



# Integrating Urban Farms into the Social Landscape of Cities

*Recommendations for Strengthening the Relationship  
Between Urban Farms and Local Communities*

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Urban Farms and Local Communities

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## Executive Summary

In cities across the U.S., urban farming is gaining traction as a way of productively using degraded vacant land while increasing access to fresh produce within cities. As urban farming continues to be promoted by municipal governments and others, it is important to understand how to ensure these projects are viable. One consideration for urban farms located in populated areas of a city is the reaction of residents who live in neighborhoods surrounding farms. Urban farms differ from urban gardens in their emphasis on income-generating agricultural activity. As such, they can challenge traditional images residents might have for how land is used in city neighborhoods. Urban farming projects are most likely to survive and thrive if they have local support, but how can these projects gain community buy-in? Through interviews with urban farmers, neighborhood leaders, community residents, and other key stakeholders in Baltimore City, **we sought to understand the processes that are most effective for gaining the acceptance of city residents for urban farming.**

Findings from our research demonstrate that urban farms are not simply farms located in the city. **Key distinctions** between urban farms and their rural counterparts include the unconventional roles of an urban farmer and the range of services – both tangible and intangible – that urban farms can provide to surrounding neighborhoods. It is the perceived benefits of these services – including the potential to increase access to fresh produce to local residents, clean up vacant lots, provide employment and educational opportunities, create community centers, and promote community revitalization – that appear to drive much of the enthusiasm for urban farming. Yet in order to survive and thrive, urban farms require local buy-in. Justifying the need for community support, interviewees highlighted the vulnerability of urban farms to vandalism and the importance of having the respect of the community so as to avoid being “sabotaged.” Additionally, interviewees emphasized that in order to make a meaningful contribution to the community, it is important to align the services an urban farm provides to a neighborhood with local residents’ needs and desires.

A range of **barriers** can hinder community acceptance for urban farming. Through our research, we identified several common barriers, including a lack of familiarity with urban farming; negative impressions of the appearance of urban farms; concerns about pests, vandalism, and the safety of eating farm food; fear that farms replace other, preferential, development; seeing urban farms as projects introduced by “outsiders” who exploit neighborhood resources; and concerns about the long-term sustainability of urban farms.

Urban farmers overcome these barriers and garner support for their urban farming projects by employing a range of **strategies**. We classify these strategies in three main phases. The first phase – gaining entry into a neighborhood – consists of strategies aimed at gaining familiarity with a neighborhood and building relationships. The second phase – introducing the idea for an urban farm to a neighborhood – relates to the way in which a farm is framed as the idea is introduced to the neighborhood. The final phase – engaging the neighborhood – is an ongoing process to encourage local residents to be involved with the farm.

Based on these findings, we present **recommendations** for urban farmers, city planners, and others who support urban farming to assist them in creating urban farming projects that are accepted and embraced by communities. While community buy-in is essential for all urban farms located in residential areas, the degree to which urban farmers engage local communities will differ based on the goals they have for their farm. Therefore these recommendations are not intended to be a checklist that is applied to every urban farming project, but rather a full spectrum of actions to consider when creating a strategy to gain community buy-in.

## Summary of recommendations:

<b>Phase 1: Gaining entry into a neighborhood</b>
A. Ensure the site selected for an urban farm is not actively used for other purposes (e.g. family gatherings, parking, playfields) and provides an opportunity to improve blighted land
B. Take steps to gain an understanding of the neighborhood context (including the history of the neighborhood and potential farm site, and neighborhood challenges and assets)
C. Avoid assumptions about what local residents desire and take steps to identify ways the urban farm can provide services that they value
D. Forge relationships with community leaders or groups that can champion the idea for the urban farm and assist urban farmers to incorporate goals into their project that are meaningful for neighborhood residents
E. Avoid perceptions that an urban farm is an “outsider project” by demonstrating dedication to the neighborhood through active community involvement
<b>Phase 2: Introducing the idea for an urban farm</b>
F. Include local residents in the process of planning the urban farm
G. De-mystify urban farming to overcome a lack of familiarity with the concept by sharing examples of other urban farms via photographs and tours
H. Proactively address common concerns about urban farming and explain potential benefits for the local neighborhood
I. Use multiple forums to present the idea for the urban farm, including community meetings and engaging residents who live in direct proximity to the potential farm site
<b>Phase 3: Engaging the neighborhood</b>
J. Create a welcoming environment at the urban farm site
K. Create opportunities for residents to be involved with the urban farm
L. Provide opportunities for local residents to access farm produce; for farms with a mission of providing food for the neighborhood, consult residents to determine the types of food they want to eat and convenient times/locations for distribution, and ensure food is affordable
M. Communicate with residents to maintain a positive and active relationship
N. Maintain and beautify the urban farm to meet residents’ expectations for their neighborhood’s appearance, including creating a sense of permanence in the space in the off-season

## Definition of terms

**Community buy-in:** Community buy-in refers to acceptance and support by a particular neighborhood or community of people for a decision or project. Gaining the buy-in of communities for a particular program or project is generally recognized as important for its success and survival. Without it, community members are unlikely to participate in or support the project, and may feel antagonistic towards its presence.

**Community garden:** A community garden is a single site, which may or may not be broken into individual plots, that is gardened by multiple people. Produce is consumed directly by the gardeners or shared/donated, but is not typically used to generate income.

**Food desert:** The term ‘food desert’ refers to a neighborhood that lacks access to affordable fresh produce, usually due to the absence of nearby supermarkets. Though methods for defining whether a particular neighborhood is a food desert vary, the characteristics to consider include distance to a supermarket, median household income, vehicle ownership rates, and a measure of the availability of healthy food at local businesses.

**Urban agriculture:** Urban agriculture is the practice of cultivating, processing, and distributing food in or around a village, town, or city [1]. Urban agriculture can involve animal husbandry, aquaculture, agroforestry, beekeeping, and horticulture.

**Urban farm:** An urban farm is a type of urban agriculture that has a primary emphasis on income-generating agricultural activity.

**Urban farmer:** For this report, we use the term ‘urban farmer’ to broadly refer to the individuals or groups who start and manage an urban farm. This may be an individual or group of farmers, a community-based organization, or a for-profit company.

## Introduction

For many, the word ‘farm’ likely evokes imagery associated with rural farming – the sight of corn neatly aligned in vast rows, the smell of manure emanating from a barn full of animals, the sound of a tractor rumbling across fields. However, riding a wave of excitement about ‘local food,’ a different type of farm is quickly springing up around the country that challenges this imagery in every way: the urban farm.

Like urban gardens, which are a common site in cities across the U.S., urban farms utilize unused city space to produce food. However, urban farming differs from urban gardening in its focus on production: it is a commercial venture where food is grown for sale or broader distribution rather than for consumption by the grower. It also differs markedly from its rural counterpart. Compared to rural farms, urban farms are small – generally a few acres or less. The crops are diverse and frequently comprised of vegetables and herbs rather than commodity crops. If animals are present, they are the small ones permitted by City regulations – chickens, rabbits, bees. There are no tractors.

Of course, urban farms differ drastically from one another in terms of their goals, structures, and locations. They may focus on production and profit, or they may make social and educational goals their priority. In terms of structure, they can range from a tight cluster of hoop houses anchored to an asphalt-covered lot, to something more like a large garden, overflowing with greenery. As for location, urban farms are found in all types of urban spaces, ranging from a parking lot of an industrial section of a city to the center of a residential neighborhood. And unlike rural farms, where the nearest neighbor might be miles away, the people one might see at urban farms are diverse: the farmers, of course, but also a gaggle of student volunteers, neighborhood children learning how to plant seeds, a local resident stopping by to buy a bunch of carrots. And just beyond the boundaries of the farm: people coming and going from their homes, commuters driving past, passengers waiting across the street for a bus. Despite differences that may exist in their goals or structure, urban farms must integrate themselves into a social landscape that is at once a challenge and an asset.

The social nature of urban farming is a major motivation for growing food in a city as individuals and organizations work to increase access to healthy foods and connect consumers and growers. However, it also creates a new challenge for farmers, for the viability of urban farms depends in part on whether urban communities see farming as an acceptable use of city space. Urban farming not only challenges the traditional imagery of farming, it may also challenge the image people have of urban living. Whether urban residents accept the idea of having a farm in their neighborhood depends on whether they see the farm as benefitting their community. This, in turn, depends on how urban farmers interact with the neighborhood and the efforts they make to engage residents and gain their support, as well as characteristics of the farm itself.

Urban agriculture can provide substantial health, social, ecological, and economic benefits to communities. As one type of urban agriculture, urban farming also has the potential to offer many of these benefits. Considering this potential, it has been promoted at multiple levels, paralleling broader trends seen in urban agriculture. In Baltimore City, the site of this study, individuals and community groups have started urban farms as businesses and as non-profit social enterprises, bolstered by supportive municipal policies as well as local organizations.

As urban farming continues to be promoted, it is increasingly important to examine its feasibility. One consideration for urban farms located in populated areas of a city is the reaction of the residents who live in the surrounding neighborhoods. Urban farming projects are most likely to

survive and thrive if they have local support, but how can these projects gain community buy-in? This is the subject of the study on which this report is based.

## **Study Objective**

Through our research in Baltimore City, we sought to understand the processes that are most effective for gaining the buy-in of city residents for urban farming. Toward this end, our research explored the following questions:

- Why is it important for urban farming projects to have community buy-in?
- What characteristics of urban farming projects affect community buy-in?
- What strategies or processes do farmers and others use to gain community buy-in for urban farming projects, and are these perceived to be effective?
- What are the main barriers to achieving community buy-in for urban farming projects?

Based on the findings of our research, this report provides recommendations for urban farmers, city planners, and others who support urban farming to assist them in creating urban farming projects that are accepted and embraced by communities. While Baltimore City is the setting for this research, we believe that the lessons learned are applicable to other U.S. cities as well. Ultimately, we hope that this research will help farmers develop projects that thrive in the complex social landscape that defines urban farming.

## Chapter 1. Background

### Benefits of urban agriculture

Extensive research on urban agriculture, and particularly community gardening, demonstrates its potential to have a wide range of positive impacts on communities, including health, social, economic, and environmental benefits. These benefits are summarized in Table 1. Some of these benefits – such as the health benefits – stem from the very act of gardening, and so are not specific to *urban* agriculture, while others – such as the environmental benefits – come from the creation of green space, and so are not specific to urban *agriculture*.

### Definition of urban farming

Urban farming is a type of urban agriculture that has a primary emphasis on income-generating agricultural activity. It differs from other types of urban agriculture such as home gardens and community gardens in that food is produced for commercial distribution rather than for consumption by the grower. Farm produce and value-added products are distributed at different levels. For example, local residents might purchase produce at a neighborhood farm stand or local corner store, or they might receive produce in exchange for volunteering. Residents citywide might purchase urban farm produce at a farmers market or eat it at a local restaurant. Institutions such as school systems also purchase produce from urban farms for use in their cafeterias.

This report categorizes urban farms as following two main models: community farms and commercial farms. The distinction is based how they interact with the surrounding neighborhood.

- (1) **Urban community farms** are located on sites chosen based on their potential to positively influence the neighborhood, with a main component of their mission to engage and educate community members. They are frequently run as non-profits and often rely on volunteer support and grant funding.
- (2) **Urban commercial farms** are generally started as entrepreneurial ventures and so are located on sites that are chosen for being most conducive to production farming. They tend to be run as for-profits and often support paid employees.

### Urban farming in Baltimore City

This research takes place in Baltimore City, where support for urban farming stems from concerns about an overabundance of vacant properties, a lack of access to healthy foods in many low-income neighborhoods, and high unemployment rates, three interrelated problems that urban farms are seen as addressing. Community gardens have long been part of Baltimore's landscape, but since 2010, over a dozen urban farms have popped up around the city through the efforts of individual entrepreneurs, non-profit organizations, and businesses, reflecting the grassroots excitement that exists in Baltimore around local food production. The municipal government, through the City's Office of Sustainability, increasingly supports urban farms. This is evident by recent changes to Baltimore City's zoning code to allow for agricultural uses, a new program that provides water access to growers, the development of the City's first [urban agriculture plan](#), and the implementation of a land-leasing initiative that leases vacant city-owned land to qualified urban farmers.

