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LOS ANGELES FOOD POLICY COUNCIL

August 2023

Rooted Horizons: Growing Food By and For Angelenos



Supported by a grant from

California COMMUNITY Foundation

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Rooted Horizons: Growing Food By and For Angelenos

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We reside, work, and cultivate food on unceded Indigenous homelands. We acknowledge and honor the descendants of the Tongva, Kizh, and Gabrieleño peoples as the traditional land caretakers of Tovaangar (the Los Angeles Basin and the Southern Channel Islands). We pay our respects to the Honuukvetam (Ancestors), ʻAhiihirom (Elders) and ʻEyoohiinkem (our relatives/relations) past, present and emerging. As part of a greater foodshed, we would also like to pay respect to and honor the Chumash, Tataviam, Serrano, Kitanemuk, ʔívilʃuqaletem, Acjachemen, Payómkawichum, and any other tribal group possibly not mentioned. We recognize this land acknowledgment is limited and engagement is an ongoing process of learning and accountability.



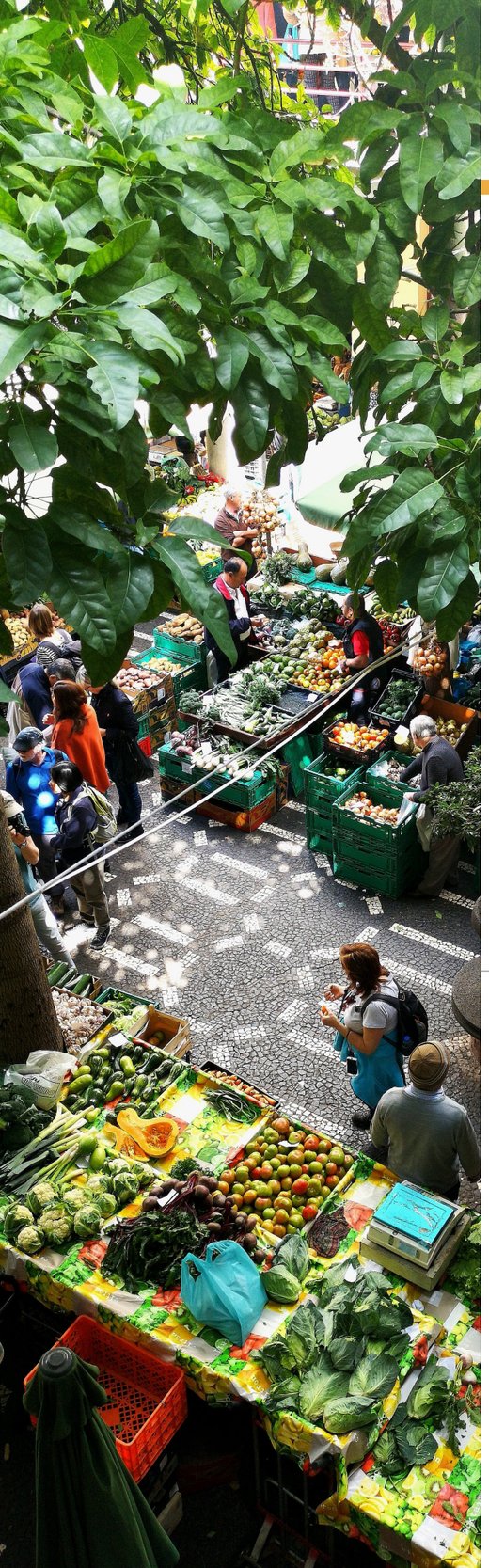


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01 | Executive Summary

In a globalized economy, Los Angeles County is a major powerhouse in the food industry. Despite the significant role our region plays in our global food supply chain, a large portion is not intended for local consumption. As a result, many neighborhoods across the county's 88 cities experience high levels of food insecurity and limited access to fresh produce. To address these inequalities, local leaders are turning to urban agriculture in hopes of achieving a triple bottom line of social, environmental, and financial returns of investment.

Urban agriculture encompasses various initiatives, from small educational gardens to large-scale urban farms, utilizing a range of techniques and technologies. Its potential extends beyond nourishing communities to improving community health and socio-economic conditions through community engagement and workforce development. However, there is a need for frameworks that connect community collaborations, philanthropic resources, and government policies to advance Los Angeles County's urban agricultural network. This report examines the innovations, barriers, and promising opportunities in advancing urban agriculture in the county.

Snapshot of Los Angeles County

- Los Angeles County is one of the 9 most influential counties in the American food system, exporting about 6.5 billion pounds of food per year (second most in the United States) and imports about 7 billion pounds of food (third most in the United States).[1]
- Total gross value of Los Angeles County grown agricultural crops and commodities produced in 2019 was $177,612,300.[2]
- 1 in 4 (24%) households in the County experienced food insecurity in 2022.[3] Throughout Los Angeles County, many residents experience food insecurity because of limited incomes as well as poor local, healthy, and high-quality, food options.[4]
- If Los Angeles County reached 100% of CalFresh participation, the region would receive $541 million in additional CalFresh federal funding annually and circulate an additional $833.1 million in the local economy to pay for fresh produce and jobs.[5]

Project Overview

From November 2022 to June 2023, the Los Angeles Food Policy Council (LAFPC) worked with Larta Institute to:

- Explore the agricultural landscape of Los Angeles County.
- Report out the existing assets of the Los Angeles urban agricultural network.
- Identify the needs in this network that could be met by government or philanthropic investment.

The report had three areas of exploration: (1) a thematic analysis of government-supported plans to identify shared vision and strategic priorities; (2) an exploratory survey of urban agricultural growers and partners to better understand the broader existing urban agricultural landscape of Los Angeles County; and (3) case studies of urban agricultural growers and aggregators to illuminate implementation-level needs, challenges, and promising practices.

[1] Karakoc, D. B., Wang, J., & Konar, M. (2022). Data for: Food flows between counties in the United States from 2007 to 2017. University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign.
[2] Los Angeles County Department of Agricultural Commissioner Weights and Measures. Los Angeles County Crop & Livestock 2019 Report.
[3] de la Haye, K., Livings, M., Bruine de Bruin, W., Wilson, J., Scott, J., Fanning, J., & Wald, R. (2023). Research Brief: Food Insecurity in Los Angeles County, December 2022. Dornsife Public Exchange, University of Southern California.
[4] de la Haye, K., Wilson, J., Bruine de Bruin, W., Xu, M., Ramirez, C., Lerner, L., Livings, M., Wasim, N., Perez, M., Fanning, J., Wald, R., & Marianna, B. (2023). Improving Healthy Food Access in Four Eastside Los Angeles Neighborhoods. Dornsife Public Exchange, University of Southern California.
[5] Call, J. (2020, June). Lost Dollars, Empty Plates 2020. Nourish California.

Key Findings

1. **Community & Collaboration.**
Urban agriculture promotes intergenerational learning about food production, culture, and health in safe community spaces. It encompasses ecological, economic, and cultural dimensions of land use which fosters environmental stewardship. Urban growers respond to their community's desire for quality food and engage with their neighborhoods to develop trust. Knowledge sharing has fostered networks spanning traditional peer-to-peer connections and cross-sector collaborations. These networks facilitate grant applications, resource sharing, creative implementation, and assistance with permitting processes.

2. **Barriers in Infrastructure & Operational Costs.**
Urban agriculture projects require substantial capital and financing during their initial stages to secure land, construct necessary infrastructure, and cover operating expenses until they establish a financially sustainable model, with a particular focus on offering produce at an affordable price and paying their staff a dignified wage. Access to starting capital, including loans, grants, and investments, is often necessary to launch these projects successfully.

3. **Barriers in Navigating & Overcoming Bureaucracy.**
Existing policies do not adequately support urban growers and the local sale or distribution of food. Despite initiatives like Urban Agriculture Incentive Zones (UAIZ), urban growers frequently face misclassification by government agencies, utility providers, and insurance companies. Different protocols and processes across government jurisdictions and service providers complicate matters, depending on the farm or market/farm stand's location.

Recommendations

1. **Foster Community & Collaboration:**
   a. Developing metrics that quantify stewardship & community benefit (reimagining ROIs).
   b. Promoting farm-to-school opportunities by assisting urban farmers with complying to risk management policies & standards.
   c. Resourcing farmer peer-to-peer learning opportunities & farm business training programs.

2. **Support Infrastructure & Operational Costs:**
   a. Creating a paid urban agriculture apprenticeship.
   b. Offering microgrants for start-up/essential infrastructure.
   c. Providing incentives and subsidies for locally grown food.
   d. Creating and promoting innovative land access solutions.

3. **Support in Navigating & Overcoming Bureaucracy:**
   a. Invest in & amend Urban Agriculture Incentive Zone policy.
   b. Address R1 zoning restrictions in city of LA.
   c. Standardized definition of urban farm for sake of permitting, regulations, & insurance.
   d. TA provider to assist with permitting, start-up, & troubleshooting.

4. **Creation of Hyperlocal Food Hubs**
   a. Incorporate shared resources and learning communities.
   b. Support community engagement and job creation.
   c. Invest in logistics and infrastructure.



02 | Rooted Horizons

Introduction

In a globalized economy, Los Angeles County is a major powerhouse in the food industry. It is one of the top nine influential counties in the American food system, exporting 6.5 billion pounds of food annually (second highest in the US) and importing 7 billion pounds of food (third highest in the US).[6] Despite the significant role our region plays in our global food supply chain, a large portion is not intended for local consumption. Even more important is the lack of attention paid by large healthy food retailers to significant swaths of the County, especially high-density areas with low median purchasing power. A history of systematic divestment in healthy food infrastructure and predation by the fast food industry in these communities has prolonged assumptions that certain neighborhoods lack a market for healthy food. This has been a continuing and thus far fruitless endeavor: to lure healthy food retail establishments to establish sites in these areas. As a result, many neighborhoods across the county's 88 cities experience high levels of food insecurity and limited access to fresh produce.[7] In fact, one in four (24%) LA County households experienced food insecurity in 2022.[8] To address these inequalities, and to further jumpstart the national movement of "localized production and distribution" in the County, local leaders are turning to urban agriculture with the objective of building community resilience through achieving a triple bottom line of social, environmental, and financial outcomes.

Urban agriculture is a broad, community-driven sector encompassing small educational gardens at schools and larger urban farms on sizable lots of land. Urban agriculture encompasses many techniques and technologies, from a simple raised bed to complex indoor vertical hydroponic systems. The diversity of urban agriculture has the potential not only to nourish communities but also improve the health and socio-economic fabric of communities through intergenerational community engagement, entrepreneurial activity, workforce development, and ecosystem services. However, to realize the imperative and the opportunity, we need to "connect the dots": enable grass-roots community collaborations, develop cohesive and unified policies and regulations, encourage the development of entrepreneurial ventures within communities, and with this the development of a robust workforce, invite philanthropic resources in a more directed, enduring way, and build awareness of food, nutrition and wellness throughout communities in Los Angeles. These actions are crucial in advancing Los Angeles County's urban agricultural network. Los Angeles must support and leverage its champions and pioneers directly engaging in urban agriculture.

The following report explores the innovations, barriers, and promising opportunities to advance urban agriculture in Los Angeles County.

[6] Karakoc, D. B., Wang, J., & Konar, M. (2022). Data for: Food flows between counties in the United States from 2007 to 2017. University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign.
[7] The USDA defines food insecurity as "a lack of consistent access to enough food for every person in a household to live an active, healthy life."
[8] de la Haye, K., Wilson, J., Bruine de Bruin, W., Xu, M., Ramirez, C., Lerner, L., Livings, M., Wasim, N., Perez, M., Fanning, J., Wald, R., & Marianna, B. (2023). Improving Healthy Food Access in Four Eastside Los Angeles Neighborhoods. Dornsife Public Exchange, University of Southern California.

Project Overview

From November 2022 to June 2023, the Los Angeles Food Policy Council (LAFPC) worked with Larta Institute to:

- Explore the agricultural landscape of Los Angeles County.
- Report out the existing assets of the LA urban agricultural network.
- Identify the needs in the LA urban agriculture network that could be met by government and/or philanthropic investment.

This report has three major areas of analysis:

1. **Thematic Analysis of Government-Supported Plans.** We analyzed the City of Los Angeles' Green New Deal (2019)[9] and the Los Angeles County Food Equity Roundtable Action Plan (2022)[10] for themes related to urban agriculture.
2. **Survey of Urban Agricultural Growers & Partners.** We conducted an exploratory survey to gather a preliminary range of community feedback on the agricultural landscape of Los Angeles County. This survey included questions for urban food producers, food rescue and recovery organizations, food retailers, educators and academics, and others who participate in food systems work across Los Angeles County.
3. **Case Studies of Urban Agricultural Growers & Aggregators.** We purposefully sampled and analyzed semi-structured interview data from local growers and aggregators. We aimed to learn how Angeleno farmers are connected to one another and the ways in which they sell and/or distribute locally grown produce. From this, we developed five distinctive case studies with the following groups:
   - ALMA Backyard Farms (multi-site)
   - Avenue 33 Farm (Lincoln Heights)
   - Crop Swap LA (multi-site)
   - Moonwater Farm (Compton)
   - Prosperity Market (multi-mobile site)

Overview of Urban Agriculture

Urban agriculture in America has been growing in popularity since the World Wars, during which the federal government encouraged people to "dig on for victory," inspiring what are now known as "victory gardens." The most recent resurgence in popularity has been linked to abandoned urban warehouses, as factory work moved out-of-country, and vacant plots of urban land.[11] The National Conference of State Legislatures reports that seventeen states have enacted policy related to urban agriculture since 2007; this includes California's enactment of Urban Agriculture Incentive Zones (AB 551) in 2013.[12]

The United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) defines urban agriculture as "the cultivating, processing and distributing agricultural products in urban and suburban areas, [including] community gardens, rooftop farms, hydroponic, aeroponic, and aquaponic facilities, and vertical production."[13] These different types of urban agriculture can be broken down even further (for a full list, see Appendix 1). The key differences pertaining to the farming methodology of these types are in-ground versus above-ground, controlled versus natural environment, and soil versus soil-alternative (i.e. coconut coir, rock wool, etc.).

