

# Urban Agriculture and Innovative Production Advisory Committee

FINAL REPORT | 2023



## URBAN AGRICULTURE AND INNOVATIVE PRODUCTION



**Recommendations made to the U.S. Department of Agriculture to advance the development of policies and outreach relating to urban, indoor, and other emerging agriculture practices.**

[WWW.USDA.GOV/URBAN](http://WWW.USDA.GOV/URBAN)

November 8, 2023

Thomas J. Vilsack  
Secretary, U.S. Department of Agriculture  
1400 Independence Ave., SW  
Washington, D.C. 20250

Gloria Montaña Greene  
Deputy Under Secretary, Farm Production and Conservation  
1400 Independence Ave., SW  
Washington, D.C. 20250

Dear Secretary Vilsack and Deputy Under Secretary Montaña:

As the Urban Agriculture and Innovative Production Advisory Committee (UAIPAC) puts forth its first set of recommendations to the USDA, we thank you for the opportunity to support our diverse agricultural industry and advance the various USDA programs, policies, and initiatives that are affected.

To finalize this report, the UAIPAC held 6 public meetings on the following dates:

- March 23-24, 2022
- August 5, 2022
- November 29, 2022
- February 23, 2023
- April 18, 2023
- August 1, 2023

Public input was gathered through a combination of written and oral comments provided before, during and after the public meetings referenced above. All public comments were shared with voting members of the UAIPAC for review and consideration and are posted on the public [UAIPAC website](#).

To help form the recommendations enclosed in this report, the UAIPAC was honored to receive briefings from several high-ranking educators and advocates in the industry including Senator Debbie Stabenow and several USDA Staff:

- Under Secretary Robert Bonnie, Farm Production and Conservation
- Deputy Under Secretary Gloria Montaña Greene, Farm Production and Conservation
- Chief Terry Cosby, Natural Resources Conservation Service
- Associate Chief Louis Aspey, Natural Resources Conservation Service
- Administrator Zach Ducheneaux, Farm Service Agency
- Senior Advisor for Racial Justice and Equity, Dr. Dewayne Goldmon
- Designated Federal Officer Cecilia Hernandez, USDA Equity Commission
- Designated Federal Officer RJ Cabrera, Office of Partnerships and Public Engagement

- Deputy Associate Administrator Angela Kline, Food and Nutrition Service
- Deputy Associate Administrator Ron Ward, Food and Nutrition Service
- Deputy Administrator Bill Cobb, Farm Service Agency
- Assistant Deputy Administrator Dana Richey, Farm Service Agency
- Deputy Director Jeff Canavan, Food Safety and Inspection Service
- USDA Food Loss and Waste Liaison Jean Buzby, Office of the Chief Scientist
- Microbiologist Dr. Pat Millner, Agricultural Research Service
- National Science Liaison Bradley Rein, National Institute of Food and Agriculture
- National Program Leader Dr. Rizana Mahroof, National Institute of Food and Agriculture
- Branch Chief Chandra Place, Risk Management Agency

Following the public meeting held on November 29, 2022, several members traveled to USDA HQ to meet in-person and had an opportunity to visit the Agriculture Research Service (ARS), Beltsville Agriculture Research Center (BARC). During the visit the members in attendance were able to get a tour of the Genetic Improvement of Fruits and Vegetable Lab and Food Quality Lab. In addition, members also had an opportunity to meet several ARS Subject Matter Experts who offered presentations to highlight the ARS Urban Ag program and Grant Challenge Synergies Project on Controlled Environment Agriculture.

The attached report includes our first set of 14 recommendations that were proposed for deliberation and approved by a simple majority vote during public meetings. While there is background information included in the report, we welcome the opportunity to discuss any recommendation(s) in detail and provide any additional information requested. As the first set of recommendations put forth since the original 12 members were appointed, we are eager to obtain USDA's feedback in addition to learning how we may help facilitate the implementation of any initiatives that may be presented as a result.

On behalf of our fellow members, we want to thank you again for this opportunity to extend support and build frameworks to support urban agriculture and innovation production practices.

Sincerely,



**Angela Mason**  
Chairperson,  
UAIPAC



**Tara Chadwick**  
Co-Chairperson,  
UAIPAC

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## I. Executive Summary

The Urban Agriculture and Innovative Production Advisory Committee (UAIPAC) is established with the primary objective of promoting sustainable and innovative agricultural practices within urban environments. The Committee brings together experts, stakeholders, and community leaders to address the pressing challenges and opportunities in urban agriculture and innovative production practices.

