

Massachusetts Department of Agricultural Resources

Urban Agriculture Funding Report: 2014–2024



To access our Urban
Agriculture Program
page, scan the QR Code
or visit:
mass.gov/agr



Since 2014, MDAR's Urban Agriculture Program has supported urban food production across the Commonwealth. Based in low-moderate income areas, urban farms with market outlets, community gardens and/or community-based food production sites are thriving and providing greater food access in their communities.



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WELCOME LETTER FROM COMMISSIONER RANDLE



Dear Massachusetts Agricultural Stakeholders,

I'm pleased to share the Massachusetts Department of Agricultural Resources' (MDAR) first ten-year urban agriculture report! Over the past decade, this innovative program has helped the Commonwealth address the climate crisis and improve equitable access to food and land, all while building community.

Following its successful rollout as a pilot in 2014 in which it received \$2,000,000 in requests for an available \$200,000, MDAR's Urban Agriculture Program has become a fast growing and very popular permanent component of the suite of assistance programs MDAR makes available to farmers. Its goal is to advance commercial urban food production in MA, increase access to affordable nutritious food for urban residents, and address the challenges of small-scale farming in dense environments. Above all, the program builds community and supports long-term public health benefits by educating participants about healthy eating and the local food system.

Since its inception, MDAR has strengthened the sustainability of new and expanding urban agriculture enterprises through targeted investments of \$3.1M in grants to one hundred and four awardees during eleven rounds of availability. The program also incentivizes municipalities, organizations, and institutions to partner on projects, leading to increased access to fresh, nutritious food for urban residents, while promoting viable farming methods and policies that enable farming in urban centers.

Additionally, MDAR's Urban Agriculture Program, along with its non-government partners, has organized seven state-wide Urban Farming Conferences, which have drawn hundreds of people, many from out of state; created a 2020 pilot (now incorporated into the program) to fund community gardens; and presented symposia for municipal planners relative to urban agricultural zoning ordinances and bylaws.

In my six years at MDAR, my urban agriculture education has been both deeply and widely focused, as we develop policy and programming and interact directly with stakeholders at urban farms throughout the state. I have learned that there is much, much more to urban agriculture than can be measured in pounds of harvest or dollars of sales volume. Urban agriculture also guides people to appreciate and purchase locally grown, nutritious food; strengthens communities; trains and employs; and connects urban legislators to agriculture.

We look forward to continuing to build upon our programs and relationships to further advance urban agriculture in Massachusetts. Thank you for your partnership and support of Massachusetts urban agriculture!

With deep appreciation,



Ashley E. Randle
Commissioner

MASSACHUSETTS URBAN AGRICULTURE PROGRAM



REPORT OVERVIEW

The rise in interest of urban agriculture in cities across the Commonwealth and throughout the country over the years has generated an exciting and dynamic sector, which is focused on strengthening local neighborhoods and economies through the production, processing, marketing and sale of fresh food at the local level for greater food security.

Over 10 years ago, the Massachusetts Department of Agricultural Resources (MDAR) launched the Urban Agriculture Program, under the guidance of former Commissioner Greg Watson, to champion this emerging field.

To support these efforts in Massachusetts, MDAR's goals have been to increase and sustain the capacity of urban agriculture to provide tangible, measurable benefits to residents in urban centers, which include increased access to healthy fresh food, improved public health, entrepreneurial opportunities, youth employment and community revitalization.

This report hopes to provide constituents a snapshot into a sector that plays a crucial role with our local food systems in many cities in Massachusetts and as well as an opportunity to learn about the organizations committed to ensuring that more communities have equitable access to fresh, nutritious food.

MDAR Grant Funding

**104
Funded
Infrastructure
Projects**

**38 Individual
Organizations
in 7 Counties
Funded**

**\$3,110,000
Million
Awarded**

Over a decade ago, as demand from advocates to support urban farming enterprises increased, the Massachusetts Legislature authorized funding to promote and support urban agriculture in the 2014 Environmental Bond Bill. Allocation of these funds was critical to ensuring a viable and sustainable future for urban farming in Massachusetts.

