Food from the Neighborhood

By: Janet Bratkovich

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INTRODUCTION

Where does our food come from? We go to the grocery store and it's always there, but where do the stores get our food? Oh, food is grown on farms, but where are these farms? Do you ever see them? Why are some of them so far away? Do you think we could grow our food closer to home? What would that look like?

We used to think of farms as always being in the country, but new ways of growing food are being developed all the time to provide nutrition people need.

New ways of thinking are evident everywhere, including the areas of energy, forestry, architecture, landscape design, urban planning, engineering, and transportation to name a few. New approaches to agriculture are also being explored. This report is about urban agriculture – the idea of growing more food in cities and towns.

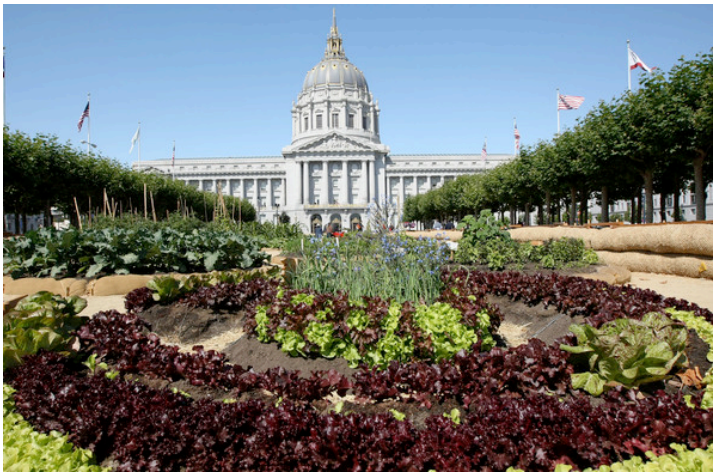
Agriculture is the working of soil to grow crops/plants and/or the raising of animals (like chickens and pigs).

Urban Agriculture is growing food and sometimes raising animals in cities – places where lots of people live.

Source: Merriam-Webster Dictionary

URBAN AGRICULTURE

Urban agriculture can take many shapes and forms. Urban agriculture ranges from rows of crops grown on city lots, to rooftop farms, to backyard gardens. Growing food where people live helps them to know more about where their food comes from and how it's processed, and to learn more about how to help the environment.



San Francisco City Hall Food Garden
Source: *Justin Sullivan/Getty Images*

Growing food in places where many people live can help the environment. Less fuel is used to plant and care for city gardens and get the food to market. There is less soil and air pollution because the gardeners use fewer chemicals and fertilizers. Urban agriculture tends to be organic farming, meaning it doesn't use artificial chemicals and fertilizers for growing food. This means artificial chemicals are not put into the environment.

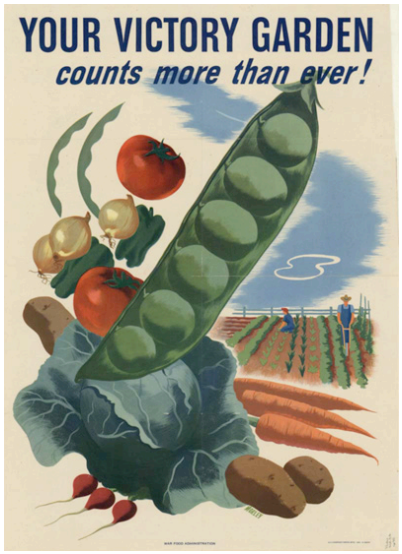
When more food is grown in cities, there are more jobs for the people who live nearby. People work to plant the gardens, take care of them (weeding and watering), harvest (pick) the crops, and sell the produce. Often cities

find that by growing food in the community they can help make the area an even better (healthier and attractive) place to live.

City gardens help people make good use of space, work together to produce food that everyone needs, and can result in better health. With urban agriculture, people can see how gardens are grown, and can get involved in helping make them a success. Also, people might be healthier by being physically active and have fresh food to eat.

History

City gardens are not a new idea in the United States. During WWI and II, our government asked people to plant gardens to help feed the country so the government could spend its money supporting our soldiers. Since the government had to send food to the soldiers far away it was important that U.S. citizens grew their own food. Food sold in stores was in short supply. People/families were given rations, which meant they were only allowed to buy a certain amount of most things. If you grew your own garden, then you could have more – as much as you could grow! These were called **Victory Gardens**.