Urban agriculture was only recently incorporated into USDA initiatives, enabled by the 2018 Farm Bill which directed the creation of the Urban Agriculture and Innovative Production Federal Advisory Committee. The Committee is committed to investing in urban agriculture and innovating production, compost and food waste reduction, and the Agricultural Marketing Service (AMS)'s Local Agriculture Market Program.[14] USDA is also organizing 17 Farm Service Agency (FSA) urban county committees, one of which is based in Compton, CA.

[9] In 2019, the City of Los Angeles released an updated Green New Deal plan that aims to address our current climate emergency by identifying goals to transform Los Angeles into a sustainable city.
[10] In February 2023, the Los Angeles County Board of Supervisors unanimously approved the adoption of the LA County Food Equity Roundtable Action Plan. The Roundtable is led in partnership by the LA County Chief Sustainability Office and philanthropic partners, including the Annenberg Foundation, the California Community Foundation, and the Weingart Foundation.
[11] Aurora University (2019, October). History of Urban Agriculture.
[12] National Conference of State Legislatures (2019, August). Urban Agriculture State Legislation.
[13] US Department of Agriculture (n.d.). Topics: Urban Agriculture.
[14] U.S. Department of Agriculture (2023, March). Urban Producers, Public Invited to Attend April Meeting of Federal Advisory Committee for Urban Agriculture and Innovative Production.

Historical Overview on Agriculture in Los Angeles

Today, Los Angeles County is highly urbanized, encompassing 88 cities and approximately 2,650 square miles of unincorporated communities across a total area of about 4,083 square miles. The region's landscape has undergone significant transformations throughout its history. Before the concrete pavements we see today in Los Angeles County, the region's landscape comprised large lots of farmland and cultivation acreage. Foundational to these iterations is the indigenous stewardship of its First Peoples, the Tongva. Much of our cultivation infrastructure today exists from the indigenous ecosystem maintained by the Tongva people as they lived within and traded across the biodiverse terrain of ocean, rivers, grasslands, and mountains.[15] Colonization led the transformation of natural habitats into Spanish missions and Mexican ranchos, where early Los Angeles domesticated agriculture began through the cultivation of grapes and olives for sacramental wine and oil as well as tallow and cow hide for export to Europe.[16]

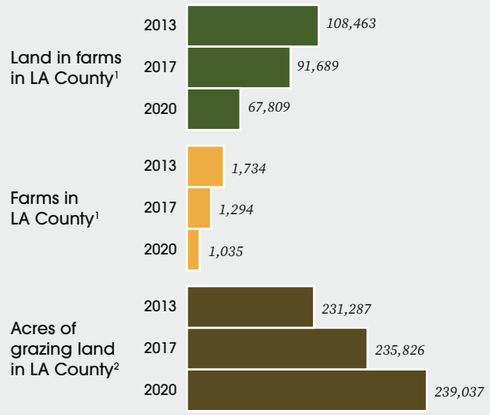
Mexican land grants gave rise to well-known street and neighborhood names like Palos Verdes, San Pedro, La Brea, Centinela, San Vicente, and Santa Anita.[17] The period between 1909 and 1949 marked the peak of agricultural production in Los Angeles, with the region becoming the most profitable agricultural county in the United States and a global agricultural powerhouse.[18] Notably, Exposition Park was initially known as Agricultural Park, serving as a fairground for showcasing farming innovations during the late 19th century.

Today, prominent reminders of the burgeoning agricultural industry are found in regional names like "The Cornfield" (Los Angeles State Historic Park), Valencia (as in the orange varietal that used to be widely grown there), Orange County, and even Knott's Berry Farm. The Tongva people are also still very much present today and are the largest urban indigenous populations in the United States.[19] For many, especially those who are indigenous to this region, agriculture means reclaiming ancestral practices through "food sovereignty," a localized food system in which the people have decision-making power to produce, distribute, and consume food.[20] This type of land stewardship includes practicing traditional ecological knowledge that could be instrumental in building and nurturing regenerative ecosystems.

Urbanization & Present Day Agriculture in Los Angeles

However, over the years, agricultural land has shrunk significantly (Table 1). The stark decline in agricultural land use not only indicated a decline in farming operations but also the conversion of agricultural land to other uses. Due to the rising value of land for non-agricultural purposes, many farmers were and are being displaced not only in Los Angeles County but also across other regions including the Inland Empire.[21] While agricultural land use is essential to the environment and our ecosystem, our region is part of a statewide trend of the shrinking of agricultural land. In fact, California is losing 50,000 acres of farmland every year, or just over 78 square miles which is equivalent to 12 Yosemite Valleys, 1.5 San Franciscos, 4 Malibus, or 4 Napa Valleys.[22] Despite the decline in regional agricultural production and land use over the last few decades, Los Angeles County is still very much agriculturally productive. In 2019, the total gross value of agricultural crops and commodities produced in Los Angeles County was $177,612,300 with nursery plant production as the leading commodity at $98,440,000.[23]

Table 1. Agricultural trends in Los Angeles County



[1] National Agricultural Statistic Service, United States Department of Agriculture, 2007, 2012, 2017
[2] California Department of Conservation Farmland Mapping and Monitoring Program, 2008-10, 2010-12, 2014-16

[15] Pulido, L., Barraclough, L., & Cheng, W. (2012, April). A People's Guide to Los Angeles. University of California Press.
[16] Robinson, W. W. (1979). Land in California. University of California Press.
[17] Morrison, P. (2021, May 4). You know their names: Palos Verdes, La Brea, Sepulveda. But what were the ranchos?. The Los Angeles Times.
[18] Surls, R., & Gerber, J. B. (2016). From cows to concrete: The rise and fall of farming in Los Angeles. Angel City Press.
[19] Zappia, N. (2019). The Original "Farm-to-Table": Native Foodscapes and the Future of California Cuisine. California History, 96(4), 88–92.
[20] Wittman, H., Desmarais, A., & Wiebe, N. (2010). Food sovereignty: Reconnecting food, Nature and Community. Food First Books.
[21] Uranga, R. (2023, February 5). Warehouse boom transformed Inland Empire. Are jobs worth the environmental degradation?. The Los Angeles Times.
[22] Western Plant Health (n.d). Loss of California Farmland Threatens Climate.
[23] Los Angeles County Department of Agricultural Commissioner Weights and Measures. Los Angeles County Crop & Livestock 2019 Report.

Urban Agriculture & Improving Localized Food Access

Much of the food that is grown in California and moves through Los Angeles County is not meant for local consumption. The food belongs to supply chains destined for other states and countries. This is important in discussing food access issues at the local-level. In fact, 1 in 4 (24%) households in the County experienced food insecurity in 2022,[24] more than double the national rate of food insecurity (10.4%).[25] In addition to limited incomes, many do not have local access to healthy and high-quality food options.[26] There are ways to leverage federal funding like CalFresh and WIC to support a localized supply chain. For instance, if Los Angeles County reached 100% of CalFresh participation, the region would receive $541 million in additional CalFresh federal funding annually and circulate an additional $833.1 million in the local economy at over 6,200 food retailers and pay for fresh produce and jobs.[27] We believe that urban agriculture is well positioned in Los Angeles County to address this lack of local food access by prioritizing our local communities as both the first and last mile of food.

Urban agriculture addresses food access issues by activating the community desire for food sovereignty and a more localized food system and by leveraging the pre-existing ecological infrastructure. Contrasted with conventional agricultural models, urban agriculture is unique in that it takes into account creative land use and often prioritizes creating on-site community gathering and engagement opportunities. These spaces frequently become intergenerational, hosting a variety of local residents to share historical knowledge, culturally significant recipes, and traditional ways of connecting with the land and community. Urban farms often also seek to educate the community about local food production, encouraging the community around civic engagement and also creating both entrepreneurial and workforce development opportunities for community members to pursue farming. We hope to broaden the reader's understanding of urban agriculture as it meets the triple bottom line (impact) of social, environmental and financial returns of investment, while identifying the barriers and areas of opportunities to further support urban agriculture in the region.



[24] de la Haye, K., Livings, M., Bruine de Bruin, W., Wilson, J., Scott, J., Fanning, J., & Wald, R. (2023). Research Brief: Food Insecurity in Los Angeles County, December 2022. Dornsife Public Exchange, University of Southern California.
[25] Feeding America. (2021). Food Insecurity among Overall (all ages) Population in the United States.
[26] de la Haye, K., Wilson, J., Bruine de Bruin, W., Xu, M., Ramirez, C., Lerner, L., Livings, M., Wasim, N., Perez, M., Fanning, J., Wald, R., & Marianna, B. (2023). Improving Healthy Food Access in Four Eastside Los Angeles Neighborhoods. Dornsife Public Exchange, University of Southern California.
[27] Call, J. (2020, June). Lost Dollars, Empty Plates 2020. Nourish California.

Report Areas

Thematic Analysis of Government-Supported Plans

The success of urban agriculture in Los Angeles hinges on recognizing the region's geographical, political, and governmental complexities. When these complexities are better understood, then resources can be better allocated and activated. This includes braiding in philanthropic dollars to support start-up costs and capacity building within the local food economy.

A key challenge in addressing governmental complexities is understanding operations between and across federal, state, and local-level jurisdictions. For instance, the County of Los Angeles has a population of 10 million. It encompasses the City of Los Angeles, which alone has about 4 million residents and is one of the County's 88 cities. The City of Los Angeles operates independently with its own local government, making decisions and providing services within its limits. However, it relies on the County of Los Angeles for certain services and coordination, such as public health. The City and County have an interdependent relationship, where the City has autonomy but depends on the County for shared services and regional matters.

Governmental complexities present challenges for urban growers and aggregators navigating the systems. However, it is crucial to highlight that both the County and City have asserted their desire to better support and value urban agriculture. In the past five years, there has been growing interest in food systems work, evident in the targets of the City of Los Angeles' Green New Deal plan (2019) and the policy goals of the County's Food Equity Roundtable Action Plan (2022). The Green New Deal envisions an environmentally sustainable city, while the Food Equity Roundtable aims to address food insecurity and structural inequalities in the county's food system. Despite their different foci and scopes, both initiatives promote urban agriculture as a strategy for achieving environmental sustainability, better health, and increased food equity. The following are key highlights and shared themes of plans centered around urban agriculture:

Economic & Workforce Development
LA's Green New Deal promotes the creation of green jobs and commits to reducing burdens on food entrepreneurs, while the Food Equity Roundtable proposes to strengthen the workforce development and employment opportunities for those working in the food system, with a focus on local hiring practices and enabling employers to offer adequate benefits and training to their employees.

Green Business Support
LA's Green New Deal calls for increased technical assistance to healthy food merchants and reduced barriers for food entrepreneurs, while the Food Equity Roundtable calls for increased inclusivity and support for minority-owned farms and small businesses.

Childhood Nutrition
Both the LA Green New Deal and the Food Equity Roundtable prioritize the nutritional needs of young people, with recommendations for wellness and healthy eating programs and a summer lunch program from the Green New Deal, and objectives to teach healthy eating in childhood advocated for by the Food Equity Roundtable.

Hyperlocal Food Systems
The LA Green New Deal prioritizes the optimization of our local food system so as to reduce the miles that fruits and vegetables travel to reach residents' plates. The plan also suggests that discarded food should become compost for local growing rather than as waste in landfills, further decreasing the carbon footprint of our food system. The Food Equity Roundtable similarly supports the shortening of our supply chains to promote climate-friendly food in Los Angeles, which includes improving the efficiency of the food supply chain and recovery management systems through data and technology solutions as well as coordination between local producers, processors, distributors, and retailers.

Sustainable Farming Practices
The LA Green New Deal proposes an increase in urban agriculture to achieve agricultural sustainability in our region, which includes the streamlining of permitting regimes to expand the number of gardens on both public and private local land, while also proposing new zoning categories for innovative food production. The Food Equity Roundtable also prioritizes innovative food production, calling for increased support for small farmers and growers who wish to engage in and receive certification for sustainable agricultural practices.



Highlights of Community Case Studies

Founded by Richard Garcia and Erika Cuellar in 2013, ALMA Backyard Farms is a nonprofit organization with a multi-dimensional mission in Compton and San Pedro. They use urban agriculture to assist individuals re-entering society from incarceration, address food access issues, build community, and contribute to society. Starting with underutilized residential backyards, they expanded to farms in re-entry homes and leased land from a church in Compton and empty lots in San Pedro. ALMA Backyard Farms prioritizes hiring formerly incarcerated individuals, and they run job training, children's programming, and a pay-what-you-can farm stand that serves around 500 community members every other week. The organization faces challenges related to zoning, insurance, water, land costs, and lack of specific government guidelines for urban farms. However, their innovative practices, such as using CoolBot technology for cold storage and philanthropic funding for community food access, contribute to their hyperlocal impact.



(See Appendix #3: Case Study on ALMA Backyard Farms to learn more).

Owned and operated by Eric Tomassini and Ali Greer, Avenue 33 Farm is a 1.2 acre hillside urban farm in Lincoln Heights. After remediating the soil and building infrastructure, they established revenue streams through produce sales and school-community partnerships. Eric also works as a farm educator at Los Angeles Leadership Academy (LALA), managing their school farm and student-led apprenticeship program. The school-based food distribution program includes harvested produce from LALA Farm, Imperfect Produce donations, recovered food from the LALA cafeteria, and produce from Avenue 33 Farm. Their operational model focuses on regenerative agriculture and agroforestry practices to stabilize the hillside soil and ensure a pest-resistant farm. They offer sliding-scale pricing for customers and utilize ARPA Market Match funding for their EBT Farm Stand to promote community food access. Challenges include labor costs, insurance difficulties, high water costs, and the need for additional off-farm income due to low profitability on crops. Avenue 33 Farm prioritizes promoting job creation, values-based sourcing, and supply chain flexibility through school-community partnerships and innovative farming techniques.



