



URBAN AGRICULTURE & INNOVATIVE PRODUCTION POLICY PROJECT

City Governance and Public Funding

Local Policy Barriers and Strategies for Urban Agriculture

A city government's structure—how policy decisions are made, who makes them, and how municipal funds are raised and allocated—directly affects whether and how farmers can access land, water, funding, and other support. This structure is what we mean by *governance*. When urban farmers understand how governance works, they can be better equipped to navigate local government, access programs and funding, and lobby for updates to local policies. When city leaders recognize how governance impacts agriculture, they can make targeted changes—like creating staff positions or adjusting funding priorities—to more directly support urban farmers.

Who Does What in City Government (Relevant to Urban Agriculture)

CITY COUNCIL

Passes ordinances and approves budgets

MAYOR

Issues executive orders, appoints department heads, and sets funding and policymaking priorities

CITY MANAGER

In some cities, coordinates the day-to-day business of running the city government and implementing policies passed by city council

PLANNING AND ZONING DEPARTMENT

Plans for and regulates land use and zoning

PARKS AND RECREATION

Manages land and water use on city-owned parks lands

WATER AND SEWER DEPARTMENT

Controls water permits, rates, and connections

PUBLIC HEALTH DEPARTMENT

Regulates food safety and administers nutrition and food access programs

ENVIRONMENT AND SUSTAINABILITY OFFICE

Implements city sustainability initiatives, including green infrastructure and climate resilience programs

COUNTY GOVERNMENT

May coordinate with the city on some services, like parks and open space administration

NONPROFITS

Fill in gaps in services, on their own or in partnership with the city, e.g. by coordinating community gardens or farmers markets

CITY HIGHLIGHT



New Orleans's Urban Agriculture Liaison

In October 2024, New Orleans established an Urban Agriculture Liaison role within the city's Office of Resilience & Sustainability in response to the A Greener New Orleans campaign, led by a coalition of local farmers, gardeners, and nonprofit organizations. The Urban Agriculture Liaison serves as a point of contact for farmers, helps farmers navigate permitting processes and water access, convenes working group meetings, and meets with city officials to recommend policy improvements to support urban agriculture. Embedding this role in city government helps make farming visible and supported in the city by providing a direct bridge between farmers and city departments.

City Governance and Public Funding Barriers and Policy Strategies

Urban agriculture is often overlooked by local governments. By explicitly incorporating urban agriculture concerns into city governance, policymakers can help connect urban farmers and local government. City policies, staffing, and budget decisions can all shape whether urban farmers can access resources, land, and services. Below are common challenges urban farmers face while navigating city government, along with policy strategies cities can adopt to better support farmers.

COMMON BARRIERS FOR FARMERS

Farmers do not have a clear point of contact in the city to help them to understand policies or navigate permitting processes.

Urban agriculture programs are vulnerable to budget cuts, and may be excluded from long-term funding priorities.

Nonprofits serve as primary service providers, which can lead to limited democratic oversight and uneven delivery of services.

STRATEGIES FOR POLICYMAKERS

Appoint city staff or establish a specific urban agriculture office to serve as a liaison to farmers.

Integrate urban agriculture into annual budgets, economic development programs, or dedicated funds like climate resilience initiatives.

Form a city-affiliated or closely coordinated food or urban agriculture policy council to guide the implementation of urban agriculture policies and serve as a forum for public engagement with city policies.

Best Practices for Farmers to Engage with Local Government

- **Find the right point of contact.** Identify the city office, department, or staff member responsible for urban agriculture or food systems.
- **Leverage nonprofit support.** If your city lacks a dedicated urban agriculture office, connect with local nonprofits that support urban farmers through policy advocacy, technical assistance, or community organizing.
- **Know your policy landscape.** Look for relevant programs and policies not just at the city level but also at the county and state level.
- **Participate in local government.** Attend public meetings, submit comments during policy reviews, and connect with like-minded neighbors to advocate for long-term city support for urban agriculture.



This fact sheet is part of a series of resources on legal topics related to urban agriculture and innovative production. It was produced with support from the Office of Urban Agriculture and Innovative Production at the U.S. Department of Agriculture.

Want to learn more?

View the whole project at cafs.vermontlaw.edu/projects/urban-agriculture-and-innovative-production or scan the QR code.



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