition for Sustaining Agriculture and University of New Hampshire Cooperative Extension. This analysis helped the task force identify potential barriers and challenges to further explore.

Online Survey

The task force developed two online surveys, one for urban planners and another for urban farmers, to gauge perceptions of urban agriculture and understand barriers and challenges related to planning and zoning. Survey questions were adapted from a survey tool developed by a research team with the Center for Public Issues at the University of Florida. Their research study examined the knowledge, attitudes and needs of local decision makers in Florida regarding local food production.

A link to the urban planner survey was sent directly to 28 planners in the study area and received 18 complete survey responses. The urban farmer survey was sent to local urban agriculture groups and organizations who were asked to forward the survey link to their contacts. We received 45 responses from urban farmers representing 10 cities in the Kansas City region.

Focus Group and Interviews

Urban farmers who completed the survey were invited to participate in a focus group to dig deeper into barriers and challenges to urban agriculture identified in the survey results. Three urban farmers, including several task force members who are also urban farmers, joined the focus group. Based on the discussion, we conducted expert interviews with a local urban planner and a landscape architect who have experience working with urban agriculture.

Urban Agriculture Partners

- Beginning Farmer Wholesale Project
- Cultivate KC
- Greater KC Food Policy Coalition
- Growing Growers
- Ivanhoe Neighborhood Council
- JCCC Sustainable Agriculture Program
- KC Black Urban Growers
- KC Urban Farm Coop
- KSU-Olathe Urban Food Systems Program
- New Roots for Refugees
- The KC Food Hub

Policy Research

After conducting document analysis, online surveys, focus groups, interviews and monthly public meetings, the task force identified the recurring barriers and challenges urban farmers faced related to planning and zoning, including:

- Land access and tenure
- Affordable access to water
- Commercial urban farming
- Accessory uses and structures
- Navigating policies and processes

We then researched best practices, policies and ordinances to find policy recommendations and case studies for each barrier.

SMART Goals

Our policy recommendations were presented to stakeholders at a monthly meeting. After each policy recommendation was discussed, task force members and stakeholders used SMART Goal criteria to rank them.

The top three ranked policy recommendations were selected for the Greater KC Food Policy Coalition to include in their 2020-2023 policy agenda. Based on feedback from stakeholders, the top two policy recommendations were combined to create one comprehensive policy recommendation on zoning for urban agriculture.

Land and water access were ranked the lowest because task force members and stakeholders believed other organizations in the community are better suited to take on those barriers and advocate for or implement the recommendations.

SMART Goal Ratings	Specific	Measurable	Achievable	Relevant	Timely	Total
Accessory Structures	51	51	47	55	45	249
Commercial Farming	49	49	44	53	49	244
Navigating Systems	44	43	45	46	45	223
Water Access	42	41	40	49	44	216
Land Access	40	42	39	49	39	209