

City of Cincinnati

Urban Farming- The New Design of Social Sustainability

Summary

In 2012, six community-based farms in Cincinnati provided thousands of pounds of fresh produce to residents in disadvantaged neighborhoods. The Urban Farming Program, part of the Cincinnati Health Department's Creating Healthy Communities (CHC) program, partnered with Urban Farming Inc., a Detroit, Michigan-based non-profit, as part of a national initiative to convert unused parcels of land into community-based urban farms. The program increases access to healthful foods, addresses issues of health disparities, and works to establish local food systems.



Challenge

For Cincinnati, food access is an issue of health equity. Access to healthful foods has been recognized as a major issue for Cincinnati residents. A recent study of Cincinnati showed that 69% of residents live at least 1.5 miles or more (a 30-minute walk) from a mainstream grocery outlet. This was true for 82% of African-American residents compared to only 41% of Caucasian residents, further emphasizing the disproportionate inequities amongst minority populations and increasing risk of malnutrition, diabetes, heart disease, obesity, and other chronic health conditions.

Solution

The Urban Farming Program, led by the Creating Healthy Communities program, assesses current food access issues and works with local government, policymakers, and community stakeholders to establish healthful and sustainable local food systems.

Since its inception, the practice of urban agriculture has rapidly expanded throughout Cincinnati's many neighborhoods. The Urban Farming Program recognizes urban agriculture as an innovative and comprehensive approach to improving the health of social, ecological, and economic systems. Additionally, there is an increase in physical activity, community involvement, and education of healthful lifestyle practices and eating habits.

Your Involvement is Key

The task of strengthening our regional food system and farming economy, and ensuring that all people have access to affordable healthy food, is a comprehensive commitment. Any serious ambition to scale up local food production requires a system that has the ability to bridge the gap between a fragmented supply and the volume and scale of demand. You can help with this initiative by becoming involved in an existing community garden, starting your own garden, and/or supporting local foods in your area.



Results

Through community engagement and small-scale intensive farming methods, six community-based farms are able to provide nutritious foods to neighborhood residents, community recreation centers, community food pantries, and local senior centers. Since 2010, there has been an annual increase in food production and community participation with over 5,000 pounds of fruits and vegetables produced in 2012. The distribution process is unregulated, meaning the food is available to all community members, regardless of participation. There are no barriers or fencing restricting access to each site, and community members are trained on proper harvesting techniques and sustainable gardening practices.

The Cincinnati City Health Department recognizes the development of local food systems as a key initiative to the sustainable health of our region. In 2012, the City of Cincinnati adopted programs and policies to help with this effort, including a mobile food and produce vending program and approval for a commercial composting facility.

“I love to see kids who were eating hot fries and other processed foods out of a bag asking to get food from our garden. I do not say no. “Ms. Lauri, we are hungry. Can we go get some mustard greens?” Would anyone say no to that?”

-Lauri Aultman, Winton Hills CRC Assistant Director

Future Directions

These results/initiatives serve as a call to action for organizations, entities, policy makers, and community stakeholders to acknowledge and holistically address issues of local food systems. Long-term sustainability requires a ‘local food infrastructure,’ an economic network of people and activities in which year-round food production and aggregation, processing, distribution, access, consumption, and resource/waste recovery are tied to our geographic region. Short-term goals include the expansion of our community farming initiatives through identifying and

leveraging assets, enhancing networks and policy support to sustain environmental and systems changes – while increasing production and consumption of healthful foods.



Contact:

Denisha Porter, MPH, RS, HHS
Cincinnati City Health Department
3101 Burnet Avenue
Cincinnati, OH 45229
513-357-7457
Denisha.Porter@cincinnati-oh.gov