



URBAN AGRICULTURE IN PROVIDENCE

Growing our community by growing good food



The Providence Urban Agriculture Task Force envisions doubling the amount of food being grown in and around Providence in the next ten years. This will be achieved by increasing the number of home gardeners, community gardeners, community gardens, commercial community agriculture projects, and urban agriculture businesses.

WHAT IS URBAN AGRICULTURE?

Most people think of agriculture as something that happens in the countryside, but agriculture takes place everywhere (see diagram on page 3). Even in the densest urban communities, people grow food on windowsills, rooftops, and in back yards and vacant lots. Urban Agriculture means growing in ways uniquely adapted to small urban spaces, creating markets for local products, and decreasing energy and environmental costs because food travels fewer miles to reach our markets and tables.

Urban Agriculture is an important source of sustenance for city dwellers around the world. According to the United Nations, up to 15% of the food eaten by city dwellers worldwide is grown right in those cities. In modern cities like Vancouver and Toronto, nearly 40% of families grow some part of their own food. For many poor urban dwellers, the home garden is what keeps body and soul together.

WHY IN PROVIDENCE?

In the face of Global Warming and weather emergencies, political strife and ever-increasing fuel costs, we are increasingly aware of the need to plan for the long-term needs of our community. Food security is an important part of this picture.

Between 1964 and 1997, approximately half of Rhode Island's farmland was lost to development and urban sprawl. Reinvigorating agriculture in the Rhode Island countryside and growing more of our food locally are vital to preventing hunger and maintaining healthy diets, creating jobs, and improving quality of water, air and soil.

Currently, less than 2% of Providence families grow some of their food. Some grow just a couple of tomato plants in containers, while others tend intensively-planted backyard gardens or community garden plots. Several of these home growers are entrepreneurs, raising food for sale through farmers' markets, restaurants and local grocery stores. Additionally, Providence is beginning to see agricultural community development projects and businesses built on local food production.

We must continue and expand this positive trend. Making local food production a priority will contribute to the health of our families, our local economy, and the sustainability of our community.

And locally-grown food tastes better and is better for you!



HOW DOES URBAN AGRICULTURE BENEFIT PROVIDENCE?

- **Creating A Healthy, Beautiful City for All**
 - Creating a clean, healthy environment
 - Fostering community caretakers of the city's green spaces
 - Increasing property values
- **Creating Strong, Financially Stable Families**
 - Keeping our families healthy through better nutrition
 - Supplementing family incomes by selling and sharing produce
- **Encouraging Economic Growth**
 - Supporting local businesses
 - Creating jobs
 - Keeping local dollars local
- **Strengthening Communities**
 - Reflecting the richness of our city's cultures
 - Connecting neighbor-to-neighbor, generation-to-generation and culture-to-culture
 - Transforming neglected property into beautiful, productive and safe spaces
- **Raising Healthier Kids:**
 - Teaching children how to make healthy food choices
 - Preventing childhood obesity

A HEALTHY, BEAUTIFUL CITY FOR ALL: LAND USE AND THE COMPREHENSIVE PLAN

Zoning and Comprehensive Planning both arose in response to the ills of urbanization. Originally, these tools were focused on keeping incompatible uses apart, principally keeping dangerous factories out of residential neighborhoods. Now these tools are used to better our neighborhoods by addressing citizen needs.

The City of Providence Comprehensive Plan currently contains few specific actions to be undertaken to promote the growing of food in backyards, community gardens or on small farms.

Both the Zoning Ordinance and Comprehensive Plan of Providence are being updated. This provides a tremendous opportunity to protect and promote urban agriculture in a variety of forms by including innovative ideas found in other cities.

Recommendations:

- **Create new community gardens on city property.**
- **Implement an overnight on-street parking program** to get pavement out of backyards and gardens in.
- **Include language allowing small scale, hand tended farms to operate within the city limits**, in harmony with their neighbors.
- **Remove Special Use Permit requirements for community gardens** in residential neighborhoods and create design standards that are beneficial to both the neighborhood and the gardens' users.