**Table 1.** Potential benefits associated with urban agriculture\*

<b>Health benefits</b>	
Food access and security	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Greater access to fresh, wholesome, organic, and/or culturally appropriate produce by gardeners [2-11]</li> <li>• Improved access to fresh food within the larger community (e.g. via donations by gardeners) [4, 6, 12-14]</li> <li>• Cost savings on groceries and access to foods otherwise unaffordable in supermarkets [9, 11, 14, 15]</li> </ul>
Increased fruit and vegetable consumption	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Greater fruit and vegetable consumption by gardening households** [11, 13, 15-19]</li> <li>• Increased preference for, consumption of, or willingness to try fruits and vegetables by youth participating in gardening programs [20-25]</li> </ul>
General health and well being	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Source of physical activity [2, 6, 7, 9, 11]</li> <li>• Mental health/therapeutic benefits, including: stress reduction, improved emotional health, cognitive stimulation, creating a sense of pride and accomplishment, and provision of a connection to nature, a retreat from the urban environment and a way to spend time outdoors [2, 3, 6, 7, 9, 11, 26, 27]</li> </ul>
<b>Social benefits</b>	
Community development [2, 3, 5-7, 9-11, 13, 14, 26, 28-36]	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Provision of opportunities for social interaction, strengthening social ties and facilitating new social connections</li> <li>• Reduced social isolation for community gardeners</li> <li>• Increased community cohesion including increased pride in and attachment to one's neighborhood</li> <li>• Catalyst for community organizing and broader community improvement</li> </ul>
Education and youth development	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Provision of opportunities to learn about the provenance of food, agricultural processes, and nutrition, and to develop new skills [5, 9, 12, 14, 37-40]</li> <li>• Provision of constructive activity for youth that promotes youth development and as an alternative for youth exposed to drug and crime economies, including wage-earning opportunities [12, 27, 38, 41]</li> </ul>
Cultural integration/ preservation [3, 6, 9, 12, 14, 38, 42]	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Provision of opportunities for neighborhood residents to interact who otherwise would not have such an impetus</li> <li>• Provision of opportunities for immigrants to develop ties with host and other ethnic communities, expand cultural competencies, and gain a sense of belonging</li> <li>• Provision of opportunities for expression and maintenance of cultural heritage</li> <li>• Provision of opportunities to strengthen intergenerational relationships</li> </ul>

<b>Economic benefits</b>	
Job creation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Employment opportunities, particularly for low-income and socially excluded populations (e.g. formerly incarcerated individuals) [27]</li> </ul>
Increased property values	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Increased property values surrounding community gardens [43]</li> </ul>
<b>Environmental benefits</b>	
Ecosystem services [27, 44-46]	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Increased biodiversity, including provision of habitat for pollinators</li> <li>• Reduced air pollution through filtration of particulates by vegetation</li> <li>• Micro-climate regulation (e.g. reduction in the “urban heat island effect”) through transpiration processes</li> <li>• Increased rainwater drainage, reducing the risk of flooding, ground water contamination, and depleted groundwater levels</li> <li>• Recycling of organic waste (e.g. through composting)</li> <li>• Noise reduction (due to the soft character of unpaved ground)</li> <li>• Restoration of natural landscapes (e.g. waterways)</li> </ul>
Climate change mitigation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• As part of a local food system, reduces greenhouse gas emissions associated with transporting food [47]</li> </ul>
Improvements to built environment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Transformation of vacant lots into productive green space/neighborhood beautification [7, 9, 12, 27, 29]</li> <li>• Provision of safe outdoor green space for urban residents [9, 10, 14, 29]</li> </ul>
Environmental education [6, 27, 48]	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Improved environmental attitudes</li> <li>• Provision of opportunities for environmental education and hands-on learning about ecological processes</li> </ul>

\*Many of the studies cited here are exploratory studies that use qualitative methods, and the quantitative studies rarely measure change before and after implementation of an urban agriculture project, use a control group, or include a large sample. Therefore, these benefits are not “proven” benefits in terms of having been rigorously measured.

\*\*Without longitudinal studies, it cannot be determined whether participation in urban agriculture increases fruit and vegetable intake or whether individuals who prefer these foods seek out gardening opportunities.

## Chapter 2: Study Methods

We used a case study approach to explore the relationship between urban farms located in residential neighborhoods and the residents who live in proximity to them. Three types of cases were included, comprising five sites (see Table 2).

**Table 2. Case types included in study**

Case type	Description of case	# of sites
Active Farm	Fully operational urban farms (for at least one year) and the surrounding neighborhood	2
New Farm	Vacant lots where a new urban farm was planned and the surrounding neighborhood	2
Rejected Farm	Neighborhood in which a proposal to start an urban farm on a vacant lot was withdrawn based on objections by residents	1

All farm sites were located in residential areas, with housing along at least one border of the farm site. The (existing and proposed) urban farms defining each study site included both community and commercial farms. Among the new farm sites, one farm had just broken ground at the time data collection began and was in production by the time data collection was complete, while no farming-related activity occurred at the second site during the study period.

The neighborhoods surrounding each farm site were mostly low-income, with a greater proportion of residents living below the poverty line (between 21% and 37%) as compared to Baltimore City as a whole (18%). The exception was the rejected farm site, which bordered two neighborhoods, one of which had a lower rate of poverty (12%) than Baltimore City as a whole. The majority of residents living in our study sites were black (ranging from 79% to 97% of the neighborhood's population, as compared to 64% of all Baltimore City residents).<sup>1</sup>

We conducted interviews with 49 individuals: key stakeholders with expertise related to urban farming (n=8), urban farmers associated with each site (n=8), neighborhood leaders (n=12), and residents of the study neighborhoods (n=21). See Tables 3 and 4 for additional information about the interviewees. We also conducted participant observation at farm sites in which there was ongoing activity or viewed the vacant lot where the farm was supposed to be located.

Following data collection and analysis, we developed a series of recommendations aimed at helping urban farmers gain community buy-in for their urban farming projects. To elicit feedback on these recommendations, we held a dissemination meeting, inviting our study participants and other stakeholders to attend. During this meeting, we informed attendees of the results presented in this report and asked for their feedback on our draft recommendations. Through discussion and written feedback from meeting participants, we re-assessed the recommendations in terms of feasibility to urban farmers and how much each would benefit urban residents. The final series of recommendations included in this report incorporates the feedback we received from the dissemination meeting.

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<sup>1</sup> Data from the Baltimore Neighborhood Indicators Alliance ([http://bniajfi.org/vital\\_signs/cprofiles/](http://bniajfi.org/vital_signs/cprofiles/)). Income data is from 2011; race/ethnicity data is from 2010.

**Table 3. Number of interviewee types by site**

Site	Farmers	Neighborhood leaders	Residents	Total
Active farm sites (2)	3	5	12	<b>20</b>
New farm sites (2)	4	4	5	<b>13</b>
Rejected farm site (1)	1	3	4	<b>8</b>
<b>Total</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>12</b>	<b>21</b>	<b>41</b>

**Table 4. Demographics of neighborhood leaders and residents by case type**

Case type	Black	White	Hispanic	Male	Female	Total
Active farm sites (2)	10	7	0	7	10	<b>17</b>
New farm sites (2)	8	0	1	5	4	<b>9</b>
Rejected farm site (1)	3	4	0	2	5	<b>7</b>
<b>Total</b>	<b>21</b>	<b>11</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>14</b>	<b>19</b>	<b>33</b>

### Study limitations

The purpose of our research is to understand how to effectively gain community buy-in for urban farming. For urban farming projects, community buy-in refers to the acceptance of an urban farm by members of the geographic community (i.e. the neighborhood surrounding the farm). However, a limitation of this endeavor lies in assuming that neighborhoods are made up of a cohesive group with homogenous preferences and needs. In reality, the views of our interviewees represent their specific social, economic, and cultural perspectives, inherently excluding others. Therefore, given the diversity of views inherent in any group, gaining the buy-in of all members of a neighborhood for an urban farming project is an ideal rather than a reality.

Another limitation to this study is that we were unable to identify residents or neighborhood leaders who opposed the idea of urban farming. To some degree, this is due to a lack of interest by such individuals in participating in our research; however, it also reflects a lack of opposition to urban farming. The majority of our interviewees had some interest in urban agriculture, had established a relationship with the urban farm in their neighborhood, or appeared to play a leadership role in their neighborhood. However, this is also a strength, since our interviewees were generally interested in the research topic and so provided rich and insightful information.

As with all qualitative research, it is important to consider contextual factors when transferring the findings of this study to settings beyond Baltimore. However, we believe that the proposed recommendations provide a springboard for developing community buy-in processes that are tailored to meet the needs of a variety of urban farming models.

## Chapter 3. Positioning urban farms: Not just a farm in the city

In this chapter, we highlight findings from our study that demonstrate the ways that urban farms are not simply farms located within cities, but rather unique projects that lay at the nexus of food production and community development. Key distinctions between urban farms and their rural counterparts include the unconventional roles of an urban farmer and the range of services – both tangible and intangible – that urban farms can provide to surrounding neighborhoods. We then turn to the importance of community buy-in for urban farms, revealing that it is not only perceived to be a practical necessity to ensure that urban farms are not subject to vandalism, but is also driven by a sense of obligation among urban farmers to make a meaningful contribution to disadvantaged neighborhoods.

### The role of the urban farmer

Whether an individual, a group of committed residents, a community-based organization, or a for-profit company, those who start and run urban farms contribute to the idiosyncrasy of urban farming. Our research findings reveal that urban farmers' motivations often extend beyond entrepreneurial goals or personal interest in growing food, encompassing a desire to make a positive contribution to the neighborhoods where their farms are located. As one stakeholder put it, "they also want to be part of trying to do something about their world that they see around them."

Among the urban farmers we interviewed, motivations ranged from wanting to see greater food equity in disadvantaged neighborhoods, to providing employment, to creating opportunities for experience-based education in agriculture. One community farmer said that while she was eager to grow food on a large scale, it felt "unfair coming into a neighborhood where there was a lot of vacant land, growing food on it, and not sharing it with the community." We found that commercial farmers also have social goals for their urban farms, or at least recognize the opportunities an urban farm can bring a neighborhood. For example, one farmer viewed urban agriculture as part of a "paradigm shift that we need to see in the food system," while another commented on the social benefits of urban farming:

*[W]e were... looking to start a business in the neighborhood... I don't think we were claiming to be any major solution to the world's problems or the neighborhood's problems. ... [T]hat said, I mean, I think we would have brought really good food into the neighborhood and ... we would have hired a handful of people. And I think just cleaning that plot up ... I think [people] would have felt that their neighborhood is changing for the best then. – Urban farmer, rejected farm*

One farmer viewed such goals as inherent to farming in cities, stating, "If you don't have that social goal, you might as well be... in the country, where [farming] is much easier." Key stakeholders we interviewed similarly contrasted urban farming with its rural counterpart, noting the demands urban farmers face as they strive to meet these social goals.

*An urban farmer isn't a rural farmer in the city. ... the rural farmer who's looking at the land, they have to understand the land for weather conditions, rainfall, slope, you know all that kind of stuff... And one of the conditions that an urban farmer has to understand that's [part of] the ecology of the environment as well is the cultural and social environment. – Key stakeholder*

Through our interviews, we noted the many roles that urban farmers – particularly community farmers – play beyond food production; these are exemplified in Box 1. Creativity and flexibility were seen as important attributes of urban farmers as they address the challenges that arise when farming in a social environment. For example, although one farmer's motivation was to

produce food for the neighborhood, she soon “found herself in the babysitting gardening services,” as the farm drew the attention of the neighborhood children. Over time the farmer embraced this role and started an afterschool garden club with the local elementary school. A resident from this neighborhood complimented the urban farmer’s lack of rigidity and willingness to go on a “journey” beyond the “framework of what [the farm] was supposed to be.”

*If you’re not willing to go on that journey, including a journey that may take you places you did not want to go, or did not envision going, you probably will not be successful in the urban farming world. – Resident, active farm site*

### Box 1. Examples of roles urban farmers play beyond food production

- Keeping the site maintained and clear of trash
- Beautifying the space to ensure it is attractive to neighborhood residents
- Marketing the produce to a variety of consumers
- Recruiting and coordinating volunteers to help at the farm
- Planning and hosting community events and educational workshops
- Organizing and running after-school gardening programs
- Interacting with neighborhood children who spend time at the farm
- Engaging with residents one-on-one and at community meetings to encourage resident involvement, promote the farm, and update neighborhood residents
- Maintaining an online presence in order to communicate with farm supporters
- Pursuing grants to fund the farm’s activities
- Managing a community garden on the farm site, including recruiting residents to participate, helping them plan the garden, and teaching them gardening practices

As urban farmers strive to meet these additional social goals, an important question is how their efforts and expanded roles affect local community buy-in for urban farming. Through our interviews, we found that residents are not necessarily aware of urban farmers’ motivations to improve the neighborhood; rather, they see urban farmers as motivated by their “love” of farming and a desire to grow their own produce. However, they often complimented urban farmers for their tenacity, industriousness, and dedication to farming.

*[M]y experience had been in the past with the community is somebody would come up with some idea and then half way through they would change their minds and just abandon it. ...but I was just so impressed with the level of dedication. The way they worked, and I mean it’s been days when it was like blistering hot and they would be out there working. – Resident, active farm site*

A few residents and neighborhood leaders we interviewed from community farm sites did recognize urban farmers’ commitment to social goals. For example, at one active farm site, a neighborhood leader praised the farmers for prioritizing the neighborhood:

*When they relate to people, it’s not all about themselves. It’s about sharing what they have with others. ... They have made it clear that this is not just a farm that is used to produce food to put money in their pockets, this is a COMMUNITY thing. The money they have gotten from the farm, they turn around and spend it back on the farm, and things FOR the neighborhood! – Neighborhood leader, active farm site*

## Services urban farms provide to neighborhoods

Urban farms are uniquely positioned to provide a range of services to surrounding neighborhoods. These benefits drive much of the enthusiasm for individual farms and urban farming as a movement and facilitate the community buy-in process. Through this research, we found that urban farms are seen as having the potential to increase access to fresh produce to local residents, clean up vacant lots, provide employment and educational opportunities, create community centers, and promote community revitalization.