Among the highest focus of UAIPAC priorities and goals include:

**Sustainable Urban Agriculture:** Develop and endorse strategies that foster sustainable urban agriculture practices, including vertical farming, rooftop gardens, aquaponics, and hydroponics. The committee seeks to reduce the environmental footprint of urban food production while increasing local food resilience.

**Food Security:** Enhance food security in urban areas. This involves supporting initiatives that enable residents to access fresh, locally grown produce and reduce reliance on long-distance food transportation.

**Innovation and Technology:** Prioritize the exploration and adoption of cutting-edge technologies and innovative production methods within urban agriculture. This includes promoting research, development, and implementation of smart farming solutions and data-driven approaches.

**Community Engagement:** Engage communities in urban agriculture through educational programs, workshops, and partnerships with local schools and organizations. By fostering a sense of ownership and participation, UAIPAC seeks to promote the strengthening of community bonds and empower residents to take an active role in urban farming.

**Policy and Regulation:** Advocate for supportive policies and regulations that enable the growth of urban agriculture and innovative production including farm loans, zoning reforms, incentives for urban farmers, and streamlined permitting processes.

**Economic Viability:** Promote viable business models for urban farmers and innovative producers including exploring opportunities for entrepreneurship, job creation, and economic growth within urban agriculture sectors.

**Environmental Stewardship:** Strive to reduce resource consumption, minimize waste, and promote eco-friendly practices in urban agriculture.

**Research and Data Collection:** Support research initiatives and data collection efforts to better

understand the impacts of urban agriculture on local ecosystems, public health, and community well-being. This information is crucial for evidence-based decision-making.

By pursuing these objectives and goals, UAIPAC aims to create healthier, more vibrant, and sustainable urban and innovative environments that benefit both residents and the planet.

There are a total of 14 recommendations presented in this report for USDA's consideration. All recommendations were created by the original 12 members of the Committee appointed by the Secretary of Agriculture in January 2022. The recommendations cover several different topics that affect multiple USDA mission areas, agencies, and program offices. The primary focus of the recommendations is long-term action that will bring positive change to the policies and outreach relating to urban, indoor, and other emerging agriculture practices.

## II. About the Committee and its Members

Section 12302 of the Agriculture and Improvement Act of 2018 directed USDA to establish an Urban Agriculture and Innovative Production Advisory Committee (Committee) to advise the Secretary on the development of policies and outreach relating to urban, indoor, and other emerging agriculture practices.

The duties of the Committee are solely advisory in nature and include:

- 1) Provide recommendations and advise the Director on policies, initiatives, and outreach administered by the Office of Urban Agriculture and Innovative Production;
- 2) evaluate and review ongoing research and extension activities relating to urban, indoor, and other innovative agricultural practices;
- 3) identify new and existing barriers to successful urban, indoor, and other emerging agricultural production practices; and
- 4) provide additional assistance and advice to the Director as appropriate.

The original 12 UAIPAC members include:

- **Angie Mason**, Chairperson, Representative Member, Related Experience
- **Tara Chadwick**, Co-Chairperson, Representative Member, Related Experience
- **Carl P. Wallace**, Representative Member, Nonprofit
- **Bobby L. Wilson**, Representative Member, Urban Producer
- **Jerry Ann Hebron**, Representative Member, Urban Producer
- **Viraj Puri**, Representative Member, Innovative Producer
- **Kaben Smallwood**, Representative Member, Innovative Producer
- **Allison Paap**, Representative Member, Financial Entity
- **John Erwin**, Representative, Higher Education or Extension Program

- **Sally Brown**, Representative Member, Higher Education or Extension Program
- **Zachari Curtis**, Special Government Employee, Supply Chain
- **John Lebeaux**, Representative Member, Business and Economic Development

Additional background information and member biographies can be found on the [UAIPAC website](#).

### III. Public Meeting Summary

The inaugural UAIPAC public meeting was held March 23 – 24, 2022 after the first 12 members were appointed in January 2022. The opening of the meeting included briefing remarks from Tom Vilsack, Secretary of Agriculture; U.S Senator, Debbie Stabenow; Terry Cosby, Chief of Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS); and Deputy Under Secretary Gloria Montañó Green, Farm Production and Conservation (FPAC). The meeting addressed the UAIPAC objectives and priorities as stated above in addition to roles and responsibilities of both USDA and the UAIPAC voting members.