MDAR has conducted **11 Rounds of funding and has awarded over \$3 million** in grants to organizations sited in low-moderate income communities. These are farms and producers who are providing fresh produce as well as culturally relevant crops and are creating greater access to healthy food with innovative marketing strategies.

"MDAR has been a thought leader in the nation in its support of Urban Farming and the growers and farmers who encompass the field. Through direct financial support, technical assistance, farm visits, Urban Farming Conferences and one on one consultation, MDAR has been one of the key funders for many of us in the movement. MDAR has maintained a direct connection with diverse urban farmers on the ground, understanding our successes and challenges, as we continue to focus on locally grown food."

**Patricia E. Spence
President & CEO
Urban Farming Institute**

MDAR Grant Program

Funding is provided through a competitive application process in which **\$5,000- \$50,000** for reimbursable grants are made available for capital infrastructure projects.

In **FY20**, our agency's efforts to increase access to fresh, nutritious food led to expanding the scope of the program, providing funding for community gardens, and in FY22 additional funding to local collaborations focused on urban food production without commercial intent.

[Click here](#) for more information on application



Examples of Projects Funded

- Installation of water systems
- Wash and pack stations
- Farm stands
- Composting equipment
- Walk-in cold storage
- Hydroponics systems and installation
- Aquaponics systems and installation
- Perimeter fencing
- Greenhouses and High Tunnels
- Raised bed materials and installation
- Farming tools and equipment
- Market trailers
- Roof top farm materials and installation

Urban Farming Conferences

Education and technical assistance are areas that practitioners request support for to enhance food production and to sustain their businesses.

There are a host of unique challenges with urban food production, ranging from the possibility of contaminated soil, limited land access and the lack of ordinances that allow for growing produce within city limits. In addition to funding, curating opportunities to provide resources for practitioners has been a priority for MDAR.



MDAR, in partnership with the Urban Farming Institute, has facilitated seven state-wide Urban Farming Conferences and three symposiums to provide urban producers opportunities for obtaining skills and technical information. Topics covering pest management, soil health, greenhouse management and marketing are just a few of the sessions that have been requested.

Urban Farming Conferences



The conferences have consistently attracted hundreds of practitioners, advocates, and policy makers to support urban food production. Seasoned experts have shared critical technical assistance practices, participated on informative panels, and attendees experienced networking opportunities, all to benefit this growing sector.



[Click here](#) to find programs for past conference programs.



URBAN AGRICULTURE GRANT RECIPIENTS



Since the inception of the Urban Agriculture Program in 2014, MDAR has enthusiastically supported urban agriculture practitioners who are determined to bring access to fresh, nutritious food to their communities. Their missions encompass training youth and beautifying once forgotten lots in city centers, as well as bringing health, equity and wellbeing to deserving neighborhoods. The following pages feature several of these organizations, *in their own words*, and all have been supported through MDAR's Urban Agriculture Grant program. Each organization offers information on their **2023 season**, each page has a link and QR Code to find more information about them.

To learn more about all of our grantees, find a full list, [click here](#).



Regional Environmental Council

Worcester, MA



20 Market
Sites-
\$400K in
Sales

83% in
SNAP
Sales

The Regional Environmental Council (REC) is a food justice organization based in Worcester, Massachusetts. Our mission is to bring people together to create a just food system and to build healthy, sustainable and equitable communities in Worcester, MA and beyond. REC programs include our Community and School Gardens network, which supports 74 gardens, serving over 600 community gardeners and 2,600 students, YouthGROW, a youth development farming program employing 40 young people who work together to grow food and the next generations of leaders in our food system, and the REC Community and Mobile Markets, which includes 19 unique market locations serving over 5,000 unique customers annually.

6 MDAR Grants: Tools, Hoop House Infrastructure, Mobile Market Van, Sales Software



Nuestras Raíces

Holyoke, MA



La Finca is
Utilized by 8
Independent
Farmers

Programing
Serves 2000
families



Nuestras Raíces has served the Holyoke community for over 30 years as a community development corporation rooted in the large, growing Latinx population of Holyoke and the nearby cities through programs and investments that build community strength, leverage our collective power, support our traditions and culture, and create a more resilient urban environment in which to raise our families. Nuestras Raíces has an expanding network of 10 community gardens, a 30 acre urban farm, 2 commercial kitchen spaces, and a vast network of community partners with whom we work on an array of social and environmental justice initiatives. We operate on a membership model, with over 600 members drawn from our community gardeners, farmers, and small businesses we have helped launch, along with other community stakeholders. We focus on community entrepreneurship and business development; agriculture, food skills, and nutrition education; community food security initiatives; and youth/community leadership development.

