

Worldwide network for urban agriculture

The Urban Agriculture Network is a focal point and resource centre for promoting urban farming in low-income countries. It brings together over 1000 NGOs, researchers, farmers, government agencies and international agencies from over 25 countries. The network promotes urban farming as a strategy to empower the poor, reduce hunger and malnutrition, promote income-generating employment and enterprise development, and make the urban environment healthier. The network promotes increased interaction and cooperation among agencies working in urban farming at local, national and international level.

For urban farming to reach its potential, farmers need better production and marketing skills and better municipal policy and services: legalisation of farming, access to land, access to credit, removal of market constraints in input and output markets, technical and extension support. To stimulate this, the network follows a three-pronged approach:

- encouraging and empowering local groups, such as NGOs, private voluntary associations and farmer organisations, to support urban farmers
- encouraging government agencies to support and take a planned approach to urban farming
- promoting urban farming as a strategy in the programs and policies of national and international research and development agencies.

Local groups are assisted through provision of information, support to local group interaction and project advice. The network has a collaborative relationship with several local expert groups such as CET (Centre for Education and Technology) in Chile and IAGU (Institut Africain de Gestion Urbaine) in Senegal. Among local groups advised are the Zimbabwe Farmers Network, which is starting an urban farming project, and the Carvajal Foundation in Colombia, which proposes an income-generating project in a low-income community. Assistance has been given to the Institute of Built Environment in Calcutta for a proposed national workshop on urban farming, and to IAGU for creating a West African Network for research in urban agriculture and environment.

The network tries to influence government policy to support urban farming, by providing information on its potential. This has taken the form of: advice to Bulawayo city on the possibilities of local farming, a proposal to study potential use of city waste in farming in Dakar, and a study with ANC (African National Congress) and the City of Johannesburg on possibilities for urban farming to feed the poor and socially reintegrate the city.

International development agencies have a key role to play in promoting urban

farming worldwide, as they influence both local groups and governments. The Urban Agriculture Network has worked with IDRC (International Development Research Centre), Care International, World Bank and several United Nations agencies in considering urban farming among their development strategies.

Urban Agriculture Workshop in London

Thirty senior professionals representing agencies from Canada, Chile, France, Germany, Netherlands, Sweden, Switzerland, the UK and the USA took part in a workshop on 29 June 1994 in London, UK, on the current reality and future possibilities of urban agriculture. The workshop was organised by the Urban Agriculture Network and co-hosted by the Development Planning Unit and the Natural Resources Institute of the UK.

It was a rare opportunity for researchers in this budding field to meet. The participants each reviewed their work, and compared experiences across the world. The workshop furthered the cooperation among European specialists concerned with urban farming, creating an "affinity group" of like-minded agencies which will remain in contact. Suzanne Gura of ATSAF (German Council for Tropical and Subtropical Research) announced a conference on vegetable production in tropical cities, to be co-hosted by DSE (German Foundation for International Development) in Leipzig in mid-November 1994.

The affinity group defined priorities for their future work in urban agriculture, including: spreading information, raising awareness in related sectors, participatory action research, establishing a journal or newsletter, and research to demonstrate that urban farming can reach agreed ends. The workshop proceedings are to be published.

Annu Ratta, Urban Agriculture Network

The network has three programs: communication, research and project development assistance. It presents at conferences, prints information briefs, publishes articles, maintains a library, and answers queries from members and non-members. The first comprehensive book on urban agriculture, written by the network, will soon be published.

The network now plans to decentralise and integrate its activities by creating regional centres in Asia, Africa and Latin America and publishing an international newsletter. Training sessions and workshops will be designed with collaborators from the field. Best-practice scenarios and research results will be disseminated across the network to increase efficiency and effectiveness of local initiatives. Guidance publications, presenting experiences from different countries on various aspects of urban farming, such as land allocation and marketing systems, will be published.

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