### *Increasing access to fresh produce*

Our interviewees frequently discussed the provision of fresh produce as a benefit that urban farms can provide to local communities and an important mechanism for gaining community acceptance for an urban farm. One stakeholder asked, “Why wouldn’t you leverage the fact that you have fresh produce in a community that might be in a food desert to the residents who live directly in that community? That just makes sense.”

All of the neighborhood leaders we interviewed thought that a main goal of urban farming is to provide food to local residents and that residents would welcome the ability to more easily access fresh produce. Relating her own history in which local gardens had filled gaps in food security for her family, one neighborhood leader thought the urban farm in her neighborhood could fill a similar need for local families:

*Today, there are families that are living like the way I grew up. ... I don't want people to go through what I went through... There's gonna be some other kids that's gonna need that garden. So it was important for me that that garden be there. – Neighborhood leader, active farm site*

Across all of our study sites, nearly all the neighborhood leaders and residents we interviewed assumed that at least some portion of the food grown on the local urban farm would be made available to residents. This assumption was even made at a site where there were no opportunities for residents to purchase food, and at the rejected farm site, where the urban farmer had explained at community meetings that the farm would operate as a for-profit business and had not “promised them anything” in terms of providing local food access. The exception was one neighborhood leader from a site where the urban farm does not currently make food available to local residents. She questioned the logic that the urban farm would “uplift” her neighborhood, since without residents being able to access the fresh food, “it’s still a food desert.” She argued that even for-profit farms should ensure that local residents “get something out of the deal,” proposing a farm “giveaway day” for the residents in the immediate vicinity.

Urban farmers expressed varied opinions as to whether providing food to the neighborhood is an ethical obligation. Some farmers – particularly those associated with community farms – went to great lengths to provide local residents opportunities to access farm produce through onsite farm stands, community supported agriculture programs, and local corner stores. One active farm also routinely gave out samples of farm produce to residents passing by the farm, at community events at the farm, and at community association meetings, while the other offered produce in exchange for volunteer hours. Residents described these efforts as important for gaining the neighborhood’s support for the farm.



In contrast, farmers from the urban commercial farms in our study did not necessarily plan to provide food directly to the neighborhood, citing the difficulty in selling food at prices residents can afford while running an economically sustainable farm.

*No, you can't grow food on two acres of land or less... and sell it to poor people... without tweaking the market... without giving them, WIC or like ... double dollars at farmers markets... [O]r the farmer has to be grant funded and just like paid to give away food. ... To make it on a few acres of farm you gotta grow the most expensive delicacies you can do and you'll still just get by." – Urban farmer, rejected farm*

Several urban farmers echoed the sentiment that in order to be economically sustainable, an urban farm must produce niche products that can be sold to high-end buyers like upscale restaurants.

### **Cleaning up vacant lots**

Our study results demonstrate that one of the most appreciated services that urban farms provide is the transformation of vacant land. Urban farms are seen as a way to clean up problematic vacant lots that were previously used for dumping trash, improving the aesthetics of the neighborhood. Most residents we interviewed at the active farm sites expressed appreciation that a formerly vacant site was being used for something productive.

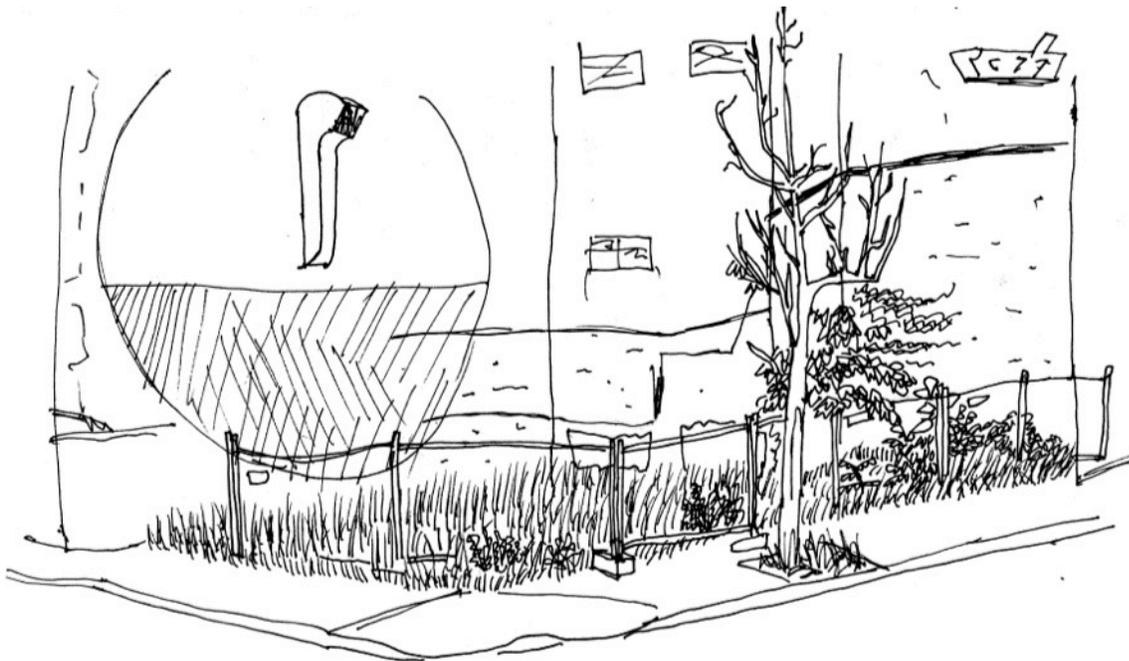
*I think it was very exuberant feeling and exciting to see something like [the farm] happening in the area, because before it was just an empty plot of land and when that happens and there's always an accumulation of garbage, bottles, and things of that sort. – Resident, active farm site*

The benefit of bringing regular attention and activity to a formerly vacant lot was commonly mentioned as a way to stop trash dumping, loitering, and illegal activity that may occur on the

lot. One stakeholder explained that an urban farm can make the neighborhood safer by bringing in more pedestrian traffic and “more eyes on the street,” an idea that was also expressed by several resident interviewees.

Another stakeholder commented that vacant lots are most prevalent in low-income communities, leading to “a lot of people who feel that they’re living in a hopeless environment.” She felt that gardening or farming in such lots can transform these feelings into something more positive. Several interviewees shared the sentiment that an urban farm can offer “hope” that something good is happening and lend a more positive image to the neighborhood.

*So you got a lot of people been in this community for years, man, and when they see things like this, they applaud it. ... They want to see this community grow and take away from the negative part of it, you know? You know the drugs, the prostitution. ... They like to see crack pipes and dope needles turned into vegetables. ... [The farm] is gonna take the area that looked, you know, degraded, it's gonna make it look like it's productive. ... It's making our area look like we're making it useful. You know, it don't look like we just letting it wear away and wear down and not doing anything with it. – Resident, new farm site*



### **Providing employment**

With an unemployment rate of nearly 14% in Baltimore City as a whole and upwards of 24% in our study neighborhoods<sup>2</sup>, it was not surprising that many of our interviewees discussed employment as a valuable service that urban farms can provide to local residents. In the words of one urban farmer, providing employment to local residents is “a quick way of gaining acceptance” within a neighborhood. Across the board, interviewees thought that residents would

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<sup>2</sup> Data from 2012 from the Baltimore Neighborhood Indicators Alliance ([http://bniajfi.org/vital\\_signs/cprofiles/](http://bniajfi.org/vital_signs/cprofiles/))

value employment on a farm, though many seemed doubtful that urban farming is lucrative enough to create many jobs.

Among farmer interviewees, only those associated with urban commercial farms voiced optimism about the employment potential of urban farming. One commercial farmer argued that urban farms can help keep the billions of dollars spent annually on fresh produce within the Baltimore metropolitan area, while another stated that “there are a thousand jobs that we could create if we were serious about local food production.” Similarly, one stakeholder cited Maryland’s long growing season, the ample vacant space available in Baltimore, and increasing demand for locally-grown produce as creating a setting conducive to the expansion of urban farming, and with it, farming jobs.

Beyond full-time employment, many interviewees saw the potential for urban farms to create job training opportunities and summer employment for youth, helping to fill a gap in neighborhoods where “there’s nothing for them to do” and allowing youth to fulfill mandatory service learning hours. At the rejected farm site, one resident lamented that the farm had not come to fruition because she “saw an opportunity... to create some employment opportunities... because we’ve really just kind of accompanied a lot of young people... into joblessness.” A neighborhood leader at one new farm site saw employment opportunities for youth as providing activities “other than drugs and crime.” For younger children, interviewees saw urban farms as providing a safe outdoor space where children can spend time doing something that they enjoy and that keeps them out of trouble.

### **Providing educational opportunities**

Many interviewees recognized the educational opportunities that urban farms can bring to a neighborhood.

*People don’t understand where your food comes from, how to grow it, why it costs so much. So that’s the nice point about urban farming, it shows people what it takes, you know to actually put something on the plate. – Urban farmer, new farm*

Similarly, several interviewees discussed the benefits of youth learning about “where food comes from” and the potential of urban farms to change children’s relationship with food.

*Because you remember things you did when you was younger, whether or not you do it now... it’s good for them to know that the vegetables you get have been in the dirt SOMEWHERE down the line. ...now they just bring them to the market, you don’t see nothing like this, so they really don’t know, until they get older. – Resident, active farm site*

The active farm sites in our study facilitated such educational opportunities by creating afterschool gardening clubs for children, hosting field trips for students of all ages, hosting gardening workshops, partnering with community-based organizations to provide cooking classes, and creating neighborhood cookbooks. Additionally, we observed that informal education occurs through interactions with volunteers and people passing by the farm.

### **Creating community centers**

Several interviewees discussed the positive role urban farms can play in providing a gathering space within the neighborhood – for example, by hosting events like block parties – and that they give something for residents to commune around and talk about, ultimately helping to “bring the community together.” For example, neighborhood leaders described one active farm as a place “where people see each other, work together, interact together, and learn more about each other.” Other interviewees reiterated the idea that an urban farm can create a space that

“gets together people you just wouldn’t see working together any other place,” where people can recognize “the humanity in each other.”

*It may sound cliché, but it helps the community grow itself because you have more people that are involved ... and you have a sense of, you know, this is mine, this is where I live. You have a sense of pride ... Resident, active farm site*

### **Revitalizing the community**

Most of the potential benefits that interviewees attributed to urban farms were tangible – healthy food, a transformed lot, employment. However, there was also a sense among interviewees that these tangible benefits ultimately contribute to a more intangible benefit – what one interviewee described as “urban revitalization.”

*I think they have the potential to take an area that is in a downward spiral, begin positive momentum. – Urban farmer, new farm*

Several interviewees said urban farms bring “something positive” to neighborhoods that are characterized as crime-ridden, poor, or simply lacking basic amenities, giving residents “a ray of hope.” One resident at a new farm site thought the local farm would bring positive attention to a neighborhood that usually only receives attention for the crime that occurs there. The urban farmer at this site similarly described the farm as “something different,” stating, “It’s not a liquor store, it’s not a corner store, it’s not a housing development where people still have no jobs.”

At the rejected farm site, one neighborhood leader characterized her neighborhood as lacking activities for children and social gathering spaces, while other interviewees at this site discussed the lack of businesses and other amenities. They believed that the presence of an urban farm – and particularly the availability of fresh local produce – could help revitalize their neighborhood and attract new, young, residents to the neighborhood. In fact, one urban farmer shared that her urban farm is featured on a realtor’s website advertising houses in the neighborhood. Numerous interviewees talked about residents being excited to have an urban farm in the neighborhood because these projects are perceived as novel and “hip.”

*[Y]ou develop an image of [the neighborhood] as a kind of green culture and a happening place where interesting things are occurring, and folks are learning how to live together and work together, and there’s a dynamic, there’s something interesting happening. – Neighborhood leader, active farm site*

At a broader level, one stakeholder described the establishment of urban farms as contributing to the uniqueness of Baltimore as a city, and was therefore a “part of the puzzle” in attracting new residents to Baltimore and retaining the current ones. Similarly, another stakeholder felt that urban farms are doing so much for the city that the City government should be financially supporting them.

*[Urban farms] are doing something other than growing food. They’re building community. They’re doing social repair. And right now the City is getting that for free. And the developers in the neighborhood are getting that for free. And that’s wrong. Because they’re creating value and rebuilding property value. – Key stakeholder*

### **The importance of community buy-in for urban farms**

Our findings revealed consensus regarding the importance of community buy-in for urban farms located in residential areas. While neighborhood leaders were most ardent in their views, with several interviewees emphasizing the importance of community buy-in to the viability of *any* new project that enters a neighborhood, other interviewees saw a specific need for urban farms to become “a part of the neighborhood” since farms are not traditionally located in cities.

Opinions varied as to the degree of community buy-in that is necessary. For example, one farmer stated that a few outspoken naysayers should not “keep you from serving all these other people that live in the neighborhood.” In contrast, one key stakeholder noted the difficulty that arises when even a “small minority of people” is opposed to an urban farm:

*I think in a situation ... where you have ... one or two people who are very opposed [to an urban farm], you know, if those are your neighbors, it's very hard to say to your neighbor, “I don't care how upset you are. This is going in front of our houses...” Nobody wants to ruin other people's experiences of their safe space, their home space. ...[I]t can't really be like a purely democratic process. Like 51% is not enough. – Key stakeholder*

Some urban farmers saw differing needs for community buy-in depending on whether urban farms are for-profit or non-profit.

