Nonprofit Business Model for Management of Community Gardens in Berkeley, California



By Jacqueline Warren

Introduction to Urban Agriculture

Urban agriculture is defined as the growing and distribution of food in or around cities with the purpose of feeding local populations. Urban agriculture can take many forms, including but not limited to home gardens, community gardens, indoor farms, and urban farms and ranches. For an urban agricultural site to be successful, it should be local, culturally appropriate, and promote a relationship between community and the land. The act of consuming food inherently connects everyone to the agro-food system, and urban agriculture fosters this relationship by reviving and strengthening the connection between community and food.

There are many places where conventional,rural agriculture fails and urban agriculture has the potential to overcome these deficiencies. Most notably, urban agriculture has the power to increase food security, financial stability, and environmental preservation and rejuvenation (pg. 3). One of the greatest crisis facing the world today is lack of food sovereignty following rapid urbanization and globalization. Food sovereignty is a broad concept defined as the right to healthy, sustainable, and culturally appropriate foods. Urban agriculture is essential for increasing and establishing widespread food sovereignty, supporting the culture of eating locally grown foods.



Benefits of Urban Agriculture

Social and Cultural

Urban Agriculture plays a significant role in fostering community, connecting people to the land, and allowing expression of culture. Urban farming projects promote a sense of belonging through collective action while producing food and serving as a place for sharing of knowledge and culture.

Health, Nutrition, and Access

Food insecurity is a growing problem defined as consistent lack of reliable access to sufficient and nutritious food, often due to financial limitations. Urban agriculture has the potential to increase food security in urban areas by bringing fresh produce directly to those lacking access. Greater access and consumption of fresh, nutritious, and culturally appropriate foods contribute to a reduction of diet related illnesses. Urban farms also promote physical exercise and cognitive stimulation, leading to increased overall well-being.

Economic

Urban agriculture may support local economies by acting as a small business and generating jobs and income in low-income communities. It also contributes to making fresh produce more affordable and accessible. In addition, excess food produced can be donated to food pantries and food banks further assisting low-income communities. Outside of the farm itself, the utilization of vacant land leads to a reduction in vandalism and illegal use of the lots.

Environmental

Depending on how urban farms are managed, they offer a variety of environmental benefits. They support biodiversity by acting as habitats for pollinators and other creatures. Farms also serve to clean the air and reduce climate change by sequestration of carbon. If farming organically, there may be a reduction of pesticides and herbicides. In addition, the presence of urban farms adds to the beauty of the city.



Berkeley Unified School District
Photo by Adrian Mahlstede and Storyng Change

Berkeley City Goals:
Encourage and Support Community Gardens

City General Plan - Open Space Element

- Additional space is desired for community gardens, farmers markets, and cultural events
- Encourage and support community gardens
  - Encourage neighborhood groups to organize, design, and manage community gardens particularly where space is not suitable for housing, parks, pathways, or recreational facilities
  - Pursue community gardens in high-density areas with little private open space suitable for gardening
  - Increase support for community gardens through partnerships

Environmental Management Element

- Support community outreach and education to strengthen organic sustainable food systems
- Encourage donation of fresh produce from community gardens to local food programs
- Promote seed distribution, lead testing, and composting programs for community gardens

Climate Action Plan

- Increase access to healthy and affordable foods for the community by supporting efforts to build more complete and sustainable local food production and distribution system



Berkeley research plots on Oxford Street
Photo by: Miguel Altieri

Current Berkeley Regulations

Municipal Code Chapter 23C.26: Urban Agriculture Ordinance

- Urban agriculture should be allowed in all zoning districts in the City except ES-R (Environmental Safety Residential)
- Low-impact urban agriculture (meets all or falls below thresholds) is allowed by right with a Zoning Certificate
  High-impact urban agriculture (does not meet one or more of thresholds listed) may be permitted by an Administrative Use Permit
  - Thresholds 23C.26.040
  - Operation Standards 23C.26.050
- Sale or donation of food for human consumption is governed by food and safety health laws



Photo from Berkeley Food Institute

Nonprofit Model Proposal

To tackle problems as expansive as climate change and lack of food sovereignty, we must take one step at a time because small and consistent changes are the only way to truly improve these conditions. There is no one solution to approaching these issues, however I hope to play my part by developing a non-profit organization to oversee and organize the management of community gardens. This mission is proposed in the hopes of increasing the number of community gardens in Berkeley, California.

I would like to create a nonprofit organization run by Berkeley citizens to encourage and support the creation of community gardens, meeting the city government's goals (pg. 4) and directly benefiting the community (pg. 3). The organization will promote citizen interest in community gardens by making the process of starting one simple. My vision is that this organization will be a starting point where regional managers will help potential allotment holders through the process of starting and managing their own community garden. The organization will serve as a center for assistance and information about potential or current community gardens in the city of Berkeley.

