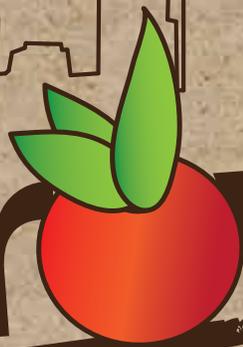




# growTO



an urban agriculture  
**ACTION PLAN**  
for Toronto

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**Photo credits:** Thanks to Lorraine Johnson and Lauren Baker for providing photos.

## why GrowTO?

In 2010 the Metcalf Foundation published “Scaling Up Urban Agriculture in Toronto: Building the Infrastructure,” outlining key opportunities and barriers to growing food in Toronto. One year later the GrowTO process—consisting of four moderated discussions and two action-planning sessions—was launched to delve more deeply into the issues identified in the paper, and develop an action plan for Toronto.

## GrowTO was created to:

- Bring together the stakeholders who play a vital role in urban agriculture in Toronto;
- Propose solutions to different Divisions across the City of Toronto in order to increase support for urban agriculture;
- Highlight the economic and social development opportunities that urban agriculture can bring to communities and neighbourhoods;
- Focus attention on the untapped potential of urban agriculture in Toronto;
- Involve, inform and propose both policy solutions and on-the-ground actions that build and support urban agriculture.

# growing food in and around the city

Toronto has long been known as a North American leader in the global movement for sustainable food. A wealth of innovative projects—both small and large—attests to Toronto’s diverse agriculture and food cultures.

The City’s government, institutions and community organizations have generally supported the food-growing efforts of Torontonians. In some ways, though, the infrastructure around these movements—from policies to practical support—has not kept pace with the enthusiasm and energy that exist to move urban agriculture forward.

There are many examples of simple changes, as well as some that are more complex, that would make an enormous difference to urban agriculture efforts in this city. It is within this context of “moving forward” and “scaling up” that this report has been written.

Many people and organizations have been involved in developing the recommendations in this report. We have worked together to identify gaps and policy hurdles and, most importantly, we have recommended actions and changes that will help Toronto’s urban agriculture movement grow and flourish. The enthusiasm with which everyone embraced this task, and the energy devoted to it, are evidence of the commitment of numerous people and organizations to “growing the city” (hence GrowTO) and continuing to make Toronto an innovator and a leader in urban agriculture.

This Action Plan reflects our vision of a green city full of fresh, local, healthy, nutritious, affordable, culturally diverse, and flavourful food available for all.



GrowTO and this Action Plan are a “work-in-progress” and involve many people and organizations who play different roles. Just as collaborative effort has been the defining approach for urban agriculture activities in Toronto, we envision further collaborative efforts to move urban agriculture forward. We envision a significant and ongoing role for City government and City staff in terms of supporting and encouraging diverse urban agriculture initiatives throughout Toronto, working in partnership with the range of community organizations and community food leaders across the city.

## The following organizations and institutions contributed to the GrowTO Action Plan

Afri-Can Food Basket; Toronto Environment Office; City of Toronto Environment Office; Cultivate Toronto; Everdale; Evergreen; FarmStart; FoodShare; Fresh City Farms; Greater Toronto Area Agriculture Action Committee (GTA AAC); Green Roofs for Healthy Cities; Green Thumbs Growing Kids; Greenest City; Housing Services Corporation; Metcalf Foundation; MetroAg, North York Harvest; Not Far From the Tree; Ryerson University; The Stop Community Food Centre; Toronto and Region Conservation Authority (TRCA); Toronto Community Garden Network; Toronto Community Housing Corporation; Toronto District School Board (TDSB); Toronto Food Policy Council; Toronto Public Health; Toronto Urban Growers (TUG); Toronto Youth Food Policy Council; University of Toronto; West End Food Coop (WEFC); YMCA; York University.

# introduction to urban agriculture

When we think of growing food, we tend to conjure up images of large fields in the countryside: acres of crops cultivated in rows as far as the eye can see; barns housing hay; ploughs and tractors making steady progress across the land; perhaps some cows grazing on forage.

And when we think of farmers—the men and women who work the land and grow the food on our grocery store shelves and on our farmers' markets tables—we might think of families living in this rural landscape, with hedgerows along highways and concession roads, and productive land just outside the farm house door.

This is the agricultural story many of us are familiar with, and it has powerful emotional force in our collective imagination. Farms and farmers feed us.

While the rural farmscape might be what immediately comes to mind, cities, too, are (and have always been) places of significant, energetic and committed food production. Urban agriculture<sup>1</sup> has entered the lexicon as a way to describe a myriad of food-growing practices that are increasingly taking place in cities throughout the country and, indeed, the world. In fact, globally, it is common for a significant portion of food consumed in cities to be grown within and immediately surrounding those same cities.

In North America, too, we have a long tradition of urban agriculture; we just didn't necessarily label it as such historically. During the Depression and the two World Wars, for example, citizens of Canadian cities produced millions of pounds of food (115 million pounds in 1943 alone)<sup>2</sup> for the war effort and to alleviate poverty and hunger. This food was grown in front and backyards, parks, churches, community gathering places, fire halls, vacant lots—almost anywhere there was land available for planting.

This same spirit—searching the urban landscape for potentially productive land and rooftops—is being rekindled today, right here in Toronto and around the world. Community groups are starting food gardens in city parks, supplementing allotment garden programs. Churches and community centres, universities and public housing corporations are turning part of their grounds into places where members of the community can work the soil and grow food. Private landowners are making space for gardening available for condo and apartment dwellers. Small businesses are sprouting up, offering backyard food-growing services to people who want fresh and local food right outside their doors. Food growing enthusiasts are becoming entrepreneurs and launching new businesses and young farmers are forming co-ops, devising new models of land tenure to grow food commercially and keep the rich agricultural land often found in and around cities in production. City schools are starting garden projects in schoolyards, and integrating food literacy and career-oriented horticulture into the curriculum. Restaurants are converting their roofs into small rooftop farms, growing some of the food that appears on their menus. Hotels are inviting beekeepers to start apiaries on their rooftops and serving their honey for breakfast. And the beat goes on...

<sup>1</sup>Urban agriculture is the growing of food through intensive plant cultivation and animal husbandry in and around cities. It also includes the processing and distribution of food produced through urban agriculture activities.

<sup>2</sup>Johnson, Lorraine (2010). *City Farmer: Adventures in Urban Food Growing* (Vancouver: Greystone Books).

## Growing momentum for growing food in Toronto

**1993** - Interdepartmental collaboration in the City leads to the creation of the report: "Supports for Urban Food Production: Creating a Garden City."

**1997** - Community Gardens Program Coordinator position created in the Parks, Forestry, and Recreation division of the City.

**1999** - City Council endorses the Community Garden Action Plan, which sets the goal of establishing a community garden in every ward of the city.

**2001** - Through the adoption of the Toronto Food Charter, City Council promises to support community gardening and urban agriculture in the interest of increased food security in the city.

**2002** - Toronto's Official Plan expresses support for community and rooftop gardens as important elements for creating beautiful, healthy and active cities and for engaging diverse communities.

**2002** - City of Toronto partners with TRCA to create the Toronto Urban Farm at Black Creek.

**2004** - City of Toronto hosts the American Community Gardening Association annual conference.

**2005** - The City's Community Partnership and Investment Program funds FoodShare Toronto, and its partners The Stop Community Food Centre, the Afri-Can Food Basket and Second Harvest to start the Toronto Community Food Animators Program.



