

Support for Urban Agriculture and Community/Backyard Gardening

Pacific Organic Policy Toolkit
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Political Justification

Urban agriculture and community gardens tend strongly toward organic approaches and can go a long way toward developing a local organic food supply. This is especially notable for governments aiming to develop organic agriculture to promote the health of its citizens. Urban agriculture and community gardens can provide a safe and healthy fresh food supply, increase the vegetables and fruits in diets, and provide opportunity for movement and exercise. Larger scale urban agriculture can also be a source of jobs for disadvantaged and at-risk populations.

These programs also educate the public and promote organic production methods. The resulting public awareness and support can positively affect domestic demand for organic products in commercial market channels. Building demand can then also have a positive impact on commercial organic producers.

Government support for urban agriculture and community gardens most often comes from local governments. However, national governments can play a role to promote the concepts among the population, provide grants for local governments to implement projects, and develop implementation guidance that is appropriate to the national situation. Domestic NGO's and international development organizations working in the country may be suitable and willing partners for these measures.

Suitable contexts

Support to organic urban gardening and collective gardening can be implemented in any context (any stage of development of the organic sector, any organic regulatory framework, any culture of government intervention on the organic sector) and is often happening at the level of local governments. It is relevant to all objectives of support to organic, except the one to earn foreign currencies through organic exports. It is suitable to the objective of increasing self-sufficiency, even though the potential in terms of volume replacement is usually limited.

Possible modalities of implementation

Obviously, there is a lot that local policy makers (especially at the municipality level) can do to encourage and facilitate urban gardening and collective gardening projects. Municipalities have a strong role to play in terms of urban zoning policies, in making public land available, in cleaning up contaminated land, and in providing financial and other types of support for kick-starting urban/collective gardening projects. State or national governments can also set-up enabling frameworks, both from a land policy point of view, but also with special grant programs linking, for example (organic) urban/collective gardens to care for disadvantaged groups such as the disabled, unemployed, immigrants, old people, homeless, formerly incarcerated residents, etc. In this way, urban gardening can be a tool to achieve broader social policy goals.

Rather than detailing here the types of public policies and support programs that can be developed to encourage urban gardening, we refer the interested readers to existing resources on the topic.

A toolkit "[*Seeding the City – Land Use Policies to Promote Urban Agriculture*](#)" was developed in 2012 by ChangeLab Solutions, a US NGO, to provide a framework and model language for land use policies that local policymakers can tailor to promote and sustain urban agriculture in their communities. Apart from providing specific model legislation related to urban agriculture promotion, the toolkit also reviews other laws affecting Urban Agriculture. Although the land use policy framework is specific to the United States, other countries may benefit from the concepts and can adapt them to their own policy framework.

To encourage organic agriculture in urban environments and collective gardens, municipalities can pass local decrees prohibiting the use of agrochemicals (other than those allowed under the organic regulations) on public land such as where urban gardens are located. This is the case for example in Havana (Cuba) where the use of synthetic fertilizers and pesticides is prohibited by law.

Countries examples

Cuba: Cuba, and particularly Havana, is a premier example of urban (organic) agriculture. Cuba's national programme for food production in urban areas was developed in the 1990s due to the economic crisis and has put a very strong focus on organic practices. At national level the National Urban Agriculture Group, created in 1998, has oversight responsibilities for urban agriculture in the country and includes four ministries and 15 scientific institutions and agencies linked to the agricultural sector. Provincial councils were charged with developing urban vegetable production, including identifying land for production. This included a major push for production in Havana. Supporting policy measures also include the provision of training, technical support, and provision of basic resources such as water and supplies. The government established subsidized agricultural stores, compost production sites, artisanal pesticide labs and urban veterinary clinics. Additionally, it introduced a wage incentives to encourage people to engage in urban farming. Havana's urban agriculture accounts for more than 35,000 ha of land, employs more than 22,000 urban farmers and contributes significantly to the country's food production.

Antigua and Barbuda: Antigua and Barbuda has a long tradition of backyard (or "kitchen") gardens. With most households producing enough to meet their immediate needs, the main benefits are savings on food purchases and improved nutritional status. However, a number of households do sell produce at local markets and shops. Backyard vegetable production is also a good means of food security in times of extreme weather events.

Concerted action to develop this form of food production under the Antigua and Barbuda Backyard Gardening Programme began after the introduction of FAO's Initiative on Soaring Food Prices in 2008/09. Progress made since then has been exceptional, and the country serves as a reservoir of good lessons to share with other countries. Similar results have been achieved by backyard gardening activities under the country's Zero Hunger Challenge plan, where the planned target of 400 gardens being established within the two-year period has been amply surpassed. By 2015, over 450 gardens had been established and close to 700 people had registered for the programme. Six backyard garden facilitators have been trained in various aspects of agricultural production. Training Demonstration Centres have been established in vulnerable communities and ten primary schools and one private secondary school have set up gardens. Due to the National Backyard Gardening Programme, almost 10 percent of Antigua and Barbuda's population eat home-grown food

United States: The city of Seattle was an early adopted of policies in favour of community garden. The municipality approved a resolution making community gardens part of city's Comprehensive Plan in 1992. In 2008, the Seattle's City Council passed a resolution supporting community garden and urban agricultural development. Many States in the have enacted legislation or provided allocation of funds for programs that promote urban agriculture by supporting local and regional food. For example, in 2009, North Carolina, Montana, Oregon, Vermont, and Minnesota enacted legislation supporting local and regional food systems.

Denmark: In 2001, a nationwide "colony garden" law was passed that effectively made all community gardens on public land and all spaces located on the Danish railway system land permanent. Gardens can be dismantled only for reasons of substantial social importance, in which case the gardening association is entitled to replacement space. The colony garden law also includes provisions aimed at increasing the number of plots