(See Appendix #3: Case Study on Avenue 33 Farm to learn more).

Founded by Jamiah Hargins in 2018, Crop Swap LA is a nonprofit organization aiming to achieve food sovereignty and community resilience by transforming homeowners' lawns into small urban farms. Through advanced water recycling infrastructure and a hyperlocal distribution market, they seek to create communities independent of grocery stores and supply chains for high-quality produce. Starting with home garden exchanges and free fruit tree harvesting events, the organization secured a 4 million dollar investment, enabling them to hire full-time farmers and invest in legal support. They established microfarms on homeowners' properties, supplying about 175 families with weekly CSA boxes. To address financial sustainability, Crop Swap LA is fundraising to create an $80 million endowment for urban farming. Challenges include personnel costs, insurance classifications, and difficulties in partnering with the LA Unified School District for broader reach. Nevertheless, their innovative strategies, such as land use agreements, limited CSA memberships, and climate change mitigation, contribute to their hyperlocal impact and community resilience efforts.



(See Appendix #3: Case Study on Crop Swap LA to learn more).

Established in 2014 in Compton by Kathleen Blakistone and Richard Draut, Moonwater Farm is a regenerative land-based learning hub. The farm follows an "agrarian commons" model, openly sharing its space with the community for education, art, and regenerative agriculture. Using their 401k money, the founders purchased the land and house to create a gathering place for community members to connect with each other and the food system. They host students from various educational institutions for enrichment classes and field trips focused on Next Generation Science Standards. Moonwater Farm also aims to work towards meal sovereignty by creating a space for biweekly community meals and supporting local food and art pop-up vendors. Challenges include limited financial support, animal husbandry expenses, the need for a commercial kitchen space, and difficulties partnering with schools for agricultural learning due to risk management policies. Despite these challenges, the farm's innovative approaches, such as incorporating livestock and offering alternative pricing for educational opportunities, contribute to its hyperlocal impact and regenerative practices.



(See Appendix #3: Case Study on Moonwater Farm to learn more).

Founded in 2020 by Kara Still and Carmen Dianne, Prosperity Market is a mobile farmers market with a mission to transform the Los Angeles ecosystem and economy through agriculture, food access, nutrition education, and community partnerships. By providing a platform for small Black farmers and food vendors to sell their products, Prosperity Market aims to address the lack of food access in the communities they serve. Initially funded through grants, they have built strong community partnerships to support their venture. Operating as a "farmers market on wheels," they rotate market locations and offer online purchasing with local pickup, delivery, or nationwide shipping. The markets also feature an incentive program called "Prosperity Bucks," granting customers additional money to spend at the markets. Prosperity Market seeks to expand its wholesale business by developing a mobile farmers market trailer, while also assisting farmers with business courses to support their growth. Challenges include a lack of infrastructure for storage and distribution, limited market opportunities for farmers, and the need to connect and support the local farmer network.



(See Appendix #3: Case Study on Prosperity Market to learn more)

Findings & Recommendations

This Report explores the urban farming and system opportunity in Los Angeles County through engagement with three themes: Community and Collaboration, Barriers — Infrastructure and Operations, and Barriers — Navigating and Overcoming Bureaucracy. These themes emerged both from engaging with urban farmers, experts across the landscape of Los Angeles, and literature drawn from the Food Equity Roundtable's important and seminal work.

Each of these sections presents our Findings through our analysis supplemented by surveys, interviews, and cited literature. We follow this with Recommendations which flow from the findings and analyses. We devote a separate section to Food Hubs, which we believe to incorporate several of the findings in this Report, and serve to ensure a cohesive, coordinated, and purposeful response to the need for community resilience in a challenging environment for communities in Los Angeles, especially underinvested, undervalued, and vulnerable communities.

Theme 1: Community & Collaboration



Did you know... // What is...

What is... meal sovereignty?
Meal sovereignty is defined as the capacity to create and mindfully eat a prepared, nutritious meal at least once a day. This term is an extension of food sovereignty, or the ability of communities to determine the quantity and quality of the food that they consume by controlling how their food is produced and distributed. Meal sovereignty acknowledges that even if someone is able to financially or physically access nutritious food, there are still limitations on an individual's time and resources to be able to prepare and enjoy nutritious meals.

What is... Good Food Purchasing Program?
The Good Food Purchasing Program is a procurement standard that measures large institutions' purchases according to five core values: local economies, environmental sustainability, valued workforce, animal welfare, and nutrition.

What is... an intergenerational space?
Intergenerational spaces are gathering places where people from a variety of ages and backgrounds can connect. These spaces promote the sharing and preservation of historical knowledge, such as regenerative agricultural practices, culturally significant recipes, and traditional ways of connecting with the land and community.

How can urban farming support climate resilience?
Regenerative farming practices provide essential ecosystem services that benefit the local community and arable land. Some of the regenerative practices LAC urban farmers are utilizing include composting, stripcropping, reducing tillage, rainwater harvesting, mulching, and rotating crops. These practices combined on an average sized residential lot in LA have the potential to sequester over 1 tonne of carbon dioxide per year (USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service, COMET-planner).

Findings

Farm-to-school partnerships are integral for LA County urban farms, but farmers find partnering with LAUSD is nearly impossible.
Every farmer we spoke with partnered with schools as part of their community engagement model. These partnerships included installing school gardens and farms, hosting school field trips, and joining school staff as an agricultural instructor. Some farms even created urban agriculture curricula that meet California Common Core and Next Generation Science Standards. These partnerships further the hope that teaching students from a young age about food origin and cultivation could promote food sovereignty within the students' families and encourage a deeper community understanding of our food system. Despite the benefits of these partnerships for the students, farmers, and community, many farmers reported they are only able to partner with charter schools and some schools in Compton Unified School District. They cited LA Unified School District's risk management policies as the main barrier for participation.

> "The community organization schools hub has always been something for us that we think is very important. We don't have to do any community outreach because the school is a fixed thing that has however many hundreds of families that you know are there."
>
> - URBAN FARMER

> "Very similar to urban agriculture, everyone loves the idea of a school garden. But then, that teacher transfers, that parent volunteer matriculates, and it ends up being an eyesore and overgrown. So, we've had a lot of enthusiasm to have us come on, but navigating the bureaucracy of LAUSD is a whole other conversation."
>
> - URBAN FARMER

> "I don't do farming in the classroom, it is way too regulated and a lot of that is USDA. So if I don't have enough food for the entire school, I can't show up."
>
> - URBAN FARMER

LAC urban farmers expressed a strong desire for connection & collaboration opportunities.
Urban farmers in the LA region know of one another, but there is no streamlined means of connecting. When able to network and collaborate, farmers share irrigation and cold-storage innovations, connect with new suppliers or markets, or simply find solidarity with one another, especially after the isolating period under COVID restrictions, and the changed work/space environment post-COVID. However, these opportunities are rare and local farmers reported craving more opportunities to connect. Some farmers expressed wanting to collaborate around funding opportunities, which can be challenging to navigate due to the non-profit/ for-profit heterogeneity of the urban farms. Other farmers are looking to connect with larger buyers, which would require the aggregated volume of several small producers combined. Farmers also spoke of wanting more "open-source" information to reduce redundant efforts and encourage learning from the innovations and processes of other local farmers.

> "We found that with the farmers and the spaces that we're connecting with, so many people were so disconnected or knew of each other but had never met. So there's very few organizations that are connecting the dots. And also there's no resources that we've found where you can be like, okay, who are the farmers in California, in Los Angeles. There's none of those kinds of resources to make it easier for people to connect and find each other."
>
> - URBAN FARMER



Photo courtesy of Avenue 33 Farm

Findings

Climate change remediation & regenerative practices are central for LAC urban farmers.
Of the LAC farmers we surveyed, 95% reported their key goal was promoting overall community health. In interviews, the farmers spoke about their relationships with the land and their collective desire to increase the sustainability and resilience of their communities. Many farmers acknowledged a sense of reciprocity they felt between themselves and the land, a notion rooted in indigenous-based practices. According to the farmers, reciprocity goes beyond the simple science of propagation, instead incorporating deep care, humility, and gratitude in their cultivation practices. This focus on reciprocity leads the vast majority of LAC farmers to engage with regenerative practices such as composting, stripcropping, permaculture, crop rotation, and cover cropping. They speak about their spaces as "edible landscapes" and "food forests," seeing the land for the beauty of what it can produce without reducing the land to a commodity.

> "There's a law of reciprocity. I think the plants have become our teachers and (our farm) is honoring the reality of the reciprocal relationship between plants and people."
>
> - URBAN FARMER

> "(That's) our goal (is) to make our neighborhood a sustainable place, comfortable in the worst situations."
>
> - URBAN FARMER

> "I have a great deal of interest in raising all of our ecological consciousness through regenerative practice. And not like fashionable regenerative practice but the whole story, it's our communities, it's our building, it's our way we steward land, you know,it's very complex. It's our energy. It's all of those pieces together."
>
> - URBAN FARMER

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> "We've learned from community members that there is a large interest in good food and good greens. They will travel the distance. So, in a way we're honoring the interest that already exists."
>
> - URBAN FARMER

Community trust and buy-in is essential to the success of LAC urban farms.
When starting an urban farm operation, LAC farmers cited community trust and involvement as essential to the success of their operations. From what they choose to grow to the programming they offer, their work is centered around what the community wants. The farmers recalled building this trust over time by having "boots on the ground" and prioritizing collaborations with other justice-seeking organizations and activists. Urban farmers also shared extensively about how the local community is invited to intersect with their work and share their physical space. Particularly in neighborhoods that lack parks and green spaces, these urban farms exist as key places for the community to interact with one another and regularly experience nature. This differs from more production-driven farms, which are unlikely to be open to the public due to food safety regulations and a focus on efficiency.

> "Most of the barriers come in the slowness of the way true community engagement is going to happen if you're not of and from the community."
>
> - URBAN FARMER

> "There's the communal dimension of what we do where food brings people together. This social dimension of what we're doing is key because it makes communities more receptive to these changes, the changes they would like to see. It also brings a lot of people together from many different backgrounds."
>
> - URBAN FARMER

> "The place is a canvas for community members to have access to land, access to good food, and really this conversation around interrogating notions of private property, saying what would it look like if more people shared land."
>
> - URBAN FARMER



Photo courtesy of ALMA Backyard Farms



Photo courtesy of Moonwater Farm

Recommendations

Metrics that quantify stewardship & community benefit (reimagining ROIs).
We need to reimagine returns on investment (ROIs) to properly capture the various ecosystem services and community benefits that urban farms offer their communities. Many agricultural opportunities silo the impact of farms solely to providing food for the community, not accounting for farms' ability to increase civic engagement through sharing stories about the community, promoting food as medicine, and fostering knowledge on pollinators and native plants. Our region must make a collective effort to develop metrics calling out these alternative benefits of urban agriculture and develop tools to measure the extent of the impact.

Promote farm-to-school opportunities by assisting urban farmers in complying risk management policies & standards.
Farm-to-school partnerships fall mainly into educational opportunities and procurement. Educational opportunities include but are not limited to establishing and/or maintaining farm spaces on school campuses, hosting students for farm field trips, and doing recipe demonstrations or garden taste-tests. Procurement includes but is not limited to becoming an approved vendor with the school district and selling produce to the district for use in the cafeteria. In both farm-to-school partnership categories, risk management policies are involved for the sake of child safety and food safety, respectively. These risk management policies serve necessary and helpful purposes, however urban farmers are in need of assistance to become compliant and pursue partnerships with schools.

Examples of this support include helping new farmers earn a Certified Producer Certificate, which allows farmers to sell fresh fruits, nuts, vegetables, shell eggs, honey, flowers, and nursery stock directly to consumers. Farmers could also partner with a local aggregator with approved vendor status that could then sell directly to the district. Support could also include more schools hiring on-site agricultural educators, reducing the need for extra insurance when students travel off campus to visit a farm space. This would also increase the local agricultural job market substantially and address land access, one of the farmers' largest barriers.

Fund farmer peer-to-peer learning opportunities & farm business training programs.
Local community-based organizations (CBOs) should build out existing urban farmer peer-to-peer learning networks, such as the Urban Growers Alliance, to create more spaces for growers to connect and learn from one another. CBOs should also invest in resources allowing urban farmers and people interested in partnering with or sourcing from urban farms to connect with one another. Similarly, there could be resources providing information for challenges commonly faced by farmers in the region, such as business model planning, farm-to-market sales, and permitting processes. Programs like Prosperity Market's farm business workshops and Crop Swap LA's Urban Grower Certificate are examples of initiatives that could be expanded upon to meet this local need. These farm business training programs could be offered at a Food Hub, creating a central location for farmers and assistance providers to connect with one another. This support could take the form of technical and business assistance, representation of ombudsman services, and aggregation coordination to distribute fresh produce throughout local communities.

> "Working with farmers as the aggregator, we see what's missing. A grocery store is going to need these things, a retailer will need these things, and you need these things."
>
> - AGGREGATOR

> "We did know how to grow food, but we did not know how to run a business, especially a farm business… But the out-of-state extension services had a farmbusiness class and it's probably the most important thing I did. And I wish I would have taken way more business classes."
>
> - URBAN FARMER

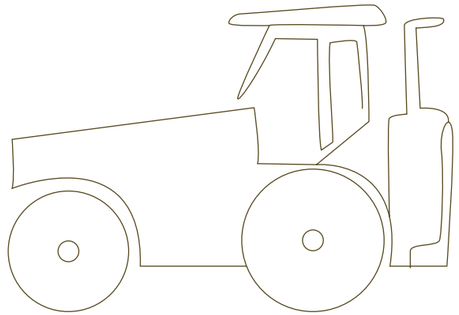
Resource an aggregator to support the procurement and distribution of regeneratively, locally grown food.
A centralized aggregation coordinator and facility focused specifically on regeneratively and locally grown food could spur the growth of the urban farming movement in the LA region. Areas that this aggregation facility could improve include increasing collaboration between small-scale growers and markets and promoting partnerships between regional farmers and larger institutional food buyers, such as LA Unified School District, hospitals, and universities. Currently, while many of these institutions abide by the Good Food Purchasing Policy or similar procurement standards, there is no aggregator large enough to service these buyers. Such a facility could serve as the central foci of the food hub(s) proposed later in this report.