UAIPAC held an additional 5 public meetings through August 2023 that included deliberations of the recommendations included in this report. Most of the public meetings were held virtually, however the first hybrid meeting was held on November 29, 2022, when several members traveled to USDA Headquarters in Washington, DC to meet in-person. During this visit, members also had an opportunity to visit the Agriculture Research Service (ARS), Beltsville Agriculture Research Center (BARC) in College Park, MD to get a tour of the Genetic Improvement of Fruits and Vegetable Lab and Food Quality Lab. The tour also included meeting several ARS Subject Matter Experts who offered presentations to highlight the ARS Urban Agriculture program and Grant Challenge Synergies Project on Controlled Environment Agriculture.

In accordance with the Federal Advisory Committee Act (FACA) guidelines, the public was given the opportunity to attend the public meetings virtually and participate by providing written or oral comments. All public comments were provided to the UAIPAC for review and consideration and can also be reviewed on the [UAIPAC website](#) along with additional meeting materials.

## IV. Report Recommendations

### Recommendation 1: Public Database for Grant/Funding Program

*While it is well known that some rural farms engage in agri-tourism and agricultural education, urban farms are uniquely positioned to serve as aggregators for regional produce. They are often doing so without adequate resources to ensure safety and continuous production. During the pandemic, urban producers stepped in to ensure that local residents were fed and educated with nutritional, culturally appropriate food. Major gaps exist in accessing comprehensive, succinct, clear information. It is difficult to access information because there are so many agencies working independently. Clarity is needed for where to access information, resources and technical assistance, understandable tiers and categories of types of assistance available, and the training of agents and regulatory staff need to include the proper way to evaluate farms and agricultural production according to the type of farm. This access will benefit people in the community and especially those that do not have power and privilege.*

- 1. Create a public/online database that would serve as the aggregation point for a comprehensive updated list of programs for funding, incentives and support available to urban farmers and innovative producers and share these opportunities to access funding and support in ways that are culturally and linguistically appropriate.**
  - a. Address the historic legacy of discrimination that has negatively impacted Black and underserved farmers by compiling and annually publicizing accessible aggregated demographic information for use of each USDA service or resource to ensure that all resources are being made available and are being utilized by all eligible applicants across geographic regions, including but not limited to farmers and potential new farmers who are from historically underserved groups.
  - b. Share economic impacts by creating access to land and water for urban farming and agricultural production by:
    - i. providing access to municipal and state zoning and land use templates;
    - ii. providing research, toolkits and resources to ensure that urban farmers in every state and territory have economic incentives that are equal and equitable in comparison with other farmers to support long term sustainability for urban agriculture; and
    - iii. providing data to ensure equitable access by all eligible applicants to all USDA resources such as technical assistance, loans, special programs, cooperative agreements, and cost sharing programs.
  - c. Create a comprehensive USDA agency website that uses clear and concise images and multilingual text to convey all resources (technical, financial, etc.) that are available to existing and potential urban farmers and innovative agricultural producers that reaches the full length, depth, and breadth of our diverse communities across all USDA agencies (Food and Nutrition Service, Forest Service, Natural Resources Conservation Service, Farm Service Agency, etc.).

- d. Include clear eligibility, selection criteria and inspection procedures for all programs. Ensure they all make use of an open peer review process with adequate optional honoraria for non-federal staff peer review participants.
- e. Study the ways in which USDA funding and support opportunities are being shared and received by the public in an effort to track effectiveness and establish best practices in communicating across geographies and demographics.

