Urban Agriculture and Food Access: The Public Health Perspective

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What happened to our food system?

- Lots and lots of food everywhere
- Bigger portion size
- More processed foods
- Decreased nutrient quality
Barriers to healthy food access

- Physical
- Social
- Financial
  - Food insecurity rates increasing
- Educational
- Availability
  - Store quality
Recent Research

- Areas with low access have diets high in fat and salt
- High schools near fast food restaurants high obesity prevalence
- Low-income areas more access to all food outlets
- Low education associated unhealthful food purchasing patterns
- Nutritional education strengthens consumer self-efficacy
How are communities responding to these trends?

Increase in resources and activities at the community, county and state levels to respond to challenges

- Food policy
- Farmers markets
- Corner store conversions
- Community supported agriculture (CSA)
- Community gardens
- Food retail strategies
- Smaller scale farms (rural/peri-urban)
- Urban agriculture
What role does urban agriculture play?

- Increases access to fresh, whole food
- Turns unused land into productive land (i.e., Brownfields)
- Uses alternative distribution models – food hubs
- Creates jobs / provides supplemental income
Health and social benefits of urban agriculture

- Provides seasonal source of food
- Increased food security
- Exposure to new foods, cooking skills
- Self-reliance – benefits community not outsiders
- Community organizing tool
- Higher level of social interaction
How should we value it?

- Crime rate decreases
- Costs city less to maintain property
- Green space = happiness, well being
- Improves air quality
- Permeable space for rainwater
- Uses fewer fossil fuels
- Compost reduces waste streams
Whom does urban agriculture benefit?

- Immigrants/refugees
- Neighborhood residents
- Previously incarcerated
  – Lower rates of recidivism
Unanswered questions

• How to measure its potential
  – Yields, jobs created, etc.
• Do benefits offset tax losses?
  – Temporary/conditional use
• How to measure the contribution of green space
  – Quality of life, carbon sequestration, etc.
• Policy supported needed to grow urban ag
  – Land trusts, ag districts, etc.