



# Urban crops and livestock: The experiences, challenges, and opportunities of planning for urban agriculture in two Canadian provinces



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## ABSTRACT

While many municipalities globally are currently undertaking initiatives to support urban agriculture, policies and zoning regulations can act as barriers, with the former usually not integrated with planning. Extensive research has been conducted on urban agriculture policies in the global South, but much less is known about associated practices and policies in the global North. This is especially true for the Canadian context and therefore the present study aims at improving our overall understanding of the urban agriculture situation in two Canadian provinces. Relevant policies, such as official plans or official community plans, alternate policy documents and guidelines, zoning by-laws, and animal-related by-laws were reviewed for 10 municipalities in Ontario and in British Columbia, all varying in socio-economic and climatological characteristics. Additional key informant interviews were conducted with municipal planners, community garden coordinators, and other municipal staff familiar with urban agriculture policies from six of the selected municipalities.

In line with global trends, our results suggest that urban agriculture is becoming more widespread in the two provinces. However, even though all studied municipalities consistently support urban agriculture, they vary significantly in their approach, with some municipalities focusing much more narrowly on certain types of activities than others. Overall, community advocacy and municipal council support are the most important drivers in the policy process. Key informants expressed a need to bridge existing gaps between policy adoption and implementation of tools, emphasize public education and public awareness, create inventories of land available for urban agriculture, incorporate urban agriculture in the development review process, and focus on the commercial potential of the practice. Encouragingly, despite the many challenges that need to be addressed, we found that many opportunities exist that municipalities could consider when creating improved local urban agriculture policies and tools to enhance the urban food system.

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## Introduction

The practice of urban agriculture is not new and is especially widespread in the global South (Lovell, 2010). However, in the recent years, it has also grown in popularity in many cities of the global North (Broadway, 2009; Fairholm, 1998; Mendes, 2012; Mougeot, 2000; Voigt, 2011). Contributing factors include population growth, food security concerns, sustainability concerns, and climate change (Bouris et al., 2009; Broadway, 2009; Mees and

Stone, 2012; Roehr and Kunigk, 2009). While a number of municipalities are encouraging urban agriculture initiatives by creating relevant policies, a review of the literature reveals that planning policies and zoning provisions can sometimes act as barriers to these initiatives (De Zeeuw et al., 2000; Lejava and Goonan, 2012; Richter, 2012; Roehr and Kunigk, 2009). Most of these studies refer to cases from cities in the global South (Tornaghi, 2014) or in the United States. On the other hand, the studies that do concentrate on case examples from Canada tend to address urban agriculture or urban food production within larger cities or regions and do not cover the existing breadth of socio-economic situations and agricultural suitabilities (e.g. see Black (2013) and Roehr and Kunigk (2009) for Metro Vancouver, Desjardins et al. (2011) for the Region of Waterloo, and Thibert (2012) for Toronto and Montreal).

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Therefore, by using Ontario and British Columbia as case examples, this study aims to fill this knowledge gap by exploring the relationship between urban agriculture and mainstream planning in cities of varying size, geography, socio-economic conditions, and climate.

The primary objective of the present study is to contribute to knowledge regarding the urban agriculture situation in the two Canadian provinces. It aims to investigate whether issues are similar in cities with varying characteristics and in different regions, explore policies with regard to opportunities and challenges of urban agriculture, identify the similarities and differences between municipalities in terms of urban agriculture policies, and examine the experiences of municipalities during the process of creating such policies.

The article begins with a review of the literature, thus providing a background of urban agriculture within the planning context. Specifically, this review examines the influence from stakeholders, the connection between urban agriculture and planning, hindrances to implementing urban agriculture initiatives, and planning instruments and tools for urban agriculture. Following a description of the research approach, we present an overview of the findings of the policies that support urban agriculture, factors for adding urban agriculture policies, and strengths and challenges. We then discuss the key themes that emerged from the key informant interviews and offer a series of recommendations that might be considered by other municipalities when creating policies and implementation tools in support of urban agriculture.