*[Community buy-in] shouldn't matter very much if you're just trying to start a business. If you're just trying to like, grow and sell it ... it's not essential to get community buy-in. ... I guess if I were trying to start a non-profit like a youth education farm then... it would be in my best interest to have community buy-in because I'm trying to serve the community, but if you're not trying to serve your immediate community then I think you wanna like give people a heads up. – Urban farmer, rejected farm*

### **Surviving and thriving through community buy-in**

Our findings revealed that urban farms differ from other projects in two critical ways that necessitate community buy-in: their vulnerability to vandalism and their potential to directly serve the communities in which they are housed. In this sense, urban farms require community buy-in in order to survive and thrive.

Among our interviewees, the most common reason given for needing community buy-in is the vulnerability of farms. None of the farms included in the study are fenced-in, so there is little to deter people from entering the farm. As one stakeholder stated, if people are opposed to a farm, they “can come in the middle of the night and slash all the plastic up on your hoop house and... stomp on your plants.” Noting the substantial time, effort, and resources that urban farmers invest into their projects, she cautioned that this investment could all go to waste if farmers do not have a working relationship with the surrounding community, or at the very least, they may “feel uncomfortable and unwanted.” Many neighborhood leader and resident interviewees confirmed this concern about vandalism. One resident put it bluntly, stating, “If you don't have the neighborhood backing you, then you're pretty much gone. ... It's not going to last long. It'll be done in six months.”

According to interviewees, engaging neighborhood residents in an urban farming project can alleviate this concern by creating a level of respect for and sense of ownership of the farm, which can result in residents wanting to keep an eye out for it. Every urban farmer we interviewed cited the threat of vandalism as a reason for needing community buy-in, describing community support as the best form of security. For example, one urban farmer described residents living around the farm as his “local security,” explaining that they had asked for his number so they could call if anything happens to the farm when he is not on-site. In terms of preventing vandalism, he concluded “there's basically nothing you can do but having trust and faith in our neighbors.”

While this indicates that community buy-in is critical to an urban farm's survival, having community acceptance is equally important to its capacity to thrive as urban farms strive to make a positive contribution to the surrounding neighborhood. According to some interviewees,

in order to make a meaningful contribution to the neighborhood, urban farmers should engage residents to ensure that urban farming projects provide benefits that resonate with them and “support the goals that the residents have.”

One stakeholder emphasized that if an urban farming project aims to “help” the neighborhood, a purposeful process is needed for gaining community buy-in.

*[Otherwise] you're there for this self-righteous idea you have for yourself, but you're not trying to allow the community to grow with your idea... you'll always have that tension there. ... I can have the greatest idea, but if people ... don't feel the benefits of it because they haven't bought into the idea, then it's really just a great idea that won't go nowhere. – Key stakeholder*

Serving the neighborhood was thought to be particularly important for urban farming projects that utilize city-owned land, as this land is perceived to “belong” to the neighborhood.

This is not to say that striking a balance between production and social goals is easy. While some urban farmers we interviewed were optimistic about balancing both goals, others believed that prioritization was necessary. One stakeholder pointed out that when urban farms operate as “community social spaces... a lot of their energy goes into community building,” taking time away from production. Neighborhood leaders acknowledged this “push and pull” between effective food production and creating opportunities to engage the neighborhood.

*Community building is a much less direct and efficient process. And I think the farm is constantly trying to negotiate where they fall on that continuum. Between making the maximum efficiency of farming and the slower, kind of stop-and-start process of a community project. – Neighborhood leader, active farm site*

While this illustrates the potential for tension due to the differing goals of farmers and neighborhood leaders, it also highlights the utility of neighborhood leaders in guiding the efforts of urban farmers towards activities that are meaningful for neighborhood residents.

## Chapter Summary

In this chapter, we examined a key distinction between urban farms and their peri-urban and rural counterparts – namely, urban farms are embedded within a preexisting social landscape that urban farmers must navigate. The individuals that choose to farm in such an environment are often motivated by a desire to make a positive contribution to the neighborhoods where their farms are located. Defined by a mission to positively influence neighborhoods, urban community farmers build social goals into their farm’s model, but even commercial farmers recognize the myriad benefits that urban farms bring to neighborhoods. These perceived benefits – including the potential to increase access to fresh produce, clean up vacant lots, provide employment and educational opportunities, create community centers, and promote community revitalization – drive much of the enthusiasm for urban farming and facilitate community buy-in.

Our findings revealed consensus among urban farmers, neighborhood leaders, and residents that it is important for urban farms to gain community buy-in. Both the community and commercial farmers we interviewed cited the vulnerability of urban farms to vandalism as a reason to gain community buy-in. Urban community farmers were further compelled to seek buy-in out of recognition of the importance of aligning their farms’ services with the needs and desires of neighborhood residents. In the next chapter, we take a closer look at factors that can hinder residents’ acceptance of urban farming.

## Chapter 4. Barriers to gaining community buy-in for urban farming

Through this research we identified several common barriers that negatively affect urban residents' acceptance of urban farming. These include a lack of knowledge about urban farming; negative impressions of the appearance of urban farms; concerns about pests, vandalism, and the safety of farm food; fear that urban farms might replace other development; seeing urban farms as "outsider projects"; and concerns about the long-term sustainability of urban farms.

### Lack of familiarity with urban farming

Stakeholders and farmers reported that one of the biggest barriers to gaining community buy-in for urban farming is a lack of familiarity with urban farming – people do not necessarily know what urban farming is or how it can benefit a neighborhood, or they might hold misconceptions about potential negative impacts of urban farming.

*People don't have a mental image. They hear 'farm' and maybe they picture cows or fields of wheat, or tractors, and they just don't see how that could possibly fit into an urban environment. – Key stakeholder*

Considering the ubiquitous lack of familiarity with urban farming, several interviewees cited a need for education.

*I think that in any urban initiative there has to be an effort to educate the IMMEDIATE population, to draw them in in terms of their own investment: "You will benefit from the produce, it'll be a positive impact, it's gonna benefit the schools, whatever. PLUS, let us educate you about what, what a farm is and does, and how it basically functions." We can't make the assumption that there's any agrarian education at all. – Resident, rejected farm site*

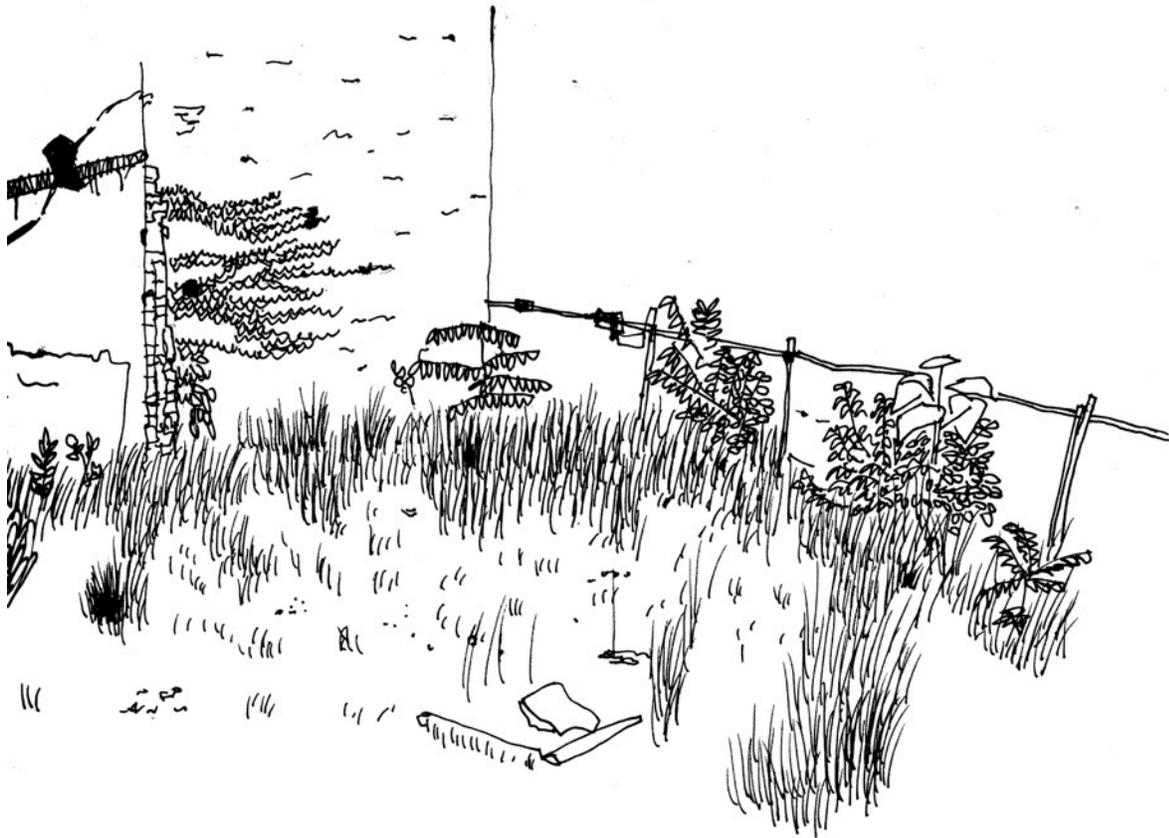
In a similar vein, many interviewees brought up the idea that some residents are opposed to urban farming projects simply because they are "resistant to change." One stakeholder explained this as a discomfort with anything unfamiliar and described how residents may couch their resistance within an array of concerns – pests, soil safety, aesthetics – but "it just keeps coming around, and each time we address one issue, another issue pops up, *if* people didn't want [the farm] in the first place. ... It's like either they're open to the idea or they're not." This attitude does not seem to be specific to urban farming, but rather reflects the concerns that arise when any new project enters a neighborhood, concerns that are frequently alleviated as the benefits of the new project become apparent.

### Farm aesthetics

We found that an important consideration for community buy-in is the appearance of urban farms, for, as one neighborhood leader explained, residents' negative impressions of an urban farm's appearance can detract from residents' overall support of the project. At one site, this had become a major point of tension for the community, with residents and neighborhood leaders complaining that the urban farm appeared overgrown and unkempt. The urban farmer acknowledged the problem and began prioritizing the farm's appearance to appease the community.

Neighborhood leaders at all of our study sites noted that residents had expressed concerns about the appearance of urban farms, revealing that such concerns can creep up even before an urban farm has broken ground. Interviewees noted that residents often worry that a proposed farm will look "trashy" and question how it will be maintained. One urban farmer described

resistance to his proposals to start new urban farms from neighborhood leaders who did not see an urban farm fitting into either the residential or business sections of neighborhoods for “aesthetic reasons.”



One potential point of contention is the inclusion of hoop houses on urban farming sites. These structures are a critical tool for urban farmers, as they are an inexpensive way to extend the growing season and protect plants from exposure to animals and pollution. However, there is concern that city residents may find them unattractive. At one site, residents reportedly thought the hoop house made the farm look “like an industrial section,” and at least one farmer had heard residents comment that the farm’s hoop house “looks ugly.” That said, residents we interviewed who commented on the issue did not view hoop houses negatively; rather, some interviewees perceived them to be novel or said they understood their importance in protecting the plants from the cold.

Farmers are in a somewhat difficult position when it comes to addressing farm aesthetics. As noted by several interviewees, although a farm’s first season is a critical time to cultivate community buy-in, it is challenging to beautify a space when the focus is on getting the farm set up and crops planted. A farm is likely to look messy during its first season before structures like pergolas are built, perennials established, and grounds mulched. Additionally, some strategies for increasing soil fertility and food production (such as using tall grasses as cover crops) may leave the site looking unkempt from the perspective of local residents. Finally, with limited time to devote to the many tasks required to manage a productive farm, urban farmers may choose to prioritize food production over beautification.

Despite the challenges to maintaining and beautifying an urban farm, one stakeholder noted this is one of the adaptations that a farmer has to make when farming in the city:

*[Y]ou're not up a dirt road where just your two immediate neighbors are seeing you. You really have a responsibility... to keep it looking sharp, to keep it beautiful. ... Where you could have some equipment lying around, or where you could leave a pile of woodchips sitting at the corner of your plot for a while in the country, you just can't do that in the city. – Key stakeholder*

## Pests

One of the greatest concerns residents in Baltimore have about urban farming is that a farm will attract more rats to their neighborhood. Sanitation is a major problem in many Baltimore neighborhoods and – as stakeholders explained – residents may feel that an urban farm will exacerbate the problem. Several residents who were largely supportive of the urban farms in their neighborhoods admitted that this was a fear of theirs before they saw the farm up and running.

*I was thinking about thousands... of rodents just running—all migrating to this one area, you know, and it'll be really a mess. – Resident, new farm site*

Concerns about rats appear to have played a central role in the decision not to start a farm at the rejected farm site. As one interviewee explained, a community leader in a neighborhood bordering the potential farm site had concerns about “a lot of wildlife coming to the area as a result of the farm.” The community leader ultimately led a charge to halt the farm’s entry into the area.

Stakeholders and farmers viewed concerns about rats as a misconception, explaining that rats prefer to eat food found in the trash over fresh produce and that a well-maintained garden or farm will not attract rats. Some residents we interviewed were aware of this, but said that when it comes to growing food, rats will always be a widespread concern among most urban residents in Baltimore.

