

Urban Agriculture

Summary and Highlights March 2021

Ohio agriculture is essential to the state's economy and social fabric of our communities. As part of Extension's commitment to equitable engagement throughout Ohio, a robust urban agriculture team of faculty, staff, students, and volunteers serve in the state's 14 Metropolitan Statistical Areas (MSAs). Two primary areas of urban agriculture focus include:

- Urban Agriculture and Food Systems
- Urban Environmental Horticulture and Urban Forestry

In addition to specialists in a variety of related areas, OSU Extension personnel collaborate with partners and volunteers to address local and statewide issues. Addressing the distinct urban context creates connection rather than divide along the urban-rural interface.

In urban communities, interest in agriculture continues to grow. Many Ohioans engage in aspects of urban agriculture including those growing at home, in community gardens, or through commercial operations. It's more important now than ever to address issues of food security, food safety, economic opportunity, environmental sustainability, cultural influences, workforce developments, policy implications, social impacts, and other concerns. With multiple jurisdictions and diverse stakeholder perspectives, Extension serves an important role to convene, educate, and engage in respectful community participatory research to advance urban agriculture.

The following examples address NUEL and ECOP questions and illustrate some of Extension's urban ag initiatives in Ohio. These are just a few examples to demonstrate the geographic reach and programmatic impact in Ohio.

Extension eliminates food deserts and addresses food security through urban agriculture.

- OSU Extension personnel serve on and/or lead local food policy coalitions at local and state levels.
- OSU Extension, Cuyahoga County receives Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) funding through the City of Cleveland for a [Summer Sprout program](#) that provides soil testing, seeds, starter plants, soil amendments, tilling services, raised bed materials, educational outreach and support to participating gardens. OSU Extension works with community partners, including the City of Cleveland Land Bank, who develops land tenureship for garden sites. In 2020, Summer Sprout supported 13 new community gardens in the City of Cleveland, adding to the 139 that returned from the 2019 growing season. [Community gardens in Cleveland](#) are diverse; neighborhood clubs, schools, faith-based groups, non-profit agencies, and many others. [2020 Summer Sprout Annual Report](#)
- [Produce Perks](#) is a SNAP incentive program based out of Cuyahoga County that was developed by partners of the Cleveland-Cuyahoga County Food Policy Coalition (FPC) and administered by Ohio State University Extension, Cuyahoga County. The Produce Perks SNAP incentive program is offered to all residents receiving SNAP benefits each time they shop at a participating farmers' market or farm stand. 2019 statewide impacts – \$912,000 in healthy food sales; \$16,126 SNAP consumers; 500+ farmers impacted.
- OSU Extension Franklin County is part of The Buckeye ISA grant partnership that includes Nationwide Children's Hospital, OSU dining services, the Initiative for AgriCultural Transformation as well as seven community liaisons to teach families with children how to grow their own food to provide for their personal and family food security as well as have the opportunity for sales to The Ohio State University as a small food production business. This W. K. Kellogg grant sponsored program has enrolled 100 families in economically disadvantaged neighborhoods in Franklin County and has had successful sales to OSU dining services for use in Traditions at Scott dining hall.
- Dayton, Ohio Community [Center to sustainably diminish a local "Food Desert"](#)

Extension builds new businesses through urban agriculture.

- Urban agribusiness education is provided by OSU Extension throughout the state.
- The Ohio Master Urban Farmer program was developed by OSU Extension in Franklin County (Columbus) in 2014. The program is a 10-week course designed to give participants the knowledge and skills needed to produce and market food in an urban environment.
- The Market Gardener Training program was developed by OSU Extension in Cuyahoga County (Cleveland) in 2011. The program is a 10-week course designed to give participants the knowledge and skills needed to produce and market food in an urban environment.
- In Akron, OSU Extension, Summit County engages with immigrant and refugee communities to assist with gardening skills.
- In Cleveland, financial institutions fund a long-standing [Gardening for Greenbacks](#) program, administered through the city's Department on Economic Development and pre-requisite training provided by OSU Extension, Cuyahoga County. OSU Extension provides the marketing gardening training program.
- OSU Extension supports urban environmental horticulture. There are 642 green industry companies based in Hamilton County (Cincinnati), with an average number of 15 employees per company. The 642 companies represent almost 10,000 employees. Floriculture encompasses 226 businesses in Hamilton County, ranking 3rd among all Ohio counties in the number of floriculture firms. Cincinnati ranks 7th in the state in equivalent wholesale value of the floriculture industry and 6th in covered (greenhouse) production. In a typical year OSU Extension, Hamilton County answers over 1,000 questions through calls and e-mails, provides direct technical support to over 350 green industry individuals, and makes over 100 on-site green industry visits. They host 35 educational workshops which earn Hamilton County green industry employees more than 250 hours of Ohio Pesticide Applicator License Continuing Education Units (CEUs).