> "We want to keep making relationships and building, but we first need to make sure that we have all the essentials and logistics for where we are before we can keep building on to it."
>
> - AGGREGATOR

Theme 2:
Barriers in Infrastructure & Operations

Did you know... // What is...

What are... produce incentives and who can participate?
Produce incentive programs provide extra funds, sometimes in the form of vouchers and other times as discounts, for purchasing fruits and vegetables. Current government-sponsored incentive programs tie receiving incentive dollars, which can be spent on locally-grown fruits and vegetables, to spending a certain amount of SNAP benefits. However, this inherently limits program participation to SNAP recipients and vendors.



Findings

Locally grown food is financially inaccessible to low-income customers without subsidizing the cost.
The economies of scale are generally not possible for urban growers in the region, given the limited space and expense of land within Los Angeles and its surrounding cities. However, the majority of LA's urban farms operate in low-income neighborhoods with high instances of food insecurity. Operating in these communities is part of their mission: provide locally-grown nutritious food to their communities. When asked about the key goals of their farms, 63% responded 'addressing root causes of hunger' and 95% responded 'community health.' For farmers to turn a profit and community members to be able to afford the fresh produce, some of the farmers' expenses must be externalized. All the farmers we spoke with who are growing to sell, as opposed to giving their harvests away, are employing alternative-pricing strategies, such as offering discounts for EBT customers, providing vouchers for customers who attend cooking demonstrations, or allowing customers to 'pay-what-you-can.' These discounts are supported by government nutrition incentive grants, corporations, and foundations.

> "Our food system is heavily subsidized. Food is cheap, which is great and like it should be. But a lot of those things as an urban farmer you don't have access to, to make the produce cost less."
>
> - URBAN FARMER

Irrigation infrastructure is one of the most essential and costly factors of starting a farm.
Urban farmers consistently mentioned irrigation systems as the foundation of their farms' infrastructures as well as one of their largest financial hurdles when starting their farms. Many farmers mentioned that irrigation infrastructure is the thing they are asked most about by individuals looking to start their own farms. However, irrigation installation can be costly, both due to the materials themselves and the initial deposit required by water providers like LA Department of Water & Power (LADWP) to start a new water service account. Some farms in LA are utilizing rainwater harvesting to reduce their reliance on water service providers, reducing water usage by up to 92%, compared to traditional grass lawns. Despite these water saving technologies, some urban farmers still reported being categorized as residential users who are in the "fourth tier" of municipal water usage, resulting in paying about 64% more per gallon than the standard residential fee. Moreover, the LA local government has not given any information as to how farmers within the county can comply with water restrictions, despite having specific zoning policies allowing for farming on county land. Current exceptions are only available for sports parks or large (>3 acres) landscapes within the LA Department of Water's service area.

> "I think when we talk about infrastructure and capacity building, it's the farm's capacity to be profitable while trying to decrease the amount of direct time I need to spend."
>
> - URBAN FARMER

LAC urban farmers utilize and land access workarounds to address significant land access barriers.
Land cost and access consistently came up as the single most difficult barrier to starting an urban farm in LAC. Every farmer we spoke with had innovative means to address this issue. Some farmers cultivate the land at their personal residence, combining their mortgage and farmland lease into a single expense. One farmer who took this approach called it ***"a huge advantage and part of how we're capable of existing."*** Other farmers sought out community institutions, such as churches and schools, for cheap or no-cost leases; these farmers spoke particularly to the value of collaborating with an entity with staying-power as it is unlikely to be developed into something else. Some farmers purchased their land using 401K funds to do an 'alternative investment,' however they spoke to the heavy legal and administrative burdens of taking that route. Other farmers utilize land use agreements with homeowners, transforming residential yard spaces into urban farms. While LA County passed the Urban Agriculture Incentive Zone policy in 2017 in an effort to address the issue of land access for urban farmers, the policy inherently benefits the land owners, and hence only benefits farmers who are landowners themselves.

> "Residential homes have one decision maker. However, when a nonprofit or the city has land that we walk by for years, we say, how come that's not different. But there's all these bodies of incentivized decision makers about that land. The neighbor next door could claim as a taxpayer, I have a say. That just becomes very complicated. That's why we wanted to circumvent that."
>
> - AGGREGATOR

Urban farm operations incorporate workforce development and community education to generate "off-farm" income.
Many of the farms' employment models underscore the fact that urban farming in LA is not a profitable profession when siloed from the broader food network. Almost all of the full-time farmers we spoke with are engaged with schools in some capacity, generating additional revenue as agricultural educators at schools, installing school gardens, or hosting children's farm camps on site at their farms. Other farmers have community education initiatives or integrate workforce development programming into their operations. The workforce development programs support individuals in becoming well-trained farmers, with some incorporating transitional employment for people coming out of incarceration. Many other farmers spoke of their need for additional income, working second jobs or relying on a spouses' income, to supplement revenue from the farm.

> "Just like unlocking the potential of a vacant lot, there's the parallel of unlocking the potential of that person."
>
> - URBAN FARMER

Production farms either invest in cold-storage infrastructure or are forced to harvest, process, and sell in a single day.
Many LAC farmers have invested in innovative cold-storage technology, such as CoolBots, which trick a standard window unit air conditioner into chilling a space down to food safe temperatures (below 40°F). This CoolBot technology can be installed into an insulated storage shed, a refrigerated freight container ("reefer"), or a walk-in cooler. Both the infrastructure cost and energy use are significantly less than that of traditional walk-in coolers, but the initial cost of this technology was still up to $10,000 for about 120 sq ft of cold-storage. Before investing in cold-storage, farmers reported that they had to do all of the harvesting, processing, and distributing in a single day to keep the produce fresh and be in accordance with food safety regulations. For this reason, some farms would delay harvesting, limiting the farm's overall production.

> "I I used to think that the best storage for the vegetables was on the plant but it ends up being the case that the plant will give more when you take more from it."
>
> - URBAN FARMER

Findings

Skilled personnel is difficult to find & retain.
LAC farmers highlighted labor scarcity as a significant issue for small-scale farmers, particularly in LA where labor costs are expensive and many farms cannot afford to offer benefits like healthcare. When asked what is the biggest inhibitor of their growth, the most common answer was limited funding for personnel. It also takes several months for new hires to work at the speed needed in order for the operation to be revenue neutral, let alone profitable. In some instances, farmers said people quit after 3-6 months due to the physical demands of the job. Moreover, the need for skilled labor cannot be solved by utilizing volunteers, as their participation can be inconsistent and they take significant time to manage and direct. The only farms who did not report difficulty with employee retention were non-profit operations who offer generous compensation, thanks to the support of grants and foundations.

> "It's about consistency. You have to pay so much to have consistent support."
>
> - URBAN FARMER

> "It would not be possible to do what we have been able to do with volunteers. And our volunteeropportunities we've had to actually limit a lot because volunteers take a lot of our time to train up and to bring up to speed, and sometimes the operations don't lend themselves to that."
>
> - URBAN FARMER

> "I think a lot of the farmers need help. They need more. They need actual hands to help them harvest and just do what they need to do."
>
> - URBAN FARMER

Recommendations

Create a paid urban agriculture apprenticeship.
There should be significant investment in growing the pool of skilled agricultural workers in the LA region, who could go on to work at preexisting LAC urban farms or start their own. There is precedent in other cities, such as Chicago's 9-month apprenticeship program with Windy City Harvest, indicating that paid apprenticeship and urban farm incubator programs can lead to growth in the urban farming sector. The apprenticeship could tie in with existing certification and educational programs, like the Master Gardener program, Occidental College's the Don B. Huntley College of Agriculture at Cal Poly Pomona, or Crop Swap LA's Urban Food Grower Certification. The apprenticeship should center around growing food for market in urban spaces, but it could also incorporate workplace readiness training as well as re-entry support for individuals with prior justice system involvement. This program should be at least 3-6 months long so that participants have time to become familiar with the work and see the farm through a significant season of growing. This program should also be paid in order to encourage the participation of any and all individuals interested in pursuing urban farming as a career as well as legitimize the validity of urban farming as a career. Not only would the apprenticeship support future farmers, but it would also provide support for the existing farmers who the apprentices would be learning under. The local government, such as the newly-created LA County Department of Economic Opportunity and the Chief Sustainability Office, should consider identifying the unique requirements of apprenticeship programs to stimulate workforce development in urban agriculture, tapping into other local resources and institutions.

> "I think an apprenticeship would be really special particularly for Black farmers because we already don't have enough, and it's not like it's a sexy industry that people want to get in. I think maybe exposing younger farmers to what this could be, would be great. They're getting paid to do it. They're learning. And then that's how we can actually get more people interested in farming."
>
> - URBAN FARMER

> "It creates some consistency. If the internship is paid for this amount of time, then the farmer knows they have help for this amount of time, rather than the occasional volunteer that will show up every now and again. So I think that definitely creates some structure and then you can actually determine, I have help for this long and we can get some things done and I can plan that out."
>
> - URBAN FARMER

Offer early funding for start-up/essential infrastructure.
One of the easiest barriers to address in regards to starting a new urban farm is the cost of simple infrastructure, such as irrigation systems, composters, wash stations, and cold-storage. Farmers reported that this infrastructure adds up to about $150,000 for starting a new farm on a vacant lot (the average land parcel in LA is 0.15 acre). LAC urban farms have historically relied on personal finances, foundation grants, or corporate sponsorships to cover these expenses. Urban farms will soon have access to USDA support as well, in partnership with the USDA Service Center opening in Compton, which houses a Committee of Urban Agriculture and Innovative Production. These resources need to not only be made available for local farmers but also made accessible and visible through a concerted and cohesive effort by County and City jurisdictions.

> "A lot of your input costs like irrigation and infrastructure is up front and required to actually be able to do something profitably on the farm. If you don't have a wash station that can function efficiently, you can't move produce through quickly enough to make money."
>
> - URBAN FARMER

Support incentives and subsidies for locally grown food.
Investing in programs such as Market Match, Farm Fresh LA, and Prosperity Bucks as well as financially supporting pay-what-you-can models has a multiplied impact: providing food to community members, fighting inflation, and supporting local small farmers' sales. These programs can also stand in place of produce giveaways, minimizing the logistics that go into a food distribution, such as a storage facility to prepare, aggregate, and distribute food, while also giving more autonomy to the community members who are free to shop and purchase food most relevant to their households' preferences.

> "EBT is great but if the carrots are still $5, then it doesn't matter."
>
> - URBAN FARMER

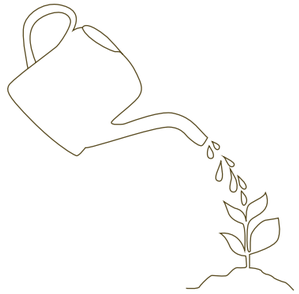
Support innovative land access solutions.
Land access, including cost of land, short-term leases, and lack of protection against eviction, leaves many individuals unable or unwilling to ever start their own farm. LAC farmers have ample examples of innovative solutions that allowed them to overcome the land access barrier, leading to the farms we see today. It is essential that we promote these pathways, such as providing matchmaking services for land owners and aspiring farmers, or encouraging homeowners to contract urban farmers to transform their yards into growing spaces. We can also look to significant landowners in the region, such as the Los Angeles Unified School District (LAUSD), which owns over 6,400 acres of land.[28] One potential solution is for LAUSD schools to each lease part of their land to a farmer at a low-cost; this could provide greening services for the school and create a large job market for entrepreneurial farmers.



Photo courtesy of Prosperity Market

[28] Blume, H. (2018, March 19). As a mega-landowner, L.A. Unified has lots to figure out, a new report says. Los Angeles Times.

Theme 3:
Barriers in Navigating & Overcoming Bureaucracy



Did you know... // What is...

What is... the "Cottage Foods Act?"
The Cottage Foods Act (AB 626) adopted by the LA County Department of Public Health in 2013 allows people to sell "low risk" foods that are prepared in their home kitchens as opposed to a rented commercial kitchen space. However, people operating businesses under the Cottage Foods Act cannot exceed $50,000 in gross annual sales, limiting the ability of someone to live solely off of income from their Cottage Food business since the average living wage in Los Angeles is about $67,300.[29]

What is... "Truck Gardening?"
Truck gardening (also termed "truck farming") is the language used in the city of LA zoning code which permits the growing of agricultural products on residentially zoned land. Truck gardeners are allowed to grow berries, flowers, fruit grains, herbs, mushrooms, nuts, ornamental plants, seedlings, and vegetables, but are prohibited from selling on-site or raising livestock.

Findings

Farm land lease terms are often too short or do not offer protections for farmers.
For the farmers who lease their land, the cost of the land and the length of the lease are large concerns. Initial investments were reported being up to $150,000. Farmers primarily negotiate leases guaranteed for 5-7 years to allow time to get the farm up and running at maximum production. Some growers stressed that this negotiation process is particularly difficult for farms operating as non-profit organizations.

> "It's a big learning curve for your first years. You're not producing at the level that you're capable of, or that the space is capable of."
>
> - URBAN FARMER

> "We looked to have at least a three-year agreement on the use of the land, so that had to be negotiated because if there's a large initial investment on a vacant lot, then the return is not going to happen for at least three years. It'll probably be fully operational in more like five to seven years."
>
> - URBAN FARMER

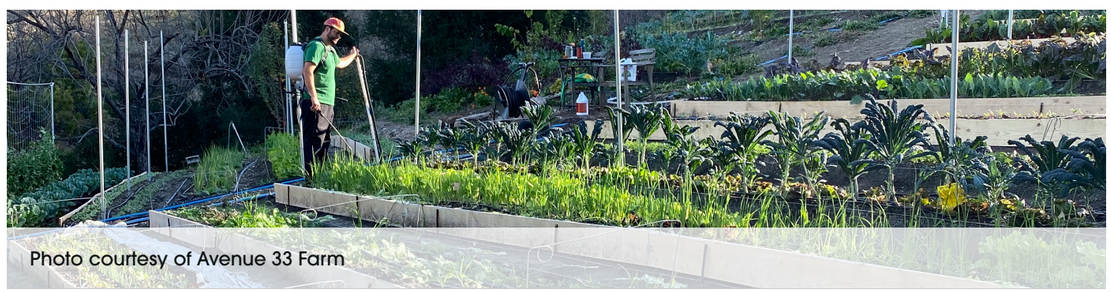


Photo courtesy of Avenue 33 Farm

[29] Massachusetts Institute of Technology (2023). Living Wage Calculation for Los Angeles County, California.