Everywhere, and in many different ways, city dwellers are seeking, seeing and seizing opportunity. They are doing so for reasons as diverse as the projects and participants themselves. Some are growing food for economic reasons, to reduce costs and stretch the family budget. Some are growing food as a way to achieve “food justice,” our collective right to be free of hunger and have enough food to lead a healthy and active life. Some are doing it to grow community along with food. Some are growing food to forge an innovative business and make a living. Some are growing food out of an environmental commitment: to bring their food “closer to home” and reduce their carbon footprint. Some are doing it for nutritional reasons, in order to eat fresher food, and more of it. Some others are doing it for the health benefits gardening provides, such as physical activity and stress-reduction. Still others are growing food for the simplest and perhaps most basic reason: because it tastes better.

In Toronto, almost half the residents were born in other countries. We celebrate Toronto as a global city, and recognize the challenge and opportunity to grow more diverse foods in and around the city. Right now, the vast majority of the city’s fresh food is imported from other countries. Yet many immigrants have brought food-growing knowledge with them and are growing these crops in hundreds of community and backyard gardens. New-Canadian growers and “world” crops are a vital component of the urban agriculture movement taking off in Toronto today.

Urban agriculture activity in Toronto has been growing steadily over the past decade. There are now dozens of non-profit organizations, commercial businesses, community groups and informal collectives all working to support and promote the growing of food in this city, and there are many, many individuals of all ages, backgrounds and circumstances growing food in Toronto. They do so within a political and policy framework that has seen a huge increase of interest in urban agriculture and food issues.



**2006** - City supports TDSE research on market gardens.

**2006** - Toronto’s Official Plan expresses support for community and rooftop gardens as important elements for creating beautiful, healthy and active cities and for engaging diverse communities.

**2007** - Toronto Community Housing publishes a Community Gardening Manual.

**2009** - TRCA introduces a progressive Sustainable Near-Urban Agriculture Policy.

**2009** - Through adopting the report “Identifying Urban Agriculture Opportunities in the City of Toronto,” City Council affirms its support for strategies and initiatives that achieve the overall goal of expanding opportunities for local food production in Toronto.

**2010** - The Toronto Food Strategy is established as a unit in Toronto Public Health. Goals of the Strategy include the development of policy and program options to support an increase in urban agriculture activities across the City.

**2011** - City supports the GrowTO Speaker Series.

**2012** - City Council endorses the Greater Golden Horseshoe Action Plan, which promotes the preservation of farmland in Ontario as well as the expansion of urban opportunities to produce food.

# urban agriculture in Toronto: a “snapshot”

Urban agriculture is an inclusive term that describes a myriad of activities, all of which are connected with the growing, processing and distribution of food and food-related products in and around cities. Although vegetables and fruit are perhaps the most common foods produced through urban agriculture, the term also includes animal husbandry, such as urban hens for eggs, beekeeping for honey and aquaculture for fish.

The following “snapshots” represent some of the wide array of activities in Toronto that exist today under the umbrella of urban agriculture.

## Commercial Farms and Market Gardens

Commercial farming and market gardening take place in and around the city. In Northeast Scarborough, some tracts of land are still zoned agricultural. Beyond the city, the Ontario Greenbelt legislation protects 1.8 million acres across the Greater Golden Horseshoe region, and much of that land is farmland. In 2012 Toronto City Council and the surrounding regions and municipalities endorsed the Greater Golden Horseshoe Food and Farming Action Plan to promote and coordinate the food and farming cluster in this region.



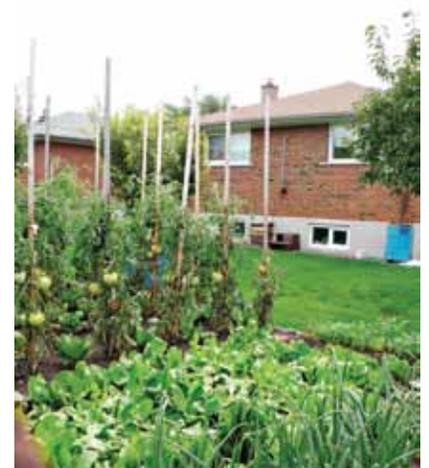
## Residential Gardens and Edible Landscaping

Perhaps the most common urban agriculture practice, seen in every neighbourhood, takes place in the gardens, and on the window sills and balconies of Toronto residents. Taking advantage of the often beautiful flowers, foliage and fruits of food plants, creative gardeners are including food plants in their gardens of every size at home.

Non-profit groups are helping city residents find land to grow food: The Stop Community Food Centre, for example, has a program called Yes In My Back Yard (YIMBY) that connects people who want to grow food but don't have access to land, with people willing to share space in their yards.

## Community Gardens on City-owned Land

Toronto has more than one hundred food-growing gardens on City-owned land, a testament to the long tradition of support in the city for urban agriculture. These range from allotment gardens (administered by the City via permits that plot-holders purchase for an annual fee) to community projects administered by non-profit groups. Many are in public parks, and many were started by volunteers keen to grow food and willing to navigate through various permission processes in order to sustain their projects. Many of these gardens primarily grow vegetables; virtually all use organic principles, and some follow sustainable design techniques, such as permaculture.



Along with gardens on parkland, a growing number of food projects take place on City-owned land at community centres and Toronto Community Housing Corporation properties. The “Tower Renewal” project, for example, is a city-wide initiative, one component of which is to increase the number of food gardens on the relatively large landscapes that surround the many apartment buildings of Toronto.



## Gardens or Farms on Institutional Land

Institutional lands are also sites of urban agriculture activity in Toronto. Many community health centres, universities and churches, for example, have food gardens not only on their grounds, but on their rooftops as well. The produce from these gardens is often donated to local residents or used by community programs, thus forging links between institutions and the neighbourhood. Relatively large farms are currently producing food within the city, adding to the diversity of scale in urban agriculture projects. The Toronto and Region Conservation Authority is investigating opportunities with Everdale, FoodShare, Fresh City Farms, York University, Ryerson University and other many local community partners for the ongoing development of the Toronto Urban Farm.



## Gardens at Schools

Thanks to the efforts of parents, administrators, students, and non-profit organizations such as Evergreen, FoodShare and Green Thumbs Growing Kids, Toronto's schoolgrounds are places where children can dig in and grow food. In Scarborough, for example, Bendale Business and Technical Institute and FoodShare have created a one-acre school market garden where students are involved in every step of the process of bringing food from field to table: they plant, grow and harvest the food on what was once the front and back lawns of the school, they cook the fruits and vegetables in culinary arts classes, they serve the food to their peers in the cafeteria, and they sell any remaining produce at a market for the local community.

Schools are a major source of land in the city, and cultivating this land could provide summer jobs and training opportunities for youth, as well as recreational and food growing opportunities for communities. The Toronto District School Board actively supports school-based community and market gardens on many of their properties.





## Entrepreneurial Farms/Community Supported Agriculture

Interest in urban agriculture has led to many innovative entrepreneurial activities and inventive business models. Fresh City Farms, for example, grows food in many different backyard “mini-farms” that together add up to enough growing space to support a business (customers buy shares in the farm and receive weekly deliveries of produce). Backyard Urban Farm Co. sells a service in which they plant and maintain vegetable gardens in the city’s backyards—and, indeed, front yards.



## Gleaning Projects and Orchards

Gleaning projects are a form of urban agriculture that takes advantage of the abundance of food already growing, but not necessarily being harvested, in the city. Volunteers from the non-profit group Not Far From The Tree, for example, pick fruit from trees and distribute it to the homeowners, volunteers and social service agencies. In this way, the “fruits” of their labour and the fruits of the city’s orchards find a home. A few community orchards also grow fruit trees that are looked after by neighbourhood volunteers.



