



# Institutional Requirements for Urban Agriculture

Jim Hanson

Department of Agricultural and Resource Economics

University of Maryland

College Park

[jhanson@arec.umd.edu](mailto:jhanson@arec.umd.edu)

301-405-8122





# Investments by Public and Private Institutions Necessary to Grow Urban Agriculture

*A Holistic Approach is Required*

- Vision and Leadership
- Land
- Water, Security, and Compost
- Credit
- Markets
- Agricultural Extension



## **Vision and Leadership can be provided by**

- **Food Policy Council**
- **City Dept. (in Baltimore City, Office of Sustainability, Dept. of Planning)**
- **or Non-Profit Organization**

*Local Leadership is essential to identify priorities (income growth, improved nutrition), select geographic regions (food deserts), create ownership (grassroots empowerment), and identify resources (land, compost, water)*

**Federal and state grants are also useful for implementing the necessary investments required for urban agriculture**



# Systematic allocation of abandoned land within cities with declining populations

*Baltimore City has 30,000 abandoned properties*

## In Baltimore City:

- **Community Gardens:** There is an “Adopt-a-Lot” program where, on an adopted lot, several families produce food on adjacent plots for their own consumption, lots vary in size, long-term lease.
- **Urban Agriculture:** Urban agriculture is producing food for profit by sale to others, includes food banks. Currently, there is a “Request for Qualifications” by farmers for 35 one-acre lots, <3% slope, 90% sunlight, 5-year lease with potential 5-year extension



## Critical Inputs Requiring Public Sector Support Water, Security, and Compost

### In Baltimore City:

- Community Gardens - when possible, free compost, security fences, and access to city water
- Urban Agriculture - \$5,000 to \$10,000 grants for water, compost, and security fences







## Credit Requirements for Infrastructures

**Typical technologies are high tunnels (20 ft x 100 ft) that extends the production season. Gross \$10,000 per tunnel; 10 high tunnels/A; Net \$75,000/A (w/two farmers); Cost \$5,000/tunnel**





## **Credit problems with leased land and inexperienced farmers**

- **Private lenders – difficult to make loans for high tunnels on leased land**
- **Public lenders**
  - **Farm Service Agency – Beginning farmers < 10 years of experience, but need at least one year. New urban farmers typically lack experience.**
  - **Natural Resource Conservation Service – cost sharing for conservation technologies but need to see a ‘standing crop’.**



## Markets are Critical (but often lacking)

- Farmers markets (producer only)
  - Land issues: If located on public lands, permission by city authorities to operate, food safety inspection, and access to parking are required
  - Transactions: Tremendous opportunities for WIC, Seniors, & SNAP (but EBT machines may be required)
- Restaurants
  - Tend to benefit high volume producers who sell wholesale
- Community Supported Agriculture (CSA)
  - Does not work as well with poorer families who struggle with cash flow issues for family expenses
- On-Farm Markets
  - With limited land, production space has to be sacrificed for marketing space.





## Agricultural Extension

- **Agricultural Extension (support for farmers)**
  - **Extension agents and/or Master Gardeners (BC)**
  - **Soil Conservation Districts (doesn't exist in BC) and NRCS**
  - **Non-profit organizations (Tacoma, WA)**

*Often time, these support groups can also provide seeds and transplants*

**We have the support for rural farmers,  
looking forward there needs to  
be similar support for urban farmers.**