

Urban Agriculture as an Avenue for Transforming Food Insecure Neighborhoods



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Abstract

With over 17 percent of Virginia population living in food deserts, or areas with limited access to affordable and nutritious food, it is imperative to mitigate the situation by investing in urban food production. Offering continuous extension education that involves hands-on training is the key to increasing urban food production leading to enhanced food security. The Sustainable and Urban Agriculture Program (SUAP) at Virginia State University, in conjunction with other partners, is providing comprehensive urban agriculture education across the state to increase knowledge and hands-on skills of gardeners, farmers, and extension educators. To accomplish this, the program is engaged in conducting regular workshops, field days, and hands-on training on various urban agriculture topics. In addition, the program is establishing demonstration sites across the state for displaying appropriate techniques, as well as developing and disseminating educational resources. The expected long-term project outcomes are increased urban food production, enhanced food security, reduced cost of food, improved health through access to fresh foods, and increased local incomes. The success of the project is constantly being evaluated using appropriate tools such as pre/post tests, questionnaires, surveys, and follow up interviews.

Outreach Activities

The program outreach activities include: Training participants through workshops, field days and in-service training; Establishing demonstration sites across the state for hands-on experiential learning; Developing and disseminating educational resources including facts sheets, bulletins, CDs, and DVDs. The program covers various urban agriculture topics, including: Urban farming; Backyard gardening; Patio and container gardening; Rooftop gardening; Hydroponic and aquaponic systems; and Production in high and low tunnel systems. More details are provided in the Logic Model.

Program Outcomes

Short-term Outcomes

- ≥ 200 individuals have been made aware of the sustainable and urban agriculture program;
- ≥ 100 participants have received in-class training in sustainable and urban agriculture; and
- ≥ 20 participants have received hands-on training in urban agriculture.

Medium-term Outcomes

- ≥ 40 participants will change behavior towards sustainable and urban agriculture; and
- ≥ 35 participants will make decisions to start or expand their urban agriculture projects; and
- ≥ 5 faith or community based organization will start educational gardens; and
- ≥ 3 schools will establish school gardens.

Projected long-term Impacts

- ≥ 25% increase in fruits and vegetable production;
- ≥ 20% reduction in cost of fruits and vegetables;
- ≥ 15 increase in local incomes;
- ≥ 10% increase in urban food security; and
- ≥ 10% reduction in Food Deserts in Virginia.

Target Audiences

The Sustainable and Urban Agriculture Program targets several audiences including: Extension agents; Master gardeners; Youth leaders; Urban communities; Nonprofit organizations; and School teachers.