## Rooftop Farms

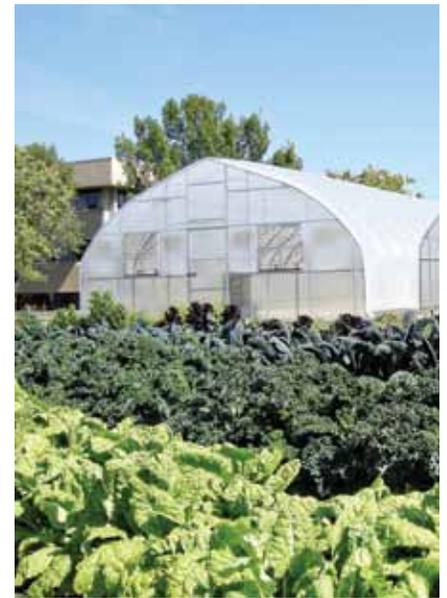
The huge potential of rooftops for urban agriculture is currently being tapped by a number of restaurants that are growing food on top of their buildings—food that is then promoted on their menus as the most local possible. Enterprising rooftop food gardeners affirm the value of Toronto’s progressive policies, such as the Green Roof Bylaw. They prove that given the opportunity, Torontonians are keen to take green infrastructure to a new level by incorporating food production and the additional benefits it provides to a city’s ecosystem. Rooftops gardens that meet the Toronto Green Roof Construction Standard are eligible for funding under the City’s Eco-Roof Incentive Program.





## Greenhouses

Toronto has many greenhouses—connected to senior’s residences, in schools and community centres. The City of Toronto administers greenhouse allotments in Etobicoke. The Friends of Trinity Bellwoods Park coordinates a community greenhouse in Trinity Bellwoods Park; people from the community pay a small fee to rent space. These greenhouses are sometimes used to grow seedlings or food. Greenhouse space makes it possible for urban gardeners to start seedlings for long-season crops, particularly those grown by new Canadian gardeners who can’t find desired varieties at commercial garden centres.



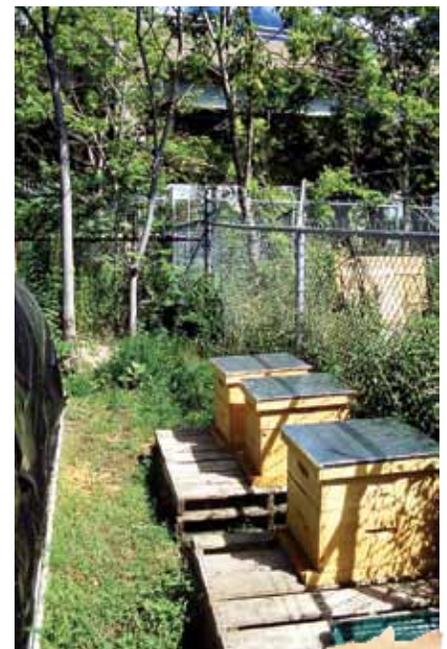
## Therapeutic Gardens

Many social service agencies and health institutions across the city are using food gardens as therapeutic tools. For example, FoodShare in partnership with the Centre for Addiction and Mental Health created the Sunshine Garden, Toronto’s first large market garden on public land. The Canadian Mental Health Association has worked to set up a community food garden for their participants, and several Community Health Centres have similar projects under way in Toronto. Food gardening can be a therapeutic activity for anyone, and promotes healthy and active lifestyles, boosts self-esteem, builds community bonds, provides intellectual stimulation, develops employment skills, encourages healthy relationships with food, and enhances emotional well being.



## Urban Livestock

Urban livestock is one of the “food frontiers” of urban agriculture in Toronto. While there are currently restrictions and many challenges to overcome—both legislative and technical—the city is home to the Toronto Beekeeping Cooperative and a number of other beekeeping projects (for honey). An eager group of people are working to legalize backyard chicken coops (for eggs). FoodShare in partnership with Bendale Technical Institute in Scarborough has started an aquaculture project.



# the benefits of urban agriculture

## Economic benefits:

The economic benefits of urban agriculture can be found at every scale, from the money saved in individual household budgets by growing food, through to the potential cost savings to provincial healthcare budgets as a result of increased vegetable consumption and increased social cohesion (both of which have been documented in community garden projects, for example). While some of these economic benefits are directly quantifiable (for example, the savings in personal food costs; and the municipal maintenance-cost savings when community groups are stewarding food gardens in public parks), others are more complex (such as the reduced energy demands that result from locally produced food, and the healthcare savings that result from an improved diet). Despite the complexity of quantifying all the variables, there is great potential for urban agriculture, at the individual and societal levels, to provide economic benefits in terms of monetary savings (i.e., access to inexpensive food; lower maintenance costs for public space) and in terms of income generation (i.e., starting small, locally produced food businesses).

- **Creates business opportunities**
- **Enhances economic development**
- **Generates income**
- **Develops job-related skills in areas such as business management, communications, customer service, and community organizing**

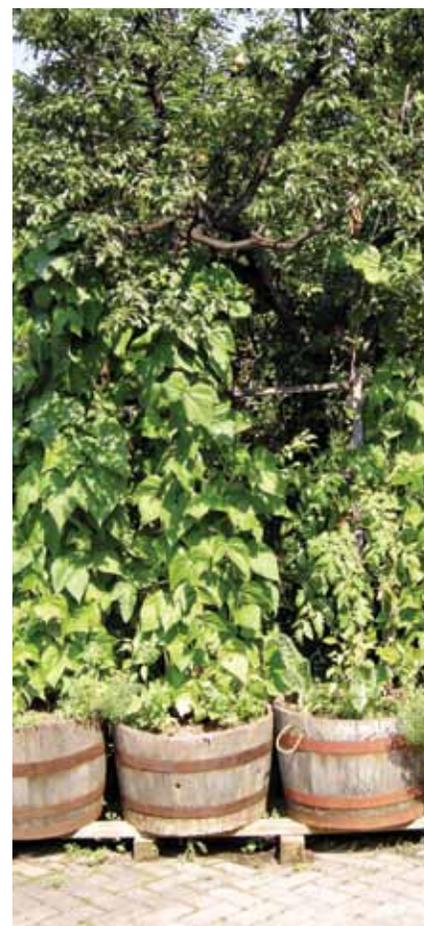
## Community benefits:

Study after study has shown that various forms of urban agriculture—in particular, community projects—are great at bringing people together and building neighbourhood cohesion. The safety of neighbourhoods increases, and crime is reduced, for example, when community gardens animate an area with activity. Community members beyond the gardeners gain direct benefit when social events such as arts performances and barbecues are added to the mix. Public spaces such as parks likewise benefit from volunteer engagement and stewardship. And when underutilized spaces such as vacant lots are turned to productive purposes through community involvement around the growing of food, everyone benefits. Indeed, in many ways, what grows in urban agriculture is not simply food, but community and, as a result, a more livable city.

- **Builds community**
- **Encourages life-long learning**
- **Reduces social isolation**
- **Uses under-utilized land and rooftops**

## Health benefits:

A city in which food is front and centre, growing all around us, is a city in which no child will grow up thinking that carrots naturally and exclusively come in plastic bags at the supermarket. People—young and old and everyone in between—who have had a hand in growing food are not only more aware of where their food comes from, they're also more likely to eat fresh vegetables. The health benefits go beyond nutrition: the recreational aspects of gardening





have been shown to increase physical activity and reduce stress. With appropriate programming, community gardens can be a powerful way to support and integrate people experiencing mental illness. These personal health benefits are powerful but they're only a part of the bigger picture: if we measure social health in terms of the degree to which we have control over our basic needs, then a city in which urban agriculture flourishes is a city one step closer to having a secure food supply, accessible to all.

