

Information about the Kentucky State University Cooperative Extension Program



Urban Agriculture in Kentucky

Nia Ragland, Graduate Research Assistant

Cora Teets, Research & Extension Associate

Theoneste Nzaramyimana, PhD, Assistant Professor for Urban Agriculture

Editor: Marie Merci Uwimbabazi

Introduction

- Urban agriculture in Kentucky is rapidly becoming a viable solution to food insecurity, economic development, and environmental sustainability. By growing food in urban settings, communities can increase access to fresh produce, reduce food costs, and foster local engagement.
- Kentucky's Urban Agriculture Landscape shows that most urban growers in Kentucky farms are for personal or community use, with only 11% operating for profit.
- The Sustainable farming practices are widely used in urban agricultural settings (Poulsen, Neff, & Winch, 2017). These include:
 - o 60% use composting
 - o 54% practice crop rotation
 - o 49% follow organic growing methods
 - o 46% use low-till or no-till practices
- Kentucky's agricultural landscape is changing with the number of farms decreased from 75,966 in 2017 to 69,425 in 2022, an 8.6% decline (Szumigala & Szumigala, 2018).
- The average farm size in Kentucky is 179 acres, compared to the national average of 463 acres (Szumigala & Szumigala, 2018).
- The state's largest urban farm spans 40 acres, with seven known urban farming operations statewide (Szumigala & Szumigala, 2018).
- Farmers and households are encouraged to participate in urban agriculture by establishing more community initiatives. These initiatives help maximize land use, improve access to fresh produce, and strengthen local food security, making urban farming an essential component of Kentucky's agricultural future.

Urban Agriculture Practices for Kentuckians



- **Container Gardening:** Residents can grow herbs and vegetables in pots or buckets in small spaces.
- **Raised Bed Gardening:** Use controlled soil conditions for efficient farming.
- **Vertical Gardening:** Maximize space by growing plants upwards with trellises.
- **Composting:** Convert organic waste into nutrient-rich soil.
- **Hydroponics & Aquaponics:** Grow crops in nutrient-rich water without soil.
- **Rooftop Gardening:** Utilize rooftops to grow food in urban spaces.
- **Windowsill Gardening:** Use natural light to cultivate herbs and microgreens indoors.

Benefits of Urban Agriculture

- **Improving Access to Fresh Produce**
 - Urban farms and community gardens provide fresh fruits and vegetables in areas with limited grocery access, helping to combat food deserts. For example, in West Louisville, where 60,000 residents have access to only two full-service grocery stores.
- **Reducing Food Costs**
 - Locally grown food lowers transportation costs, making produce more affordable through CSA programs and farmers' markets.
- **Building Stronger Communities**
 - Community gardens foster social connections, increase civic engagement, lower crime rates, and promote youth engagement in STEM and environmental awareness.
- **Promoting Sustainability**
 - Urban farms use eco-friendly practices, reduce carbon emissions, support pollinators, and enhance urban biodiversity.



Challenges Faced by Kentucky's Urban Growers

- **Limited land access:** High land costs and urban zoning restrictions create barriers for urban growers.
- **Financial constraints:** Lack of funding for supplies, infrastructure, and expansion.
- **Soil contamination:** Industrial areas, particularly in Louisville, face soil pollution concerns.
- **Lack of awareness and education:** Inadequate knowledge about urban farming systems, opportunities, and benefits.

Urban Ag Initiatives in Kentucky:

- *Iroquois Urban Farm* – Louisville, KY
- *Berea Urban Farm* – Berea, KY
- *Louisville Grows Urban Agriculture Program* – Louisville, KY
- *AppHarvest* – Morehead, KY
- *Redden Gardens* – Covington, KY
- *CommonWealth Gardens* – Frankfort, KY
- *Thorn Hill Garden* – Frankfort, KY

Takeaways:

- Urban agriculture in Kentucky is growing as a key strategy to enhance food security, community well-being, and environmental resilience.
- By supporting local farming initiatives and adopting sustainable practices, Kentuckians can contribute to a healthier and more sustainable food system.

Sources

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