Objectives

- Promote interest and excitement about community gardens
- Assist Berkeley citizens in starting and maintaining community gardens
- Provide nutritious, affordable, and culturally appropriate food for Berkeley communities
- Beautify Berkeley and reduce environmental damage

How it Works

Step 0: Advertise and spread word about opportunity, ease, and benefits of starting a community garden

Step 1: Community members show interest in starting a community garden, becoming allotment holders (examples on the right)

Step 2: We help in choosing a location (pg. 12)

Step 3: We provide services to help allotment holders successfully start their community garden (pg. 8)

Step 4: We make sure they follow regulations to ensure continuation of the garden (pg. 5)

Step 5: If desired, we provide some assistance with organizing workshops and other educational opportunities

Step 6: Give information about food distribution and donation (pg. 15)

Target Allotment Holders

Individual Citizens
Cultural Organizations
Environmental Nonprofits
Corporations ("Adopt a garden")
Anyone interested!



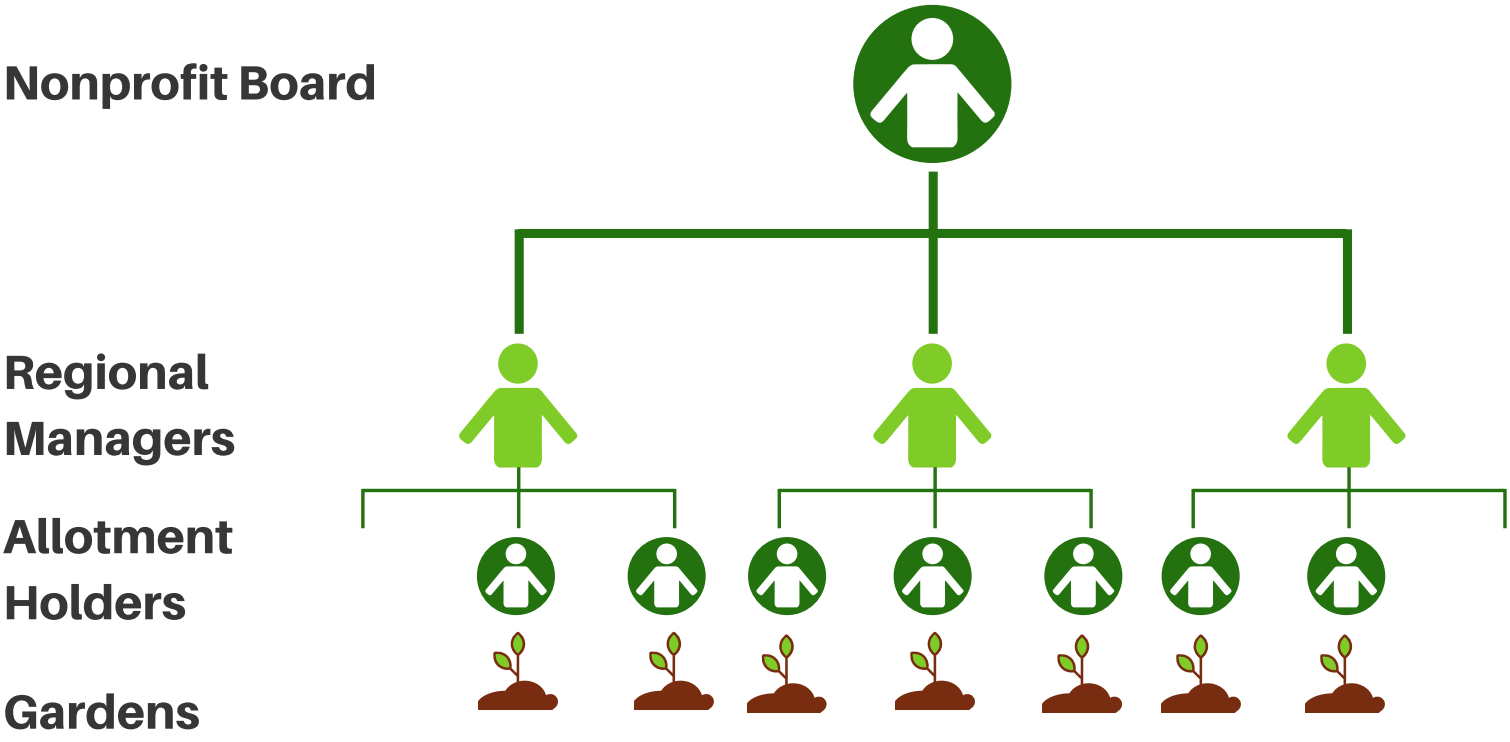
Why it works:

1. Our nonprofit system only works if the public is interested and we would only want it to work if the public is interested
2. The organization forms partnerships making it easy to access the necessary resources and services (seen below)
3. Berkeley city government supports community gardens
4. Gives power to the people and freedom to grow their own food
5. Works within the regulations regarding community gardens
6. Works within our current capitalistic economy

Services Provided to Potential Allotment Holders

- Serve as a partner when seeking land use permissions
- Assistance with permit paperwork
- Soil testing
- Training in the basics of agriculture
- Understanding of land use and safety regulations
- Public information about gardens: up-to-date website of current crops, workshops, and corresponding locations

Nonprofit Management



Roles at each level

Nonprofit Board: Stay updated on current regulations, maintain and manage partner and resource relationships, ensure regional managers have all necessary information and training, oversee organization management and funding, make decisions about future of nonprofit

Regional Managers: Advertise about the opportunities, support process of creating community gardens, make sure allotment holders have all necessary information and training, conduct periodic safety and quality audits, keep track and share current crops grown within region

Allotment Holders: Manage and care for garden, conduct gardening courses (optional), manage distribution and donation of food

Gardens: Produce food!!