Finding the 'best-fit' insurance provider and plan is a challenge.
Financially-stable LAC urban farm operations are combining their farming operations with activities that have been historically associated with non-profit work, such as community engagement and education. This cross-functional job description can lead to confusion with the type of insurance needed for both the employees and the spaces they work on. Complications around insurance were echoed by the farmers who operate on their own private residential land. Additionally, insurance companies are sometimes reluctant to offer coverage when they learn people will frequently be visiting the space. Insurance is especially critical when applying for grants.

> "We tried a lot of variations (of insurance policies) from related fields like landscaping and gardening but they all factored in using equipment and heavy machinery, lifting in excess of 50 lbs, or other similar workplace risks our farmers are not exposed to."
>
> - URBAN FARMER

> "The insurance stuff, it's just really confusing and difficult. In terms of things that could be organized, that would be really helpful to everyone."
>
> - URBAN FARMER

Navigating the permitting process is expensive & confusing as an urban farm.
To start a farm in Los Angeles County, a farmer has to communicate with a variety of permitting departments. Although the county adopted the Urban Agriculture Incentive Zone (UAIZ) policy in 2017 to foster growth in the region's urban agriculture industry, LAC urban farmers reported that permitting departments had little knowledge of what urban agriculture entails. For example, some urban farms started on residentially zoned vacant lots were frequently questioned by the LA Department of Building and Safety as to whether they were building a residence, because of the need for electricity and water lines. Farmers also cited a seeming lack of communication between local government departments, particularly between those advocating for and shaping UAIZ and those who permit farmers trying to take advantage of UAIZ or starting a new urban agriculture venture.

> "I think there's inefficiency in transforming vacant lots because there's probably just a lack of communication between the (local government) departments and policymakers."
>
> - URBAN FARMER

> "The agricultural system in LA is missing the education piece for the people that are making policy, like they need to be able to see what's happening in real time."
>
> - URBAN FARMER

Compton's "Residential Agriculture (RA)" zoning attracts and supports urban farming.
Our research indicates that Compton's agricultural zoning has created a culture that embraces urban agriculture, with a particular emphasis on incorporating livestock and horseback riding. Some farmers relocated to Compton when they wanted to start a farm because of the favorable zoning policy–Residential Agriculture (RA-1)–which differs from the city of LA in that it allows for on-site sales and distribution and certain livestock. Compton's reputation as an agricultural neighborhood is tied to the historic Richland Farms area, which served as agricultural land and later as a community garden from 1888-2006.

> "At the time you could not grow food legally in a residential neighborhood, we were living in Los Angeles. We went searching and heard about this horse neighborhood in Compton. We could get started right away since it's zoned residential agriculture."
>
> - URBAN FARMER

Recommendations

Invest in & Amend UAIZ.
To support the transformation of vacant lots into urban farms and implement a streamlined permitting and installation process, UAIZ should be better understood and adopted by local government departments, such as LA Department of Water & Power and LA Department of Building & Safety. Local governments should also invest in promotion and outreach for UAIZ to encourage more participation, including outreach to landowners of vacant lots and a system to match aspiring farmers to landowners who qualify for UAIZ. Based on lease duration feedback from farmers, the policy should be amended to extend the lease period from 5 years to 7 years.

Address R1 zoning restrictions in City of LA: They are a disincentive to urban farming.
To grow the urban agriculture sector in the city of LA, local government should amend the residential zoning (R1) code to allow for limited on-site distribution of agricultural goods, modeled after Compton's residential agricultural (RA1) zone. The prohibition of on-site distribution of farming products is meant to prevent quiet neighborhoods from becoming busy commercial corridors. However, the zoning code has become a barrier for local food access in residential communities that are explicitly requesting local farm stands. Advocates propose allowing urban farms on R1 lots to distribute their produce on particular days for limited time windows, similar to a farmers market, so that local streets will not be constantly busy.

The zoning ordinance also dissuades some farmers from starting their urban farm within the city of Los Angeles because they will have to sell their products at wholesale prices to an external market, yielding lower margins and less revenue for the farm. Additionally, 93% of surveyed LAC urban farmers expressed distributing locally as a key goal for their farm. A secondary effect of the zoning ordinance is that it makes it difficult for farmers to become EBT vendors. EBT vendor registration must be tied to a physical address, and urban farmers operating on R1-zoned land cannot legally distribute from their address.

> "Our biggest hurdle is distribution on site. That's been one of our bigger hurdles because of the zoning."
>
> - URBAN FARMER

> "We're zoned for truck farming. So we're allowed to grow food and sell it off site. We do sell on site, and we invested a lot in making sure our neighbors were okay with that. We were always very hesitant to do anything that involved a lot of people coming to our home farm just because we live on a quiet street and so we wanted to be respectful of the neighbors."
>
> - URBAN FARMER



Photo courtesy of Avenue 33 Farm

Standardized definition of urban farm for sake of permitting, regulations, & insurance.
To assist with the confusion between urban farmers and government and regulated entities, such as government agencies, utility providers, and insurance agencies, a standardized definition of urban farming should be developed. This definition could streamline various permitting processes since there would be common standards and expectations of urban farms. This definition should include the expected range of water usage and potential irrigation methods, the frequency of soil testing, the amount of electricity needed and its uses, the use of the space for public events, and the means of sales/distribution. In the future, this definition could be combined with certifications, such as the USDA Good Agricultural Practices (GAP) certification, which helps reassure buyers of a farm's general operating practices. Moreover, LA County should work to provide clear and cohesive permitting policies that are harmonized across the county's multiple municipalities. While city governments will still have jurisdiction over their distinct regions, there should be an effort to coordinate amongst municipalities whenever possible and to make the differences between city policies regarding urban agriculture clear and accessible.

> "An urban farm checkbox does not exist. So when it comes to establishing utilities on a vacant lot, or workers comp, those sorts of things, how do you navigate that? We have not found a source to help us navigate that, so I feel that for future programs that is a really key piece to getting started and then to be able to maintain growth."
>
> - URBAN FARMER

TA provider to assist with permitting, start-up, & troubleshooting.
LAC urban farmers are in need of a low- to no-cost technical assistance TA providers within a local government office or a community-based organization to streamline and assist with navigating the legal and bureaucratic elements of starting an urban farm. Post farm start, the TA providers would continue to provide wrap-around support services and work alongside government offices such as the LA Department of Building & Safety and LA Department of Water & Power. These TA providers would also support and streamline permitting, grant writing, accessing capital, navigating insurance, and/or applying for USDA support.

> "As we've made progress in establishing and converting vacant lots in the city of Los Angeles, we've solicited help from local land use experts. We're blessed to have the pro bono assistance of a land use attorney because it gets very daunting having to navigate that as an urban grower."
>
> - URBAN FARMER

> "I would say if there were a budget toward the most critical infrastructure points, it'd be the legal"
>
> - URBAN FARMER

> "There's a lot that needs to be figured out with researching grants and trying to apply for different grants and figure out how to fund all this. We're responsible for figuring a lot of those things out, and for it to be fully functioning, I think it'd be better if I was just a farmer."
>
> - URBAN FARMER



Photo courtesy of ALMA Backyard Farms

Creating Hyperlocal Food Hubs

Many of the findings and recommendations expounded upon throughout this report could be addressed through the formation of food hubs. Due to the large geographic span of Los Angeles County coupled with farmers' intent on providing fresh produce to their immediate communities, we recommend forming multiple food hubs throughout the region. To minimize jurisdictional overlap and confusion, a potential option is to create one food hub per County supervisorial district. While we are not proposing a specific design for each hub, the character of the hubs should reflect the demographics and demand in each represented area.



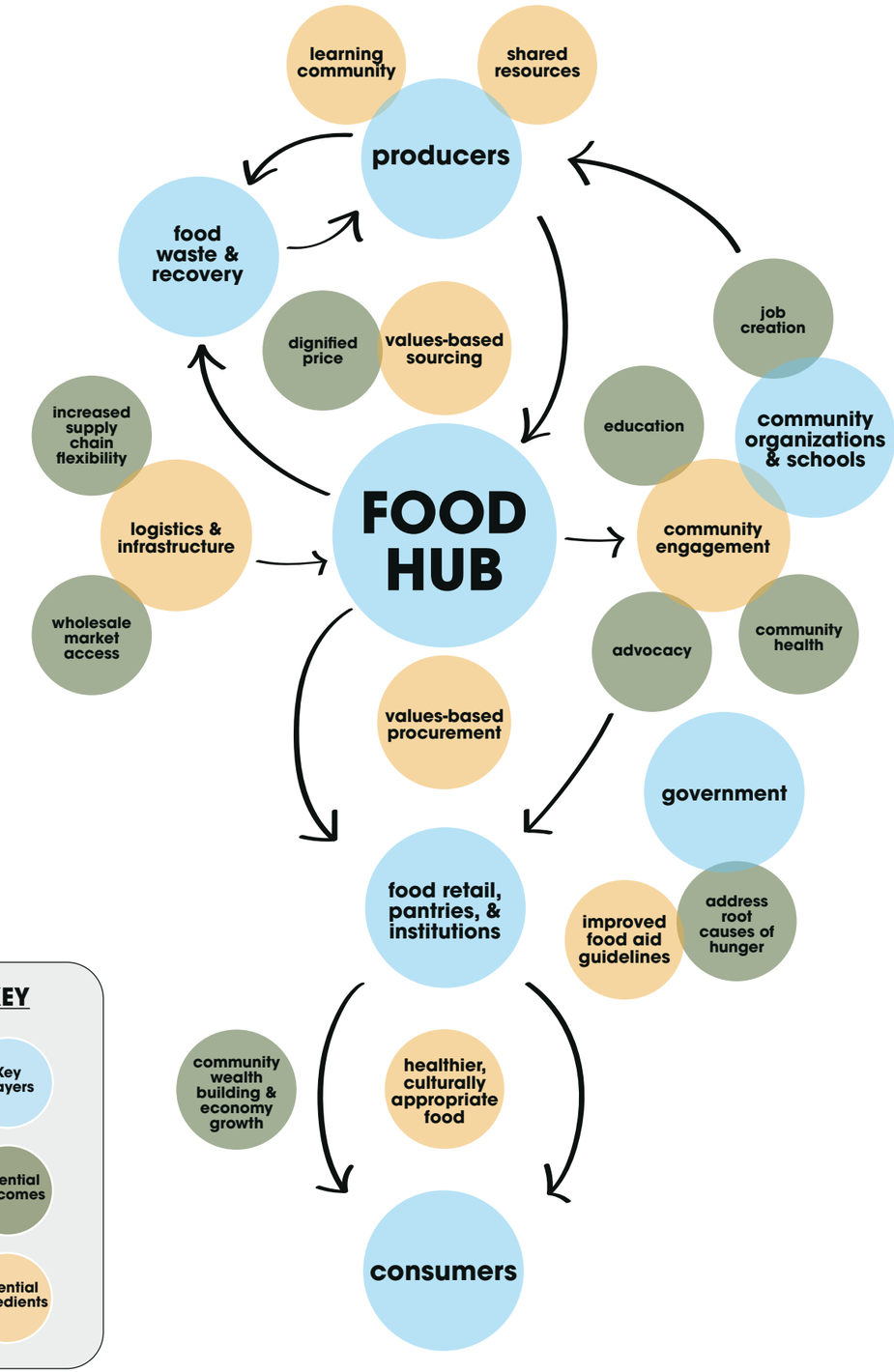
We recognize that the realization of this vision will require a coordinated process and campaign by appropriate entities within both the City and County of Los Angeles, as well as input from cities and jurisdictions in and among Los Angeles County where the opportunities for the growth of urban agriculture are most apparent. Urban farming stakeholders and practitioners need to be front and center in the design and development of food hubs.

Throughout our interviews and surveys with members of the Los Angeles County urban agriculture community, we sought to define what an urban agriculture hub would need to look like in order to best serve the region. Our research team drew inspiration from several food hub models and definitions, seeking to come to a recommended model that honors the current innovations and infrastructure within Los Angeles while also identifying where investment is needed.

We believe that the USDA definition provides a good starting point; it defines a food hub as "a business or organization that actively manages the aggregation, distribution, and marketing of source-identified food products primarily from local and regional producers to strengthen their ability to satisfy wholesale, retail, and institutional demand."[30] The East Denver Food Hub's *Values-Based Local Food System Map* takes this base structure a step further, identifying how to transform a food hub from a supply chain to a value chain; in this model, a food hub is also a resource center for the local community, it's farmers, and it's food entrepreneurs.[31]

Our research team consulted growers and aggregators on how their work is interconnected and where there are gaps. Using this Food Hub diagram to the right, we asked key players of the local food system to identify which elements of this model are present in LA and where infrastructure, relationships, or resources are needed to create a more holistic food ecosystem.

Food hubs are a crucial space bringing together 'key players' through 'essential ingredients' to create 'potential outcomes.'



[30] Barham, J., Tropp, D., Enterline, K., Farbman, J., Fisk, J., & Kiraly, S. (2012). Regional Food Hub Resource Guide. U.S. Department of Agriculture, Agricultural Marketing Service.
[31] Masters of the Environment Capstone Team (2021). Values-Based Local Food System Map. University of Colorado Boulder.

Food hubs incorporate shared resources and learning communities.

