

The contribution of Urban Agriculture towards poverty alleviation can be further enhanced if the practice is recognized and supported by all key stakeholders.

~ Global Development Network

Urban Agriculture and Poverty Reduction

Many low-income communities have limited access to affordable healthy food options. Access can be improved through Urban Agriculture, which involves producing, cultivating and distributing food in a city, town or local community. This could be accomplished in several ways, such as creating and maintaining community gardens, encouraging farm to table initiatives, and expanding local farmers' markets, forming collaborations with local farmers as well as by creating laws and policies that promote the use of local agriculture.

Urban Agriculture can help low-income communities to access healthy, affordable food even in the absence of supermarkets and full service grocery stores. In food deserts, which are often in low-income communities, there are no full service grocery stores with a wide variety of foods. Residents in many low-income communities may be limited to purchasing basic food items from corner markets, which primarily stock processed foods, high sugar content snacks, alcohol and tobacco products.

The availability of affordable and healthy food can reduce food insecurity for people in poverty. When the basic need for food is met, children are likely to be born healthier and are better prepared for school. Many cities and communities are exploring innovative ways to provide fresh fruits and vegetables in an attractive and affordable way to low-income residents. Where people live affects their ability to acquire proper nutrition through healthy and affordable food. The lack of transportation options has been cited as another reason that low-income residents have difficulty with access to healthy foods.



Urban Agriculture can provide more nutritious food, which can result in better health. Higher quality food can benefit residents of low-income communities and has the potential to address chronic medical conditions. Improved access to fresh fruits and vegetables can be an effective way to combat chronic medical conditions such as diabetes, high blood pressure, heart disease and obesity. Proper nutrition can reduce chronic medical conditions among adults, which better prepares persons to acquire the skills and education needed to overcome poverty.

Research studies highlight the connection between poor nutrition, low-income communities and chronic medical conditions. A study conducted by staff at Rutgers University described the benefits of

Urban Agriculture for low-income communities such as improved nutrition, increased exercise, mental health, food security and lower food cost.

[http://www.co.fresno.ca.us/uploadedFiles/Departments/Behavioral_Health/MHSA/Health%20Benefits%20of%20Urban%20Agriculture%20\(1-8\).pdf](http://www.co.fresno.ca.us/uploadedFiles/Departments/Behavioral_Health/MHSA/Health%20Benefits%20of%20Urban%20Agriculture%20(1-8).pdf)

Urban Agriculture Strategies in Low-Income Communities

- **Community Gardens** are used by local groups to plant, cultivate and produce fruits and vegetables that are distributed to the residents in low-income areas. Community Gardens have the potential to not only produce locally grown food products but also serve as a nutrition education strategy to teach low-income residents the value and health benefits of eating healthy. Some schools are using community gardening concepts in their curriculums and community groups are using them to teach the benefits of developing healthy eating habits. Nashville was one of a few cities in the country to receive funding from the United States Department of Health and Human Services to improve and expand community gardening in the city. NashVitality was formed using that funding and has focused on expanding the number of community and school based gardens. A list of the community and school gardens can be found on their website. http://www.nashvitality.org/media/3207/local_table.pdf
- **Farm to Table Initiatives** offer area farmers an opportunity to sell their produce directly to consumers, which lowers the cost through decreased transportation and storage cost. Low-income communities that lack access to fresh and affordable fruits and vegetables could benefit from farm to table initiatives by buying directly from area growers that would insure food freshness and food seasonality while contributing to the local economy. Area restaurants are using the farm to table initiatives to lower food cost, insure food freshness and thus assisting area farmers to sell and distribute their products. A few restaurants in the East Nashville Five Points area and other locally owned restaurants are purchasing fresh fruits and vegetables from local producers.
- **Expanding Local Farmers Markets** – Low-income communities are finding access to fresh affordable food through the establishment of localized farmers markets. While farmers' markets are not new to urban communities, they typically have been permanent structures, which created problems for low-income persons with limited transportation options to access. Small area-specific farmer markets are being encouraged to market affordable fresh produce to low-income communities. Some communities are encouraging establishing temporary or seasonal farmers markets through land use zoning changes and legislative policies. Local farmers markets are improving access to their products by accepting food stamps and/or electronic benefit transfer (EBT) cards. In Nashville, the East and West Nashville farmers markets accept EBT cards. The downtown farmers market has led the way in this effort by encouraging all market vendors to accept EBT cards. <http://blogs.usda.gov/2011/10/27/data-lovers-rejoice-more-farmers-market-geocodes-available/>