4 MDAR Grants: Greenhouse Infrastructure/Upgrades, Cold Storage, 1 Acre Fruit Orchard

Urban Farming Institute

Mattapan, MA



**Farmer Training
Program:
285 Graduates
(since 2014)**

**100 Varieties
Vegetables,
Fruits, &
Herbs**

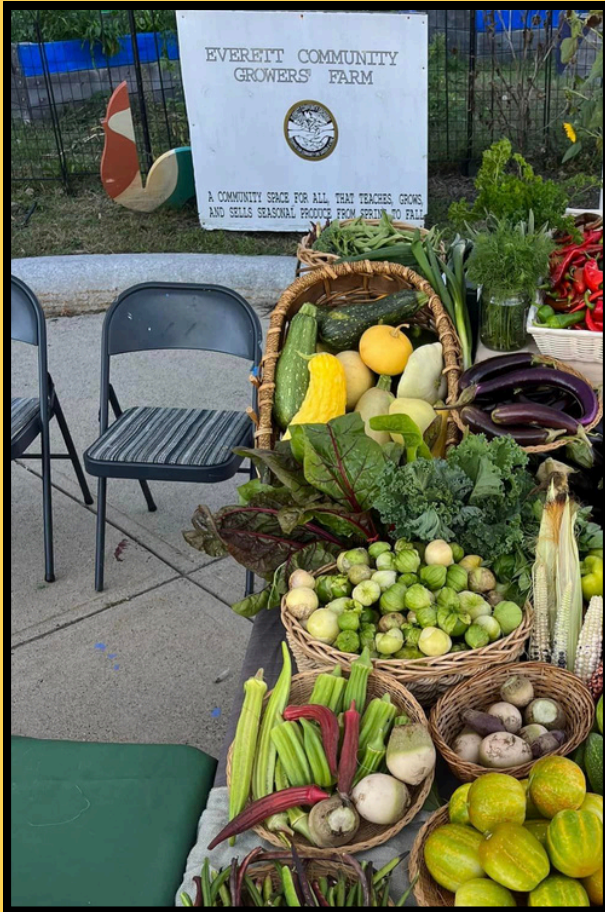
Urban Farming Institute's (UFI) mission is to develop and promote urban farming to engage individuals in growing culturally relevant food and building a healthy community. We were founded in 2011 by community residents out of a vision for a healthier local food system for Boston's Roxbury, Dorchester, and Mattapan neighborhoods. We transform neglected land, create green-collar jobs for local residents of color, engage people in growing food, and build a healthier, more locally-based food system leading to a more resilient community. The lack of access to fresh produce and quality stores leads many to consume less healthy, pre-prepared foods. Our myriad of programs focusing on families, youth, seniors and more are planned, developed, and supported by a diverse staff, most of whom live in our community.

7 MDAR Grants:
Tools, Cold Storage, Truck,
Irrigation, Production
Equipment



Everett Community Growers

Everett, MA



Everett Community Growers (ECG) is a small and mighty nonprofit organization bringing local and culturally relevant produce directly to our community members.

From 2010-12 the Everett Community Health Partnership (ECHP) and diverse Everett residents who had no space or permission to grow food at home launched a grassroots community organizing initiative to address food access. In 2014 ECHP received a grant from MDAR to conduct a land inventory and assessment to identify more land for urban agriculture and build evidence for policies to support urban agriculture expansion.

In 2018, we launched a Youth Crew, which is now our flagship program providing living wage youth jobs and skills training, a food justice and community organizing curriculum, and fresh, affordable produce to low-income Everett residents. In 2021 we opened another farm on Broadway, and since then, food grown at both sites is sold at a farmstand, to the school and donated.