Food hubs can be essential places for connection and collaboration between farmers, other community-based organizations and institutions, local government offices, and community members. Having a common space for farmers to come together can meet the expressed needs of farmers calling for more peer-to-peer learning opportunities. These spaces could also serve as a central location for workshops and one-on-one assistance with farm business planning, food safety compliance, and navigating permitting systems. Moreover, this could become a place where farmers connect with other farms and entities with resources to share. This could take the form of landowners contacting the food hub when they want to lease their land to a farmer. This could also take the form of internal connections, where farmers connect with one another to aggregate their produce for a buyer requiring larger volumes or a high degree of product consistency.

Shared Resources:

> *"When it comes to establishing utilities on a vacant lot, how do you navigate that? The workers comp, those sort of things. We have not found a source to help us navigate that, so I feel that for future programs that is a really key piece to getting started and then to be able to maintain growth." - Urban Farmer*

Essential Ingredients

Learning Community:

> *"...I think a lot of the farm groups, we could help each other, but there's a lot to figure out."*
> *- Urban Farmer*

Essential Ingredients

Food hubs incorporate logistics and infrastructure.

The food hubs will provide essential localized infrastructure to support the aggregation and redistribution of locally produced food. This infrastructure could include shared food storage, cold storage, and loading docks. Additionally, it could include a tool library with larger equipment that would pose a significant financial burden for small farmers to purchase, maintain, and store. Currently, the landscape of urban agriculture in Los Angeles seems to be heavily focused on direct to consumer sales. This emphasis is partly due to the farmers prioritizing the health of their immediate communities and partly because there is a lack of infrastructure enabling farm-to-market (business-to-business) sales. Beyond the need for physical assets, there is also a need for a facilitator who can be devoted to coordinating across farmers and buyers. To address this issue, we propose that these food hubs would possess both physical and personnel infrastructure to create efficient aggregation pathways and lower the barrier to entry for new farm entrepreneurs. By aggregating produce through these hubs, there is potential for the resulting volume to meet the demands of large institutional buyers seeking local, sustainably produced food.



Food hubs can serve to represent small producers in accessing procurement opportunities in the larger wholesale markets

Shared resources and learning opportunities represented in and by physical hubs serving specific demographics in the hub's area will help drive technical and business assistance to small producers, including underserved farmers. One key outcome would be to enable quality standards and capacity to scale beyond their individual capacities. Hubs serve to represent groupings of small producers to large opportunities (aggregation) and to advocate on their behalf to agencies and buyers to a) understand their procurement opportunities and b) to help meet them.

Wholesale Market Access:

> ***"I can envision a model where urban growers and small producers can project their surplus and share that information, and the food hub being able to take that information and match it to available procurement opportunities." - Urban Farmer"***
>
> ***"It would be amazing to see an organized food hub represent a broad cohort of small producers, emphasizing urban agriculture and underserved farmers, and go to large agencies and entities to say, 'Hey, we can meet your procurement requirements while also delivering on your CSG targets.' Even identifying these opportunities for a small producer is a prohibitive exercise, requiring a totally different skill set that many operations cannot reasonably afford." - Urban Farmer***

Potential Outcomes

Increased Supply Chain Flexibilityt:

> *"From a cooperative standpoint, it's figuring out how to coordinate, which to me is great because trying to have diversity on a small space is really difficult. Because you're on a small scale, it doesn't take much to lose that half of a bed. We'd be stronger together. I think that's also the tricky part about working with restaurants or distributors: urban, small-scale farms aren't consistent like a normal farm."*
> *- Urban Farmer*

Potential Outcomes

Finally, food hubs incorporate community engagement and job creation.

Food hubs will be a center for the surrounding communities to engage with their food system, interact with green space, and access fresh produce. The community engagement strategies could entail workshops, school field trips, (a) demonstration farm(s), or a market. The food hubs could also be home to community food resources such as CalFresh and WIC enrollment, market match, and a produce prescription program. Our survey data indicated that most local urban farmers and local aggregators are already focused on community health, education, and community advocacy, meaning there are pre-existing community-based engagement strategies and relationships that could be built upon within the hubs.

In contrast, we identified a gap in regards to workforce development and opportunities for entrepreneurship. Farmers reported focusing significantly more on community engagement than job creation, increased supply chain resilience, dignified pricing, and wholesale market access. This has created a gap between local growers and larger marketplaces and led to decreasing local agricultural job opportunities.[32] We recommend the food hubs have a distinct focus on agricultural workforce development, creating paid opportunities, such as an apprenticeship (see page 24), for individuals to learn farming skills and techniques. These trained apprentices could then work for pre-existing farms, providing much needed skilled labor, as well as go on to found new farms, which could sell into the food hub's market or aggregation network.

Community Engagement:

> *"An urban farm can become a community hub with multiple layers of programming for different generations." - Urban Farmer*

Essential Ingredients



[32] Jobs in agriculture, forestry, fishing and hunting decreased 47% from 2011 to 2020, according to LEHD Origin-Destination Employment Statistics.

03 | Conclusion

Los Angeles possesses all the necessary elements to serve as both the starting and ending points of the food supply chain. These elements include the availability of land, public agendas that aligns with this vision, and a strong civic interest. However, to fully realize the promise of urban agriculture, more substantial investments in infrastructure and capacity building are needed for practitioners like growers and aggregators and regulators like utility providers and permitting agencies. It is also imperative to foster greater coordination between stakeholders and capital sources, including state & federal entities and philanthropy, with urban farmers reporting across the board (93% of surveyed growers) that access to capital is their primary growth inhibitor.

This report emphasizes that urban agriculture in Los Angeles has the potential to unify us in a holistic and sustainable way, moving us towards community and climate resilience, it enables us to establish connections with the land, the environment, and one another, all while simultaneously re-imagining food availability and accessibility for the people of Los Angeles. The intent is to honor the extraordinary efforts and progress made by stakeholders in the region, and to focus on collaboration to enhance our collective impact. By cultivating food for and by our communities, we can attain a triple bottom line of social, environmental, and financial returns on investment (ROI):

Social ROI. Urban agriculture differs from conventional agriculture in that it benefits the community beyond food production. Urban farms often serve as safe spaces, intergenerational spaces, and green spaces for their neighborhoods. By investing in urban agriculture, stakeholders are not only contributing to the development of local food systems that provide accessible, affordable, and healthy food options but also creating a more equitable built environment that connects individuals with one another and their food, particularly in areas with limited access to grocery stores or fresh produce. We have an opportunity to trial novel approaches that can be used as a blueprint for communities globally, as well as to adapt approaches taken successfully in other cities in the U.S., like Chicago and Denver, and in many countries, such as tiny Singapore (which is constrained by land and the lack of a hinterland). We believe that our recommendations can, if adopted, have a transformative impact on the well-being and health outcomes of communities, addressing food apartheid, improving food sovereignty, and moving toward community resilience.

Environmental ROI. Investing in urban agriculture can also offer an opportunity to enhance the region's environmental sustainability and resilience. Urban agriculture can play a vital role in mitigating climate change by reducing carbon emissions associated with long-distance food transportation, promoting carbon sequestration through regenerative agricultural practices, and harvesting rainwater to alleviate reliance on regional aqueducts. Local food production helps conserve natural resources and minimize food waste. By integrating green spaces and urban farming into civic landscapes, stakeholders can create resilient and adaptable communities that are better equipped to withstand the impacts of climate change, like extreme weather events, supply chain disruption, and water scarcity.

Economic ROI. Investing in urban agriculture in Los Angeles can generate economic benefits such as job creation, local economic growth, and community development. As a leader in the global food economy, Los Angeles has the opportunity to maintain and even improve supply chains. As our survey noted, better access to capital for urban farmers is key to progress. We have a rich tapestry of funding types and sources available in our region, from traditional government nutritional benefits like WIC and Calfresh to private funders open to offering low cost loans. USDA remains an important source of purpose-driven grants given its engagement in urban agriculture in the region, as noted above. This gives us a unique opportunity to develop innovative financial products that can better support our local farmers and urban agricultural businesses.

Technology ROI. Farming has always been a communal activity, with farmers relying on one another for growing techniques, market connections, and local insights. In an urban and modern context where farmers are more easily siloed, this communal knowledge sharing is more difficult to access from a neighbor but more easily accessed using technological resources. The popularization of generative AI and the sharp fall in costs of offering online learning, research, and expertise combine to offer a unique moment for Angeleno farmers to benefit from the development of online platforms to aid in seeking farming services, education, and capital. Such a platform would create a library of local knowledge and expertise such as irrigation techniques or land acquisition strategies. It would also enable Angeleno farmers to easily access expertise from other regions, education on key topics (like how to navigate USDA resources and funding opportunities.

Overall, investing in urban agriculture in Los Angeles offers stakeholders a unique chance to address food insecurity, enhance sustainability, and foster economic growth. It has the potential to create healthier communities, improve environmental stewardship, and contribute to a more equitable and resilient region. By recognizing these compelling reasons and taking action, Los Angeles stakeholders can make a significant positive impact on the well-being of their communities. Together, we can be more **rooted** in our **horizons** and collaborate on a better food future for Los Angeles.



04 | Appendices

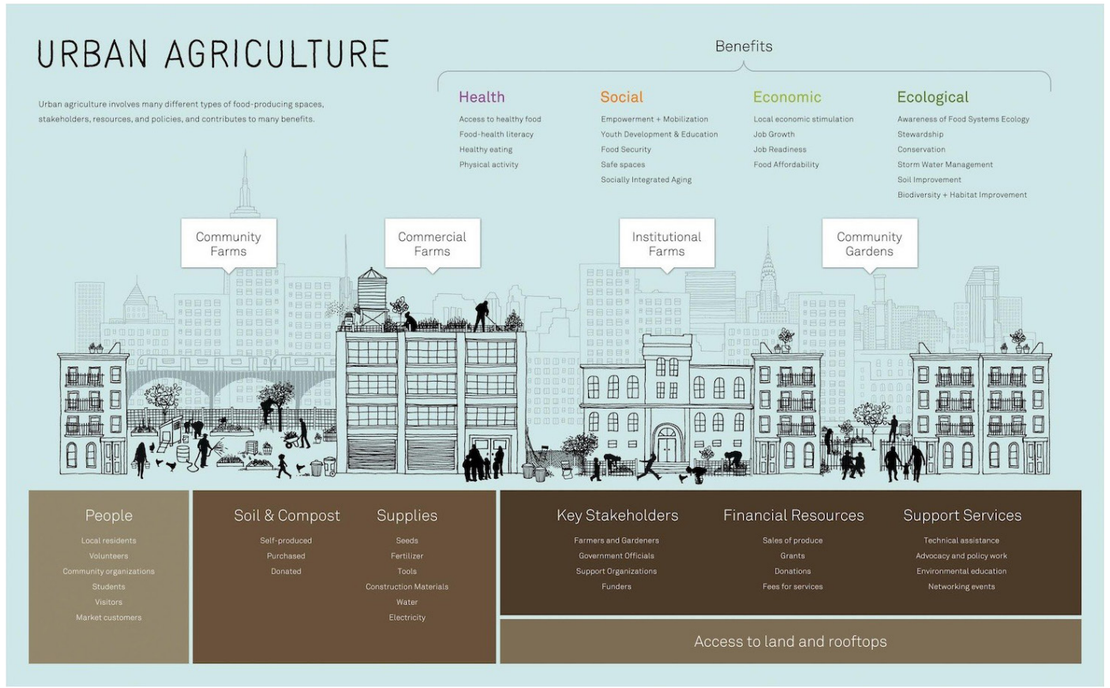
APPENDIX 01:
Urban Agriculture Glossary



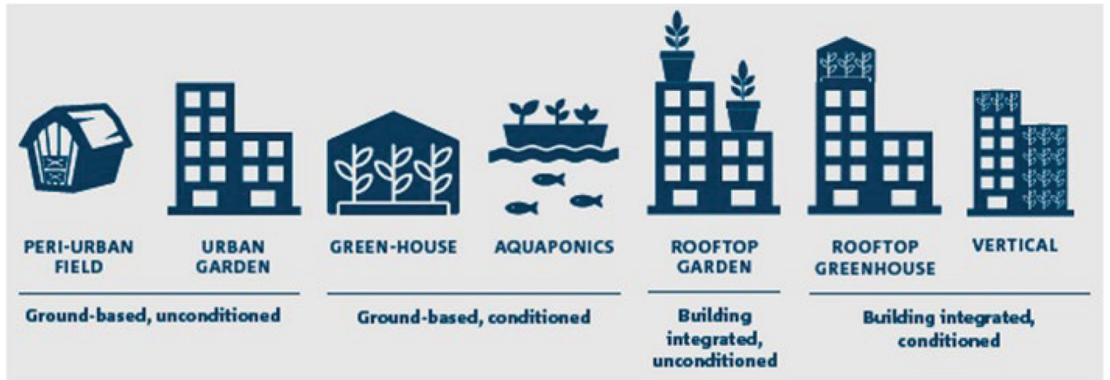
Photo courtesy of Avenue 33 Farm

Types of Urban Agriculture

"Five Borough Farm provided the most detailed NYC farming survey ever produced & created metrics framework."



O'Sullivan, C.A., Bonnet, G.D., McIntyre, C.L., Hochman, Z., & Wasson, A.P. (2019, August). Strategies to improve the productivity, product diversity and profitability of urban agriculture. Agricultural Systems, 174, 133-144.



Times Agriculture (2022, January 24). Urban Agriculture: Types, Benefits and challenges.

Types of Urban Agriculture

There are many different types of urban agriculture, including Community Gardens, Backyard Gardens, Rooftop Gardens, Tactical Gardens, Aquaponics, Indoor Farming, Market Gardening, Greenhouses, Green Walls, Vertical Farms, Urban Beekeeping, Balcony Gardens, and Window Boxes.

1. Community Gardens
Community gardens are plots of land that are shared by a group of people. They can be found in both urban and rural areas, and they vary in size from a few square feet to several acres. People who participate in community gardens can grow fruits, vegetables, herbs, flowers, or any other plants they like.