- **Connects us to the food we eat and to the broad food system**
- **Provides physical activity for all ages**
- **Improves health and nutrition**
- **Enhances urban food security**

### **Environmental benefits:**

Green infrastructure—the living systems that support a city's successful functioning—includes everything from the urban forest to urban parks to ravines and streams and private back and front yards. Urban agriculture is one form of green infrastructure that connects with all others and provides many ecological benefits in the urban environment. Plants take in carbon dioxide and release oxygen; filter pollutants from the air; capture rainwater and encourage it to percolate down to the groundwater; build the soil; and create habitat for pollinating insects and birds. Urban agriculture also increases the city's greenspace, helping to make the urban environment more comfortable and livable for everyone.

- **Increases and diversifies urban greenspace**
- **Supports stormwater management**
- **Contributes to biodiversity**
- **Mitigates air pollution**



# moving urban agriculture forward: six priorities

We have identified six priorities for moving urban agriculture forward in Toronto:

1. Link Growers to Land and Space
2. Strengthen Education and Training
3. Increase Visibility and Promotion
4. Add Value to Urban Gardens
5. Cultivate Relationships
6. Develop Supportive Policies

For each of these priorities, we describe the issues and current activities, and suggest next steps that will help the City of Toronto realize the full potential of urban agriculture.

We welcome further input. This is intended as a dynamic document that will inevitably change and evolve over time. We look forward to your contributions to help grow urban agriculture in Toronto.

## 1. link growers to land and space

Urban agriculture turns the concept of the “concrete jungle” on its head, proving instead that there are many places and spaces where food can be grown—and lots of it. Indeed, as one recent research paper demonstrated,<sup>3</sup> ten percent of Toronto’s current commercial demand for fresh vegetables could, potentially, be supplied through agricultural activities within the city.

The spaces and places to grow food already exist in this city—on the ground and on rooftops. The demand also already exists—Torontonians have demonstrated their keen interest in growing more food in more places. So, how can we connect this burgeoning movement of growers with available land and spaces? Where can people find the spaces they need in order to grow food, and how can they gain durable, long-term, secure access to those spaces? Once they find these spaces, how can they assess the soil’s health and food-growing potential?

One of the recurring suggestions that comes up in discussions about urban agriculture in Toronto is the need for an inventory of available land and rooftops that could be used to grow food. Such an inventory would not only provide a clear picture of the city’s food-growing potential, but it would also provide an enormously valuable resource for community groups and commercial ventures alike to help them identify suitable spaces for food growing. Institutional landowners such as school boards, the Toronto and Region Conservation Authority and Toronto Community Housing Corporation have all demonstrated their willingness to engage in food-growing projects on their properties, often in partnership with interested groups and individuals. An in-depth inventory that surveyed other types of institutional, agency and corporate landowners, such as universities, churches, hospitals, office towers, shopping centres, and condominiums, to name a few, would no doubt uncover many other untapped opportunities for food-growing space. An inventory could serve as a tool for “matchmaking” of sorts, linking the “supply” of land and rooftops with the “demand” of interested growers.

Finding potential space is just the beginning, though. Assessing the land, developing appropriate partnerships, drafting lease agreements, and creating business plans for use of the land or rooftops are also challenges. These could be addressed through support to institutions and growers—for example, making compost and soil amendments available, offering technical expertise, ensuring that watering and irrigation infrastructure is available—as well as research into models used in other jurisdictions.

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<sup>3</sup>MacRae, R.J., et al. (2010). Could Toronto provide 10% of its fresh vegetable requirements from within its own boundaries? Part I, Matching consumption requirements with growing spaces. *Journal of Agriculture, Food Systems, and Community Development*.

**Portland, Oregon, was one of the first North American cities to systematically identify vacant public land for possible urban agriculture uses.** In 2004, Portland's City Council unanimously passed a resolution directing staff to conduct an inventory of public properties that might be suitable for food-growing purposes. City staff completed the inventory with the assistance of graduate students from Portland State University, and in 2005 published a report, "The Diggable City: Making Urban Agriculture a Planning Priority." In total, the inventory identified 289 locations (comprised of 430 individual tax parcels) as publicly owned sites with food-growing potential.

The "Next Steps" section, on the following page, includes specific suggestions that build on these ideas of linking growers to land and space.

## Leading by Example in Toronto

### Backyard sharing

As anyone who has been the recipient of a gardener's homegrown tomatoes and zucchini can attest, gardeners tend towards generosity. YIMBY (Yes In My Back Yard), a project initiated by The Stop Community Food Centre, takes this spirit of sharing one step further. The project links people who want to grow food but don't have access to land, with people willing to share their yards. The Stop supports gardeners and land owners to develop clear, effective land sharing agreements and build their horticultural skills. Everyone wins in this wonderfully neighbourly example of connecting a resource with an opportunity: the person with the land has a caring hand to look after the land, and the person cultivating the space has a food garden (and, of course, food to share with the sharing land owner!).

### Backyard entrepreneurial gardens

While residential backyards and front yards might be considered small, on their own, for commercial food production, the inventive entrepreneurs behind Fresh City Farms have found commercial opportunity in numbers. Soliciting neighbourhoods for homeowners willing to "rent out" their yards, Fresh City Farms has amassed a collective urban farm that produces food sold directly to people who buy "shares." Fresh City Farms' unique solution to the problem of finding urban land involves more than a dozen member farmers and more than 400 member consumers.

### Toronto and Region Conservation Authority's urban agriculture policy

Toronto and Region Conservation Authority (TRCA) is perhaps best known for protecting natural areas and managing conservation areas, but this visionary agency has been proactive on the agriculture front, as well; it owns and manages nearly 409 ha of agricultural land. TRCA recognizes that urban agriculture contributes to the development of sustainable communities, and has developed a policy to promote sustainable urban agriculture for some of its land holdings. TRCA has been an instrumental, leading partner in four farm projects: the Toronto Urban Farm, located at Jane Street and Steeles Avenue; the TRCA-FarmStart McVean Incubator Farm Project, located in Brampton, which leases 15 hectares of farmland to new farmers who are developing agricultural enterprises; the Albion Hills Community Farm in the Town of Caledon; and The Living City Farm at the Kortright Centre, located in the City of Vaughan. TRCA provides infrastructure, planning, and program support to these projects.

### Toronto Public Health's urban gardening soil assessment guidelines

A common concern expressed by people interested in growing food in the city is that urban soils might be contaminated. Thus, Toronto Public Health, recognizing that urban gardening plays an important role in making Toronto a healthier city,



developed an urban gardening soil assessment guide. This tool helps people determine the level of risk related to soil contamination, and outlines what food can be safely grown. It also identifies appropriate exposure-reduction actions based on the condition of the site. Written using clear, accessible language, this step-by-step guide is a useful resource that addresses concerns and encourages urban gardening across the city.

## Next Steps

### **Compile an online inventory for making strategic connections between growers and suitable growing space.**

- Identify City-owned parks and public space suitable for urban gardening and community greenhouses.
- Work with institutional partners including the TDSB, TRCA and Hydro One to make information about suitable land available to growers.
- Link to existing land-sharing initiatives such as YIMBY and ExtraShare.
- Identify rooftops in Toronto that are structurally appropriate and potentially available for growing food.
- Identify existing greenhouse space available in the city and the conditions to its access.

### **Support growers and land owners to develop mutually beneficial land tenure arrangements that result in new urban agriculture initiatives.**

- Research and share urban land tenure and ownership models.
- Increase the City's capacity to facilitate the development of community gardens and urban agriculture in city parks.
- Develop resources to support site assessment, business and farm planning, lease negotiations, and identification of appropriate on-farm infrastructure.

