

Urban agriculture a fruitful solution for helping poor

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LOS Angeles residents are facing difficult challenges in securing nutritious and affordable food.

Gas prices are around \$4 per gallon and food prices are among the highest in the United States.

In L.A. County, 16 percent of residents are living below the poverty level, according to the 2010 U.S. Census. As the city braces itself to face these challenges, farming in the city can provide jobs, nutrition, and hope to some of L.A.'s poorest communities.

In an effort to provide stability for residents, the Los Angeles Community Garden Council is working with 70 community gardens, responsible for feeding 3,900 families. The council consists of a group of gardeners that are helping people find plots for gardens in their neighborhoods and establish relationships with neighbors by hosting picnics and educational conferences at garden sites.

The best source for teaching young people about urban agriculture and how to grow their own food is their schools. L.A. is home to the second- largest school district in the nation and the Los Angeles Unified School District is making some controversial - and healthier - changes in the school lunches, eaten by 650,000 students every day.

In April, a 1.5 acre garden and wellness project at Fremont High School was announced. The project, a partnership with the Los Angeles Neighborhood Land Trust and the University Muslim Medical Association Community Clinic, aims at "providing a community garden and quality health and human services for students, families and the surrounding neighborhood," according to Fremont High School.

Urban agriculture is an opportunity to improve the economy and provide sources of income for gardeners and farmers. In L.A., businesses are creating revenue and jobs by providing urban agricultural services in the city.

Farmscape Gardens, for example, establishes and services edible gardens in L.A. The Gardens recently announced a partnership with Naka restaurant to establish an on-site, organic garden, which will provide produce for the restaurant.

Like in L.A., there are cities in sub-Saharan Africa where farmers are finding ways to grow food and improve nutrition in their communities. In Kampala, Uganda, for example, Kukanga Government School is using a garden to educate children, much in the same way that LAUSD plans to do at Fremont High. And the Kampala City Council has opened a number of extension schools to provide training and support to urban farmers.

Like the L.A. Community Garden Council, South Africa has Harvest of Hope, an organization working with 50 community gardens to produce enough food, so that the surplus from each garden can be sold and delivered to local city schools.

Even in Kibera, the largest slum in sub-Saharan Africa with nearly 1 million people, leafy vegetables and herbs are grown in recycled burlap sacks and biodegradable cement bags. This form of urban agriculture, called vertical gardening, utilizes even the smallest of spaces, recycled materials, and does not require tillable land. These efforts show that it is not necessary to own large plots of land in order to grow crops for food and income.

Innovative efforts like those taking place in L.A. and sub-Saharan Africa can be modified and implemented around the world to build a secure food system for people living in urban areas. Urban agriculture has the potential to address many of our most pressing problems, including food insecurity, income creation and gender inequity. Schools and local governments need to create opportunities and support locally and sustainably produced agriculture.

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