

Urban Land Use

Cleveland-Cuyahoga County Food Policy Coalition Food Policy Brief



The Problem:

The population of Cleveland has dropped almost 50% since 1950, the result of a decline in manufacturing, outmigration to suburban communities, and the home foreclosure crisis. Aside from declining population, Cleveland also confronts other issues that undermine the integrity of many of its neighborhoods, including increasing rates of poverty, deteriorating infrastructure, and vacant land. The City of Cleveland has an estimated 17,000 vacant lots covering 3,300 acres of land. Creative reuse of vacant land can benefit residents, local small businesses and the environment at the neighborhood-level. Urban agriculture has emerged as an innovative and productive re-use of the abundant vacant land within the Cleveland and Cuyahoga County that comprehensively addresses many of the issues listed above. Urban agriculture provides working green space, improves storm water 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 community gardens, which are utilized by individuals or groups for self-consumption, and urban market gardens, which are managed by

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*

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 185 community gardens and 22 market gardens, Cleveland has been a forerunner in the urban agriculture movement.

Goals:

The goals of the Cleveland-Cuyahoga County Food Policy Coalition in terms of land use are to help establish and communicate urban agriculture as a valuable use of vacant land, and to enable agriculture as a use of urban land in any way needed. This has initially come in the form of zoning legislation, but has also included facilitating farming and gardening classes, and collaborating with various invested organizations on urban agriculture vacant land use projects.

Progress to Date:

One of the projects completed by the Cleveland Cuyahoga County Food Policy Coalition is a vacant land inventory for Cuyahoga County, which identified parcels that are optimal for urban agriculture. The inventory will be used to identify strategic parcels of land for urban agriculture in Cuyahoga County, support farmland preservation efforts in the suburban communities, and inform land

use decisions for the Cleveland and Cuyahoga County Land Banks when new parcels are acquired. Additionally, the Coalition worked with Cleveland City Council to create a new zoning designation for urban agriculture called Urban Garden District Zoning, which allows parcels to be used exclusively for food production. The Coalition also worked to create an ordinance allowing for the keeping of bees, chicken and other small livestock in residential neighborhoods. The Farm Animals and Bees legislation was adopted by Cleveland City Council as an official City of Cleveland policy in June, 2011. The FPC also advocated for revisions to Residential Districts in the City of Cleveland that permit crop production, farm stands, and agricultural structures on residential lots. The FPC also collaborated with the City Planning Commission to create an Urban Agriculture Overlay District that creates new zoning regulations allowing for more intensive food production in the city. The legislation passed the City Planning Commission in 2010. The FPC started the Gardening for Greenbacks program, a grants and small loans program for urban farmers within the City of Cleveland's Department of Economic Development, which has provided capital to 20 new agriculture enterprises in the City of Cleveland. The FPC also developed a water policy for urban agriculture and community greening projects in partnership with the Cleveland Division of Water to provide access to irrigation water for projects throughout Cleveland and Cuyahoga County at an affordable rate. Finally, the FPC also worked collaboratively with the City of Cleveland's Land Bank to remove the \$1 million commercial liability policy

requirement for the annual use (license) of land bank lots.

Example:

Community gardens are a great use of vacant urban land. Below are three creative urban gardens, each in a different neighborhood, and each customized to serve the local community and the available land and resources.