2. Backyard Gardens
Backyard gardens are small plots of land that are typically used to grow fruits, vegetables, and herbs. They can be located in any part of the city, and they are perfect for people who want to produce their own food but don't have a lot of space.

3. Rooftop Gardens
Rooftop gardens are becoming increasingly popular in cities around the world. They are a great way to use wasted space, and they can be used to grow a variety of fruits, vegetables, herbs, flowers, and other plants.

4. Tactical Gardens
Tactical gardens are small gardens that are planted in unexpected places, such as vacant lots, under bridges, or on the sides of buildings. They are often created by guerrilla gardeners-people who plant gardens without permission from the property owner.

5. Aquaponics
Aquaponics is a type of urban agriculture that combines aquatic animals like fish farming and hydroponics. In an aquaponic system, the fish provide nutrients for the plants, and the plants filter the water for the fish.

6. Indoor Farming
Indoor farming is a type of urban agriculture that takes place in a controlled environment, such as a greenhouse or an indoor farm. Indoor farms are perfect for growing fruits, vegetables, and herbs that would not normally grow well in the city climate.

7. Market Gardening
Market gardening is the practice of growing fruits, vegetables, and flowers for sale at local markets. It is a popular form of urban agriculture because it allows people to sell their produce directly to consumers.

8. Greenhouses
Greenhouses are structures made out of glass or plastic that allow plants to grow in climates that would not be possible outside. They are often used in urban areas to extend the growing season or to grow crops that cannot be grown outdoors year-round.

9. Green Walls
Green walls are walls covered in plants. They can be used to improve the appearance of a building, to reduce noise and air pollution, or to increase the amount of green space in an urban area.

10. Vertical Farms
Vertical farms are buildings that are designed specifically for agriculture. The crops are grown on multiple levels, often in vertically stacked containers. Vertical farms are a great way to use limited space in an urban area.

11. Urban Beekeeping
Urban beekeeping is the practice of keeping bees in an urban environment. It is becoming increasingly popular because it helps promote biodiversity and provides a source of honey and other products from local bees.

12. Balcony Gardens
Balcony gardens are small gardens that are planted on balconies or terraces. They are a great way to add green space to an urban area, and they can be used to grow a variety of fruits, vegetables, herbs, flowers, and other plants.

13. Window Boxes
Window boxes are small containers that can be attached to the windows of buildings. They are a great way to grow herbs, vegetables, and flowers in an urban area.

APPENDIX 02: Summaries of LA City and County-level Commitments to Urban Agriculture

LA City's Green New Deal / Sustainable City Plan.
In 2019, the City of Los Angeles released an updated Green New Deal plan that aims to address our current climate emergency by identifying goals to transform Los Angeles into a sustainable city. The plan:

- Uplifts wastewater recycling, new energy technologies, green job creation, and green transportation innovations.
- Proposes a number of food systems targets that include: (1) expanding healthy eating programs for children (2) improving food recovery infrastructure (3) expanding food access and CalFresh participation (4) reducing barriers to food entrepreneurship (5) increasing urban agriculture and (6) building up the sustainability of corner stores.
- Sets a goal of expanding urban agriculture in Los Angeles, the Green New Deal delineated a target of at least a 25% increase in the number of urban agriculture sites in the City by 2025, and a 50% increase by 2035. The plan specifies that this increase is to be achieved by planting edible gardens on public land – like City parks and public libraries – as well as expanding participation in the Urban Agriculture Incentive Zone program (see pages 27–28).



Photo courtesy of ALMA Backyard Farms

LA County's Food Equity Roundtable Action Plan.
In February 2023, the Los Angeles County Board of Supervisors unanimously approved the adoption of the LA County Food Equity Roundtable Action Plan. The Roundtable is led in partnership by the LA County Chief Sustainability Office and philanthropic partners, including the Annenberg Foundation, the California Community Foundation, and the Weingart Foundation. The goal of this initial phase of the Roundtable was to create a partnership between the County of Los Angeles and these LA-based foundations to address the structural inequalities in our food system, with the specific targets of improving the affordability, access, consumption, and sustainability of healthy food in the County. The plan:

- Champions these six objectives: (1) improve the affordability of healthy food (2) build a smart and connected food system (3) adopt a dignity of service approach in delivery of food services (4) elevate food as medicine (5) bolster nutrition education and (6) champion a whole person approach.
- Calls for an increased investment in urban agriculture is one possible method of addressing the need for a more equitable, connected, and innovative food system.
- Aims to strengthen urban agriculture in Los Angeles by linking local growers of color with public nutrition programs, connecting growers with land and other resources for urban agriculture production, and providing greater support to leaders and entrepreneurs that are exploring nontraditional gardening practices.
- Proposes to test the viability of a food hub in which a network of growers and other community members can collect, store, and transport surplus edible food, as well as a proposal to build the capacity of hyperlocal community-based food assistance nonprofits that operate cold storage and convening spaces for food distribution and consumption.

APPENDIX 03:
Survey & Case Studies of LA's Urban Agricultural Growers, Aggregators, & Partners

Urban Agriculture Survey 2023

Total number of participants: 16 | Number of urban farmers/growers: 14

How would you envision an Urban Agriculture Hub in LA County? What essential elements would it include? (n=15)

- 4 answered : Multi-site (county wide)
- 4 answered : Coalition/network of stakeholders, gatekeepers, & assistance providers
- 4 answered : Aggregation & distribution space; co-op model
- 3 answered : Processing & storage capacity
- 3 answered : Tool library / shared space
- 2 answered : Demonstration, education, & community building space
- 2 answered : Funding & supplies for start-ups

Which of these are key goals for your organization/business (select all that apply)? (n=14)

- 13 answered : Community Health
- 12 answered : Education
- 10 answered : Community Advocacy
- 9 answered : Local Economic Growth
- 8 answered : Addressing Root Causes of Hunger
- 6 answered : Job Creation
- 5 answered : Increased Supply Chain Resilience
- 4 answered : Dignified Pricing
- 4 answered : Institutional / Wholesale Access

What gaps currently exist in the urban agriculture sector that you envision a Hub filling? (n=13)

- 4 answered : Distribution center with shared equipment & storage space
- 3 answered : Whole systems / regenerative education
- 3 answered : Lack of coordination among urban farming stakeholders (includes permitting gov departments, peer-to-peer urban farm connections, and farm to school connections)
- 2 answered : No aggregator to connect small farms to large buyers
- 2 answered : TA (grant support, navigating technology)

If your organization/business was asked to expand its work, what resources would you need to make that happen? (n=14)

- 8 answered : Funding for personnel
- 3 answered : General funding
- 2 answered : Funding for specialized contractors
- 2 answered : No aggregator to connect small farms to large buyers
- 2 answered : TA (grant support, navigating technology)

How does your organization recruit volunteers or employees? (n=10)

- 4 answered : Word of mouth
- 3 answered : Community engagement
- 2 answered : Network partners
- 2 answered : Website

Have you found it difficult to retain volunteers or employees? (n=11)

- 6 answered : Yes
- 5 answered : No

Why/why not? (n=7)

- 5 answered : Yes, because of limited ongoing funding to pay staff
- 1 answered : Yes, because it takes staff time to properly and effectively facilitate volunteers
- 2 answered : No, because pay staff generously and actively work to limit burnout

What are your main sources of revenue?

- 5 answered : Government grants, foundation grants, and/or private donors
- 1 answered : What we grow

Does your organization/business currently sell to any institutions or sell via wholesale?

- 13 answered : No
- 1 answered : Yes

Why/why not? (n=9)

- 3 answered : No, we do not grow to sell; we give away our harvests to local residents
- 2 answered : No, we have not reached scale capacity
- 1 answered : No, we do not have a selling license
- 1 answered : No, we sell on a suggested-donation basis to keep the prices accessible to our consumers
- 1 answered : No, but we are actively looking for customers
- 1 answered : Yes, it's "the biggest bang for our buck"

ALMA Backyard Farms

Introduction

Founded in 2013 by husband and wife duo Richard Garcia and Erika Cuellar, ALMA Backyard Farms is a multi-site, non-profit operation in Compton and San Pedro. Their multi-dimensional mission is to assist individuals re-entering society from incarceration, address the lack of access to good food, build community, and contribute to society through urban agriculture and the spaces the farms provide.

> We don't grow food to sell it. We don't grow food to distribute it. We grow food to nourish people's souls.
>
> Richard Garcia, Co-founder of ALMA Backyard Farms





ALMA BACKYARD FARMS

Start-up Expenses & Journey
The couple started by farming on underutilized residential backyards but then shifted to creating farms in the backyards of re-entry homes and sober living programs. In 2016, they began leasing land from St. Albert the Great Catholic Church in Compton, transforming a former softball field into a ½ acre farm of raised beds, in-ground rows, fruit trees, and pollinator gardens, which serves as the primary site for their programming. They have since installed two additional farms totalling ¾ acre on empty lots in Los Angeles's San Pedro neighborhood.

They recalled the importance of apprenticing themselves to growers, landscapers, carpenters and plumbers to set up the farm space properly and establish efficient standard operating procedures. They also invested in cold-storage infrastructure to store produce on site, increase their yields through more frequent harvesting, and receive food from partner organizations.

Operational Model
ALMA Backyard Farms has three major programs that expand on their farming operations: job training for individuals re-entering from incarceration, children's programming, and a community farm stand. Since ALMA's founding, they have pursued their mission of "reclaiming lives, repurposing land, and reimagining community" by prioritizing hiring formerly incarcerated individuals. Currently, they have 6 full-time employees to manage their combined 1.5 acres of farmland and associated programming. Richard and Erika emphasized that everything they do would not be possible without hired staff because volunteers require time to train and manage and cannot work with the same level of efficiency as consistent staff. Their farm sites in Compton and San Pedro operate independently from one another, creating a replicable model that could be expanded to additional locations. However, since San Pedro is located in the city of Los Angeles and zoned residential (R1), they are unable to distribute produce on-site despite community support.

From the beginning, ALMA recognized the damaging effects of persistent food insecurity and the community's desire to have healthy food access. Some residents reported driving 30 minutes one-way to the nearest high-quality grocery stores. Currently, their Compton farm stand serves about 500 community members every other week. Produce is priced at or below market price to keep the food affordable for community members, but the farm stand operates on a pay-what-you-can model thanks to support from private family foundations that help subsidize the cost. This financial support has allowed them to keep their prices constant even through the pandemic. The vast majority of the product offerings are from ALMA's farms, with only about 10% being sourced from other local, organic farmers. Their farm stand also features "Peas-In-A-Pod" workshops for elementary aged kids, which serve over 500 children annually.

Urban Farm Innovation & Hyperlocal Impact
- **Pay-What-You-Can Farm Stand:** utilizes philanthropic funding to promote community food access, sustain a dignified price for the farm's locally-grown produce, and stimulate local economic growth
- **Job Training for Re-entry Population:** employs and trains people formerly incarcerated so that both land and individuals are moving from isolation to integration, while unlocking financial support unrelated to agriculture
- **Cold-storage Infrastructure:** utilizes CoolBot technology to store harvested produce on-site and receive additional produce for redistribution in a walk-in shed

Challenges
- **Zoning:** operating on residential land in the city of LA binds them under the "Truck Gardening" ordinance, which prohibits sales and distribution on-site
- **Insurance:** cost of workers' compensation due to assumption that heavy equipment is involved because of "farm" title; no clear distinction of urban farm
- **Water:** large initial deposit required to make a commercial account with LADWP
- **Cost of Land:** difficulty negotiating a long-term (5-7 years minimum) lease so that the farmer can ensure they will occupy the space and receive ROI when it is fully productive
- **Lack of Government Communication:** LA Dept of Building & Safety and LA Dept of Water & Power do not have urban farm specific guidelines despite UAIZ policy



Avenue 33 Farm

Introduction

Avenue 33 Farm is a 1.2 acre hillside urban farm located in Lincoln Heights. The farm is owned and operated by husband and wife duo, Eric Tomassini and Ali Greer. They started their main farm in 2018 and later took over a small teaching farm on the campus of Los Angeles Leadership Academy (LALA), a charter school down the street. Eric has over a decade of experience farming in Colorado, Oregon, and Northern California working on community focused farms and cooperatives.

> If all we did was farm, then it would have a really minimal impact on people actually getting food. But we do more than just farm. Urban farms can be the center of communities by existing as gathering spaces where food distribution happens, where there's an EBT farm stand…or Market Match for anybody, whether they have EBT or not. We can get produce from other organic, local producers. We can use this space to increase food access.
>
> **Eric Tomassini, Co-founder of Avenue 33 Farm**



Start-up Expenses & Journey

They spent the first couple of years remediating the soil and building out the infrastructure for the farm. During this time, Eric relied on connections with the restaurant industry and other farms running community supported agriculture (CSA) programs to take anything he grew. For larger purchases, such as a wash station or an irrigation system, Eric and Ali occasionally loaned the farm money from their personal finances. For other expensive infrastructure, such as their commercial worm bin or a hoop house, they've sought out grants. Eric mentioned that purchasing the house and adjacent land for the farm, allowing them to combine personal and business mortgages into a single expense, was essential to managing their initial costs. All of the start-up costs, excluding the cost of land, added up to about $50,000 for the 1.2 acre farm. Eric recalled that it took about three years for the farm to become fully productive and pest resistant, due in part to utilizing regenerative agriculture techniques which take several years to develop comprehensively.

Operational Model

Avenue 33 Farm has a mixed operational model that requires revenues from produce sales along with school-community partnerships. In addition to growing food on the main farm property, Eric began employment with LALA in 2022 as a farm educator managing their school farm and facilitating a student-led farm and food apprenticeship program. Students spend at least two days on the LALA farm per school year: one day harvesting items for a food distribution out of the elementary school campus and the second day packing and distributing. The school-based food distribution program is an aggregation of harvested produce from the LALA Farm, donated produce from Imperfect Produce, recovered food from the LALA cafeteria, and (if needed) donated produce from Avenue 33 Farm. The overall goal, Eric says, is that "[the students] are very connected to the food that's being distributed." Aside from the distribution, the high school students also spend time studying ecological processes or helping to maintain the farm, and the K-8 LALA campus takes regular field trips to the farm.