## **Recommendation 2: Farm Service Agency (FSA) Loan Program**

*FSA programs have historically required production data for large scale loans, so the microloan is the best asset to move the generation of urban agriculture and innovative producers forward. However, there have been historic issues with ensuring equitable access to technical assistance, access to land, and access to capital. A topic frequently visited by the Committee was access to capital, existing programs in place, and the application process for FSA loans. The Committee concluded that FSA is aware of the lengthy application process and attempted to expedite the method by creating a new loan product – the microloan. The Committee observed the microloan program was intended to improve access to new and beginning farmers, but the program seems to be underutilized.*

- 2. Conduct a review of the Farm Service Agency (FSA) Microloan Program to determine program effectiveness as determined by overall utilization, timeframes for credit decisioning and funding, and feedback from borrowers by reviewing inquiry data, application data, and addressing challenges to current program requirements.**
  - a. Address the historic legacy of discrimination and racism and identify ways to ensure it is not still happening today and if it is, how to address, resolve and stop it from continuing.
  - b. Review the inquiry and application data collected by FSA to determine overall program utilization. The data review could include:
    - i. Percent of complete application received from loan inquiries;
    - ii. Percent of loans funded from complete applications received;
    - iii. Number of loan inquiries not processed due to incomplete applications; and
    - iv. Areas of missing information so that applications are deemed incomplete.
  - c. Rethink the current maximum dollar set for the Microloan program so that additional purchases or projects could be included in a program designed to have a simplified application process.
  - d. Rethink the 3-year Farm Experience Requirements so there would be additional flexibility to the eligibility and experience requirements to account for the changing nature of who is farming, where farming activities are occurring, and production methods utilized in farming.
  - e. Improve consistency of borrower experiences between County offices by creating and publishing metrics related to the customer experience. Public feedback provided to the FAC during listing sessions indicates that there is a high level of variation in the overall customer experience depending on the county office and loan officer assigned to the account.
  - f. Clarify documentation needed for the determination of the requirement for an inability to obtain sufficient credit elsewhere.

- g. Invigorate and enhance the Preferred Lender Program to allow improvements in timeframes for credit decisioning and improved utilization of options for joint financing.

### **Recommendation 3: Food and Nutrition Service (FNS) Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP)**

*Participation in SNAP on its own does not qualify an individual to serve on local USDA committees. As far as we know, decision making bodies like county committees do not formally consider the valuable input of SNAP participants since SNAP eligibility is not a criteria for participation in any USDA funding administration or decision making bodies. We won't know the impact of the emergency waiver ending unless we study the before and after data.*

#### **3. Add SNAP participation as a criteria for eligibility to vote on or serve on a local USDA county or urban committee. In addition, track and publish the ending of SNAP emergency food waivers.**

- a. SNAP participation should be added to the existing list of criteria for eligibility to vote on or serve on a local USDA committee, starting with urban county committees as a pilot.
- b. Provide data that allows us to analyze the before and after impacts of ending temporary waivers for emergency benefits such as SNAP hot foods and pandemic EBT in schools.
- c. USDA should provide public documentation regarding exploration of data in pilot SNAP use for foods purchased from grocers/ farmers/ farm stands/ value added producers and food trucks.
- d. Extension service should be presenting farming for food and economic information alongside existing programs such as cooking demonstrations for nutritious eating during SNAP Ed.

### **Recommendation 4: Land and Water Access, Resilience, and Conservation**

*There is a lack of access to safe agricultural land and water, zoning, development issues and lack of access to capital through USDA. Land suitable for agricultural production is difficult to find and once it's found it's difficult for urban/innovative producers to operate a sustainable urban/innovative agricultural enterprise. One example of a useful interactive mapping tool is the EPA's enviro-mapper which allows the public to search locations within their neighborhoods. Additional examples of policies that cities and states have implemented to advance urban agricultural practices include:*

- Atlanta Urban Agriculture has guidelines that were established from the ground up.
- Baltimore: <https://www.baltimoresustainability.org/projects/baltimore-food-policy-initiative/homegrown-baltimore/urban-agriculture-2/>
- PolicyLink: [https://www.policylink.org/sites/default/files/URBAN\\_AG\\_FULLREPORT.PDF](https://www.policylink.org/sites/default/files/URBAN_AG_FULLREPORT.PDF)
- DC: <https://doee.dc.gov/urbanag>
- USDA: <https://www.usda.gov/topics/urban>
- NC State (excellent general resource) <https://localfood.ces.ncsu.edu/local-food-agriculture-policy/localfood-urban-ag-policy/>
- Johns Hopkins: <https://clf.jhsph.edu>