## Background of urban agriculture within the planning context

### *Influence and roles of stakeholders*

Much of the existing literature addresses the relationships between the food system, urban agriculture and the local planning context. Many different actors have been identified that are involved in the development of urban agriculture activities (Mougeot, 2000). These stakeholders include, but are not limited to, citizenry at large, non-governmental organizations, governments and public authorities, municipal departments, academic and research institutions, and private firms (Dubbeling and Merzthal, 2006; Smit et al., 2001). This variety of actors is due to the many linkages of the practice to different urban systems, such as health, land use, waste management, and transportation. Four key roles that these stakeholders are responsible for are regulating, facilitating, providing, and partnering (Smit et al., 2001). While some stakeholders take on only one or few of these roles, governments undertake the most comprehensive and complex tasks by influencing urban agriculture through all four roles. As noted by Dunn (2013), land use planning is important in the success of local food systems and municipalities “make local land use planning decisions that respond to local conditions and which are appropriate for the future of their communities” (p. 5).

However, as highlighted in their research on urban agriculture policy-making processes in New York City, Cohen and Reynolds (2014) found that besides government bringing forward conventional policy plans for urban agriculture, collaborative decision making is also occurring among a range of participants, such as advocates, practitioners, and researchers in “new political spaces” (p. 224). Similarly, but more specifically for planners, opportunities exist to support the discourse on community food systems and food security (Campbell, 2004). Among a number of suggestions in her article on food system conflicts in the United States, Campbell (2004) recommends that planning practitioners promote the local food system by making changes to community land use plans and regulations. For instance, planners can eliminate

regulatory barriers that hinder community gardens and commercial urban agriculture in order to enhance the development of local food systems. Another example is to adopt mixed-use zoning to improve local food access to food sources, such as community gardens and farmers’ markets, in residential zones (Dunn, 2013). As summarized by Adin and Kurnicki (2014), “municipal planners have an important role to play in the creation of policies and programs that will take a broader view of food security, working to reduce social inequality and environmental impacts while increasing residents’ quality of life” (p. 11).

### *Integration of urban agriculture and planning*

Some scholars have noted that urban agriculture, including the food system as a whole, is often not fully integrated with planning (see Bouris et al., 2009; Lovell, 2010; Pothukuchi and Kaufman, 1999; Rydin et al., 2012; Thibert, 2012). Consequently, while many cities are becoming more involved with food system activities, these initiatives are often isolated and piecemeal (Bouris et al., 2009). Thibert (2012) offers several reasons for this lack of integration: (a) agriculture has traditionally sat uncomfortably within the realm of planning as the latter is largely based on separating “incompatible” land uses; (b) land use planning tends to focus on the “highest and best use” of land excluding agriculture as valuable land use from the urban context; (c) the development of urban agriculture policies is not neatly captured within a specific subfield of planning because it is related to many disciplines; and (d) many planners believe they should not intervene in the area of food policy because it is not their expertise or they do not see the importance of the problems associated with the food system. But though nutrition, food access, food supply, food preparation, and waste disposal are understudied by the planning community, they are integral parts of urban food system issues (Pothukuchi and Kaufman, 1999). Unfortunately, by not paying close attention to these problems, the connection between food and other issues (i.e. political, ecological, social, and economic) often remains unaddressed (Bouris et al., 2009).

### *Hindrances to implementing urban agriculture initiatives*

Policies, regulations, and zoning by-laws can also hinder the implementation of urban agriculture initiatives, as noted by Castillo et al. (2013), Roehr and Kunigk (2009), and Voigt (2011). An example of these hindrances is the keeping of hens in urban areas. According to Pollock et al. (2012), it was common in the past for North American residents to keep urban birds in their backyards, but the practice then fell into disfavour and was discouraged by municipalities. As a result, some municipalities prohibit urban hens through planning and city by-laws because of public health concerns, including the spread of diseases, the attraction of pests, and other nuisances (e.g. noise and odour) (Pollock et al., 2012). On the other hand, there are municipalities that regulate the keeping of livestock through other means, such as limiting the numbers of animals and setting minimum lot sizes and setbacks (Butler, 2012; McClintock et al., 2014; Voigt, 2011). However, the keeping of urban livestock is regaining popularity today, as demonstrated by several municipalities now permitting the keeping of animals such as rabbits, goats, ducks, geese, and hens.

In a recent study conducted by McClintock et al. (2014), survey responses from urban livestock owners revealed that there are a number of social and environmental benefits associated with owning livestock, a practice that owners view as “an integral part of a sustainable food system” (p. 437). Benefits include higher quality food products compared to those produced conventionally and fostering a sense of community with neighbours. Findings also suggest that today, owners consider their urban livestock as pets or

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