Urban Farm Innovation & Hyperlocal Impact

- **Agroforestry:** Practicing a method of regenerative farming which builds up and stabilizes hillside soil through creating an overstory of food-producing trees with large, deep roots and an understory of soil-enriching shade tolerant plants
- **EBT Farm Stand:** Utilizes ARPA Market Match funding to promote community food access, set a dignified price for the farm's locally-grown produce, and stimulate local economic growth
- **Sliding-Scale Pricing:** Offers sliding scale pricing for all customers and reduced-price produce boxes at the end of the month to support individuals whose EBT runs out
- **School-Community Partnerships:** Partners with LALA for both farm education and food distribution work to promote job creation, values-based sourcing, and supply chain flexibility

Challenges

- **Labor:** cost to employ personnel & inability to offer benefits due to small profit margins; lack of local, skilled agricultural workforce
- **Insurance:** cost of workers' compensation; difficulty finding company willing to insure a residential farm
- **Water:** high cost due to being in high-usage tier, despite water-conserving practices; no drought guidelines specific to urban farms using municipal water
- **Affordability of produce for target population:** local produce is expensive to produce due to lack of economies of scale, so grants or subsidies are necessary
- **Lack of business support:** specific to urban growers
- **Need for "off-farm" income:** supplements low profitability on crops



Crop Swap LA

Introduction

Crop Swap LA is a non-profit organization founded by Jamiah Hargins in 2018. The organization takes a multifaceted approach to food sovereignty and community resilience by transforming homeowners lawns into small urban farms complete with advanced water recycling infrastructure and a hyperlocal distribution market. They envision communities that are free from reliance on grocery stores, supply chains, and/or their paychecks to obtain high quality, nutrient-dense produce. Working towards this vision, Crop Swap LA grows food in unused urban spaces, creating sustainable jobs and addressing food security needs in the process.

> Urban agriculture is truly a way to make our cities more livable and climate resilient, and to transform the food system. These are the sort of jobs that as we move into climate reality can actually sustain neighborhoods.
>
> John Garside, Director of Policy & Development of Crop Swap LA



Start-up Expenses & Journey

Crop Swap LA started by organizing home garden exchanges and free fruit tree harvesting events in the View Park community of Los Angeles county. Jamiah recalls that Crop Swap LA did not initially have the people and infrastructure ready to channel the community's enthusiasm for their work. Thanks to a 4 million dollar investment from then-State Senator Sydney Kamlager, they were able to hire full-time farmers and invest in legal support, which they identified as the most critical infrastructure needs for urban farming organizations. In 2020, they installed their first of three microfarms. The initial investment for each microfarm ranged from $25-100K and each farm took about 4-8 weeks to install. For efficient project buildout, expert contractors were hired to install irrigation systems and electricity and to provide landscaping services. This initial investment allowed Crop Swap LA to specialize in and focus on farming and reduced the amount of volunteers needed to make the project come to life. On average, each site requires one full-time farmer, one part-time farmer, and volunteer support on harvesting days.

Operational Model

Crop Swap LA's core strategy for expanding agriculture is to capitalize on the existing landscaping industry by incorporating edible crops and rainwater capture into their integrated landscape installations, or "microfarms". The microfarm use and installation follows land use agreements formed with homeowners, which dictate the terms of water use, installation, and growing and harvesting times. Land access is one of the major infrastructure and capital constraints of urban farming. By utilizing these agreements and regenerative agricultural practices, Crop Swap LA circumvents the land access issue encountered by other urban farms. These farms, in combination with fruit from their fruit tree harvesting service, supply about 175 families with weekly CSA boxes, limiting CSA membership to residents living about a mile from the farm they receive produce from.

Crop Swap LA prioritizes hiring full-time staff and offering generous compensation to best attract good people, maintain their microfarms, and follow their mission to the fullest. However, the farm sales only cover about 10-20% of their personnel costs. To supplement their income, farm staff assist with other projects or community education efforts supported by grants and charitable donations that supplement the farmers' salaries. Additionally, the Crop Swap LA founders emphasized the importance of sound insurance policies. Insurance policies range significantly in price and choosing the wrong insurance policy could lead to the organization having to reduce their staff due to high workers' compensation costs. They ultimately classified their urban growers as working on a "truck farm" because it most closely captured the work being done.

To increase the financial sustainability of their organization and the farmers they employ, Crop Swap LA is fundraising to create an Endowment for Urban Farming. Their goal of an $80 million endowment principal would generate enough interest to cover their operating expenses.



Urban Farm Innovation & Hyperlocal Impact

- **Land Use Agreements:** utilizes shared resources and addressing land use restrictions by leasing yard space from homeowners
- **Limit CSA Memberships:** reserves CSA boxes for residents within 1 mile of the farm site in order to promote hyperlocal community health and wealth building
- **Climate Change Mitigation:** installs rainwater capture systems and income-generating solar panels to create community sovereignty and drought resilience
- **Endowment for Urban Farming:** fundraising $80 million endowment to create funding in perpetuity, build community wealth, and increase urban farm financial stability
- **Urban Food Grower Certification:** four courses taught by experienced urban farmers in order to promote agricultural job creation and facilitate a learning community

Challenges

- **Personnel Costs:** essential to have full-time farmers to properly maintain the farm spaces
- **Insurance Classifications:** no "urban farmer" category for insurance that accurately insures for a physical job that does not involve heavy machinery
- **Farm to Public School Disconnect:** challenges partnering with LA Unified School District, causing their programs and services to be mainly limited to charter schools

Moonwater Farm

Introduction

Founded in 2014, Moonwater Farm is a land-based learning hub in Compton committed to creating a wholly regenerative space for community members to connect with one another and their food system. The farm is owned and operated by founders and certified Master Gardeners Kathleen Blakistone and Richard Draut. They openly share both their yard and house space with community members according to an "agrarian commons" model.

> The place is a canvas for community members to have access to land and access to good food. It's a place that interrogates notions of private property and asks what could it look like if more people shared land.
>
> Kathleen Blakistone,
> Co-founder of Moonwater Farm



MOONWATER FARM
ART & AGRICULTURE

Start-up Expenses & Journey

Using their 401k money, Kathleen and Richard purchased the land and house for Moonwater Farm as an alternative investment. They relocated to Compton from Venice Beach because of Compton's history as a "horse neighborhood" and its agricultural zoning (RA-1). As soon as they moved into the neighborhood, they began getting to know the community, leasing their horse stable and hosting Boy Scout Cowboy trainings. Kathleen, a white person from Venice Beach, recalls the decade-long process of building up trust in the Compton community through deep listening, volunteering, thoughtful partnerships, and shared space.

Operational Model

Moonwater Farm exists primarily as a gathering place for community education, relationship-building, and incubation of ideas for and around art and regenerative agriculture. Compton's unique residential agriculture zoning code permits residents to have livestock animals, except pigs. On Moonwater Farm, the animals live in a 1,500 sq ft space and contribute to the farm's compost.



They host students from universities, charter schools, Compton Unified School District schools, and homeschool groups for enrichment classes and field trips showcasing curriculum that amplifies Next Generation Science Standards and meets the unique goals of each class. However, Kathleen noted that forming these connections has not always been easy due to school districts' risk management policies and stipulations that entire grade-levels must attend a field trip together. During the summertime, Moonwater Farm hosts several Farm Camps focused on a specific age range and agricultural theme. Both the field trips and the Farm Camp's tuition is charged on a sliding scale, with small foundations helping cover what the students' schools and families cannot.

Kathleen's vision is to work towards meal sovereignty, defined as individuals having the time and resources to prepare, sit down, and enjoy at least one nutritious meal per day together. In line with the meal sovereignty model, she aims to create a space at Moonwater Farm for community members to come and share a table on a biweekly basis. These events will also serve as an incubator space for various food and art pop-up vendors, who are charged a small fee to share and test their product with Moonwater Farm's community. She is also advocating for a commercial kitchen space that would allow members of the community and vendors to prepare meals for their community beyond "cottage food" levels.

Urban Farm Innovation & Hyperlocal Impact

- **Agrarian Commons:** sharing their physical space with the community to create safe space to share a meal, engage with art, and learn how to produce food and fiber
- **Livestock:** attracts people, particularly families , to the farm space and facilitates regenerative agriculture practices
- **Alternative Pricing:** charging families and schools different prices for educational opportunities (i.e. Farm Camp) based upon the community they reside in

Challenges

- **Financial Support:** as a for-profit social enterprise offering low-cost services, there are limited resources available to support their operation and grow their team
- **Animal Husbandry Expenses:** lack of proximate, affordable animal feed vendors or veterinary care providers
- **Commercial Kitchen Space:** food vendors who incubate their business at Moonwater Farm have few accessible spaces to grow their business beyond "cottage food" levels
- **Farm to Public School Disconnect:** challenges partnering with schools for in-person agricultural learning and taste testing due to risk management policies



Prosperity Market

Introduction

Prosperity Market was co-founded in 2020 by friends Kara Still and Carmen Dianne with the mission of transforming the Los Angeles ecosystem and economy through agriculture, food access, nutrition education, and community partnerships. As a mobile farmers market, they provide a platform for small Black farmers and food vendors to sell their products while also addressing the lack of food access in the communities that they travel to.

> Many farmers have the capability to grow a lot in a small space, but oftentimes they don't grow as much as they can because they don't have any outlet for it. They grow because it's their passion and it's what they love. But outside of feeding themselves and giving it away to some friends and family, there's no market for them to utilize the small capacity that they do have.
>
> **Kara Still, Co-Founder & COO of Prosperity Market**



Prosperity Market
Not Your Average Farmers Market

Start-up Expenses & Journey

At the beginning of the covid-19 pandemic, Kara and Carmen saw the need for more essential Black-owned businesses that would allow the Black community to reinvest their dollar within their neighborhoods. To address the lack of Black-owned grocery retailers across a wide geographical area, they established Prosperity Market. Prior to launching their first market in February 2021, they spent six months researching business best practices and gaining insights into the Black farmer experience. The initial funding for the venture came primarily from grants. During these early stages, they emphasized the importance of community partnerships, which provided them with educational resources, new connections, and space for food storage and distribution. Initially facing challenges in finding Black farmers to partner with, they expanded their search to include urban farmers and backyard growers. Collaborating with urban growers not only allowed for increased local economic impact but also bolstered supply chain resiliency, although finding Black farmers remains one of their biggest hurdles.

Operational Model

Prosperity Market operates as a "farmers market on wheels," rotating its market locations throughout Los Angeles County. It also serves as a local aggregator, offering customers the option to purchase from all the vendors online and then offering local pickup, delivery, or nationwide shipping. The markets often feature a program called "Prosperity Bucks," an incentive program that grants customers additional money to be spent at the markets. Unlike similar programs tied to SNAP or WIC benefits, customers earn "Prosperity Bucks" by participating in cooking demos at the market or visiting small businesses near the market's location. These incentives, sponsored by funders,have a dual impact: increasing vendor sales and contributing to the local economy, while improving food accessibility.

As an aggregator and supporter of Black farmers, Prosperity Market is driven to see its farm partners expand their operations. Currently, Prosperity Market works with 10 small farmers and urban growers. However, these farmers face challenges in expanding due to limited land access, lack of personnel, and limited access to marketplaces to sell their additional products. To address these issues, Prosperity Market developed business courses to assist farmers in crop forecasting, understanding the financial aspects of their operation, brainstorming value-added products and innovations, and marketing their produce with product photography. Prosperity Market also highlighted their own capacity restraints in regards to growing their wholesale business, including a lack of cold storage, food-safe storage, and commercial kitchen space. Without this infrastructure, they are unable to partner with and aggregate from local farmers who are outside of Los Angeles.

The pop-up farmers markets organized by Prosperity Market are instrumental in building a vendor list and customer base, while also serving as proof-of-concept for the next phase of their business: a mobile farmers market trailer equipped with a full produce section. This trailer will travel throughout Los Angeles, providing access to fresh, locally-grown produce in the same communities where the pop-up farmers markets have been held in the past. To raise capital for their solar-powered & electric trailer, Prosperity Market employed crowdfunding, grants, and corporate sponsorships.

Urban Farm Innovation & Hyperlocal Impact

- **Local Wholesaler:** aggregating products from their vendors and brokering relationships between local farms and markets
- **Prioritizing Branding & Marketing:** hiring a photographer and sharing photos with vendors to create an aesthetic shopping experience that draws in new customers
- **Pop-up Markets as Proof-of-Concept:** working towards a mobile market, the pop-up markets bolster vendor/aggregator relationships and build a customer base
- **"Prosperity Bucks":** free money, sponsored by funders, given to community members to spend at the market, increasing vendor sales and food accessibility



Challenges

- **Lack of Infrastructure:** unable to store inventory, distribute consistently, and scale their wholesale operation without kitchen space, cold/dry storage space, and transportation
- **Lack of Market Opportunities:** growers with land and expertise do not grow to full capacity because they are not connected to a market where they can sell their produce
- **Growers' Capacity Limitations:** limited by land space, lack of personnel, start-up costs, business & accounting knowledge, lack of access to grants or capacity to apply
- **Grant Applications:** funding not available to for-profit entities, funding opportunities are not shared widely, and farms cannot afford to front money for reimbursement grants
- **Disconnected Farmer Network:** no list of farmers in Los Angeles, or more broadly in California; farmers report feeling disconnected from one another

05 | Acknowledgements

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LA Green Grounds
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Moonwater Farm
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06 | Endnotes

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9 In 2019, the City of Los Angeles released an updated Green New Deal plan that aims to address our current climate emergency by identifying goals to transform Los Angeles into a sustainable city.

10 In February 2023, the Los Angeles County Board of Supervisors unanimously approved the adoption of the LA County Food Equity Roundtable Action Plan. The Roundtable is led in partnership by the LA County Chief Sustainability Office and philanthropic partners, including the Annenberg Foundation, the California Community Foundation, and the Weingart Foundation.

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