

Background

The Need for SUA: Impacts of Conventional Agriculture

- Environmental impacts of conventional agriculture:
 - Soil: erosion, compaction, loss of organic matter, decreased productivity, salinization, desertification
 - Water: biocides run off, causing pollution, eutrophication, "dead zones", reduced fishery production, high rates of water depletion
 - Land conversion degrades and fragments natural ecosystems, reducing overall biodiversity and removing sources of carbon sequestration
- Why urban agriculture?
 - Offset the urban heat island effect by mitigating air pollution, providing more urban greenspace, and increasing stormwater infiltration
 - Reduce energy and shipping costs for farmers, create local green jobs, empower historically marginalized communities

Sustainability Principles and Measures

- Five key principles (FAO, 2020): food system efficiency, protecting resources, improved labour standards, enhanced resilience, equitable governance
- Conservation agriculture, nutrient management, ecological intensification, IPM
- Consider local social contexts: racial and ethnic diversity, income, education



Two Fresh City-operated farms: Downsview Park (left) and Baka Mobile (right). Photos courtesy of Courtney Patterson.

Methods

Part I: Current Efforts

- Policy scan of current efforts across municipal, provincial, and federal levels
- Literature review for existing assessments of current policy and interviews with policymakers or leaders in SUA

Part II: Interviews with Front-Line Actors

- Interviews with four front-line actors:
 - 1) Ran Goel, CEO and Founder of Fresh City Farms, a for-profit grocery delivery company.
 - 2) Julianne Keech, Farm Manager of Fresh City Farms.
 - 3) Randy Bhagwan, Communication Coordinator of Malvern Food Security Workgroup, Garden Lead at Malvern Community Gardens.
 - 4) Lorraine Johnson, author of numerous books on gardening and environmental issues, self-described cultivation activist.
- Interviewees with diverse backgrounds to reveal sector-specific (for profit, community) challenges and perspectives regarding the implementation of urban agriculture, and gaps in the system that affect all urban growers



Little's Road Garden, one of three Malvern Community Gardens. Photo courtesy of Randy Bhagwan.

Results

Part I: Current Efforts

Municipal

- 2012:
 - endorsed the *Golden Horseshoe Agriculture and Agri-Food Strategy*, committed to SUA pilot projects
 - developed the report, *GrowTO: An Urban Agriculture Action Plan for Toronto*
- 2013:
 - Toronto Agriculture Program (TAP) formed by Toronto City Council to coordinate *GrowTO* tasks
 - TAP released 2013-2014 workplan with detailed steps for developing SUA

Provincial

- currently no plans or policies that specifically support urban agriculture
 - Ontario Trillium Foundation: *Opportunities for Growth: An Urban Agriculture Toolkit* (2017)
 - relevant provincial regulations focused on agricultural operations (soil, nutrient, biocide management); well-positioned to implement decisive measures to promote sustainable agricultural practices
 - Canada-Ontario Environmental Farm Plan (EFP) and Lake Erie Agriculture Demonstrating Sustainability (LEADS) initiatives are first steps towards incentivizing of sustainable agricultural practices

Federal

- *Achieving a Sustainable Future: A Federal Sustainable Development Strategy for Canada*
 - Local Food Infrastructure Fund (\$50 million CAD): funding for community-based non-profit organizations to invest in improving accessibility and infrastructure around food security
 - First Nations outreach sessions: hosted to work towards supporting Indigenous-led agricultural participation
 - Hired Indigenous Elder to liaise and enhance awareness around Indigenous growing practices

Intersections of Social and Environmental Issues:

"We need to stress that everything is connected... social justice, urban agriculture, biodiversity, climate change, economic disparities, marginalization, just on and on... these are systems of production." (Johnson)

Consumer Education:

"The bulk of our customer base is very privileged, and we try to get them to think about food as a political issue, and realize the impacts of the food system as it is." (Goel)

Lack of Awareness:

"People come to the park and really show an interest in what we're doing and growing really close to home, and they didn't even know that was available to them or possible." (Keech)
 "People come and ask if they can buy food from us, they don't realize it's a community garden." (Bhagwan)

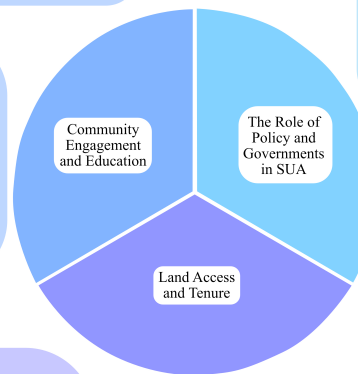
"Aesthetic" Standards:

"We're not allowed to have trellises or structures over a certain height, we have to keep all the grass cut." (Bhagwan)
 "There's a huge aesthetic barrier to urban growing...landscapes within [new] development should have all components of native plant habitat and food growing possibilities... rather than simply sodding over with lawn." (Johnson)

Government Responsibility:

"We're relying on these non-profits and charities to do the work that governments should be doing, and addressing food insecurity at the margins, rather than tackling it in a decisive way through government programs." (Goel)
 "Power structures [need to] help facilitate and remove barriers to [community-level governance], and recognize the power within community." (Johnson)

Part 2: Interview Themes



Standards and Cost of Food:

"The government should be increasing minimum wage and benefits, and setting environmental standards higher so that we're forced to charge more for food... the bottom line is we pay too little for food." (Goel)

Policymaker Attitudes:

"We need to see more city leaders really focusing on these areas as more than just a place to spend free time." (Bhagwan)

Leases and Sustainable Practices:

"There [has been] an underlying uncertainty... that has informed a lot of decisions we've made about how much to invest in infrastructure and soil, and other permanent or semi-permanent things." (Keech)

Garden Governance:

"It's really the city who would enforce rules for us. But our gardeners prefer to handle things within house, because the scare always is that if we involve the city too much, they might just take the space away from us." (Bhagwan)

Key Policy Recommendations

Municipal

- 1) Establish a municipal division dedicated solely to SUA.
- 2) Provide long-term, legally binding leases to community and allotment gardeners.
- 3) Reform by-laws and municipal code to support urban agriculture. Increase accessibility of unused public lands, subsidize rezoning applications, allow community gardens to sell produce.
- 4) Push new developments to add growing space on roofs and balconies.
- 5) Incorporate sustainable agricultural practices into environmental planning and regulation.

Provincial

- 6) Reform labour standards to encourage careers in SUA.
- 7) Include SUA in the K-12 public science curriculum.

Federal

- 8) Improve Indigenous access to urban growing space.
- 9) Sponsor urban growing careers.
- 10) Fund SUA education and research.

Selected References

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