## Vandalism

Another common concern among residents we interviewed is that urban farms will fall victim to vandalism, engendering doubt about the farm’s success. While interviewees reported some minor incidents of theft or vandalism, at both active farm sites and the new farm site that had broken ground, neighborhood leaders and residents expressed amazement that the farms had not experienced any major issues.

*So far, nobody's done anything to [the farm]. ... And I'm really kind of surprised. ... [Interviewer: ... Why's that?] Because it's Baltimore City! You got dysfunctional children, you have drug addicts ... and all kinds of people who just constantly coming through this neighborhood. – Resident, new farm site*

Interviewees attributed the lack of theft and vandalism to the relationship that the urban farms have built with the surrounding neighborhoods, and to the fact that in some neighborhoods, residents – and especially youth – know the people who work at the farm.

*[N]ow that I'm working [at the farm], a lot of kids in the neighborhood they know who I am... they'll walk past the farm and they'll see me over here and they'll be like, “Oh man he's working on that, so I'm not going to touch that. I'm not going to rough that up too much because I know he's going to, you know, get in my skin.” – Resident and part-time farm employee, new farm site*

## Safety and purity of farm food

Key stakeholders and urban farmers reported that city residents occasionally question the safety of growing food in the city, with concerns centering around soil contamination, exposure of produce to urban pollution, the presence of rats and feral cats on urban farms, and the presence of trash that is currently present as well as the trash that once populated the site.

These concerns do not necessarily result in resistance to an urban farm, but they can influence whether local residents are willing to purchase or consume food grown on the farm. One neighborhood leader explained that she was unwilling to eat produce from the urban farm in her neighborhood because she “knew too much” about the previous state of the lot, and that other residents had the same reaction.

*...there was a lot of concern in the neighborhood. A farm there? [Residents] really didn't think it was a good idea. ...'cause that area was so filthy. There was so much trash. So much rats. A lot of folks threw out mattresses. It was like a dumping ground. It was really bad, I mean not some place you wanna eat from, you know. – Neighborhood leader, active farm site*

While these concerns occasionally came up during our interviews with residents, most residents stated they would be willing to eat the food from an urban farm, describing it as “home grown,” fresh, better tasting than supermarket produce, and healthy since it is grown without chemical inputs.

## Replacement of potential development

A few interviewees related that some residents are concerned about urban farms replacing potential sites of residential or commercial development, or would prefer to see these types of development over an urban farm. One stakeholder viewed this as “natural,” stating, “When you think about progress in a community inside of an urban area like Baltimore City, you don't think of the growth of a farm.” This concern was expressed most frequently among residents at a farm site that was once a commercial area. The residents in the neighborhood continue to hold out hope that the area will once again become a commercial hub, despite the fact that it has remained vacant for decades.

Another stakeholder thought urban residents might feel like they are losing something when an urban farm takes over a vacant lot, despite the fact that the lots being leased to farmers do not have immediate development potential:

*[I]t's city-owned land that we're talking about, so really, it belongs to the community. ... We're choosing land that is not being used for any positive purposes, in which we don't have any reason to believe there are any purposes proposed for it. But still, there is the potential that it could be used for anything. And so to give it – even for a period of just five years – to private individuals for a for-profit purpose, that maybe feels like something is being taken away from you, even if it's just the potential opportunity of something else that could serve people more broadly. – Key stakeholder*

## Distrust of “outsider” projects

One recurring theme throughout our interviews was the idea that residents sometimes perceive urban farmers to be “outsiders” who are coming into a neighborhood to change things, potentially breeding resistance to or distrust of the urban farm.

*[W]e don't do good with outsiders. With you trying to start something new and bring to where we've been at for all these years, it wouldn't last. ... What happens is, vandal will take over. ... Now they have someone on the inside that*

*is from the community, a lot of that shit cuts out because I inform them. ... We can talk to people in our community because they're not afraid to ask us questions because they saw us before. Like we're what they know. – Resident and part-time farm employee, new farm*

Based on our findings, this generally occurs when urban farmers are not residents of the neighborhood, or are of a different race from the majority of residents. Some farmers we interviewed acknowledged facing resistance in neighborhoods where they were seen as outsiders while others noted that being “insiders” had helped them gain the acceptance of the broader neighborhood.

*Do I think it helped being from here? Imma say ‘yeah’ ... because if they find out that I am from around here ... they’ll be more inclined to be like, “Oh no that’s Mr. [name]’s spot, don’t throw rocks at it, don’t cut it, don’t vandalize it.” ... little kids, they gonna come and vandalize the place, but being one of their own is a plus. – Urban farmer, new farm*

According to neighborhood leader and resident interviewees across our study sites, resistance to “outsider” projects stems from a community feeling exploited, a feeling that persists even when the land used for the farm had not been previously valued by the community.

*[T]here were some people who expressed concerns. “This is OUR community. What are these outsiders coming in, taking our resources, and using them?” ... They didn’t know if this was just another case of people coming in and exploiting. – Neighborhood leader, active farm site*

*So I think that initially starts with a disbelief in thinking that somebody is coming in – again, white spoiled kids – are coming in to take advantage of their neighborhood. Even though obviously nobody was claiming that land before. And I think [residents] couldn’t quite figure out how exactly would they take advantage of the area, like what is really to take there, like what do they find so valuable? “If there’s something valuable there, maybe we should have taken advantage of it too.” – Resident, active farm site*

We found that urban farmers can overcome issues of being perceived as “outsiders” and fears of exploitation by demonstrating their dedication to the urban farming project and the larger neighborhood. One way they do this is by living in the neighborhood in which the farm is located. One stakeholder noted that most urban farmers in Baltimore either already lived in the neighborhood where they started a farm or decided to move there soon after, stating, “There’s very few ... if any, where someone just like picked a spot on a map and went there. It just wouldn’t get very far.”

*I do think the ownership has to be local. ...[i]t would mean [the farmers] would come and be a part of the neighborhood. I think that that’s SO important to trying to propagate this as a community scene-change. Because if not it’s just like somebody’s just found a good place to plop their factory, and then they go home at night. But you learn so much by being IN the community. – Resident, rejected farm site*

One urban farmer who moved to the neighborhood in which she farms affirmed, “I think it made it a lot easier to work with the neighborhood... Because it was like *our* community, not *their* community, that I was trying to help.” Neighborhood leaders from this site confirmed that her move to the neighborhood helped quell fears of exploitation and demonstrated her commitment to the neighborhood.

According to our interviewees, urban farmers can also demonstrate dedication to a neighborhood by engaging with local residents and, as one stakeholder put it, “Not just like coming in, doing your farming, and going home. But really like being there, having a farm stand set up on the weekends, talking to people, being very available, answering questions.” Other interviewees shared that being friendly, personable, and generous, as well as taking the time to build relationships facilitated the presence of urban farmers in neighborhoods that are not their own.

*In honesty... first I thought the majority of the people that were up there were white people. And I thought it was gonna benefit them. And then, [the farmers] came out in the community strong. And my whole thought just turned around. ... they got involved with the community association, they would bring stuff to the meetings, they knocked on every door darn near around here. And they gave samples out. ... It wasn't, “Cause we white, we gonna do this and... take it over here...” They gave back right to the community. – Resident, active farm site*

Urban farmers who did not live in the neighborhood in which they farmed reaffirmed this idea, explaining that while they may have initially been viewed as outsiders, social acceptance from neighborhood residents was facilitated by their visible presence on the farm, their interactions with passersby, and residents’ perception of their dedication.

*[D]efinitely I've got some death stares ... like, “I don't know you, you're not from around here, I don't trust you...” [T]hat's really only something you can change by being there a lot and just getting to know people on a daily basis and just chipping away and chipping away... – Urban farmer, active farm*

## Box 2. Building capacity for urban farming in Baltimore City

The issue of urban farmers being perceived as “outsiders” is, in part, tied to race. Many of the urban farmers in Baltimore are white, farming in historically black neighborhoods. A neighborhood leader at one farm site that faced the challenge of initially being perceived as a “white people project” posed an important question: “It’s a good project, but how do we get past the fact that [the farmers are] all young and white with money?”

Members of the urban farming community hope to increase the diversity of urban farmers in Baltimore by building the capacity of individuals living in low-income neighborhoods to farm within their own neighborhood. Real Food Farm is at the forefront of this effort. Established with the goal of demonstrating that urban farming is possible in the city, the farm has a strong focus on education. This includes an afterschool program for middle-school students, paid internships for local high school students, and Americorps positions for young adults interested in urban farming. While acknowledging that building the capacity of new farmers is a slow process, one urban farmer was optimistic that in another five years, they would have trained “20 or so potential urban farmers who are Baltimore natives that will start changing the demographic of urban farming.”

## Sustainability of urban farms

A related concern is the sustainability of projects that are devised by groups from outside the neighborhood. Urban farmers reported that residents had expressed concerns about a lack of commitment on the part of the urban farm, “that fear of someone coming in the neighborhood, putting something else up, promising this, promising that, and then letting it go.”

Some interviewees viewed this distrust as a remnant of past experiences of neighborhoods seeing “a lot of programs... come and go.”

*You know that we're coming in from the outside, and we have the idea about what's best for your neighborhood, and it's not something that you came up with... it's us just coming in and plopping it down. And then maybe we just walk away, and let it fall to pieces and become an eyesore. ...[P]eople have experience of that. Sometimes experience that's decades old, but that's still very resonant. – Key stakeholder*

Several interviewees questioned how a farm would be sustained once the urban farmer leaves or becomes burnt out, and recommended including local residents in the project and connecting with the local community association to help build long-term commitment for the project.

*Whether or not your tomato looks good is not going to sustain this project. What's going to sustain it is people taking a real interest in it, and feeling connected, and making an actual institution that's gonna live beyond the year or two that the initial group can give before burnout. – Neighborhood leader, active farm site*

## Chapter Summary

To summarize, our findings reveal several common barriers that negatively affect local residents' acceptance of urban farming:

- Unfamiliarity with urban farming can result in misconceptions about potential negative impacts of urban farming, as well as a lack of awareness of the benefits an urban farm can bring to a neighborhood.
- Residents worry that urban farms will appear messy and ultimately not improve a vacant lot, resulting in higher aesthetic standards for farms in cities.
- Residents fear that the use of city space to grow food will draw more pests – particularly rats – to neighborhoods.
- Concern that urban farms will fall victim to vandalism engender doubt a farm's potential success.
- With concerns about soil contamination, exposure of produce to urban pollution, and the presence of pests and trash, residents may question the safety or purity of food that is grown on urban farms.
- Some residents worry that urban farms will replace other types of development that they might prefer.
- A perception of urban farmers as “outsiders” – particularly when urban farmers are not from the neighborhood or are a different race from the majority of residents – can breed resistance or distrust of urban farms, as well as fear that such projects are unsustainable.

In the next chapter, we identify strategies that urban farmers draw upon to overcome these barriers and ultimately build community acceptance for urban farming.

## Chapter 5. Strategies for gaining community buy-in for urban farming

A main goal of our research was to identify strategies for gaining community buy-in for urban farming projects. We asked urban farmers about the processes they have used for gaining buy-in and what they would suggest to new urban farmers. We also asked residents, neighborhood leaders, and stakeholders what they would recommend in terms of gaining the acceptance of local communities. The strategies that emerged from our findings fell into three main phases: 1) gaining entry into a neighborhood; 2) introducing the idea for an urban farm to a neighborhood; and 3) engaging the neighborhood.

### Phase 1: Gaining entry into a neighborhood

Our results highlight that in order for urban farmers to gain entry into a neighborhood, it is important that they understand the neighborhood context where they plan to farm and build relationships within the community. While these strategies were generally discussed as useful for urban farmers who are not from the neighborhood in which they plan to farm, we found that urban farmers who planned to farm in their own neighborhood also drew upon these strategies to help garner broader support for the idea for starting an urban farm.

#### *Selecting an appropriate site for an urban farm*

By necessity, the first step in starting a new urban farm is to select a potential site that is conducive to farming in terms of parameters such as its slope, exposure to sunlight, and soil quality. Once such a site is found, the next step is to understand its suitability in terms of how it will impact the social environment of the neighborhood. Considering the positive reception that urban farms have when they turn blighted vacant lots into productive space, an important consideration is the potential for the farm to improve what is seen as a problematic piece of land in a neighborhood. A second consideration is how the site is currently used by the neighborhood, avoiding sites that are actively utilized, formally or informally.

*There was another site ... that would have been great as a [farm], but the residents parked their cars there, and kept their boats there, the kids played, kind of used it as a park. ... I turned it down because I knew that that would have been an issue for the residents, that if I were to have come in, and say, "Okay well everybody's gotta move their cars, I'm going to turn this into a farm," everybody would have been like, "Well, where are we gonna park our cars?" ... [Y]ou have to kinda look at the utility of the land ... the way that residents look at it. – Urban farmer*

Determining whether local residents use a site requires speaking directly with those residents living around the lot; urban farmers should not simply rely upon the knowledge of a community association or other partner, as they might not be aware of the ways local residents use the lot. This became apparent to us when interviewing a resident who lived across from one farm site. She was the only person we interviewed at this site that knew that people used to have family gatherings on the lot where the farm is now located.

