



# Urban Land-Use

## FOOD POLICY BRIEF #4

*Produced by the Cleveland/  
Cuyahoga County Food Policy Coalition*

### **The Problem**

The City of Cleveland has an estimated 17,000 vacant lots covering 3,300 acres. The population of Cleveland has dropped almost 50% since 1950, the result of a decline in manufacturing, outmigration into suburban communities, and a home foreclosure crisis that has undermined the integrity of many urban neighborhoods. Cleveland confronts what many so-called “shrinking cities” face: declining population, increased poverty, deteriorating infrastructure, and vacant land.

### **The Facts**

Urban agriculture has recently emerged as one innovative and productive re-use of the abundant vacant land resources within the city and county that comprehensively addresses many urban issues. Urban agriculture provides working greenspace, improves stormwater absorption, builds community connections, provides opportunities for youth, promotes physical exercise, offers income earning opportunities, and improves healthy food access.

Urban agriculture involves the growing, processing and distribution of food through intensive plant cultivation and animal husbandry within cities. Urban agriculture includes both community gardens, utilized by individuals or groups for self-consumption, or

urban market gardens, managed by individuals or groups for commercial sales.

Cleveland has emerged as a trend-setter amongst larger U.S. cities in the area of urban agriculture. With more than 220 community gardens and 22 market gardens, Cleveland residents have already been finding innovative ways to re-use urban lands.

Cleveland became the first major city in the U.S. to adopt “garden zoning” which protects urban gardens from development.

Most recently, elected leaders have been identifying opportunities to reform livestock rules to permit chickens, bees, goats, sheep, and pigs within city limits. Livestock play an important role in improving land for agriculture, loosening compacted soil, building fertility, and, in the case of bees, offering pollination services.

### **What’s Being Done**

Cleveland’s Urban Agriculture efforts are supported by a variety of organizations and agencies. Ohio State University Cooperative Extension offers training and technical support for community gardens. More recently, OSU co-founded City Fresh which included the development of a training and workshop curriculum to support urban market gardening. City Fresh also supports an entrepreneurial training program for youth that mixes urban gardening with

*Urban farmers keep food dollars in Cleveland. They create jobs and provide local food at a fair cost to our community.*

*-Joe Cimperman,  
Councilman, Ward 13*

neighborhood-based food distribution. The Cleveland Botanical Gardens have developed a Green Corps program where teams of 15-20 high school students learn basic growing and food processing skills working on four urban gardening sites. The Cuyahoga Land Trust has been working to develop models for land tenure and ownership for urban farms. Several of these groups, along with Neighborhood Progress, the Kent State University Urban Design Center, and Entrepreneurs for Sustainability have recently been determining options for an urban farm incubator to further support urban agriculture opportunities.



### What's Next?

The urban land-use working group has focused on three primary goals for future work in raising Cleveland's stature as a national innovator in urban agriculture:

- Securing short-term **access** and long-term tenure for urban agriculture through land inventories, the integration of urban agriculture into neighborhood development plans, coupling urban farm development with the land-bank system, and policy changes to support urban

agriculture.

- Build an **urban agriculture network** among farmers, landowners, consumers, and the greater community. The formation of an urban farm incubator can provide resources for land access, training, and access to resources. Also, a mentoring program can provide more connections between experienced and beginning growers and even youth across the city.
- Create **local economic development** through urban agriculture, determining the overall economic potential of urban farming and related food processing and distribution businesses.

## Re-Development of Vacant Land and Sustainable Development

- Productive Use/Public Benefit:** vacant properties should provide an economic return, community benefit, and/or enhancement to natural ecosystems.
- Ecosystem Functions:** stormwater management, soil restoration, air quality, carbon sequestration, urban heat island effects, biological diversity, wildlife habitat should be incorporated into vacant sites in city.
- Remediation:** remove the risk to human health and the environment from environmental pollutants at vacant sites, either with targeted remediation projects or with long-term incremental strategies.

*Source: Re-Imagining a More Sustainable Cleveland, Cleveland Land-Lab*