Funding the Nonprofit



Photo by Franco Folini, Downtown Berkeley Farmers Market

- Nonprofit board members and regional managers have community gardens and sell produce at the Berkeley farmers markets
- Encourage corporate partnership through an "Adopt a Garden" system, where corporations are able to get their logo on a sign near the garden to demonstrate social responsibility
- Donations and supplemental funding methods

Criticisms and Concerns

Common criticisms regarding urban agriculture and our approach to mitigating these issues

Reinforcement of Social Injustices

Urban agriculture may provide more power to those who are already privileged. This may be the case if, for example, community garden more frequently exist in already wealthy neighborhoods or if people with privilege tend to manage them. This may happen because of the lasting view that community gardens are associated with increased economic value and because more privileged citizens likely have more time and resources to start and manage community gardens.

To address this:

The proposed organization will reduce the likelihood of this for several reasons. The first is that hopefully community gardens will become so widespread that they are no longer associated with wealth. The second reason is that the opportunity to start a community garden under this organization is affordable, simple, and less time consuming, providing less privileged citizens the opportunity as well. The last reason is that the governance proposed, where the leadership is a set of board members, decreases the possibility of the wealthy taking over because there is some modulation of allotment holder diversity.



Gentrification

Community gardens are often associated with increased economic value of a neighborhood, bringing in middle and higher income residents. By making some regions of the city more desirable, low-income residents may be displaced due to the increased costs of living. Despite the goal of helping support lower income communities, this could be a result.

To address this:

This problem is difficult to manage within the nonprofit itself, but one way to decrease the effects are to simply increase the number of community gardens so that they are not only associated with higher economic value. However, this does not necessarily convert the views of non-Berkeley residents wanting to relocate. This is a systematic problem that will likely need to be addressed from outside this non-profit.

Considerations when Choosing a Location

Sunlight Availability
Plants usually prefer at least six hours of full sunlight each day, but it depends on what crops are being grown.

Soil Quality
Have soil quality tested for nutrients and toxins and consider the costs of new soil or soil revitalization. Also consider proximity to pollution hazards.

Water Availability
Setting up watering system or watering manually can be expensive or time consuming.

Crops Grown
Consider the current season and climate of the location as well as the needs and culture of the food interested in growing.



Accessibility and Community Interaction
Choose a place easily accessible to the community, who growers are trying to serve, especially if there are planned gardening workshops and events.

Land owners
There are different procedures depending on if the land is public or private. This also impacts how easy it is to get land use permission from the owners.

Possible Land Uses
Try to choose land that does not take away from other important opportunities, such as housing or parks.

Accessibility to Diverse Neighborhoods
Urban agriculture is especially impactful for low-income communities, children, disabled, and anyone who may benefit from a sense of belonging.

What about Sidewalk Landscapes?

Advantages to using sidewalk landscapes

- Land use not taking away from possible housing
- Infrastructure already set up for growing plants
- Areas small enough for even an individual to manage
- Easily accessible and visible to the community
- City-wide opportunities, not much variance in spatial distribution

Possible **disadvantages**

- Public access and possibly close to walkway (people walking through garden, etc.)
- Small area, not much space for productivity

Possible **solutions**

- Raised beds or small fence
- Care for several gardens under one person/entity



Photo of Ron Finley, by Nick Weinberg



Photo: jklune from iStock

Appendix

Potential Partners and Key Resources

Ecology Center

Offer gardening training courses

Helps with management of current community gardens in Berkeley

ecologycenter.org

Berkeley Community Garden Collaborative

"Assists and protects existing gardens and facilitates formation of new gardens"

Soil Quality

Cerco Analytical
Soil Testing Facility
1100 Willow Pass Court
Concord, CA 94520
http://cercoanalytical.com
(925) 462-2771

Free compost at Berkeley Marina (Last Sat. each month Feb-Oct)

Parks, Recreation , Waterfront Department

Roger Miller - Secretary of the Parks and Recreation Commission
Email:
rmiller@cityofberkeley.info

Public land leasing

Appendix (cont.)

Distribution and Donations

Berkeley Food Pantry

"Provides monthly emergency groceries for Berkeley and Albany families and individuals in need"

https://www.berkeleyfoodpantry.org/

UC Berkeley Food Pantry

Assistance for UC Berkeley students and staff suffering from food insecurity

https://pantry.berkeley.edu/

Farmers Markets

Participate in the celebration of locally grown foods and enjoy the community-based marketplace

Give to Neighbors!

Share with those around you who may or may not be food insecure

Community gardening is about ***community***

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