## 2. strengthen education and training

Toronto gardeners possess rich agricultural knowledge and skills. Sharing this knowledge of food-growing skills tends to be an informal practice, passed down from generation to generation, or shared among gardeners and neighbours. Very rarely is it taught to children in schools. Many urban adults have little access to farmers, have rarely been on a farm, and are removed from the wealth of knowledge that exists regarding successful techniques of food production. The new wave of urban growers is experimenting with innovative models of farming and marketing.

To bridge the pervasive urban disconnect from food production, we need to provide easily accessible opportunities for both formal and informal knowledge sharing, education and training.

People who want to grow food are in fact often very highly motivated to do so. But if the information isn't available to support their efforts, the results are often disappointing. In their discouragement, we lose the potential to create more urban growers and future farmers. Knowledge is essential at every stage to reward curiosity and hard work. Toronto is blessed with some of the best soil and growing conditions in Canada. How can we strengthen education and training opportunities related to urban agriculture in Toronto? How can we showcase Toronto as a leader in urban agricultural innovation, technology and training?

A number of excellent resources already exist in Toronto's urban agriculture community, in local universities, and within City divisions. Non-profit groups regularly hold workshops, tours and educational events. Training programs can be found through various agencies and institutions. Publications produced by various City divisions are available online, at libraries and at public events. These training opportunities and events, however, are scattered across many organizations, making it difficult for people to find.

**Vancouver has been an urban agriculture and composting leader for decades.** In the very early days of the Internet, the visionary Vancouver-based organization City Farmer saw the potential to harness the power of the Web for knowledge sharing, and became the clearinghouse for urban agriculture-related information. The City Farmer website remains the go-to site today.



## Leading by Example in Toronto

### **New farmer training**

There are several organizations in and around Toronto that currently offer new farmer training programs and workshops. Everdale, the Collaborative Regional Alliance for Farmer Training (CRAFT) and FarmStart all provide a variety of hands-on and classroom-based training opportunities for diverse groups of people interested in starting to farm. Many of these new farmers come from urban areas and aim to end up back in the city, where they can develop innovative applications of their food-growing skills.

### **Community garden training and workshops**

Across the city a large number of community food organizations (such as FoodShare, Green Thumbs Growing Kids, Afri-Can FoodBasket, Evergreen, Greenest City and The Stop), community service providers (such as Access Alliance) and Community Health Centres (such as Regent Park, South Riverdale and Stonegate) work to engage diverse communities through hands-on training in local gardens. People of all ages are able to get their hands dirty while learning about the fundamentals of urban food production from more experienced growers in their community. These programs are free, accessible to first-time food growers, and often offered in languages such as Mandarin, Cantonese, Arabic, Bengali, Spanish, and English.

### **Cultivating youth leadership**

The Afri-Can FoodBasket is dedicated to meeting the nutrition, health and employment needs of the African Canadian community; in particular, those who are economically and socially vulnerable. In addition to operating a food buying club and 26 community gardens in priority neighbourhoods, the Afri-Can FoodBasket provides youth in the Jane-Finch, Jamestown and Lawrence Heights neighbourhoods with opportunities to develop leadership and job skills, and learn about urban gardening, organic farming and community building.

### **Urban agriculture courses**

The academic literature around the subject of urban agriculture is robust, and Toronto universities are home to some of the most active, published researchers in the field in North America. Universities here are igniting the interest of students in urban agriculture studies and food systems analysis. For example, Ryerson University's Certificate in Food Security offers a certificate program that includes a whole Course Series which is focused on urban agriculture. Other universities and community colleges in Toronto are similarly developing urban agriculture curriculum. This supportive learning environment perhaps accounts in part for the very active urban agriculture movement that has developed over the years in Toronto.

## Next Steps

### **Centralize and coordinate information about urban food production in Toronto.**

- Create a community food-learning network that coordinates training, links into diverse, under-served neighbourhoods, connects community food leaders and garden coordinators, and builds capacity to implement new projects.
- Create an online calendar of events, workshops and training opportunities and publicize it widely.
- Create links between food organizations, gardening groups and novice growers.
- Create an online repository for information and research on urban agriculture and related topics.
- Begin the process of digitizing and sharing some of the contents of the Toronto Urban Food and Agriculture Learning Centre, a unique collection of materials based at FoodShare.

### **Identify new opportunities for training and education to build community capacity to grow food.**

- Provide more opportunities for hands-on training in food growing and commercial production.
- Develop and support demonstration gardens and farms in neighbourhoods, civic centres, and community centres across the city, including Riverdale and Far Enough Farm.
- Provide more mentorship opportunities and agricultural-extension-type support to urban growers.

### **Formalize food literacy and food production education across the education system.**

- Promote and strengthen programs that teach entrepreneurial and business planning skills along with growing skills, so that those who are training to be urban farmers can successfully launch small farm businesses.
- Engage more youth in garden education and food production training.
- Develop a multi-year curriculum emphasizing food literacy and growing skills for K -12 students.
- Develop secondary and post-secondary school curriculum and co-op opportunities related to urban agriculture and food production.
- Develop apprenticeship and work placement programs that link to educational institutions and programs.
- Initiate “grower to grower” exchanges of hands-on, practical information.
- Ensure a variety of community-based educational opportunities are available, including: composting, vermicomposting, rooftop gardening, world crops, business planning, introduction to growing food, season-extension, etc.

## **3. increase visibility and promotion**

A vast potential of untapped resources (including people, organizations, land and other materials) exists, yet often people are unaware of the urban agriculture possibilities—and even of existing projects—in Toronto. Food growing is sometimes “invisible” in communities, tucked in out-of-the-way places or known only to those who are already participating. There are so many examples of urban gardens animated by communities, artists and growers.

How can we spread the word, increase visibility, and “tell the stories” of the existing work that is going on in Toronto—all of which would promote involvement in urban agriculture and inspire people to “dig in”?

There is no doubt that Toronto’s urban agriculture movement is full of people and projects whose stories have the power to galvanize and inspire. Getting the word out, though, remains the challenge, despite the scattered promotional efforts already under way. Below, in the “Next Steps” section, are suggestions of ways to share these stories.

### **Leading by Example in Toronto**

#### **Toronto Community Gardening Network**

The current number of community gardens in Toronto is estimated to be more than one hundred. Toronto’s community gardeners have long worked together to support each other’s efforts and to encourage the development of even more gardens. The volunteer-run Toronto Community Garden Network (TCGN) is made up of interested and energetic individuals and organizations from across Toronto who are committed to greening and organic gardening and to making community gardening an integral part of city life. TCGN is instrumental in organizing the annual Seedy Saturday events that bring gardeners together to share seeds and celebrate the diversity of Toronto’s urban agriculture.

#### **Toronto Urban Growers**

Toronto Urban Growers (TUG) is an informal network of people and organizations involved in urban agriculture. Meeting approximately four times a year, TUG provides a forum for people to share information, strategize, network and organize. TUG also inaugurated Toronto’s first urban agriculture library; housed at FoodShare, this wonderful resource contains an extensive collection of books, magazines and pamphlets, available for exploration by anyone.

### **Next Steps**

#### **Raise the profile of existing projects and promote their future promise.**

- Develop the Toronto Urban Growers website into a comprehensive source on urban agriculture in Toronto, providing links to all existing resources and initiatives.
- Develop an online resource for Torontonians to easily find locally grown produce.

**Since its inception in 2006, “GROWN IN DETROIT” has become a household name for vegetable lovers looking for fresh, healthy and accessible produce in the city.**

“Grown in Detroit” fruits and vegetables are grown by families and youth in community gardens and urban farms throughout Detroit, Hamtramck, and Highland Park. The Grown in Detroit cooperative provides support to these urban growers to bring their produce to sell at farmers’ markets, restaurants and other retail outlets across the city.

