

Business Support and Business Development – Table #5

Round 1

- How do you make a viable, sustainable business out of urban agriculture? Can one make a living wage?
- Given low income for farmers, is problem lack of market/consumer demand or lack of land?
- Lack of access (whether to land or transportation) is crucial
- Need to get permission from City of Vancouver, there are many opportunities to use certain pieces of land though
- Access to right people is a barrier (ie. City officials)
- What revenue-generating activities do you need to include in the business model?
- Farms are never expected to make a lot of money, never going to be a “national interest”
- Should we work individually or conglomerate?
- Look at end-consumers
- No education, no one knows how to cook or grow food anymore
- Farmers don’t understand the business of selling food – provide an interesting experience
- Have to actually *sell* the produce, need to provide some incentive for people to come back
- Consider how to utilize secondary or value-enhanced products, need those facilities like kitchens, etc.
- Whose role is it to educate?
- Farmers need a business plan, include end uses
- Diversifying in terms of crops and end product
- Issue: lack of training and support for farmers to develop comprehensive business plan
- Hard for farmers to make a business plan given lack of time and collaboration between similar minds
- There is an Ag Marketing Board already, but marketing is typically ignored by those starting their own business
- Need to be able to allow people to prepare their own food for resale (using what they grow) for the diversification of products
- Urban farmers cannot accept large demand at this point, lacking the experience by virtue of only having one season per year
- Marketing encourages more investment in urban farming itself

- Is there room for growth on an individual basis? This is up to the individual what they do with it.
- Education campaign for general public: what is happening in terms of urban planning
- People need to understand true cost of food
- Know your market and how to you appeal to that market (do market analysis)
- Offer opportunities for farmers to learn how to do business plans
- City could undertake a market analysis for urban farmers
- Banks have the background to do the analysis and has the expertise to help urban farmers
- Connecting farmers to resources they need in order to build a viable business
- Business mentorship program, get away from the non-profit model
- Farming gives meaning to us as a way of life, way of sustaining oneself
- How do we view food? As a commodity or a social/public good? Is there room for government to subsidize?
- Hone in on the reasons *why* people buy urban agriculture goods
- Bylaws can be in place to address the need for resources
- Low risk vs. high risk foods
- New City Market could offer options for secondary uses
- High fructose corn syrup is subsidized, urban ag is not
- Shared Harvest is a good example of a useful resource
- Define what you can and can't sell, bylaws reflect this (ie. Being able to sell vegetable or chicken stock)
- Health laws are a barrier
- Small-batch producers should have different rules
- City could own a public kitchen where farmers could sign up with their secondary use ideas
- Relationship building is essential, having a network is important
- Urban farms need to be able to make money from what is leftover
- UBC Farm makes higher return at farmers market than at restaurants, customers come to them
- Educate on why people should be buying local as opposed to imported or "regular" produce
- Show people the experience of buying local food
- Increase in the consumption of food at farmers' markets, not an expansion of markets themselves

- Guaranteed food contracts for farmers, securing their base market
- Something like “Community Eats” diverting food from the waste stream

Round 2

- Micro loan program, some food businesses have this already, with skill development included, skills transference, infrastructure knowledge
- Some farms have developed a cooperative – have one stall at the farmers’ market (less staff, less cost)
- Incentive to form a cooperative so farmers can spend more time actually growing
- Professional marketer for farmers, brand identification
- Medical, dental benefits and retirement benefits available through a coop
- Coops are a way to minimize barriers to entry
- Small-scale growers grouped together is good from a business perspective, help each other get the product to the customer
- Need experienced people to teach new people what to do, support and mentorship
- Customers want consistency and quality so collaborate on production in order to provide best product
- Make it more accessible, convenient, easier for customers to order
- Do farmers lose anything in the exchange though? Going through a distributor or delivery company such as SPUD?
- Know your market – cannot sell to hospitals, schools because scale is too large
- Create connections between farmers and customers – meet and greets
- Schools and hospitals have long-term contracts with food providers so urban farms have to start small in order to infiltrate that market
- Increase support of farm to school program/infrastructure
- Market sales at schools would involve the community
- Educating the potential buyer will support the urban farmer
- Farmer cannot rely on one customer
- Community garden and urban farm mix – demo workshops to community gardeners as an educational/consultancy component

- Benefit from the expertise of the farmer, need facilitating group to set this up (or cooperative)
- Have a representative who can educate in the mixed-use space, not the farmer him- or herself
- Why does the City not hire farmers to increase education?
- Growing Roots in Chicago were contracted by the City as “landscapers” but it was farming. Landscapers can evolve

Round 3

- Educate about different ways to access local products (to the general public) thereby increasing the number of potential consumers for urban farms
- Build a network to connect farmers with all the resources they need in order to start and maintain a farm: benefits, start-up, microloans, etc.
- Help farmers access more business knowledge

Round 4: Priorities

- 1) Business help to farmers
 - a. Market analysis to get to know customers
 - b. Financial incentives and support for start-up (microloans, how-to workshops on business plans and feasibility)
 - c. Create consultancy opportunities (for off-season)
 - d. Enhance network of farmers to increase knowledge in all areas and share resources (could also go under ‘Infrastructure’)
- 2) Infrastructure building
 - a. Subsidized commercial kitchen space for secondary uses, less barriers for surplus product use
 - b. Farm cooperatives to share resources
- 3) By-law reconstruction
 - a. City to hire farmers for edible landscaping/demonstrations
 - b. Supporting visibility of farming
 - c. By-law review re: small batch producers