

Using Agroecological and Social Inclusion Principles in the Urban Agriculture Programme in Rosario, Argentina

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Photo by Antonio Lattuca

The Urban Agriculture Programme (PAU, Programa de Agricultura Urbana) in Rosario, Argentina is built on agroecological production principles, which support plant diversity, the improvement of soils and reduces dependence on external inputs. The programme also promotes social inclusion and public participation in all its activities.

Agroecological production

The programme trains farmers to produce organic fertilisers and plant-based phyto-stimulants to support plant growth. It collaborates with other municipal departments as well as private companies to recycle coffee and green waste from a waste bank. Waste and cow dung from a slaughterhouse, barley remnants from a company that makes craft beer, wood chips and green park waste are other items in the waste bank. All organic residues are used for the production of an organic fertiliser, through composting or vermiculture practices.

Promoting equitable access to green spaces

The programme builds on collective efforts to claim citizen's right to green spaces and spaces for food production. Diverse new productive public spaces have been integrated into the urban fabric and low-income and slum settlements. These spaces include:

- Garden Parks (through an agreement with National Roads)
- Green Corridors alongside railroads (through agreement with the NCA Railroad Company)
- Gardens with aromatic and edible plants in public squares, hospitals and schools

- Organic Seed Production Centres
- Demonstration centres for the production of organic vegetables, applying intensive production techniques
- Agroecological Innovation Centre with a rainwater and grey water recycling system
- Agroecological nursery of Rosario engaging unemployed youth.

Community and youth involvement

Local communities are engaged in the design and management of the various productive spaces. Through public workshops and garden events, the wider community is exposed to information and training on the agroecological cultivation of vegetables and medicinal plants and spices in small spaces. Events are organised both in the central district of Rosario as well as the different low-income neighbourhoods in the city where thousands of families participate. During the workshops, seeds – provided by the national Pro-Huerta INTA programme – and aromatic plant seedlings are distributed.

The programme specifically aims to reach young people. The 'Youth with More and Better Work' programme – which is managed by the Ministry of Labour, Employment and Social Security – engaged 140 young participants (aged between 18 and 24) in the PAU programme. They were assigned an individual plot and trained to farm it based on agroecological practices. Currently, youth between the ages of 16 and 35 are being trained in agroecological production in the city as part of the 'New Opportunity' programme supported by the Province of Santa Fé. In addition, young urban gardeners have begun to provide their own training and information services to others as a strategy to diversify their income. They provide guided visits to the garden parks, and develop and

coordinate workshops and training in cooperation with different institutes like the Cultural Center Parque España, the Rosario Medical Association and the Association of Municipal Workers of Rosario. In addition, they give courses in schools and institutes of secondary education in order for young people to learn about the advantages of agroecological production.

Food security and resilience

The Urban Agriculture programme contributes directly to promoting more food-secure and resilient neighbourhoods, with a focus on the most vulnerable groups in the population. Programme design based on agroecological principles stimulates environmentally-friendly food production as well as the fulfilment of social, environmental and economic goals within the framework of a social and solidarity-based economy. The following principles and priorities were established:

- Address food insecurity of urban families living in poverty by bringing into production vacant land through secure land tenure agreements
- Establish a food production system of fast-growing produce (i.e. fruits and vegetables)
- Improve the neighbourhood scenery by transforming abandoned vacant lots into productive spaces
- Produce healthy foods of high nutritional value in order to meet the dietary requirements of families living in poverty
- Establish a direct marketing system through the implementation of market fairs in strategically located public spaces in the city.

The programme's long-term plan includes the consolidation of urban agriculture as a permanent activity; it is one that supports secure spaces for production and commercialisation. Rosario's municipal public policy supports urban agriculture, while the productive use of public spaces has been included in urban planning. The programme collaborates with Pro-Huerta INTA. This is an organisation which carries out food education and promotion activities related to family orchards, school and community gardens and the production of fruit, eggs, poultry meat and rabbits.

Urban agriculture as a space of learning and innovation for peri-urban production

Experiences achieved in the PAU are currently being shared with the peri-urban agriculture programme developed by Rosario and Santa Fe Province where it is located. Long-time gardeners from the parks support training of conventional peri-urban producers in agroecological production techniques. Markets established for the urban agriculture farmers now also serve as an outlet for the peri-urban agroecological farmers. Without over 15 years of experience in the PAU, the Green Belt Project Rosario (see next article) could not have been set up as an additional step in the consolidation of agroecology as a public policy tool for the city.

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