- *Zoning for Urban Agriculture:* <https://healthyfoodpolicyproject.org/key-issues/zoning-for-urban-agriculture>
- *Las Cruces, NM:* <https://www.las-cruces.org/DocumentCenter/View/774/Urban-Agriculture-Plan-PDF>
- *New Jersey:* <https://www.nj.gov/dep/ej/docs/ejac-urban-agriculture-white-paper.pdf>
- *John Hopkins is doing an urban agriculture/ nutrition program*
- *Info on small farms* [https://papers.ssrn.com/sol3/papers.cfm?abstract\\_id=3405407](https://papers.ssrn.com/sol3/papers.cfm?abstract_id=3405407)
- *Land ownership actions that can be taken:*
  - i. *Minneapolis land forfeiture, school districts, churches*
  - ii. *McKinzie Act can transfer land to a city if shown to benefit the homeless*
  - iii. *Chicago – urban gardens, water, land, soil quality*

**4. Provide guidance to local governments and private citizens on best practices and resources to assist in accessing, maintaining, and keeping land in urban and innovative agriculture and conservation use.**

- a. Develop guidelines for state, local, and municipal governments to update outdated zoning regulations.
- b. Assemble a toolkit of existing resources and best practices across the country to assist governmental, public and private entities who are searching for ways to implement urban and innovative agricultural initiatives.
- c. Collaborate with other agencies such as EPA to learn about and create an interactive mapping tool to help landowners/ seekers identify the status of a particular piece of land, including appropriate local, state and federal resources available to help in developing, operating, retaining and improving urban and innovative agricultural initiatives.
- d. Ensure that urban and innovative agricultural producers have equitable access to conservation easements and tax incentives.

**Recommendation 5: Food Waste Prevention and Food Recovery**

*The goal of food recovery efforts is to reduce the portion of edible food that is wasted. One estimate is that 35% of the food that is produced goes unsold or uneaten (Leib et al., 2022). Home food waste prevention centers on behavior change. People need to buy what they need and use it all. Consumers need to store what they buy to maximize edible life. Consumers need to understand the difference between ‘sell by’ dates and ‘use by’ dates.*

**5. Standardize and clarify date labels for food expiration to reduce food waste. Partner with existing organizations and States to disseminate information on how to reduce food waste on a consumer level.**

- a. Standardize date labels through the Miscellaneous Title or a new Food Waste Reduction title.
- b. Launch a national food waste education and awareness campaign.

- c. Partner with existing groups, external federal agencies, and States to expand efforts to reduce food waste.

### **Recommendation 6: Surplus Food Recovery**

*The Bill Emerson Good Samaritan Food Donation Act has been very effective in encouraging commercial farms to allow gleaning post-harvest. Ensuring availability of freshly grown fruits and vegetables is a critical component of food security. As part of the resurgence of urban agriculture, however, additional opportunities exist for gleaning and food donation from community gardens and neighborhood fruit trees and food forests. These sources of food for donation are likely in relatively close proximity to food banks. Our recommendations are intended to encourage growing food for donation in community gardens or giving gardens (already common in some cases) and to encourage donations from neighborhood fruit trees. This involves communications between the sources and need for fresh foods (the development of the phone app). It involves assuring that there is sufficient refrigeration to keep food fresh. It also involves incentivizing community garden organizations to expand their mission to include cultivating food for donation and neighborhood gleaning operations. Community garden organizations or programs can provide a point of contact with food banks to make donations more efficient.*

- 6. Expand the potential for fresh food recovery and donation by urban farms, community gardens and the local community through expanded gleaning, fruit tree plantings, availability of refrigeration and better communication options between local growers and food donation centers.**
  - a. Increase the ability of food banks to partner with local growers including community gardens to accept freshly grown food by providing funding for refrigeration at food banks and refrigerated vehicles for transport.
  - b. Partner with experts to develop a phone app or accessible database that can be used to connect local growers, community gardens and gleaning efforts to local food banks. Increase funding to expand use of existing data bases and apps for this purpose.
  - c. Provide grants to non -profit community garden programs for expansion of their missions to include gleaning/ food donation both from within the gardens and from private homes.
  - d. Provide funding and extension services to municipalities to encourage planting fruit trees. These services could include funding for trees and extension services on how to care for trees.