#### *Understanding the neighborhood context*

To gain entry into a neighborhood, it is important for urban farmers to understand the community and historical context of the neighborhood. One interviewee framed this approach as:

*...recognizing that you're part of an evolving organism of your neighborhood that has been around for a long time. And figuring out how to work with people who are there, and have been there, and have been working on these issues for a long time. And not being really presumptive about what your role might be before building those connections. – Key stakeholder*

Gaining this understanding allows urban farmers to ensure a farm is a reasonable fit for the neighborhood, build off of existing resources, and identify ways the urban farm can provide services to the neighborhood that are valued by residents, rather than – as one stakeholder put it – assuming “you know more about what this community needs than what the community knows.” One neighborhood leader complimented an urban farmer for such efforts:

*It was clear that they did their research about [the neighborhood]. They looked at something that would be appealing to us and they tailored their message TO us... I feel like it would have shut people off before they even were presented all the great things that, was like, “Ya’ll don’t know this area.” But it was clear that they did their research. – Neighborhood leader, rejected farm site*

Some farmers had gained this contextual understanding through residence in the neighborhood while others relied on their relationships with community leaders and interactions with residents.

### **Forging community relationships**

One of the primary strategies urban farmers in our study used to gain entry into a neighborhood was to build relationships with community leaders, including individuals and community groups. These relationships can help urban farmers determine the suitability of a potential site, gain an understanding of the neighborhood context, and “sell” the idea of the farm to the neighborhood. Interviewees discussed two key strategies in terms of building community relationships: 1) identifying a community leader who can act as a champion for the farm, such as civically engaged residents, community association representatives, leaders of community-based organizations or institutions like churches, and City Council members; and 2) partnering with community groups.

Through our interviews with urban farmers, we found that they tend to rely on community partnerships, particularly with community associations, to facilitate entry into a neighborhood. In all of the active and new farm sites, the local community associations were in full support of the farms before the farmers ever broke ground. They also played critical roles in garnering broader community buy-in for the farms.

*[I]f you can get... [the community association] to be cool about what you're doing, then it can spread from them. Then they can be your advocates in the rest of the neighborhood instead of you trying to individually get everybody on board. – Urban farmer*

One major drawback to relying on community associations is that because they are viewed as official entities that can grant “permission” for the development of urban farms, they can obscure the voices of residents outside of the community association (see Box 3).

*I don't know if I necessarily support the practice of going to a neighborhood association to say, “Hey, we're going to put a farm here, do you guys support it?” ... It can be difficult to say, “Well, I'm going to base where I'm going to put my business on the attitudes or ideas of a few people.” I mean, at the end of the day, how many successful businesses do that? ... [I]f they say “No,” then what? What do you do? You don't do the farm? Okay, so this one person keeps you from serving all these other people that live in the neighborhood. – Urban farmer*

Urban farmers frequently forge relationships with other types of community groups, such as community-based organizations, local businesses, or institutions like churches and schools. Some interviewees perceived such relationships to be an effective strategy for increasing community buy-in for a farm, since these institutions can have broad influence on their members' views of an urban farm. Formal community partnerships that distribute responsibility for an urban farm's management can benefit an urban farming project by bringing together groups with different strengths; for example, an outside group may have the necessary farming expertise, while a community-based organization with an established and respected presence in the neighborhood can manage community relations. Two farms in our study benefitted from such a model, and the farmers recognized that their community partners were critical to gaining the trust of local residents.

*A lot of people are skeptical [of the idea for the urban farm], there's a lot of people from outside going to these neighborhoods and say they're going to help out and do things, so you always see this skepticism. But really truly going in there with that group, that have already been part of that community for decades, there wasn't really a problem, and even to now, there has really been no problems. – Urban farmer, new farm*

### Box 3. Questioning the representativeness of community associations

Baltimore is a city of neighborhoods, many of which have a community association. These groups are often considered the gateway into neighborhoods and are used to gauge support for or gain approval for new projects. As such, they are often considered representative of the broader neighborhood. Many urban farmers in Baltimore connect with the local community association before breaking ground in a new neighborhood.

Several interviewees warned against depending on community associations as a bellwether for neighborhood support for urban farming, questioning the degree to which these associations represent the full range of views in a neighborhood. For example, one resident noted they can tend to be “very parochial,” with the people who have the time and passion to participate sometimes pursuing narrow self-interests through the association; another interviewee described his local community association as comprised solely of elderly participants with a lack of representation by younger generations. In one instance, a potentially supportive neighborhood was unable to override opposition to a proposal for a new urban farm from a community association that was viewed as unrepresentative of the neighborhood.

Despite the lack of representativeness, interviewees also recognized that the residents involved in community associations are generally those who are most invested in the neighborhood and “want to see community improvement.” Others acknowledged that these groups are “an important way to reach the surrounding neighbors.” One urban farmer pointed out that community association members are often homeowners, and so potentially reflect a more “enduring” presence in the neighborhood than do renters.

While they may not represent an entire neighborhood, community associations offer a convenient point of entry into neighborhoods for urban farmers and often play a supportive role in promoting their projects. Urban farmers will likely continue to approach community associations when starting new projects in Baltimore, but building relationships with other community groups in the neighborhood is important for engaging a greater diversity of residents.

## Phase 2: Introducing the idea for an urban farm

Equally important to gaining entry in a neighborhood is the way in which a farm is framed as the idea is introduced to the neighborhood.

### *Giving local residents “a seat at the table”*

One of the strongest themes related to gaining community buy-in that emerged from this study was the need to work with communities when starting a new urban farm, allowing residents to have a “seat at the table” in the planning process.

*If you lay out things properly and you sit down and you talk to folks and you allow them a seat at the table, [I really don't see] that you're gonna get a majority of any community to say, 'We don't want that there. We rather the dirty dusty tires. We rather it to be overgrown.' – Key stakeholder*

Along these lines, some interviewees urged urban farmers to acknowledge the agricultural knowledge that exists among residents, for example, older blacks who migrated from the South and came from a farming background. One stakeholder thought urban farmers would be most successful if they “find out who grows and what their skill sets are, and see how it can be blended in.”

Neighborhood leaders warned that not soliciting local input would breed resistance to the farm, regardless of the merits of the project, framing such inclusiveness as a matter of fairness.

*[T]hat directly affects our home, not theirs, so for anybody to have more say in it than us, that would not be fair... We're the ones that's going to feel the impact of everything the most, so I guess you could say we have most of the insight as to how important it was for the garden to be there, because we know what we don't want it to become... – Neighborhood leader, new farm site*

Underlying these sentiments is the idea that residents should be involved early on, before any farming activity starts. Otherwise, efforts to involve the community may be seen as tokenism. One neighborhood leader applauded the urban farmers in his neighborhood for their early and open approach:

*I thought, well here's somebody who's not saying, “We have found a site and we're going to... start a farm.” This is someone who says, “We have an idea. We wanna know what the community thinks about it!” ... [T]hat's EXACTLY the kind of thing that the community association is interested in. ... Is it REALLY going to fit in? Well we didn't know! But at least they were saying, “Hey, we have an idea and we wanna ENGAGE with you.” And that's so different than a lot of people who come into the neighborhood. They have their plans all made up, and they come to the association, and say, “We've got this plans, we've got this money, this is what we're gonna do, we want a letter of support.” – Neighborhood leader, active farm site*

Similarly, one stakeholder emphasized the importance of not presenting the urban farm as a “done deal.” This was the exact approach of one urban farmer we interviewed:

*I present [the farm] as a blank slate. ... “What do you want out of this site?” ... [P]resenting it that way, set[ting] these kind of abstract bounds of, you know, “We need to grow food there, we want it to be aesthetically pleasing. It needs to at least keep in mind the idea of making money. ... within those boundaries, what would you like to happen?” – Urban farmer, new farm*

The urban farmers we interviewed all reported seeking out community acceptance prior to breaking ground, but they varied in the degree to which they solicited input. Community farmers attended numerous community meetings and went door-to-door to talk to residents living around the potential farm site to gauge support. Commercial farms took a more perfunctory approach, simply attending a community meeting or two to inform residents of their plans.

### **“De-mystifying” urban farming**

As discussed in Chapter 4, one common barrier to community buy-in for urban farming is urban residents’ lack of familiarity with the activity. As such, an important component of introducing the idea of an urban farm is to “de-mystify” urban farming. To overcome the lack of familiarity about urban farming and give residents an idea of what to expect, interviewees suggested sharing examples of existing urban farms through photos and tours. One farmer described his plans to take a resistant neighborhood leader on a tour of multiple farms throughout the city to demonstrate how they can fit into different types of neighborhoods.



First-hand experience with urban farms did appear to positively influence perceptions of urban farming among the residents we interviewed. A few residents reported that having seen urban farms in other Baltimore City neighborhoods or other cities made them open to the idea of having a farm in their own neighborhood.

#### **Box 4. Farm or garden?**

Through our interviews with neighborhood leaders and residents, it became clear that many people see little difference between an urban farm and garden. They used the words ‘farm’ and ‘garden’ interchangeably, and some consistently referred to their neighborhood’s urban farm as “the garden.” Is it an important differentiation to make? From a technical standpoint, the label ‘farm’ denotes a certain level of profit and the ability to access particular networks, so for formal purposes, it may be an important label. But for some urban residents, the term ‘farm’ can be a barrier to community buy-in. Interviewees thought that residents associate the term ‘farm’ with livestock (and the associated waste) or that it can create a cognitive dissonance with beliefs about what type of activities “belong” in a city. In contrast, a garden is something familiar and harmless, and according to one stakeholder, a place that residents feel “invited into” as opposed to what may be perceived as more proprietary farms.

### **Presenting the idea for an urban farm**

An important part of introducing the idea for an urban farm to a neighborhood is the act of literally presenting the farm proposal to residents. Among the urban farms included in our study, there were two common approaches: presenting at community association meetings and going door-to-door to speak with residents living around the potential farm site. Community presentations tended to include discussion of the potential benefits the farm would provide the neighborhood, mock-ups of how the space would be used, photos of other farms to give residents a sense of what they could expect, and explanation of the farms management, including details such as how soil contamination would be addressed. Neighborhood leaders expressed appreciation for the high level of detail that urban farmers provided.

*Because of that, the simplicity of their presentation, it didn't seem like they were putting on smoke and mirrors. You know, very straightforward, this is it, we're laying it out all before you, there's no behind the scenes things that we're trying to keep from your eyes. – Neighborhood leader, rejected farm site*

The purpose of these meetings was not just to inform residents about the farm proposal, but also to answer their questions, address concerns, and in some cases, get their ideas on what they would like to see in the farm. For example, one stakeholder described one urban farm for which a community meeting provided the opportunity to have the “tough discussion” that was needed to get the neighborhood’s support:

*[I]n some of our communities where we have systemic issues that kind of plague them, we know of great programs or great opportunities and we can just take over this lot that no one has really cared for and let's just do it here, but that's always the wrong approach. And I think what we were able to do very early on... was reach out to the community, bring people who already had a vested interest in the community and respect in the community on board, and walk through that tough discussion of, you know, the education and awareness piece and getting people up to speed and on board. – Key stakeholder*

Interviewees noted the importance of communicating with residents about their concerns regarding urban farming. For example, numerous interviewees highlighted the importance of proactively addressing widespread concern about farms attracting rats. Perhaps even more important is emphasizing how an urban farm can benefit a neighborhood. One neighborhood leader explained that the perspective of local residents is “if we’re gonna benefit you, then how are you gonna benefit us?” Interviewees emphasized the importance of framing the proposal for an urban farm in ways that resonate with the particular concerns and interests of local residents, attributing the positive reception farmers have received in some neighborhoods to their effective articulation of how a farm would alleviate problems in the neighborhood, such as improving access to fresh vegetables or mitigating illegal dumping on a vacant lot.

Relaying concerns about the lack of representativeness of community associations discussed in Box 3, interviewees emphasized the importance of also going door-to-door to engage residents who live in direct proximity to the potential farm site. One farmer described the process of going door-to-door as “good for building a relationship with our neighbors” because she was able to interact with many of the residents that she now sees on a day-to-day basis.

Despite efforts made by urban farmers to engage residents early on, several residents we interviewed living near one of the new farm sites reported that they first found out about the farm in their neighborhood by seeing a hoop house appear in the vacant lot, reflecting the challenge in reaching residents with one-on-one efforts, particularly in large neighborhoods.

### Phase 3: Engaging the neighborhood

Once an urban farm is established, ongoing efforts to engage local residents appear to positively effect community buy-in, further acting to de-mystify urban farming and facilitating a fondness and respect for the farm that can increase its viability. Many residents we interviewed formed positive impressions of their neighborhood farm after becoming involved in some way. Among efforts to engage residents, interviewees discussed the importance of creating a welcoming and inclusive environment, providing opportunities for involvement, including access to farm produce, and communicating with residents about opportunities to engage with the farm.

#### Creating a welcoming environment

One prerequisite to engaging neighborhoods is creating a welcoming and inclusive atmosphere at urban farms. The way urban farmers interact with the neighborhood strongly influences perceptions of how inviting the farm space is to others. One farmer discussed the importance of having a regular presence, stating “I think engaging with people and showing them around makes them feel like they are able to come in and get used to the project.” Residents we interviewed at the active farm sites praised urban farmers for their openness.

