

A report that frames the Garden State's challenges and opportunities

Prepared by Rutgers Cooperative Extension,
Office of Urban Extension and Engagement

RUTGERS
New Jersey Agricultural
Experiment Station

Executive Summary

“Urban Agriculture Strategies for the State of New Jersey” is a report that frames the Garden State’s challenges and opportunities in considering how to define, engage, educate, and fund farming in the more densely populated areas on New Jersey’s rural to urban farming continuum. The report was made possible through funding by the State of New Jersey, Department of Agriculture and was prepared by Rutgers Cooperative Extension, Office of Urban Extension and Engagement.

Urban agriculture is emerging as a significant source of affordable fresh food in underserved communities without access to grocery stores, and numerous grassroots organizations utilize urban agriculture as a strategy for addressing a variety of social and economic challenges in disadvantaged communities. However, New Jersey—the nation’s most urbanized and densely-populated state—faces significant challenges in developing a comprehensive strategy to address residents’ demand for more space to ‘green’ their urban environments and grow some of their food closer to home.

This report builds on recommendations from the NJDEP’s 2017 Urban Agriculture Symposium and the NJDEP EJAC white paper that summarized the symposium, as well as from discussions by the New Jersey Urban Agriculture stakeholder group convened for this report. The report provides the following set of recommendations and action items—a roadmap to frame the challenges and opportunities to develop urban agriculture strategies for the State of New Jersey.

Envision a ‘Right to Urban Farm’—Advocacy to Define Urban Agriculture

This report offers a flexible operational definition of urban agriculture that focuses on agricultural practices irrespective of scale or intent for consideration by local municipalities and state agencies, with the following recommendations:

- Use the operational definition of urban agriculture presented in the report to resolve the challenges posed by the Five Acre Rule.
- Provide urban growers, community-based organizations, and entrepreneurs access to state programs and grants, micro-loans, and program related investments.
- Develop comprehensive NJDA/NJDEP approved guidelines for best urban agricultural practices for local municipalities to utilize in determining how to adapt local land use ordinances for urban agriculture.

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Map Urban Agriculture to Help Support Its Preservation

This report identifies common resource needs and opportunities to create or adjust policies in support of expanding networks of urban farmers, gardeners, and entrepreneurs, who grow, distribute, process, and feed their communities, with the following recommendations:

- Map urban agriculture properties with the help of growers via the Urban Ag Portal.
- Establish an advisory group (working with an established land trust) to examine feasibility of developing a statewide urban land trust for urban agriculture.
- Fund a Phase II project to collect production/market data from selected urban farms and market gardens.

Support Urban Agriculture with Resources & Policies

The new urban agricultural web portal provides urban growers with resources, a platform for farmers to exchange knowledge with each other, and a new interactive mapping tool, with the following recommendations:

- Expand the map beyond the eight initial focus cities.
- Extend funding to support the continuation of the web portal with focus group participation.

Train and Certify Urban Growers

Training and certification are of significant interest for urban growers. It provides greater access to opportunities across the entire state, leverages the resources of SEBS/NJAES and Rutgers University most effectively and allows faculty with expertise and experience to participate in a developed program more easily, with the following recommendations:

- Establish an advisory group to develop a learning plan and curriculum content for a Rutgers Urban Grower Program.
- Identify resources and personnel to conduct and evaluate a pilot workshop.



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