Examples of Policies That Support Urban Agriculture In Low-Income Communities

- PolicyLink, a national research institute, highlights how changes in policies at federal, state and local levels can be used to assist low-income communities to benefit through Urban Agriculture. The link below describes how urban agricultural policies have been implemented successfully in several cities to address issues of poverty. Examples include:
- Cleveland, Ohio, partnered with a local nonprofit organization to develop a vacant land use program to encourage urban agriculture.
- Seattle, Washington, inventoried a list of their vacant land plots that could be used for community gardens.
- The Community Food Projects Competitive Grant Program through the United States Department of Agriculture provides funds for projects to fight food insecurity.
- USDA provides funding through its Community Food Projects Competitive Grant Program for projects that fight food insecurity in low-income communities.
- Local communities have identified and designated land suitable for growing agriculture products, provided grants and low-interest loans, included urban agricultural friendly policies in their future land planning, provided city services to support urban agriculture in specific neighborhoods and encouraged city departments to collaborate.
<http://www.policylink.org/site/c.lkIXLbMNJrE/b.7634267/k.C841/Policy.htm>
- The Metropolitan Council of Nashville and Davidson County recently passed Ordinance BL2012-182, authorizing permits domesticated hens in owner occupied primary residences. It also allows on site agriculture sales under specified conditions. The eggs produced by urban chickens are used for personal consumption, sold or distributed to local food banks. There has been discussion about the possibility of using some vacant properties acquired after the 2010 Flood for community gardens.

Burden of Place

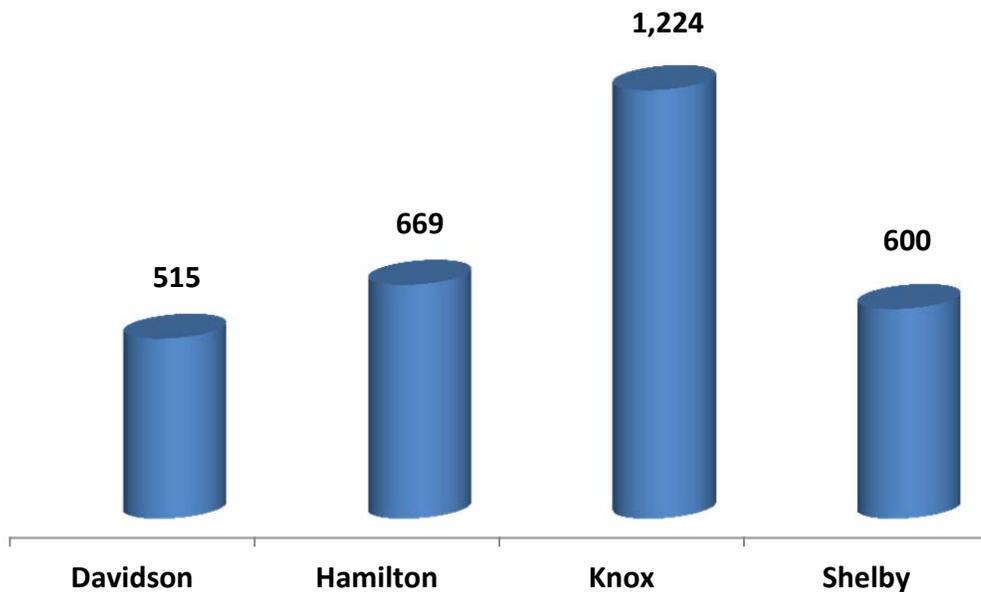
A study conducted by professors at Michigan State University highlighted how residents of low-income communities are faced with additional burdens related to food security and access because of where they live. The study indicated that the lack of access to basic human needs such as food creates additional burdens not found in other communities. Some of the findings in the study indicate that fast food restaurants were more likely to be located in and near these communities so persons had to travel further to acquire healthier affordable food and residents tended to make more visits to convenience stores. The report Urban Poor plagued by “burden of place” indicated that opportunities depended upon where you live. <http://news.msu.edu/story/urban-poor-plagued-by-burdens-of-place/>

Farming and Urban Agriculture

Contrary to popular beliefs that farming is only done in rural areas, many farms are located in urban settings. Urban Farms offer low-income communities a better variety of food products that are low cost, seasonal and generally fresher. In Tennessee’s four urban counties a number of farms produced products that could be sold or provided to low income communities that would both benefit both

residents and farmers. According to a 2007 USDA report, Tennessee’s four largest urban counties contain farms that meet their definition that offers potential for collaboration with low-income communities. Knox County has over 1,200 farms, Hamilton County has 669 farms, Shelby County has 600 farms and Davidson County has 515 farms. Some of the farms in Davidson County reported that they have donated produce to Second Harvest Food Bank.

**Number of Farms in Davidson, Hamilton, Knox and Shelby Counties
2007**



http://www.agcensus.usda.gov/Publications/2007/Full_Report/Volume_1,_Chapter_2_County_Level/Tennessee/st47_2_01_001.pdf

Additional information on Urban Agriculture:

<http://www.ruaf.org/node/512>

<http://www.usda.gov/wps/portal/usda/usdahome>

<http://frac.org/reports-and-resources/food-hardship-access-to-fruits-and-vegetables/>

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Metropolitan Social Services – Planning & Coordination

<http://www.nashville.gov/sservices/planningcoordination/index.asp>