STRONG, FINANCIALLY STABLE FAMILIES:

Over a thousand Providence families grow some portion of their own food. This means that over 2000 people eat better and supplement their family incomes by producing food inside our city.

A 10 ft by 10 ft family garden plot provides a Providence family with at least \$80.00 worth of food over the course of a summer, which translates to at least \$80,000 worth of food being grown in small plots across the city.

Providence's home gardeners and community gardeners say the same thing: they love to garden, and the food they grow is important to their family.

GARDENING IN LEAD-CONTAMINATED SOIL:

Lead contamination is a result of Providence's industrial past, and of the legacies of lead-based house paint and leaded gasoline. To learn more about gardening safely in the city, call Southside Community Land Trust at (401) 273-9419 for a copy of a Lead Safety brochure.



Recommendations:

- **Convert un-used land** owned by the City, community agencies, businesses, churches, and neighborhood groups into community food gardens.
- **Create a municipal curb-side compost system.**
- **Provide small grants to help families** create food gardens at home.

A photograph of a lush green garden. In the foreground, there are large, vibrant green leaves, possibly from a vegetable plant. In the background, a person wearing a light blue long-sleeved shirt and dark pants is bent over, working in a garden bed. The scene is brightly lit, suggesting a sunny day. The overall atmosphere is peaceful and focused on agriculture.

A PORTRAIT OF A FAMILY GARDENER:

Lon Tang (pictured on the facing page) was a farmer in Cambodia before he fled the Khmer Rouge in 1979. He came to Providence as a refugee in 1981. Soon after, friends led him to Southside Community Land Trust, which gave him the opportunity to grow traditional Cambodian foods for his family. Lon's wife, mother-in-law, cousin and four children all love to grow and cook good food together. Lon began as a community gardener, and then moved onto a vacant city lot where, until the lot was built on, he raised organically grown Asian specialty crops for his family and for 15 restaurants and markets in Providence.

Lon is proud of the example he sets for his children and his community, and of the contribution he makes to his home city, Providence. "It is important to pay back the people that helped me and my family do the right thing—make food for people.

If you want a strong country, you need strong food."



A PORTRAIT OF AGRICULTURAL ENTREPRENEURS:

Catherine Mardosa and Matt Tracy (pictured on facing page) are heroes of urban agriculture. They began their business, Red Planet Urban Farm, with support from the SCLT City Farm. Red Planet grows organic produce on formerly neglected lots throughout Providence, as well as a small plot in Rehoboth. Recently, Catherine and Matt purchased a 5,000 square foot lot in Olneyville, exchanging one of Matt's paintings for the services of a property lawyer to help them complete the purchase.

Red Planet uses as many local resources as possible, enriching the urban soil with compost from their West End and Federal Hill neighbors, coffee grounds from local cafes, crab shells from Warren and seaweed from local beaches.

Red Planet vegetables are sold through farmers' markets around the city, through the Urban Greens Food Co-Op, and through local restaurants.

“It's important to us that the food is hyper-local, grown where it is sold.”

– Matt Tracy, Farmer and Artist

ECONOMIC GROWTH:

Ten small businesses operate intensive farms on once-idle land within the city of Providence. Their cash crops are primarily vegetables and artisanal specialty foods that are sold and bartered in niche markets such as farmers' markets, restaurants, Urban Greens Food Co-op, ethnic groceries and flea markets. In a compact city like Providence, farms on the urban edge also contribute significantly to the nutritional and economic wellbeing of the urban community.

The five Providence farmers' markets connect growing agricultural businesses with a growing customer base, providing fresh, nutritious food and stimulating economic growth. The city's commercial growers share their success with donations of thousands of pounds of produce to local food pantries and the Rhode Island Food Bank.