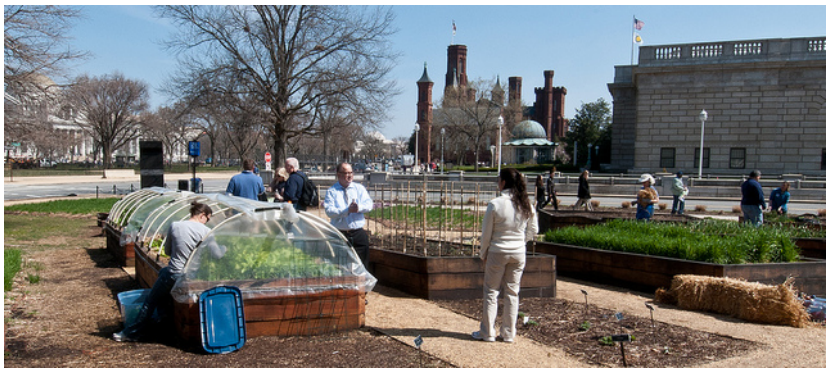


Victory Garden Poster
Source: *Jen Stewart. "It's Planning Season for Recession Gardens". Feb. 2010. The Saturday Evening Post.*

Today

After WWI and II our government didn't talk about Victory Gardens much and people didn't plant as many gardens. In 2009, First Lady Michelle Obama decided to show people how to grow their own food again. She planted a

produce (vegetable) garden at the White House in Washington, DC. Mrs. Obama wanted our nation to think more about good health. The new garden is part of the *Let's Move!* program that encourages American children and adults to eat healthy, locally grown produce, and get more exercise. There are many reasons why people are interested in planting their own gardens including concerns about food safety, national health, climate change and a need for jobs.



People's Garden at USDA in Washington, D.C.
Source: *USDA Flickr Stream: "The People's Garden – Executive Master Gardener Program"*
http://www.flickr.com/photos/usdagov/sets/72157626313329987/

Another garden plan called *The People's Garden* wants to help communities pull together to help feed people and protect the environment. This plan was named in honor of President Lincoln's description of the USDA (United States Department of Agriculture) as the people's department. It includes over 400 local and national organizations working to set up community and school gardens across the country. People's Gardens can be found in all 50 states.

There are People's Gardens in both rural (areas with fewer people) and urban locations. The food grown on these sites is donated to food shelves

and shelters across the country to help those in need. To view a map of People's Gardens, visit: www.pubinfo.usda.gov/garden/Map_View.cfm

Challenges

There have been some problems setting up city gardens. Current laws do not allow all types of city gardens. Recently laws have been changed in some places to allow land to be used differently. Gardens and farming often involve the use of different equipment and sometimes create noise, smells and problems that cities need to control.

A few cities, including Minneapolis (in Minnesota) and Detroit (in Michigan), include urban agriculture in citywide plans. In Minnesota, a program called *Homegrown Minneapolis* helps people learn how to grow healthy food in the city. In Michigan, the *Detroit Works Project* is using urban agriculture to promote change and growth. In both cases, urban agriculture is being used to help people grow food, provide jobs and take care of future needs.

In Milwaukee (in Wisconsin) a program called *Growing Power* was started to provide teens with resources for learning how to grow food. The organization has grown from a few greenhouses to a large scale working urban farm. Its headquarters consist of greenhouses, hoop houses ((half hoop-shaped structures that allow food to be grown year-round), beehives, pens for livestock animals, and a store for selling produce. The program provides training, classes, and help to people who want to learn more about growing food in the city. It also provides communities with sites for raising livestock and growing food in a sustainable manner – a healthy way that can be continued over time. Communities can benefit from healthy local food systems.

FUTURE IDEAS FOR URBAN AGRICULTURE

Rooftop Gardens

Most gardens are found in open areas away from buildings. Sometimes agriculture can be combined with architecture (buildings). Some buildings have rooftops where food can be grown for restaurants and stores. Rooftop gardens are becoming more popular with restaurants that serve food that is grown locally. This form of urban agriculture makes use of unused space on top of the buildings. Places that already prepare or sell food like restaurants, grocery stores, schools and hospitals could benefit from growing their own produce instead of importing it from far away. Rooftop gardens are still a new idea and have some problems to overcome. For example, many buildings have rooftops that are not easy to get to and were not built to carry the extra weight of plants and soil. But, rooftop farms are gaining ground!

Some architects have begun designing new buildings that combine agriculture and architecture. These concepts are not simply new buildings with better roofs, but include new ways in which architecture and agriculture can work together within cities.

Vertical Farms

Another new idea for growing food within cities is vertical farming. A vertical farm model from Seattle combines greenhouses, rooftop gardens, growing ”fields” (terraces), apartments, and street-level stores all as part of a single building. A system on the rooftop can collect rainwater and filter and purify it through the use of plants and recycle it throughout the building.

