



## Seed capital at work

By Danielle Nierenberg and Dana Drugmand

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The word “farm” may bring to mind images of rolling acres of wheat and corn fields. But here in Boston and in cities all over the world, farms are starting to take root. Urban agriculture is the practice of growing fresh food in otherwise unproductive urban spaces. Today there is a greater need than ever before to find ways to feed growing urban populations. Currently about 50 percent of the world’s population lives in cities, and, according to the United Nations, 65 percent of the world’s people will live in cities by 2050.

Cultivating fresh produce in city lots nourishes communities and strengthens local food systems. The Boston Natural Areas Network (BNAN), for example, “works to preserve, expand, and improve urban open space.” BNAN owns or leases about 40 community gardens and provides organizational support to more than 10,000 people who garden in the Boston area. In addition to helping communities plan for and maintain urban gardens, BNAN offers education and training in urban gardening to Boston schoolchildren through its Students Learning through Urban Gardening program.

Urban community gardens are places where youth and adults alike can come together to get their hands dirty and learn about the benefits of growing your own food. The Food Project, for example, aims to bring youth and adults together to grow fresh produce on several farm sites in eastern Massachusetts. In Boston,

The Food Project farms on three pieces of land in the city’s Dudley neighborhood and grows produce in a rooftop production garden at

Boston Medical Center. Food from these farms goes directly back to the community through distribution at farmer’s markets, community-supported agriculture programs and hunger relief organizations.

Another local urban agriculture initiative is Victory Programs ReVision Urban Farm, which brings fresh, locally grown food to Boston’s underserved community of Dorchester. This urban farm is associated with ReVision Family Home, a



Photo by Patrick Whittemore

FRESH IDEAS: Urban gardens and farmers markets are cropping up all over Boston.

shelter for homeless women in Dorchester's Franklin Field neighborhood. By working in the garden, shelter residents receive education and job training as well as access to fresh, healthy food.

While initiatives like The Food Project and ReVision Urban Farm are working to give Boston area residents access to fresh, nutritious food, halfway around the world initiatives are also making use of urban agriculture.

In Kibera, the largest slum in Nairobi, Kenya, for example, more than 1,000 farmers, most of them women, have started growing vegetables out of dirt-filled sacks. This "vertical farming" practice allows women in Kibera to feed their families and improve their income. When a 2008 political crisis in Nairobi cut off food supplies coming into the city, people in Kibera did not go hungry because they had their own source of food.

Innovations in sustainable agriculture, particularly urban farming, are becoming even more important as we must find a way to feed a global population that is expected to reach 9 billion by 2050. Worldwide, about 800 million people are engaged in urban agriculture, providing 15 to 20 percent of the world's food. Here in Boston, urban agriculture already has a strong presence, with more than 175 community gardens spread throughout the city's neighborhoods. These gardens not only provide a fresh, local food source for city residents, they also help strengthen and revitalize communities.

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