### **Recommendation 7: Compostable Food Packing Standards**

*A major issue with compost quality is the presence of contaminants in the final product. Plastics are difficult to screen and are ubiquitous, particularly in cases where food scraps are part of the feedstocks. A range of food service compostable plastic is available, but composters have difficulty distinguishing compostable and non- compostable plastics. Resources and potential cooperators in this effort include the Biodegradable Products Institute (<https://bpiworld.org/>). California recently passed standards for packaging that could serve as a model for other states and National policy (<https://ecology.wa.gov/Waste-Toxics/Reducing-recycling-waste/Waste-reduction->*

*programs/Plastics/Compost-labeling. Washington State also has legislation mandating that compostable plastics be easily identifiable so that they can be distinguished from non-compostable products by consumers and at composting facilities*

*(<https://app.leg.wa.gov/rcw/default.aspx?cite=70A.455&full=true#70A.455.050>);).*

*Municipalities that have contracted to compost a significant portion of their organic wastes have typically focused on diversion and collection of these materials. End use of the finished composts has been an afterthought. This has left some composters with excess amounts of finished compost. The USDA is well suited to work with municipalities and composters to encourage compost donations and to help develop markets for the finished compost. The internal expertise within the USDA is valuable and can be incorporated into outreach and extension efforts in urban areas.*

- 7. Encourage the development of clear standards for compostable packaging and incentivize the use of compost to increase the potential for success of municipal food scrap composting programs.**
  - a. Work with EPA to develop standards for compostable packaging that can be clearly identified at commercial scale compost facilities.
  - b. Research development of food packaging that is not plastic based and/or that does not contain potentially harmful chemicals such as perfluorinated organics.
  - c. Incentive compost donations by commercial producers to homeowners and commercial and non-profit urban agriculture and innovative production.
  - d. Work with municipalities and commercial composters to identify markets for finished compost including urban and non-traditional end uses. This can be done as a component of extension and outreach activities. It can also be a focus in the Urban extension offices.

### **Recommendation 8: Food Scrap Composting**

*Food waste has traditionally been considered as a component of municipal solid waste. Management of food waste fell primarily to the EPA Office of Solid Waste and Emergency Response. Efforts to take food waste out of the landfill began with the realization that in a landfill, these materials emit large amounts of methane. Food waste diversion also allows for recovery of the nutrients contained in the food waste and the production of compost. Returning organic matter back to the soil is an excellent means to restore soil health and increase soil carbon storage. USDA has extensive experience in outreach and education. Soil health and soil carbon storage are also critical missions of USDA. Food scrap-based composts can be used for a wide range of urban applications including commercial and community agriculture. Because of these reasons, it seems logical that USDA partner with the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) and make use of its' expertise to encourage food waste diversion and composting.*

- 8. Expand composting of food scraps by individuals, community composters and municipalities.**
  - a. Home composting and community composting: Provide training for backyard and small-scale composting through multiple avenues including online training and in person training through

the USDA Cooperative Extension. We also recommend that USDA work with Land Grant Universities to develop master composting classes.

- b. Community composting: We suggest that USDA partner with local and national organizations that promote community composting for funding composting programs as a way to increase the impact of the grant dollars as part of the existing Composting and Food Waste Reduction program administered by OUAIP. We recommend that the USDA provide guidance on appropriate permitting to facilitate creation of community composting sites. This can be done by providing simplified examples based on existing regulations in certain states and the US Compost Council.
- c. Municipal scale: We recommend that the USDA use its national lens to collate best practices and to provide template outreach/education campaigns as a way to foster municipal composting in cooperation with US EPA. USDA should serve as a technical resource in cooperation with US EPA for State agencies and local health departments around the Country for knowledge as to how to best manage, assist, and regulate municipal composting to enable programs to grow in areas where the practice is new. In order to facilitate commercial/municipal scale composting USDA should cooperate with EPA to incentivize and provide templates for permits for establishing compost facilities on farms and on existing landfills. The agency should provide outreach and guidance to states to encourage these options.

### **Recommendation 9: Innovative Use of Residential and Commercial Food Waste**

*As a response to landfill diversion requirements a number of new household appliances are currently on the market or in development (<https://www.biocycle.net/household-food-waste-gadgets/>). Typically, these dry and grind food scraps or may initiate aerobic decomposition of food scraps. These have the potential to increase diversion and potentially create a value-added product from these wastes. Dried food grounds might be an effective additive to animal feed or fish feed. They could also be a food source for insect larvae, increasingly recognized as a low impact source of feed for animals (<https://www.biocycle.net/connections-maggots-buffet/>).*

### **9. Research potential uses of dehydrated municipal and commercial food waste as animal feed.**

A number of home scale food scrap dehydrators have recently entered the market. Examples include FoodCycler, Lomi and Mill. There are also commercial scale units available. The output from these may be suitable for animal feed, which is a higher end use than composting. The USDA should either internally or through NIFA funded research, test the potential for these materials for animal diets including those that can be raised in close proximity to urban areas.