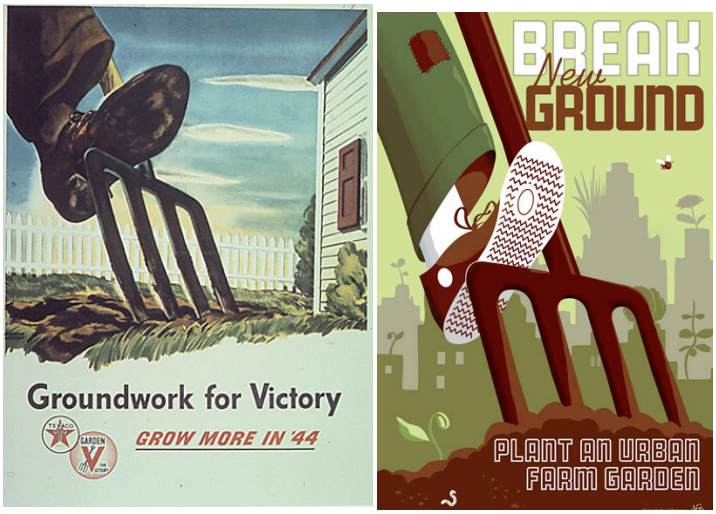
Façade Farm
Source: *http://www.kisscathcart.com/integrated_agriculture.html*

Façade Farms

Facades [fuh-sahd] means sides, and building facades are the side walls of a building. By making parallel walls of glass with shelves in between, plants can be grown up the sides of buildings inside the walls! A pulley system moves the shelves up and down for planting, watering and harvesting (like a Ferris wheel). The plants can even be grown hydroponically – in nutrient rich water. The system is a controlled indoor environment, so food could be grown year round (even when it's snowing outside!). Not only can façade farms grow food year-round, they also can reduce carbon emissions (pollution) from machinery, which would help to protect the environment.

BOTTOM LINE

Urban agriculture can benefit human health, provide more jobs and help the environment. Individuals, groups and city leaders can all work together to grow more food, and help make their living spaces healthier and more productive. Growing more food in places where people live helps them to see and understand where their food comes from, what is involved in production and how growing food benefits them.



Source: *The Victory Garden of Tomorrow,* http://victorygardenoftomorrow.com/index.html#posters

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For Teachers/Educators

Dovetail Partner's FREE Network has many resources that can be used with students to explore and reinforce the ideas and concepts presented in this report.

http://www.freenetwork.org/

- LEAF (Learning, Experiences, and Activities in Forestry): Climate Change Through Tree Planting Lesson Guide
- LEAF: K – 12 Forestry Lesson Guide
- Project Learning Tree (PLT): Pre K – 8 Environmental Education Activity Guide and also Early Childhood Supplement
- Northern Woodlands Teacher Guides
- A Teacher's Guide to Arbor Month

Also, for school districts using the FOSS Science Curriculum, there are several units that relate to growing, or food and nutrition such as: New Plants, Plants and Animals, Insects and Plants, and Trees (all for Grades K – 2), Food and Nutrition, Environments, Living Systems, and Structures of Life (all for Grades 3 – 6), and Diversity of Life, and Populations and Ecosystems (for Grades 6 – 8).

For a more in-depth version of this report see:

http://dovetailinc.org/files/DovetailUrbanAg1111.pdf

Resources

"About Us." *Growing Power.* Web. http://www.growingpower.org/about_us.htm

"Center for Urban Agriculture." *Mithun, Inc*. Web. http://mithun.com/projects/project_detail/center_for_urban_agriculture/

"Digging Their Way Out of Recession." Feb. 2009. *The Economist*. Web. http://www.economist.com/node/13185476

"A History of Victory Gardens." 2010. *ETPMC News*. U.S.D.A.

"Homegrown Minneapolis." *City of Minneapolis.* Web. http://www.ci.minneapolis.mn.us/dhfs/homegrown-home.asp

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"The People's Garden." 2009. *USDA*. Web. http://www.usda.gov/wps/portal/usda/usdahome?navid=GARDEN_RT1&parentnav=PEOPLES_GARDEN&navtype=RS

"Vertical Farming: Does it Really Stack Up?" Dec. 2010. *The Economist*. http://www.economist.com/node/17647627

"Vertically Integrated Greenhouse." *The Buckminster Fuller Challenge.* Web. http://challenge.bfi.org/application_summary/127#

"Victory Gardens, Our History". *The Dinner Garden.* Web. http://www.dinnergarden.org/victoryGardens.html

"What is Urban Agriculture?" *RUAF Foundation.* Web. http://www.ruaf.org/

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