Another aspect of creating a welcoming environment that arose is having a diversity of people involved with a farm in order to create a more inclusive space:

*For a lot of people, and certainly I'd say older African American residents, if you haven't been invited onto someone's... that's not your space to enter... So the more people we can get physically on the site itself, shows it's an open space. ... if you don't see... somebody that looks like yourself, you might be less likely to join them. – Neighborhood leader, active farm site*



## Box 5. To fence or not to fence?

Another issue related to the inclusivity of urban farms is whether these projects should be fenced. This is far from an easy decision. Some interviewees were concerned that without a fence, a farm opens itself up to vandalism and theft. At one new farm site, a neighborhood leader (C2S1NL1 p25) shared that while the farmer wanted to avoid putting up a fence, he was “strongly against” this “because I live in the community. I know, I know, I KNOW the reality.” One neighborhood leader pointed out that it is not just people that fences keep out, but animals and trash as well, noting that restaurants and others might be leery of purchasing food that is potentially exposed to the excrement of urban animals. In the spirit of engaging the community, one stakeholder recommended soliciting local residents’ input on the design of a fence, or turning it into a community art project by having local children decorate the fence.

However, others felt that a fence defied the spirit of involvement on the farm and presented a barrier to inclusiveness, both physically and psychologically. At one active farm site, a neighborhood leader (C1S1NL1 p35) asserted that a fence would have lessened the neighborhood’s support of the farm. He stated, “If it was somebody who was coming from the outside who’s going to put in a farm, put up fences and keep all the neighborhood away, then there would be so much animosity and there wouldn’t be any appeal.” Others commented that fences make a farm look more like a business rather than a project for the neighborhood, which could be seen as a positive or negative, depending on the farm’s business model.

### **Providing opportunities for resident involvement**

Through this research, we found that the most important way to gain community buy-in for an urban farm is to involve local residents in the project. One stakeholder noted that the farms that have “been successful” in Baltimore have been “good about involvement and community relations.” One resident voiced the opinion that local involvement is non-negotiable:

*You can’t just start a farm and think that, “Okay we’re going to have all this shit growing all nice,” you feel me? And not have people from the community that’s been looking at the vacant lots and throwing trash on the vacant lots. You can’t cut them people out of the equation. ... If you come and bring farming to the vacant lots you have to bring people from that community into those vacant lots to help build on that lot. – Resident, new farm site*

Urban farmers use a variety of strategies to involve residents on the farm, depending on their business model and the preferences of neighborhood residents. Some activities engage the broader neighborhood, such as hosting celebratory events on the farm, offering gardening workshops and other educational activities, creating neighborhood recipe books, and making produce from the farm available to residents. Community events were viewed as particularly important. In addition to helping to define the farm as a community space, interviewees saw these events as a key way of introducing local residents to the farm and encouraging further involvement.

Other efforts at engagement focus on involving a smaller number of residents in ongoing activities, creating strong allies for the farm. For example, at one active farm site, the urban farmers created a community garden on the lot across from the farm, giving residents ownership of part of the farm space. One resident noted the importance of having a few “passionate people who would drive [the farm] forward for the first couple of years... before it [becomes] a visible positive spot” that draws in the broader neighborhood.

Volunteerism is another mainstay of many urban farms and can create important relationships between volunteers and urban farms. Yet volunteering may not be an option for all city residents. Some resident interviewees were skeptical that local residents would have the time or desire to volunteer and even worried that an urban farm would not be viable if it relied upon residents' active involvement. Farmers we interviewed acknowledged that economic hardship bars some residents from volunteering and explained that many of their volunteers are not neighborhood residents, but people from the around the city who have an existing interest in growing food or a desire to spend time outdoors.

*[I]f you're a low income household you don't have time to volunteer to go work somewhere for free, so just naturally our volunteer folks tend to be folks who have disposable income... they've been in an office all week so they want to work outside.- Urban farmer, new farm*

Other residents discussed the sense of caring that comes about when individuals see something they have planted grow and thrive, and suggested involving the broader neighborhood in propagating the farm. For example, one resident thought that urban farmers could get residents more invested in the farm by asking them to grow a certain type of flower at home and then hold a community event during which everyone plants their flowers at the farm, thereby creating a sense of ownership in the farm.

### **Youth participation**

Interviewees reported that encouraging participation by youth provides a gateway for “de-mystifying” the farm for their parents, organically leading to engagement with the broader neighborhood.

*If you try to ask their parents to come out, it's probably not going to happen. But the kids will come. And maybe they'll go home and say good things. – Urban farmer, active farm site*

Among the farms included in our study, youth had become involved through collaborations between the farm and local elementary schools, family-focused community events, farm internships, and informally. Many residents we interviewed expressed the need for more opportunities for youth in their neighborhoods and viewed spending time at an urban farm as something constructive for them to do and an alternative to unhealthy and illegal alternatives.

### **Providing access to farm food**

A key strategy for connecting local residents to an urban farm is to provide access to the farm's produce. Although stakeholders generally suggested being generous with farm produce by giving away samples or dropping prices when selling produce to the immediate neighborhood, those that commented on the issue voiced the opinion that urban farm food should always be sold so as not to devalue it. As one stakeholder explained, residents are “more likely to eat it if they pay for it ... I think that if they just put the food out in a bag and said ‘it's for free,’ it would just sit there.” One urban farmer reported not dropping the cost of the farm produce in the local neighborhood to below standard supermarket prices for organic food, instead providing incentives when residents use federal food aid benefits to pay for farm produce. He explained:

*[W]e want that conversation of ‘Hey, why are your prices so high?’ so we can talk about how much labor we need to use because we don't use pesticides or herbicides and that we actually pay our laborer a living wage. ... All that stuff resonates and... that education is why we're out there too. So even if I don't make a sale but I have that conversation with somebody that's kind of a positive and that's accomplishing our mission. – Urban farmer, new farm site*

Many neighborhood leaders saw residents as willing to pay for the ability to easily access high quality fresh produce. For example, one said of the neighborhood's urban farm, "One hand washes the other because it keeps them from going way out of the community to just do their marketing." However, many neighborhood leaders and resident interviewees assumed that food from an urban farm would be more affordable than supermarket produce since it "cuts out the middle man."

Beyond cost, another consideration in providing food for the local neighborhood is the types of food grown. Stakeholders discussed the importance of letting local residents have a say in what is grown and explained that many urban farms grow produce that local residents want to eat, even when that means growing certain crops that have a low return on investment. Along these lines, one farmer explained that urban farmers sometimes have to curb their excitement to try out "cool" new crop varieties in order to grow familiar crops that local families will want to purchase.

*Heirloom tomatoes are great, but we gotta get ones that look like the tomatoes in the stores a little bit. We need some orange carrots, we need beets that look standard. – Urban farmer, new farm site*

Urban farmers also discussed the challenges in accommodating food preferences within diverse neighborhoods. One stakeholder noted that there is a learning curve in figuring out what foods the neighborhood wants, a dialogue that may take a season of growing to figure out. "I don't think we can just say low-income inner-city people want to eat 'blank' – that would be really shortsighted." Other interviewees emphasized the need to create greater demand for fresh food by teaching residents how to prepare such food, explaining that many people do not know how to cook fresh vegetables or that the crops grown on the farm may be unfamiliar. One active farm was planning to partner with a local community organization to offer cooking classes to local residents and had created a community cookbook that incorporated recipes from local residents.

#### **Box 6. Balancing economic sustainability and food access goals**

Striking a balance between affordability and economic sustainability is a major challenge for urban farms that strive to provide their produce to local neighborhood residents. Residents in the low-income neighborhoods where urban farms are often located frequently cannot afford to pay the real price of growing organic food. Reflecting upon the buying power of many Baltimore residents, one stakeholder explained that if prices are not kept low, "you just wouldn't sell anything, and you'd be perceived as elitist, and you wouldn't be getting any food to your neighbors." Those farms that have an explicit goal of increasing access to fresh food in food desert neighborhoods generally rely on grant-funding, volunteer labor, and federal food aid benefits that help to offset the cost of produce for low-income residents. Even then, cost can remain a challenge – an urban farmer from one urban community farm in our study noted that despite efforts to make produce available and affordable, residents had not purchased the produce, a failure she thought might be related to cost. Another strategy urban farmers use in order to offer affordably priced food within the local neighborhood is to drop prices in the immediate neighborhood, selling the harvest for less than it takes to produce, and then increasing prices at farmers markets or restaurants. The urban farming community is working to understand whether it is feasible to have an economically sustainable project while also providing affordable food to local residents; for now, the issue remains unresolved.

### **Communicating with residents**

An important aspect of neighborhood engagement is communicating with local residents. The farms we studied communicated with residents in order to keep them apprised of the farm's activities, promote events held at the farm, solicit volunteers, and market the farm's produce. Interviewees reported that the most effective communication came through face-to-face strategies such as signage on the farm, flyers given to passersby, knocking on doors of nearby residents, and providing samples of foods grown on the farm. Some farmers emphasized the importance of simply walking around the neighborhood and having spontaneous social interactions with residents. Others attended community association meetings on an ongoing basis as a part of their communication strategy, both to keep the attendees and leadership apprised of the farm's activities, as well as to stay informed about what else is happening in the neighborhood. The two active farm sites also have an online presence, including a farm website, blog, and email updates. However, urban farmers we interviewed reported using online methods primarily to communicate with an audience beyond the neighborhood, since many residents do not use these forms of communication.

### **Chapter Summary**

In this chapter, we described the key strategies urban farmers use to gain community buy-in for their projects. These strategies can be considered in three main phases. The first phase – gaining entry into a neighborhood – consists of strategies aimed at gaining familiarity with a neighborhood and building relationships. The second phase – introducing the idea for an urban farm to a neighborhood – relates to the way in which a farm is framed as the idea is introduced to the neighborhood. The final phase – engaging the neighborhood – is an ongoing process to encourage local residents to be involved with the farm. In the next chapter, we draw upon these strategies to present a series of recommendations designed to assist urban farmers in their efforts to strengthen the relationship between their urban farming projects and local communities.

## Chapter 6: Putting the Community Buy-In Process Into Action

Gaining community buy-in is a critical and unique part of integrating urban farms into the social landscape of cities. As an unconventional use of city land, buy-in is important for ensuring urban farms become an accepted part of a neighborhood. Even urban commercial farms that do not have specific social goals must navigate the social environment in which they are working. This need for community engagement places additional demands on urban farmers, who must balance food production goals with the needs and priorities of the residents living in the neighborhood surrounding the farm. To assist urban farmers in planning for the community buy-in process, this chapter presents a series of recommendations to help strengthen the relationship between urban farms and local communities. First, we consider whether all urban farms need community buy-in and discuss the timeline for gaining buy-in.

### Do all urban farms need community buy-in?

As discussed in Chapter 3, community buy-in is critical for urban community farms whose mission involves serving the local neighborhood. Considering that community engagement efforts take time away from food production activities – and therefore a farm’s potential profit – is such buy-in necessary for commercial farms too?

Based on our research, we suggest that community buy-in is essential for all urban farms located in residential areas, but the degree to which urban farmers engage local communities will differ based on the goals of the farm. This is why we consider the recommendations presented in this chapter as *options*, rather than as a checklist. For example, an urban community farmer whose project has prominent social goals and utilizes city-owned land will likely devote more time and energy to the buy-in process as compared to an urban commercial farmer farming on private land. However, even a commercial farmer needs to ensure local acceptance of the farm so as to avoid potential vandalism that can arise when community members feel the project is an imposition on their neighborhood.

### A Timeline for Gaining Community Buy-In

As seen in Chapter 5, community buy-in occurs in three main phases: 1) gaining entry into the neighborhood; 2) presenting the idea of the farm to the local neighborhood; and 3) engaging the neighborhood. The first two phases occur before ever breaking ground, while the third phase is an ongoing process that begins as soon as the farm is established and continues throughout the life of the urban farming project. The recommendations provided in this chapter align with these three phases.



Community acceptance for an urban farm generally grows as local residents see the farm in action and witness the benefits it brings to the neighborhood. This is most likely to occur once the space visibly looks like a farm (with walkways, rows of crops, flowers, etc.) as opposed to a dug-up lot. Additionally, as residents see the commitment of the urban farmers to the neighborhood and concerns about the sustainability of the project wane, buy-in is likely to increase.

In terms of timing, one urban farmer we interviewed suggested starting the buy-in process as much as a year in advance of breaking ground to become integrated as an active member of the neighborhood, but also recommended using that time to clean up the lot and remediate the

soil. Other farmers we interviewed followed a more accelerated timeline, breaking ground within a few months of their first community buy-in efforts.

It is important to also address the time needed to effectively gain community buy-in. Farming itself is an intense commitment, and farmers may find it difficult to find time to devote to community buy-in efforts. Our goal with the recommendations provided in this chapter is to help urban farmers plan in advance a buy-in process that is effective and feasible. Going into a project with a pre-determined plan for gaining community buy-in can save time down the road spent scrambling to appease unhappy residents, and can be the determining factor as to whether a project even comes to fruition.

## **Recommendations**

Based on the findings from our research discussed in Chapters 3, 4, and 5, the recommendations presented in this chapter are intended to assist urban farmers, city planners, and others who support urban farming in designing processes for gaining community buy-in that are conducive to the local setting. The ultimate goal of these recommendations is to help ensure that urban farming projects will be accepted and embraced by local communities. Summarized in Table 5, these recommendations are not intended to be a checklist that is applied to every urban farming project, since determining the most effective process for gaining community buy-in for an urban farm depends in large part on the characteristics of the neighborhood in which it is situated and the farm's business model. It also depends on the degree to which an urban farmer is perceived as an "outsider" to the neighborhood – an urban farmer who is also a longtime neighborhood resident may already understand the neighborhood context and have relationships with community partners. Rather, these recommendations should be viewed as a full spectrum of actions to consider when creating a strategy to gain community buy-in, and they should be tailored to the specific farm and its neighborhood.