### **Recommendation 10: Zoning**

*Zoning and Building codes in urban areas were developed before urban agriculture grew into the industry that it is today. Because these legacy Zoning and Building codes do not address today's diverse urban agriculture applications, siting and operating a farm location in an urban area for agricultural use can be prohibitive and a significant regulatory hurdle. To encourage urban agriculture and*

*innovation, local jurisdictions need to update their current zoning, building code, and health code guidelines which can also include business codes, business rules and tax programs for urban farmers. This can be a burden on resources for local municipalities.*

*Some local municipalities have already expended the resources to develop guidelines and update their respective regulations and codes. Understanding that the USDA is a federal agency and cannot directly influence the regulations of states, cities, towns, the USDA can create a set of guidelines and best practices on how to amend existing zoning and building codes to allow for different types of urban agriculture. These guidelines can be informed by precedent examples of jurisdictions that have successfully amended their zoning and building codes to support urban agriculture in cities across the country, such as Austin, TX, which produces more than 100,000 pounds of fresh food every year.*

- 10. To dismantle regulatory hurdles and provide resources to state and municipal governments, and to avoid duplicative efforts for them, we recommend that the USDA research, compile, and publish generic but comprehensive recommendations relative to municipal Zoning and Building codes and how they intersect with urban agriculture and innovative production. These recommendations may be used by local and state governments to amend their codes to allow for different applications for urban agriculture.**

### **Recommendation 11: Intergovernmental Information Sharing**

*Engagement with urban agriculture practitioners and with government agencies suggests a lack of wide awareness of existing programs and resources occurring throughout the US creating missed opportunities and duplication of work. Is USDA aware of what various state and city governments are doing to support urban agriculture? Are producers aware of the full range of USDA programs that are available to support their work? Are municipalities aware of federal and state urban agriculture support that is available?*

- 11. Create a one stop public national database of all known existing Urban Agriculture and Innovative Production programs at federal, state, and local levels. USDA would create and manage a web-based platform to serve as a centralized compendium of existing national urban agriculture support programming. Platform is not to be static, but a living document.**

- a. USDA will populate platform with its existing urban agriculture programs.
- b. USDA will task its local state offices (FSA, NRCS, RD) to input any specific urban agriculture activities they conduct.
- c. USDA will ask state departments of agriculture to input their urban agriculture activities and programs.
- d. USDA will ask state departments of agriculture to reach out to municipalities requesting them to input their urban agriculture activities and programs.

### **Recommendation 12: Access to Capital**

*Many community-based urban agriculture operations are highly undercapitalized which limits their potential. Urban agriculture operations and organizations need additional support and investment, in order to be successful there needs to be a program that serves their needs.*

**12. To increase producers' access to capital, we recommend that USDA model an Urban Agriculture Block Grant Program after USDA AMS's Specialty Crop Block Grant (SCBG) program.**

- a. Establish a procedure by which applications are made to appropriate state department of agriculture for review, ranking, and recommendation to USDA.
- b. Allows that funding recommendations are made by agencies more closely connected to boots on ground, providing greater insight into the status and needs of that state's urban agriculture.
- c. Reduces administrative workload to USDA by including the state agriculture departments.
- d. Unlike SCBG, this program would fund for profit and nonprofit organizations, individuals, and established farms.

**Recommendation 13: Access to Land (Easement)**

*Availability of land suitable for urban farming is frequently very limited and very costly.*

**13. To increase access to urban agriculture farmland, we recommend USDA model an Urban Agriculture Land Easement program after the NRCS Agriculture Land Easement (ALE) program. USDA will establish a program by which non-agricultural development rights are purchased by USDA, allowing the property to be marketed at its agricultural value, making it affordable to urban farmers.**

**Recommendation 14: Access to Land (Federal Land Leasing)**

*Availability of land suitable for urban farming is frequently very limited and very costly.*

**14. In order to increase access to urban agriculture farmland, we recommend USDA identify and make available appropriate federally held lands in urban locations for long term leasing opportunities for urban farmers and innovative producers.**