



# Supporting the Urban Foodbelt

## WHY IT MATTERS AND WHAT IT NEEDS TO FLOURISH

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### Your leadership and advocacy are the key to sustainable urban agriculture!

*Urban agriculture is severely limited in its capacity to feed our communities in large part due to regulatory restrictions. With increasing disruptions to supply chains, supporting food security close to home is more critical than ever. Building an “urban foodbelt” enables short supply chains that respond to local needs. An urban foodbelt includes urban and urban-edge farms, as well as community gardens.*

#### TAKEAWAYS

- Urban and urban-edge ag need more consistent policy and regulatory support to succeed.
- The first steps are to align zoning ordinances and local regulations with existing planning documents and state regulations.
- Thriving urban and urban-edge ag will provide significant economic, social, health & safety, and environmental benefits to Sonoma County.

#### WHAT URBAN AGRICULTURE NEEDS TO FLOURISH

- Include protections for agriculture in General Plan Updates.
- Protect and support agriculture, including livestock, in all appropriate areas including AR & RR and within city limits.
- Allow associated activities like minor on-site processing and sale of agricultural products, including animal products like eggs or honey.
- Develop an accessible permitting structure for urban ag that is affordable and streamlined, potentially including permit waivers for BIPOC, veteran, limited-resource, and non-profit farmers.

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#### BENEFITS OF URBAN & URBAN-EDGE AGRICULTURE

##### Social

- Community development and social capital
- Educational & youth opportunities
- Cross-generational and cultural connections
- Food sovereignty & equity

##### Health and Safety

- Food security & access
- Increase fresh fruit & vegetable consumption
- Food & health literacy
- Fire buffer zones around communities

##### Environmental

- Reduce vehicle miles traveled
- Reduce carbon emissions from development of land
- Sustainable practices in response to local customers' values

#### URBAN AGRICULTURE & THE SONOMA COUNTY ECONOMY

- Urban and urban-edge agriculture provides numerous economic benefits, including:
  - Job creation, training and business incubation
  - Market expansion, cost savings, and higher profits for farmers
  - Household savings on food
- Sonoma County residents spend approximately \$2.1 billion on food and beverages each year, and Sonoma County imports nearly 96 percent of the fruits and vegetables consumed, according to an article in [Made Local Magazine](#).
- In 2019, Sonoma County ag production per resident was one tenth of what it was in 1928 (excluding grapes). We make up this difference in imports, but bringing more ag back to Sonoma County will result in more jobs, greater food security, and more access to healthy food.
- When we purchase food from local producers, money spent in our community multiplies the economic impacts of buying local. For example, a study on [Oliver's Market](#) found that by sourcing locally, hiring locally, and being locally-owned, they create larger economic impacts. For every \$100 spent at Oliver's, there are \$186 of economic impacts created for the Sonoma County economy; \$19.60 of that \$186 is paid as state and local taxes.

## POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

- **Align zoning ordinances with county or city general plans** in compliance with California Government Code [§ 65860](#): Discrepancies can cause serious harm to farms like our host farm, as outlined in this [letter to the Cotati City Council](#).
  - **Cities:** Allow commercial fruit and vegetable production in all zones, allow farm stands where appropriate as per [County Farm Stand ordinance](#), and allow small scale poultry/livestock production, including sale and donation of eggs and honey
  - **County:** Allow farm stands in RR with same restrictions as in AR and ag zones, allow [Farm Stays](#) on AR and RR parcels when commercial farming is happening on those parcels, allow Small Scale Ag Processing in AR and RR, with zoning permits, as per [County Farm Stand ordinance](#) currently applicable in ag zones.
- **Update City and County General Plans** and other planning documents to support urban agriculture in AR & RR zones, considering urban ag's contributions to climate preparedness, community health, economic development, and other values. Example items to include are discussed in this [article on the City of Petaluma General Plan](#).
- **Align county and city regulations with the CA Community Food Producers Law** ([AB 1990](#)), [§ 114376](#), [§ 113752](#):
  - A community food producer may sell or provide whole uncut fruits or vegetables, or unrefrigerated shell eggs;
  - [California Retail Food Code](#): "Community food producer" means a producer of agricultural products on land that is not zoned for agricultural use but is otherwise in compliance with applicable local land use and zoning restrictions.
- **Put in place a Micro-Enterprise Home Kitchen Operations** ([MEHKOs ordinance](#)); state law ([AB 626](#)) gives a city or county "full discretion" to authorize the MEHKOs in their jurisdiction.

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## CASE STUDIES

These case studies from the [Greater Kansas City Food Policy Coalition](#) show how this community-based initiative is overcoming barriers for urban agriculture. More examples are available in their guide ([pdf](#)).

- [Philadelphia, Pennsylvania](#) - The City of Philadelphia developed a land use category specifically for urban agriculture. Urban farms are permitted as-of-right in most residential and commercial districts.

## RESOURCES

- **Zoning**
  - For more on zoning for urban agriculture, see [The Healthy Food Policy Project \(HFPP\)](#), which identifies local laws that promote a strong local food system. healthy food access, strong local economies, an improved environment, and health equity, with a focus on socially disadvantaged and marginalized groups.
  - [Sonoma County Land Use Map](#)
- **Produce**
  - The [CA Cottage Food Law](#) allows for processing, though not limited to farm-grown products.
  - [Selling Locally Grown Produce](#)
  - [Ag Processing on the Farm](#)
- **Urban Agriculture in California (UCANR Reports)**
  - [Workshops](#) on Urban Ag.
  - [Social, Health, and Economic Impacts](#) of Urban Agriculture.
  - [Urban Farming Needs Assessment](#)
- **Urban Heat Islands**
  - [A Case for Urban Agriculture](#)
  - [EPA - Definition & Resources](#)

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## ADDITIONAL BENEFITS INCLUDE

- [Farmers' access to urban markets](#), lower transportation costs, higher prices, as well as opportunities for direct marketing, and to produce a range of high-value, specialty products, may translate into higher profits.
- [Urban ag can contribute](#) to a household's income, offset food expenditures, and create jobs.
- [Increasing urban ag](#) is a way of reducing natural resource imports, pollution, and waste exports, at the same time making better use of existing resources.
- [Research indicates](#) that farmers markets are a major business incubator for farmers and that these markets have become important community institutions.

- [Atlanta, Georgia](#) - For urban farms in Atlanta, on-site sales and curbside pickup are allowed from 7:00 a.m. to 9:00 p.m. for produce grown on-site.
- [Cleveland, Ohio](#) - Established an Urban Garden District, which permits different kinds of accessory structures with larger area and height allowances.
- [Grounded in Philly Guide](#) - Part of the Garden Justice Legal Initiative of The Public Interest Law Center, this pathway guide has information and resources for starting a farm, securing land, accessing water & more.