**Table 5.** Summary of recommendations for gaining local community buy-in for urban farms

<b>Phase 1: Gaining entry into a neighborhood</b>
A. Ensure the site selected for an urban farm is not actively used for other purposes (e.g. family gatherings, parking, playfields) and provides an opportunity to improve blighted land
B. Take steps to gain an understanding of the neighborhood context (including the history of the neighborhood and potential farm site, and neighborhood challenges and assets)
C. Avoid assumptions about what local residents desire and take steps to identify ways the urban farm can provide services that they value
D. Forge relationships with community leaders or groups that can champion the idea for the urban farm and assist urban farmers to incorporate goals into their project that are meaningful for neighborhood residents
E. Avoid perceptions that an urban farm is an “outsider project” by demonstrating dedication to the neighborhood through active community involvement
<b>Phase 2: Introducing the idea for an urban farm</b>
F. Include local residents in the process of planning the urban farm
G. De-mystify urban farming to overcome a lack of familiarity with the concept by sharing examples of other urban farms via photographs and tours
H. Proactively address common concerns about urban farming and explain potential benefits for the local neighborhood
I. Use multiple forums to present the idea for the urban farm, including community meetings and engaging residents who live in direct proximity to the potential farm site
<b>Phase 3: Engaging the neighborhood</b>
J. Create a welcoming environment at the urban farm site
K. Create opportunities for residents to be involved with the urban farm
L. Provide opportunities for local residents to access farm produce; for farms with a mission of providing food for the neighborhood, consult residents to determine the types of food they want to eat and convenient times/locations for distribution, and ensure food is affordable
M. Communicate with residents to maintain a positive and active relationship
N. Maintain and beautify the urban farm to meet residents’ expectations for their neighborhood’s appearance, including creating a sense of permanence in the space in the off-season

## **Phase 1. Gaining entry into a neighborhood**

The first set of recommendations relates to the need for urban farmers to gain entry into a neighborhood. While these recommendations may be most applicable to urban farmers who are perceived as “outsiders” to a neighborhood, farmers starting an urban farm in their own neighborhood can also utilize them to garner broader support for the idea.

### ***A. Ensure the site selected for an urban farm is not actively used and provides an opportunity to improve blighted land***

Equally important to the agricultural suitability of a site is how use of the site as an urban farm will impact the social environment of the neighborhood. It is important to ensure that local residents do not already use the site selected for an urban farm for other purposes (e.g. family cookouts, parking, playing fields) and that other plans for the site are not underway. To determine whether the site is used farmers should speak directly with residents who live adjacent to the site, since community leaders may not be aware of everything that happens on the site. Choosing a site that is seen as blighted is beneficial since residents will likely appreciate improvement to the site. Farmers should also be prepared to speak to the lack of development potential of the land and the ways the urban farm would benefit the neighborhood. Ultimately, having the municipality’s Planning Department, a community association, or other trusted group facilitate this process can increase the legitimacy of the site selection.

### ***B. Take steps to gain an understanding of the neighborhood context***

Gaining entry into a neighborhood requires understanding the neighborhood context, including the history of the neighborhood and potential farm site; leaders within the community; challenges the neighborhood faces; existing assets and resources; and the preferences, concerns, and values of the local residents. This allows urban farmers to ensure a farm is a reasonable fit for the neighborhood, build off of existing resources, and identify ways the urban farm can provide services to the neighborhood that are valued by residents. Approaches to getting to know a neighborhood include reaching out to known neighborhood leaders and groups, going door-to-door to meet residents living around the potential farm site, attending community meetings and events, or speaking with City Council representatives.

### ***C. Avoid assumptions about what local residents desire and take steps to identify ways the urban farm can provide services they value***

Both urban community and commercial farming projects should consider ways in which the farm can provide services that are valued by local residents. This requires a humble approach when entering a new neighborhood, avoiding assumptions about what a particular neighborhood wants or needs, and taking steps to understand the neighborhood context and identify ways the farm can provide services that are valued by local residents. In some cases, a community association or other group representing the neighborhood may have formally adopted development goals to which an urban farm can contribute, while in other cases, urban farmers may need to speak with community leaders and residents in order to understand the types of services that local residents value. This recommendation is not meant to usurp production as an urban farmer’s top priority, but rather to encourage urban farmers to consider their ability to take small actions to contribute to the neighborhood’s development. Of course, a single urban farm cannot meet every resident’s desires for their neighborhood, so urban farmers will need to use the information they have to decide what services they can offer to the neighborhood.

***D. Forge relationships with community leaders or groups who champion the idea for the urban farm and assist urban farmers to incorporate goals into their project that are meaningful for neighborhood residents***

Forging relationships with community leaders or groups can facilitate entry into a neighborhood by helping an urban farmer understand local perspectives, including the benefits that will resonate with local residents and the reservations they may have about having an urban farm in their neighborhood, ultimately guiding urban farmers to incorporate goals into their project that are meaningful for neighborhood residents. Having champions for the project can also help “sell” the idea of the farm to the neighborhood. Such relationships may take the form of individual champions who support the urban farming project such as civically engaged residents, community association representatives, or a City Council representative, or as partnerships with community-based organizations or community associations that are already active in the neighborhood. It is important to ensure that a potential partner is well respected within the neighborhood, and to remember that a single community leader or organization often does not represent all stakeholders in the neighborhood.

***E. Avoid perceptions that an urban farm is an “outsider project” by demonstrating dedication to the neighborhood through active community involvement***

Particularly for farmers who are not from the neighborhood in which they are farming, in order to avoid the perception that the farm is an “outsider project,” farmers should demonstrate their dedication to the neighborhood. Some farmers feel it is important to move to the neighborhood in which they are farming, and prefer to live close to their farm. However, we found that urban farmers can be accepted as part of the neighborhood so long as they take an active role in the community by, for example, attending community association meetings, hosting community events, partnering with local institutions like schools or churches, or engaging with residents through actions as simple as being friendly and open to conversing with passersby.

**Phase 2. Introducing the idea for an urban farm**

The second set of recommendations relates to the way urban farmers introduce the idea for an urban farm to a neighborhood.

***F. Include local residents in the planning process for a new urban farm***

It is important to not present plans for an urban farm as a “done deal,” but to provide opportunities for local residents to weigh in during the planning process. This does not mean that residents need to have a say in all of the minutiae of planning and running the farm; rather, urban farmers should be open to the issues residents feel most strongly about. We also recommend that farmers identify specific decisions on which residents can be consulted, for example, the types of crops residents want to eat. It is also important to avoid assumptions that urban residents are naïve about food production and acknowledge existing agricultural knowledge. For example, we found that in many of Baltimore’s black neighborhoods, many older residents migrated from the South and came from an agricultural background.

In some cases, urban farming projects have formed advisory boards that include residents as official representatives of the neighborhood. While there are benefits to this approach, urban farmers we interviewed also cautioned against making too many demands of resident volunteers and emphasized the importance of “going to the people” to solicit their input. Community meetings are a common and logical forum for urban farms to solicit feedback, but do not replace the need to go door-to-door to engage residents living in immediate proximity to the potential farm site.

### ***G. De-mystify urban farming to overcome a lack of familiarity with the concept***

When approaching a neighborhood about starting a new urban farm, it is important to “de-mystify” urban farming, as it may not be a familiar concept. One tactic is to share examples of other urban farms via photographs, stories, and tours. One urban farmer recommended sharing “before and after” pictures of an existing farm site to show the positive transformation of the space. Sharing ideas for the new urban farm – such as a site map – is also useful.

Through our interviews, we found that many residents consider urban farming trendy, bringing something unique and exciting to the neighborhood. In contrast, some interviewees described urban farming as “nothing new,” stating that urban gardening has been around forever. Both of these views can be useful for framing the idea for a new urban farm, depending on the neighborhood. Getting to know the neighborhood in advance can help urban farmers determine which approach is more likely to resonate with the local neighborhood.

### ***H. Address common concerns about urban farming and explain potential benefits for the local neighborhood***

Urban farmers should be prepared to address common concerns about urban farming, including rats, vandalism, soil contamination, and food safety/sanitation. Concerns about rats seem to be so widespread that farmers should consider preemptively addressing this issue. Ultimately, the most important information for urban farmers to share with is how the farm can benefit the local neighborhood. When communicating with residents, farmers should be specific about the purpose of the urban farming project and realistic about the benefits it can provide to the surrounding neighborhood so as to avoid disappointing or frustrating residents when outsized expectations for the farm are not met. Interviewees also recommended being transparent about the farm’s profits and communicating with residents about how profits are used.

### ***I. Use multiple forums to present the idea for the urban farm***

Multiple forums should be provided for exchanging ideas and information about the urban farm proposal. Presenting at community meetings that are open to all residents provides a level of inclusiveness important for gaining community buy-in. Such meetings should be a give-and-take, informing residents about the farm idea and addressing their questions and concerns, as well as soliciting their input. Going door-to-door to engage residents who live in direct proximity to the potential farm site one-on-one is critical to ensure that residents who will be most affected by the farm’s presence are aware of the plans and have an opportunity to weigh in.

## **Phase 3. Engaging the neighborhood**

The final set of recommendations relates to the ongoing task of engaging the neighborhood.

### ***J. Create a welcoming environment at the urban farm site***

A key element of encouraging neighborhood engagement is creating a welcoming and inclusive atmosphere at an urban farm. Urban farmers’ interactions with the neighborhood positively influence perceptions of how inviting the farm space is to residents when farmers are seen as friendly, open, and willing to take the time to engage residents one-on-one. Events held at an urban farm can increase residents’ familiarity and comfort with the space. In addition, creating spaces where local residents can enjoy the natural green space, such as picnic tables or pergolas, can make the farm an inviting place. Other factors such as the diversity of people involved at the farm and whether the farm is fenced are also important to consider.

### ***K. Create opportunities for residents to be involved with the urban farm***

Since engaging residents increases acceptance and fondness for an urban farm, it is important to encourage residents to be involved with the urban farm. Offering a variety of opportunities

can build different types of relationships with residents. For example, ongoing activities with a small group of residents – such as an associated community garden – can create strong allies for the farm. Opportunities such as community events may encourage involvement from a broader swath of the neighborhood, engendering broad community acceptance. Creating opportunities for children to be involved can foster buy-in from their caregivers. Ultimately, residents should weigh in on the type of opportunities with which they want to be involved.

Having volunteer days is a common practice among urban farms in Baltimore. If well organized with defined tasks and hours, volunteers can be a great help. Urban farmers often reward volunteers with a basket of produce, and one urban farmer recommended recognizing long-term volunteers with special titles or greater responsibility so they feel they are a part of the project. Volunteering should not be the only opportunity for resident involvement, however, since many residents will not want to, or be able to, volunteer.

#### ***L. Provide opportunities for local residents to access farm produce***

Considering the ubiquitous expectation that local residents will have access to some of the produce from an urban farm in their neighborhood, it is important to ensure these opportunities exist. The mechanism for doing so – whether selling the food, giving it away in exchange for volunteer hours, providing it for free during community events, etc. – depends on the farm’s business model. Balancing the goals of economic sustainability and providing affordable food to the neighborhood is challenging, so farmers need to determine up front the proportion of their produce that can be provided to residents and at what cost, and be transparent about these plans. Accepting federal food aid benefits can help overcome this challenge.

For farms whose mission is to provide food for the neighborhood, it is important to have an ongoing dialogue with residents about the foods they would like to see grown, the affordability of the food, and how to make the food accessible (e.g. a convenient time and location for a farm stand). Another consideration is whether local residents know how to cook fresh produce; partnering with a community-based organization to provide recipes or cooking classes is a common approach to addressing this challenge.

#### ***M. Communicate with residents to maintain a positive and active relationship***

Communication is key to encouraging involvement and ensuring residents are aware of opportunities to access farm produce. Urban farmers need to not only ensure that two-way communication with neighborhood residents is possible, but also to seek out multiple strategies of communication. These strategies may include distributing flyers, going door-to-door to speak with residents in close proximity to the farm, making announcements at community meetings, using signage at the farm site, and – to a limited degree – using social media.

#### ***N. Maintain and beautify the urban farm to meet residents’ expectations for their neighborhood’s appearance***

While most urban farms inherently improve the physical environment of a neighborhood by cleaning up a vacant lot, it is important to realize that what may look fertile and beautiful to a seasoned farmer may look messy and unkempt to the average urbanite. Maintenance of the space is critical so that it looks “tidy” to the untrained eye, but to gain the neighborhood’s approval, urban farming projects often must go one step further to beautify the space (e.g. by planting perennials, creating a flower border, incorporating artwork and sculptures) and create a sense of permanence in the space in the winter months. Communicating with residents about their expectations will help farmers determine the level of effort that is needed. Given the challenge in transforming a blighted space quickly, particularly given the messy initial stages of building a farm, it may be useful to have onsite signs that explain to passersby the purpose of the farm and updates on its progress.

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