Extension teaches youth workforce skills through urban agriculture.

- OSU Extension, Franklin County and the Ohio Farm Bureau Foundation are hosting ExploreAg camps. [ExploreAg](#) is a unique FREE camp experience for high school freshmen, sophomores, and juniors to explore various careers in agriculture. Students interact with and learn directly from teachers, scientists, and researchers. Subject areas include food science, precision agriculture, animal science, natural resources, management skills, technology, and agricultural business. In addition to the classroom experience, scholars will participate in field experiences that highlight cutting-edge research and meet industry partners to provide a glimpse of various careers in related fields. Sessions will be focused on soft skills include interviewing, resume building, and public speaking to prepare participants for the workforce.
- OSU Extension, Franklin County has partnered with Scotts Miracle Gro, OSU Extension Farm to School and Columbus City Schools to provide the materials and educational outreach to teachers to support the development of indoor controlled environment agriculture and outdoor raised bed production experiential learning spaces to all 75 Columbus City School Elementary Schools impacting over 37,000 student per year in Ohio's largest school district.

Extension builds community through urban agriculture.

- OSU Extension hosts and supports Farm to Table events. For example, in the Toledo, OH area, the event provides an opportunity for participants to enjoy a breakfast featuring an Ohio-grown and produced menu and a self-guided tour. Community is fostered among urban-suburban-rural residents.
- OSU Extension supports community garden networks in many ways. In Stark County, the [Community Garden Network](#) is part of extensive urban agriculture initiatives in the Canton, OH area, supported by faculty, staff, students, and local community foundations.



- Master Gardeners are instrumental in fostering community. In Ohio's 15 most populated counties, 1,339 Master Gardener Volunteers (MGVs) contributed 165,945 hours in 2019 for a value of nearly \$2 million. OSU Extension's leadership has attracted diverse volunteers who engage as part of neighborhood communities making a real difference with youth, seniors, and everyone in between.
- [The Good Natured Garden Partners](#), led by OSU Extension, Mahoning County, is a program in collaboration with schools and youth programs throughout the Mahoning Valley. Youth groups team up with at least one adult to form a "growing team." Teams can also be sponsored by community organizations. Each "growing team" plants a garden and then brings their produce and flowers to the "End of Summer Garden Party" in order to compete for prizes and recognition. As part of the program, youth members gain positive relationships, develop a sense of ownership, generate an appreciation of plants, understand food production, and are rewarded through positive behavior and achievement.
- The [Mansfield Microfarm](#) on one of OSU's regional campuses provides a sustainable urban ag model. Led by an OSU urban ag team member and associate professor from OSU's [College of Arts & Sciences](#), this project has been captured in a [documentary](#) and this [Growing Community](#) article.
- [Learning About Food in Urban Communities](#), a publication from a HUD-funded project in OSU's university district neighborhood of Weinland Park (OSU Extension, Franklin County).

Extension teaches about nutrition, agriculture, and food through urban agriculture.

- OSU Extension's interdisciplinary approach to education naturally links community nutrition programs, agriculture and food systems. With Extension specialists in colleges and units across the university, this connects agriculture with public health, nursing, the medical center, and more.
- Active duty military veterans participate a five-month farming and gardening training program called the Heroes Garden. The project was a collaboration between the OSU Extension Franklin County Office and the Central Ohio Veterans Administration Healthcare System. Veterans participated in classroom sessions on urban farming and gardening topics in the early spring and then planted and maintained a vegetable garden at the new Extension Teaching and Learning Gardens at Waterman Farm on campus. Participants reported positive health outcomes such as reduced stress levels and increased fresh vegetable consumption by participating in the program.
- Early in 2020 when consumers were interested in gardening and growing their own food, not only was education share about gardening, but also one on [Backyard Poultry Production](#). Many consultations were also provided to consumers regarding meat processing.

Other

- These and additional examples are being further explored through a 2021 Ohio urban ag case study series, with the objective of better understanding and illustrating urban agriculture ventures and Extension's role in fostering impacts.
- [Urban Agriculture Stories](#), 2019
- [Urban Ag Farm Tour Series](#), 2019 (OSU Extension, Franklin County and the Columbus Urban Farmers Network)
- Ohio State has urban ag team members engaged in local food system projects, in USDA Urban County Committees, the Urban County Farm Bureau Coalition, the National Urban Extension Leaders (NUEL), the Western Center for Metropolitan Extension and Research, and other groups.
- To support peers, the OSU Extension Urban Ag Team is compiling a video series to connect with experts in the areas of urban soil, water, pollinators, and indoor growing.
- Ohio State is advancing a [master plan for Waterman](#), a 261-acre asset on prime Ohio State campus real estate. This provides tremendous opportunity to engage multiple stakeholders in urban, indoor, and emerging agriculture.
- Ohio is hosting the 2022 Urban Food System Symposium.