Recommendations:

- **Provide local growers with low-interest loans and other micro-enterprise supports** for start-up and land acquisition.
- **Support the creation of a year-round Providence Farmers' Market** to extend the economic benefits of local agriculture.
- **Continue support of local businesses and needy families through ongoing federal and state subsidies** such as WIC and Seniors' Farmers' Market Vouchers.
- **Support Buy Local Campaigns** to encourage the development and growth of local businesses.

STRENGTHENING COMMUNITIES:

All over the city, urban food gardens are working to strengthen our communities. By creating a garden, local residents and organizations can transform under-used, blighted properties into productive, safe and beautiful green spaces.

The presence of a garden beautifies and stabilizes a neighborhood, raises property values and reduces local crime. These spaces provide food, exercise and economic opportunities to those who use them.

Gardening brings diverse residents together and catalyzes support to address serious issues that extend well beyond the gardens' boundaries. It gives youth and elders an opportunity to share their knowledge and energy, and provides a productive environment in which our city's youth can develop into leaders and stewards of the community.

Recommendations:

- **Recognize urban agriculture as a strategic asset** for community development, neighborhood beautification and public safety.
- **Adequately fund non-profit urban agriculture initiatives** that promote community, economic and youth development.
- **Provide incentives for incorporating food gardens** into the design of new commercial and residential developments.
- **Celebrate the cultural benefits of Urban Agriculture.**



A PORTRAIT OF AN URBAN EXPERIMENT:

The Urban Agricultural Unit, or UAU, is a mobile hydroponic greenhouse designed for educational, artistic, and commercial purposes. Created from a discarded shipping trailer, this greenhouse is capable of year-round food production and can be transported to various locations. Coupling industrial waste with advanced agricultural technology, the UAU project is devoted to discovering how to do more... with less.

The UAU also works with local students and the community in educational programs designed to explore the urban landscape. The study of the viability of urban agriculture will be used as an educational tool for the promotion of sustainable techniques and technologies that can be used in other urban environments, such as in community garden spaces and rooftop greenhouses.



A PORTRAIT OF A HEALTHY KIDS INITIATIVE:

In Southside Community Land Trust's after school Youth Garden Clubs, young people plant, care for and harvest fruits and vegetables in lush, urban gardens. Each spring, the D'Abate Youth Garden Club in the Olneyville neighborhood welcomes the new growing season by hosting the Farmer Festival. The Farmer Festival brings together a community of food growers & families to celebrate the youth garden, swap ideas, eat local food, and encourage each other to keep on growing. Tables offer information on Farmers' markets, how and why to eat more locally, veggie word searches, cooking demonstrations, and opportunities to get involved in local organizations.

“...a garden club...is important because it teaches our students to be stewards of the earth, to take care of the environment, by speaking, listening, and applying math, science and literacy skills. It's another way for them to see the real world and learn how to apply those skills and understand their community better.”

– William D'Abate School Principal Lucille Furia



RAISING HEALTHY KIDS:

Food grown in and around Providence offers an untapped resource to our city's schools. By effectively connecting local farms and gardens with schools, we provide children with fresh, healthy fruits and vegetables. This creates educational opportunities and connects our children to the open space in their communities and throughout the state.

Children fortunate enough to have schoolyard gardens have the opportunity to gain gardening and environmental stewardship skills that they will carry their whole lives. Research indicates that gardeners, including children, have a higher intake of fruits and vegetables, and that food gardens provide appealing exercise and recreational opportunities to counter our children's sedentary lifestyles.



Recommendations:

- **Fund a state-wide Farm to School Coordinator.**
- **Pass legislation that creates financial incentives** for businesses to purchase RI-grown foods.
- **Link school food service directors with farmers,** so each of RI's 36 school districts make at least one local purchase each year.
- **Subsidize a year-round fresh fruit and vegetable program** in ALL Rhode Island schools.
- **Integrate agriculture and gardening** across school curriculum.

SUMMARY:

The City of Providence faces the same challenges as cities throughout the country: the need for economic growth, the need for a healthier environment in which to raise families, and the need to plan for the sustainability and security of our community in the face of emergencies and changing global circumstances.

