

Vancouver Urban Farming Forum

Issues and opportunities associated with the specific table theme – how to overcome barriers and take advantage of opportunities? Any best practices?

Table 7 Notes – Community Connections notes taken by Freya Kristensen

Apologies: I was on the outside of the table and could not really hear much of what was said. I did my best!

Smell of manure is difficult – how to overcome this? How do we bring it in in a way that is not offensive to others?

-This is not a new problem – in the spring many farms smell like manure and it's something that can't really be avoided

-We can try to 'celebrate' it instead of avoiding it

-building community relations will help people deal with it – if the farm is seen as an integral part of the community people will be more supportive

-Share the manure with others in the community to build good relations

-City should probably enact regulations around bringing in raw manure

-To deal with volume of community members who want to volunteer but who lack experience, need 'farm animators' who can lead work bees and teach groups without taking time of farmer

-Farmers festival to promote local food – ie. squash soup competition – bring awareness to local farms

Urban farms on public land

-Public lands should be leased (not given) or it can create strife between with non-profits who don't get free rent

-Perhaps it should be tied in with responsibilities like public education – however if you are trying to make a living by farming it would be very difficult to find the time to meet those sorts of requirements

-urban agriculture does have that responsibility (as opposed to rural agriculture) to play educational role in community

-perhaps building partnerships with non-profits would enable farms to fulfill the education role

-Chicago example – city hired Growing Power to grow model urban farm that was esthetically pleasing that both encouraged urban farming and provided a valuable service in a city that would have spent much more by hiring a private company to do landscape design. Creating a visible urban farm forces people to think about where their food comes from and provides a ready supply of customers – those community members who walk by the farm everyday.

-Problems may arise between rural and urban farmers – rural farmers may not see urban farmers as legit but urban farmers may take away customers from rural farms (like restaurants who want to sources as close to home as possible)

-Real competition between farmers in Abbotsford, for instance – not collaborative

-Farmers don't all want to be associated with 'the farming movement'

-urban farming 'elders' in Vancouver are older people who might not speak English as a first language and who have farmed a number of yards

-this is an industry where farmers themselves make very little money from actual farming – 80% of farm income is made from off the farm. so perhaps education is a great way to contribute to income of farmers

-what is appropriate to grow in the city vs. the hinterland/rural farms? opportunity to be site-specific in the city. Maybe it's better if one farm grows one thing instead of 20 things.

-relationships between rural and urban farms is really important because not all food can be grown in the city. urban farms can play the role of building community desire for local food
-urban farming can help with community nutrition – can help people connect with their food source and see what is in season and diversify their tastes perhaps

-issue of esthetics – ie. on west side of Vancouver. Affects land values when farms are not nice looking. Farms should probably take this into account – that they are in the city and that they must look decent.

-Need regulations checklist for urban farms – such as weeding, manure, other esthetic issues

-need some sort of esthetic threshold – appearance is important.

-perhaps regulations aren't entirely necessary but need a general understanding through community education etc. about what looks nice and what is appropriate for an urban farm

-list of best practices but list of guidelines that is appropriate for such diverse farms is difficult: it will have to be quite general

-maybe certification for urban farmers – can become members of an association if they follow best practice guidelines

-perhaps mentorship between rural and urban farmers – ie. helping those who want to switch from traditional to organic farming

-organic farming is tricky in the city if not impossible. need some sort of urban equivalent for certified organic that takes into account the challenges of farming in the city

-need more education for those who don't know how to cook; who mostly buy prepared food. need education for people about what to do with raw veggies.

Ways to connect community members to urban farms besides visually?

-school education – farmers going into schools

-education at the markets

-difficult at Vancouver farmers markets to do taste testing (samples have to be in individual paper cups for instance) so need to review bylaws to make it easier to educate people

-need self-funding education models – food is part of the curriculum in places like France. should be the same in Vancouver so that non-profits and farmers can get money from city to play education role

-problem with main growing season being in the summer when school is out

-Need a home for food at the governmental level – ministry of food for example

-funding is the issue – momentum for it but no money for it

-need more media support – a dedicated columnist for urban farming. build widespread support this way

-fewer restaurant reviews; more actual discussion of urban farming

-portrayal of urban farming in media is that it is a bunch of hipsters who are quitting their jobs to grow food (in Portland this is the case) but this image needs to be changed

-augmenting relationship between urban farms and restaurants

-normalize urban farms – ie. people will get used to the smell of manure the more they are exposed to it and when they understand the importance of it

What are the opportunities for urban farms?

Mitigating Nuisances (appearance of the farm, smell, etc.): Best practices, regulations, licensing

Celebrating Urban Farming: Education in schools and in farmers markets; cultivating consumers

Building Relationships: between chambers of commerce and farmers for instance.

Access: in Vancouver especially, people spend so much on housing that there isn't that much left over for buying local food. How to make local food more affordable or attractive? Making land more available for people to grow their own food; providing mentorship for farming on urban farms

Idea of cooperative to pool resources to share costs – mitigate risks

Top Issues

All can really be dissolved under 'education'

1) Formal community/school education about farming

-mitigating nuisances

-celebrating benefits of farming in the community

-building relationships between community; teaching about nutrition

2) Building a formal urban farming organization

3) Support systems

-helping farmers make a living

-city staff resource person

-mentorships

4) Building urban-rural farming linkages