- Host profile-raising events such as an Urban Food Film Festival, walking/biking tours, harvest festivals, etc.
- Develop an “adopt-a-planter” program for volunteer growers to steward small food gardens in municipal planter boxes.

#### **Assess, evaluate and recognize the progress of urban agriculture in Toronto.**

- Develop quantitative and qualitative indicators suitable for understanding and demonstrating the broad impacts of urban agriculture, and promote the use of these indicators.
- Encourage educational institutions and students to do research on urban agriculture in Toronto and make this research widely available.
- Develop a city awards program for various types of food gardens, such as balcony gardens, rooftop gardens, etc.

#### **Capture the unique appeal of city-grown food.**

- Develop a branding program for “Grown in TO” foods so people can identify these products at markets and stores.
- Create a map of urban gardens and signage to reveal where gardens are located across the city.
- Create new and innovative marketing strategies for city-grown food, such as mobile produce vending, neighbourhood produce stands, and direct market links.

## **4. add value to urban gardens**

There is untapped commercial potential for urban agriculture in this city. The issue of untapped land is addressed in Item #1: Link Growers to Land and Space. However, another major hurdle to food production (particularly larger scale and commercial food production) is the issue of access to quality compost for soil amendment. As well, post-harvest processing of urban-produced food is an issue; at present, few facilities exist where value can be added via food processing and thus increase the commercial potential of urban agriculture.

Appropriate facilities such as washing stations, community and commercial kitchens, business incubators and packing centres are critical for realizing the full economic potential for urban agriculture.

### **Leading by Example in Toronto**

#### **Mid-scale composting at FoodShare**

Composting is a vital part of urban agriculture. By composting our plant waste and then using the compost to improve the garden’s soil, we are closing the loop between production, consumption, and waste. FoodShare has a mid-scale compost processing operation. Food waste from the organization’s catering and Good Food Box operations is turned into rich, fertile soil that is used in their gardening programs.

#### **The West End Food Co-op**

The West End Food Co-op (WEFC) brings eaters, workers, farmers and community members together around a vision of local food security. Co-ordinating a broad range of community-driven food initiatives, such as the Sorauren Farmers’ Market and a community cannery, WEFC is in the process of opening a central food hub in Toronto’s Parkdale neighbourhood, including a community kitchen, café and a grocery store.



## Next Steps

### Use urban waste as a resource for urban gardening.

- Encourage composting at all scales: backyard, community, vermi-composting and mid-scale, by creating demonstration composting sites.
- Share information about how to begin composting, how to improve composting practices, and the benefits of composting and waste reduction.
- Facilitate access to City compost as a soil amendment for food-growing projects.

### Realize the full potential of urban-grown food.

- Develop facilities for post-harvest handling of city-grown food.
- Develop a spectrum of food-processing opportunities including community-based, mid-scale and commercial food-processing facilities.
- Develop a network of multi-faceted food hubs (combining growing with on-site food education, direct sales, cooking classes, etc.) across the city.

### Strengthen the financing of urban agriculture.

- Link social investors and seed capital to fledging initiatives.
- Create incentives for urban agriculture through City grants.
- Develop new funding models, such as competitions or crowd sourcing, to fund urban agriculture initiatives.
- Organize a funders' conference to educate funders on urban agriculture.

## 5. cultivate relationships

One of the intrinsic strengths of the urban agriculture movement is that food is a basic need—for everyone. And thus, everyone can potentially relate to any effort that makes fresh, healthy, local, nutritious, affordable, and culturally diverse food available—to everyone.

Urban agriculture unites constituencies of people across the broadest possible spectrum at the same time as it connects to our most basic personal and societal needs: good health, productive economies, and a sustainable environment. It provides a stepping stone for those who wish to eventually farm at a larger scale, making the transition from beginning farmer to productive farmer much easier.

How can we ensure that strong links are forged between the urban agriculture movement and all those who might be interested in it? Are the many personal and societal benefits of urban agriculture currently available and accessible to everyone?

Toronto is one of the most diverse cities in the world, with people from all over the globe finding a home here. People bring with them a vast store of knowledge and experience related to food and agriculture. The “Next Steps” section, on the following page, includes suggestions of ways to ensure that Toronto’s urban agriculture movement reflects this diversity and embraces all.

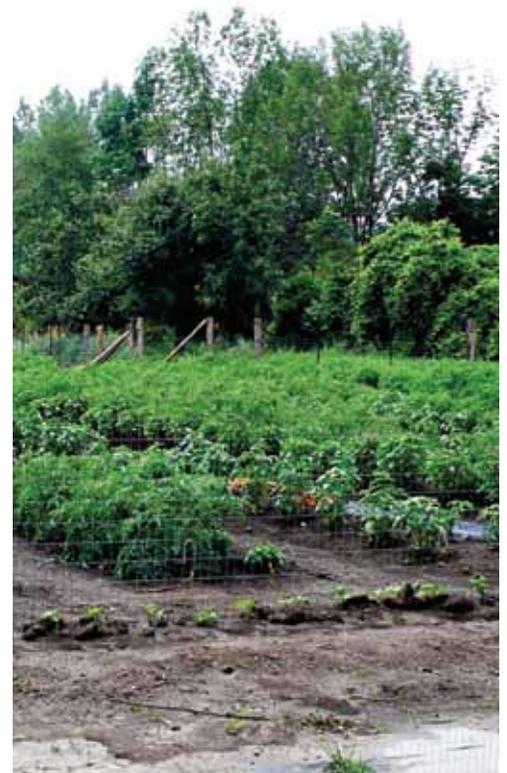
## Leading by Example in Toronto

### World Crops and Learning Gardens project

Torontonians from all over the world have been growing ethno-culturally diverse crops from their home country in their gardens for generations. Promoting and commercializing these “world crops” – for example, bottle gourd, callaloo,

**Renowned throughout North America's urban agriculture community, Growing Power is indeed a powerhouse of inspiration.** The

incredible productivity of its flagship 2.5-acre urban farm in Milwaukee is due to the amount and fertility of the compost produced by Growing Power: more than 180,000 pounds of waste per week is processed into soil amendments for use in the organization's various farm projects. As Growing Power points out, that's more than 10 million pounds of waste not going into Wisconsin and Illinois' landfills annually.



yard-long beans, okra, Asian eggplant and Indian red carrot— that grow and thrive in Toronto gardens and Greenbelt farms, can improve access to a more diverse range of fresh local food. The World Crops and Learning Gardens project is a network of over fourteen community-based sites growing some of these world crops and engaging urban newcomers through crop testing. The Learning Gardens are spread across the city—from Scarborough to Etobicoke—and several are even on rooftops.

### **Live Green Toronto's Community Animators provide the spark**

Sometimes all it takes is a little spark to turn a community's innovative food idea into action. That spark is what Live Green Toronto's Community Animators provide to community groups across the city. From developing workshops and fundraising strategies, to helping residents navigate the maze of regulations and permits, Live Green Toronto's animators help residents get their projects—such as tree plantings, eco-conservation initiatives and community gardens—off the ground. The City's Community Animator program is delivered by EcoSpark.

### **Global Roots at The Stop**

The Stop Community Food Centre is a hive of activity centred around food. One of The Stop's innovative projects is the Global Roots Garden—eight plots devoted to particular vegetables and herbs that are significant in the food cultures of ethnic communities with large populations in Toronto. The gardens, which feature plants as diverse as bitter melon, cardamom and lemongrass, are tended by seniors and youth, many of whom got involved with the project through The Stop's partnership with CultureLink, a newcomer settlement organization. Gardeners meet once a week to tend the plots, socialize and cook food together—and to demonstrate just how much food (particularly food not traditionally grown in Ontario) can be produced in a small space.

