

The 'Suit' of urban agriculture

Agriculture has a developed a new suit, a suit that fits the city: urban agriculture

Lately urban agriculture has gained interests of scholars, policy makers and citizens. Urban agriculture forms a unique integration with the urban system. It uses resources from the city and produces for the city. For the Foodprint program, Stroom has investigated the potentials of urban agriculture for the city of The Hague.

In terms of flows of energy and food is a city one giant glutton, consuming tons of high valuable material coming from the countryside and only leaving tons of waste in return. The Hague therefore has, like other cities, to increase its environmental sustainability, for example the reduction and reuse of waste, the improvement of the urban climate. It requires a systematic change of the metabolic system of the city. Various, often costly, measures are undertaken in order to change this unsustainable metabolic system of the city. Yet these are all very specific solutions to specific problems for example: the assigning of ecological protected areas to certain regions in The Hague and municipality buildings being covered with solar panels to supply energy.

Since agriculture can form an ecological circular system, urban agriculture will be able to combine a multitude of environmental facets.

The research investigated the potentials of urban agriculture to contribute to the sustainability of The Hague.

Organizations active in The Hague were asked about the possibilities to integrate urban agriculture in the city; how and where could this happen, and how can the respondents participate?

It turned out that urban agriculture offers potentials to be integrated with business and organizations in The Hague. Urban agriculture could produce green energy and food for the city or it could use urban waste for the nutrition in horticulture or as fodder for livestock farming. On top of that it could of example help to improve the urban climate.

When urban agriculture is integrated in The Hague it can connect different facets of urban environmental sustainability and can add value through food production, and therefore

reduce costs of the measures that are undertaken to enhance ecological sustainability in The Hague.

So how and where could urban agriculture be implemented in The Hague? The research has shown that not all facets of environmental sustainability can be addressed on all locations. For example improvement of the urban climate can only be done by increasing the percentage of vegetation, therefore urban agriculture should in the first place not be located inside parks but on non-green areas like rooftops and the production of bio-energy requires livestock production, which according to the respondents, is preferably located in the urban fringe. However these are practicalities, and show the opportunities that urban agriculture offers to The Hague. The question is however who will take up the initiative?

According to the respondents mainly the citizens themselves have to take up the initiative. Despite of the above mentioned functions respondents argued the most important function for urban agriculture is the education on (environmental) sustainability of citizens, it should encourage people to live more sustainable. In other words, according to the respondents it is not urban agriculture directly but the citizens that have to change in order to contribute to environmental sustainability.

Scholars have studied the motivations for ecological behavior and concluded citizens are mainly encouraged to live more sustainable (i.e. safe energy, minimize waste) if they can perceive the effect of their action. But not all citizens feel they actually have the *means* to significantly contribute to environmental sustainability, instead they feel the large companies and government could and should do so.

So who has the most influence and can change this unsustainable urban system?

Urban agriculture can only succeed in its contribution if organizations as well as citizens recognize its potential. Its execution requires collective participation, from waste processors retailers, consumers and energy producers. That leaves us with the question: who should take the initiative?

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Would you like to take initiative?

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