Providence is beginning a city-wide process to update our Comprehensive Plan and zoning ordinances. This process offers us a unique opportunity to meet the city's challenges by creating land use policies that include Urban Agriculture in the long-term strategy for the city's development. Doing so will create economic opportunities for small businesses and for families throughout the city. We will contribute not only to the environmental health of our city and state, but to the physical health of citizens of all ages and economic backgrounds. We will create ways for residents to take pride in their neighborhoods and showcase the cultural vitality that makes Providence great.

Providence's Urban Agriculture pioneers have already made a positive impact on our communities through farmers' markets, community gardens, home gardens, non-profit community initiatives, home kitchens and school lunch rooms and gardens. Please learn more, support these efforts, and help our community grow by growing good food!

TO ORDER BOOKLETS:

Contact Southside Community
Land Trust
109 Somerset Street
Providence, RI 02907
(401) 273-9419
www.southsideclt.org

RESOURCES:

White papers available at www.southsideclt.org:

Planning for Appropriately Scaled Agriculture
in Providence Ben Morton

Urban Agriculture: A new approach to development in
Providence Greg Gerritt

The Farm-to-School Subcommittee Summary Report
Louella Hill and Dorothy Brayley

LEAD BROCHURE: TITLE
& AUTHOR?

Local Organizations & Agencies:

Aperion Institute for Environmental Living: www.apeiron.org

City of Providence: www.providenceri.com

City of Providence Dept of Planning and Development:
www.providenceplanning.org

Farm Fresh RI: www.farmfreshri.org

GrowSmart Rhode Island: www.growsmartri.com

Kids First RI: www.kidsfirstri.org

Rhode Island Farmways: www.rifarmways.org

Southside Community Land Trust: www.southsideclt.org

University of Rhode Island Cooperative Extension Service:
www.uri.edu/ce

Urban Greens Cooperative: www.urbangreens.org

General Internet Resources:

Boston Natural Areas Network's Master Urban Gardeners:
www.bostonnatural.org/mug.php

City Farmer's Urban Agriculture Notes: www.cityfarmer.org

The Community Food Security Coalition:
www.foodsecurity.org

The Food Project (Boston): www.thefoodproject.org

Kitchen Gardeners International: www.kitchengardeners.org

Books:

**Edens Lost & Found: How Ordinary Citizens are Restoring
our Great American Cities**, by Harry Willand and Dale Bell.
Chelsea Green Publishing Company, 2006. ISBN 1933392266

**Fields of Plenty: A Farmer's Journey in Search of Real Food
and the People Who Grow It**, by Michael Ableman. Chroni-
cle Books, 2005. ISBN 0811842231

**French Fries and the Food System: A Year Round Curriculum
Connecting Youth with Farming and Food**, by Sara Coblyn.
The Food Project, 2001. ISBN 0970353006

On Good Land: The Autobiography of an Urban Farm, by
Michael Ableman and Cynthia Wisehart. Chronicle Books,
1998. ISBN 0811819213

The Urban Agriculture Policy Task Force was initiated by Southside Community Land Trust, as a subcommittee of Citywide Green, in 2004. This coalition of more than 25 members –farmers, policy-makers, community agencies, and also advocates –promotes policy changes that will ensure the future of food production in the Providence Metropolitan Area.

The Cambodian Society of RI
Citywide Green
Cleanscape, Inc
Elmwood Collaborative and
Elmwood Foundation
Farm Fresh RI
Friends of India Point Park
Green Party of Rhode Island
Groundwork Providence
Kids First
Olneyville Collaborative

Olneyville Housing
Planted on Hope
Project Outreach
Providence Parks Department
PUENTE
Red Planet
RI Center for Agriculture
Promotion and Education
RI DEM / Division of Agriculture
RI Department of Health

RI Food Bank
RI Land Trust Council
Roger Willams Park Zoo
Southern RI Conservation District
Southside Community Land Trust
URI Cooperative Extension
URI Feinstein Center for Hunger
West Bay Community Action
Woonasquatucket River
Watershed Council

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