## **Next Steps**

### **Build institutional support for urban agriculture.**

- Encourage and support institutions to develop or host urban agriculture projects.
- Create opportunities for City government, universities, day care centres, seniors housing and other public entities to engage in urban agriculture activities and purchase city-grown food through local food procurement policies and targets.

### **Connect with diverse neighbourhoods and cultural communities across the city.**

- Develop partnerships with community groups and agencies working at the neighbourhood level in every ward to link communities to city-grown food, diverse cuisines, gardening resources and projects.
- Encourage city councillors to support their constituents and facilitate urban agriculture projects.
- Engage with cultural communities to implement and document new urban agriculture initiatives across the city.
- Fund community food animators to support neighbourhood level work.

### **Strengthen urban/rural linkages through partnerships, education and communication.**

- Support the implementation of the Greater Golden Horseshoe Food and Farming Action Plan to strengthen the food and farm cluster in the region.
- Work with regional farmers and Greater Toronto Area Agricultural Action Committee to promote locally grown food.
- Coordinate with regional partners to model and document new innovative urban/near-urban food production approaches.
- Support the establishment of urban/near-urban agricultural cooperatives.

### **The New Orleans Food and Farm Network began in 2002 to create a network of local and regional organizations and individuals addressing issues of food security.**

Using a model of Neighborhood Food Clusters, NOFFN works with neighbourhood-level partners to initiate collaborative actions to improve neighbourhood food security and spur local food economic activities. Through public education, training and assistance in creating food gardens in underserved areas with limited fresh food access, their goal is “growing growers” who then become community leaders.

## 6. develop supportive policies

While policy discussions can sometimes seem far removed from “on the ground” action, policies are indeed the backbone and framework that either support or hinder urban agriculture.

Many policies at both the municipal and provincial levels of government have an impact on urban agricultural activities in Toronto. Some policies support and facilitate the growing of food—such as the existing policy to include a community garden in every ward of Toronto. Other policies have had the effect of placing barriers in the way of urban agriculture activities—such as the prohibition against keeping backyard hens in Toronto.

What policy changes, municipally and provincially, could move urban agriculture forward in Toronto? What policy changes could be further studied in order to explore their pros and cons?

Throughout this document, there are suggestions that move across and through various levels of jurisdiction and control—from neighbourhood to community to municipality to region to province. Sometimes, the lines of connection are clear-cut and easily delineated, but in most instances they require coordination and cooperation across jurisdictions. Currently, there is no one governmental body, community organization or agency in this coordinating role.

Of all the policy suggestions presented in the “Next Steps” section that follows, the policy that would have the most impact—the change that would move urban agriculture forward in the most efficient and effective manner—is the one that encourages the City to create an Urban Agriculture Program.

From this one step, all else could grow.

### Leading by Example in Toronto

#### Toronto’s Official Plan

Toronto’s Official Plan (OP) was last revised in 2002 and includes supportive language related to urban agriculture and community gardening. The OP considers community gardening and urban agriculture to be part of a high-quality public realm, Toronto’s green space system, and as a type of community service. This activity is promoted in a number of places throughout the OP. The OP also recognizes the importance of protecting the region’s prime agricultural land.

#### Toronto Food Strategy

In 2010, Toronto Public Health published “Cultivating Food Connections: Toward a Healthy and Sustainable Food System for Toronto.” This food strategy proposes a new vision for Toronto’s food, one that unites health and city building, and promotes a health-focused food system. The food strategy recognizes the importance of community gardening and urban agriculture in a number of places.

### In 2011, San Francisco amended its Administrative Code by creating an Urban Agriculture Program to oversee and coordinate all of the City’s urban agriculture activities.

This bold step also identified a number of visionary, overarching goals for urban agriculture in San Francisco, such as developing incentives for property owners to allow temporary urban agriculture projects, particularly on vacant properties awaiting development; creating a “one-stop shop” for urban agriculture to provide information, programming and technical assistance to all San Francisco residents, businesses and organizations working to engage in urban agriculture; and opening garden resource centres in neighbourhoods across the city. The new law also requires the Mayor and the City Administrator to develop a Strategic Plan for the Urban Agriculture Program by December 31, 2012. The plan will contain baseline data on urban agriculture in San Francisco, including an accounting of all city funding and resources, a list of all local urban agriculture programs, a count of all active and inactive sites and site coordinators, a count of waiting lists for community gardens, and an assessment of resident, organization and business needs.

## Next Steps

### **Update City policies, zoning and bylaws to enable and encourage urban agriculture.**

- Update the Official Plan to include stronger endorsements of urban agriculture and community gardening as widely acceptable land-uses that enhance the City's vision of vibrant, healthy and active urban environments that engage diverse communities.
- Ensure that existing and future zoning designations do not restrict urban agriculture or any of its supporting activities, by allowing food production (for both commercial and non-commercial purposes) and related activities in most zoning categories, and introducing an "urban agriculture" zoning category for use in designated locations.
- Examine existing bylaws that prevent the sale of Toronto-grown food through Community Shared Agriculture programs, at farmers' markets, and at the place of production (farm gate).
- Allow for backyard hens to be kept in the city.

### **Work with the City to implement urban agriculture and community gardening initiatives.**

- Encourage the City to create and fund an Urban Agriculture program, which would support, promote and facilitate the broad diversity of urban agriculture activities in Toronto, and coordinate activities across City Divisions.
- Encourage Toronto Water and other City Divisions to promote urban agriculture as green infrastructure—for example, as part of stormwater management plans.
- Encourage Toronto Public Health to promote and disseminate the Urban Gardening Soil Assessment Guide.
- Publish a guide on how to navigate the policy, food safety, and regulatory landscape related to growing and selling food in the City.

### **Work with provincial ministries to support urban agriculture activities.**

- Revise the Association of Supervisors of Public Health Inspectors of Ontario (ASPHIO) guidelines to allow urban producers to sell food grown in their backyards and at farmers' markets.
- Encourage the Ministry of the Environment to develop a process to fast-track approvals for mid-scale composting facilities.
- Encourage the Ontario Ministry of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs (OMAFRA) to examine the eligibility of urban farms under the current Farm Business Registration rules.
- Request that the Municipal Property Assessment Corporation (MPAC) study the possibility of establishing a small-scale urban farm designation and study the tax implications for the City of Toronto.
- Work with the Ontario Ministry of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs to enhance the resources available to urban farmers.
- Improve communication between the City of Toronto and province through an OMAFRA regional representative.

# looking forward

The plans and recommendations contained in this report cover extensive ground and call for the weaving together of many different threads. No one organization or level of government can do it all, and that is indeed the strength of this vision for urban agriculture. It will take energetic work and commitment from a diversity of people, organizations and governments.

We have identified four immediate goals from which all other priorities and next steps can be facilitated.

- 1. Create an Urban Agriculture program at the City of Toronto.**
- 2. Update City policies to support and implement urban agriculture.**
- 3. Provide incentives (financial and/or other) to groups and individuals starting or growing their urban agriculture initiatives.**
- 4. Develop a website that links to all resources, organizations and initiatives to encourage collaboration and realize the full benefits of urban agriculture.**

There are many possible routes that lead to an expanded urban agriculture vision for Toronto, but these paths all have at their heart one basic goal: healthy, sustainable, culturally diverse, accessible, affordable food for everyone. We're en route, but we're not there yet. We've got a lot of growing to do, and many, many enthusiastic hands to do the digging.

The following chart provides a summary of actions needed scale up urban agriculture in the City of Toronto.

## Link Growers to Land and Space

Compile an online inventory for making strategic connections between growers and suitable growing space.

- Identify City-owned parks and public space suitable for urban gardening and community greenhouses.
- Work with institutional partners including the TDSB, TRCA and Hydro One to make information about suitable land available to growers.
- Link to existing land-sharing initiatives such as YIMBY and ExtraShare.
- Identify rooftops in Toronto that are structurally appropriate and potentially available for growing food.
- Identify existing greenhouse space available in the city and the conditions to its access.

Support growers and land owners to develop mutually beneficial land tenure arrangements that result in new urban agriculture initiatives.

- Research and share urban land tenure and ownership models.
- Increase City capacity to facilitate the development of community gardens and urban agriculture in city parks.
- Develop resources to support site assessment, business and farm planning, lease negotiations, and identification of appropriate on-farm infrastructure.

## Strengthen Education and Training

Centralize and coordinate information about urban food production in Toronto.

- Create a community food-learning network that coordinates training, links into diverse underserved neighbourhoods, connects community food leaders and garden coordinators, and builds capacity to implement new projects.
- Create an online calendar of events, workshops and training opportunities and publicize it widely.
- Create links between food organizations, gardening groups and novice growers.
- Create an on-line repository for information and research on urban agriculture and related topics.
- Begin the process of digitizing and sharing some of the contents of the Toronto Urban Food and Agriculture Learning Centre, a unique collection of materials based at FoodShare.

Identify new opportunities for training and education to build community capacity to grow food.

- Provide more opportunities for hands-on training in food growing and commercial production.
- Develop and support demonstration gardens and farms in neighbourhoods, civic centres, and community centres across the city, including Riverdale and Far Enough Farm.
- Provide more mentorship opportunities and agricultural-extension-type support to urban growers.

Formalize food literacy and food production education across the education system.

- Promote and strengthen programs that teach entrepreneurial and business planning skills along with growing skills, so that those who are training to be urban farmers can successfully launch small farm businesses.
- Engage more youth in garden education and food production training.
- Develop a multi-year curriculum emphasizing food literacy and growing skills for K -12 students.
- Develop secondary and post-secondary school curriculum and co-op opportunities related to urban agriculture and food production.
- Develop apprenticeship and work placement programs that link to educational institutions and programs.
- Initiate “grower to grower” exchanges of hands-on, practical information.
- Ensure a variety of community-based educational opportunities are available, including: composting, vermicomposting, rooftop gardening, world crops, business planning, introduction to growing food, season-extension, etc.

## Increase Visibility and Promotion

Raise the profile of existing projects and promote their future promise.

- Develop the Toronto Urban Growers website into a comprehensive source on urban agriculture in Toronto, providing links to all existing resources and initiatives.
- Develop an online resource for Torontonians to easily find locally grown produce.
- Host profile-raising events such as an urban food film festival, walking and biking tours, harvest festivals, etc.
- Develop an “adopt-a-planter” program for volunteer growers to steward small food gardens in municipal planter boxes.

Assess, evaluate and recognize the progress of urban agriculture in Toronto.

- Develop quantitative and qualitative indicators suitable for understanding and demonstrating the broad impacts of urban agriculture, and promote the use of these indicators.
- Encourage educational institutions and students to do research on urban agriculture in Toronto and make this research widely available.
- Develop a City awards program for various types of food gardens, such as balcony gardens, rooftop gardens, etc.

Capture the unique appeal of city-grown food.

- Develop a branding program for “Grown in TO” foods so people can identify these products at markets and stores.
- Create a map of urban gardens and signage to reveal where gardens are located across the city.
- Create new and innovative marketing strategies for city-grown food, such as mobile produce vending, neighbourhood produce stands, and direct market links.

## Add Value to Urban Gardens

Use urban waste as a resource for urban gardening.

- Encourage composting at all scales: backyard, community, vermicomposting and mid-scale, by creating demonstration composting sites.
- Share information about how to begin composting, how to improve composting practices, and the benefits of composting and waste reduction.
- Facilitate access to City compost as a soil amendment for food-growing projects.

Realize the full potential of urban-grown food.

- Develop facilities for post-harvest handling of city-grown food.
- Develop a spectrum of food-processing opportunities including community-based, mid-scale and commercial food-processing facilities.
- Develop a network of multi-faceted food hubs (combining growing with on-site food education, direct sales, cooking classes, etc.) across the city.

Strengthen the financing of urban agriculture.

- Link social investors and seed capital to fledging initiatives.
- Create incentives for urban agriculture through City grants.
- Develop new funding models, such as competitions or crowd sourcing, to fund urban agriculture initiatives.
- Organize a funders' conference to educate funders on urban agriculture

## Cultivate Relationships

Build institutional support for urban agriculture.

- Encourage and support institutions to develop or host urban agriculture projects.
- Create opportunities for City government, universities, day care centres, seniors housing and other public entities to engage in urban agriculture activities and purchase city-grown food through local food procurement policies and targets.

Connect with diverse neighbourhoods and cultural communities across the city.

- Develop partnerships with community groups and agencies working at the neighbourhood level in every ward to link communities to city-grown food, diverse cuisines, gardening resources and projects.
- Encourage city councillors to support their constituents and facilitate urban agriculture projects.
- Engage with cultural communities to implement and document new urban agriculture initiatives across the city.
- Support the development of the Growing Food Justice For All Initiative.
- Fund community food animators to support neighbourhood level work.

Strengthen urban/rural linkages through partnerships, education and communication.

- Support the implementation of the Greater Golden Horseshoe Food and Farming Action Plan to strengthen the food and farm cluster in the region.
- Work with regional farmers and Greater Toronto Area Agricultural Action Committee to promote locally grown food.
- Coordinate with regional partners to model and document new innovative urban/near-urban food production approaches.
- Support the establishment of urban/near-urban agricultural cooperatives.

## Develop Supportive Policies

Update City policies, zoning and bylaws to enable and encourage urban agriculture.

- Update the Official Plan to include stronger endorsements of urban agriculture and community gardening as widely acceptable land-uses that enhance the City's vision of vibrant, healthy and active urban environments.
- Ensure that existing and future zoning designations do not restrict urban agriculture or any of its supporting activities, by allowing food production (for both commercial and non-commercial purposes) and related activities in most zoning categories, and introducing an "urban agriculture" zoning category for use in designated locations.
- Examine existing bylaws that prevent the sale of Toronto-grown food through CSAs, at farmers' markets, and at the place of production (farm gate).
- Allow for backyard hens to be kept in the city.

Work with the City to implement urban agriculture and community gardening initiatives.

- Encourage the City to create and fund an Urban Agriculture Program, which would support, promote and facilitate the broad diversity of urban agriculture activities in Toronto, and coordinate activities across City Divisions.
- Encourage Toronto Water and other City Divisions to promote urban agriculture as green infrastructure—for example, as part of stormwater management plans.
- Encourage Toronto Public Health to promote and disseminate the Urban Gardening Soil Assessment Guide.
- Publish a guide on how to navigate the policy, food safety, and regulatory landscape related to growing and selling food in the city.

Work with provincial ministries to support urban agriculture activities.

- Revise the Association of Supervisors of Public Health Inspectors of Ontario (ASPHIO) guidelines to allow urban producers to sell food grown in their backyards and at farmers' markets.
- Encourage the Ministry of the Environment to develop a process to fast-track approvals for mid-scale composting facilities.
- Encourage the Ontario Ministry of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs to examine the eligibility of urban farms under the current Farm Business Registration rules.
- Request that the Municipal Property Assessment Corporation (MPAC) study the possibility of establishing a small-scale urban farm designation and study the tax implications for the City of Toronto.
- Work with the Ontario Ministry of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs to enhance the resources available to urban farmers.
- Improve communication between the City of Toronto and province through an OMAFFRA regional representative.



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