We also operate community gardens (providing over 40 families with space to grow their own food and connect with one another) and engage residents and community members in policy advocacy centered on racial, economic, and environmental justice.

12
Market Sites
in 2023

40 Families
Utilizing
Gardens

1 MDAR Grant: Pilot
Rezoning Initiative in
City of Everett



Green Roots Chelsea, MA



Our Food Justice and Urban Agricultural work is one of **GreenRoots'** longest-standing and foundational programs. Born from a mission to combat food insecurity and rejuvenate neglected urban land into vibrant, lush growing spaces, we created our first program, alongside other Chelsea-based organizations in 1998. Fast forward over twenty-five years, we now nurture six growing spaces, including our Urban Farm. These gardens, spanning 1752 sq. ft, not only yields fresh food, it empowers our community members to plan, cultivate, and harvest culturally appropriate food in an environmentally sustainable manner.

Since the inception of each of these growing spaces, we have engaged hundreds of residents, volunteers, and stakeholders to advance our efforts to address food insecurity and transform vacant lots into healthy growing spaces that provide nutritious, local produce for our community.

Over 40 Culturally
Relevant Crops Grown

2 MDAR Grants: Irrigation,
Farm Tools, Garden
Expansion and Materials



Groundwork Lawrence

Lawrence, MA

Over 26K
Residents
Served in
2023

HIP Sales:
80%

4 MDAR Grants:

Greenhouse
Infrastructure,
Irrigation, Low-
Tunnels, Wash
Station



Groundwork Lawrence is celebrating 25 years of changing places, changing lives, and changing systems in Lawrence. Our Fresh Food and Healthy Living Programs have been an integral part of our work to address food insecurity and lack of fresh food options in our community.

One measure of the success of this work has been our Farmer's Markets which had a 28% increase in customers and a 3% increase in sales since 2022. MDAR Urban Agriculture funding has helped Groundwork Lawrence to implement projects and improvements that benefit our community by increasing access to fresh healthy foods. In 2014, MDAR provided resources to expand our Costello Urban farm by 10,600 feet and to install an irrigation system. Additional funding in 2015 supported the construction of a 27'x48' high tunnel which added 1,296 square feet of growing space. And in 2020, we received a grant that allowed us to construct 32 community garden beds at Costello Urban Farm.

Mill City Grows Lowell, MA



Mill City Grows (MCG) fosters food justice by improving physical health, economic independence and environmental sustainability in Lowell, MA, through increased access to land, locally grown food, and education. We have grown our programming from a single community garden in 2012 to include 27 school and community gardens, 5+ acres of Urban Farmland, 20 staff, and an annual budget of over \$1.6M. Each year, our Food Access programs serve over 15,000 people and distribute over 30,000 pounds of food back to the residents of Lowell with year-round mobile farmers markets, a farm share delivery, and over 200 community garden beds. Holistic gardening, nutrition, and agricultural education is embedded in our work with youth, growers, and consumers. Over the last decade, support from MDAR has helped MCG establish these programs, which have resulted in enhanced organizational sustainability, food access, and community engagement with the local food system.

5 MDAR Grants:

Mobile Market Bus Retrofit,
Compost Spreader,
Pack/Wash Station, Mobile
Cooler



Groundwork South Coast

New Bedford, MA



Youth
Training

17,400 sq.
ft. of Food
Production

Working at the intersection of community, environmental, and climate resilience, **Groundwork Southcoast** (GWSC) was founded in 2017 to be a part of the transformation of two Gateway Cities and Justice40 communities in southeastern Massachusetts: New Bedford and Fall River. Our mission is to bring about sustained regeneration, improvement, and management of the physical environment by developing community-based partnerships that empower people, businesses, and organizations to promote environmental, economic, and social well-being.

GWSC's community leadership investments take root in three main programmatic areas: 1.) workforce development, 2.) climate resilience, and 3.) engagement. This three-pronged focused approach actively engages marginalized populations from environmental justice (EJ) communities disproportionately impacted by environmental hazards, including youth.

3 MDAR Grants:
Raised Bed Materials,
Compost Equipment,
Storage Shed



Gardening The Community Springfield, MA

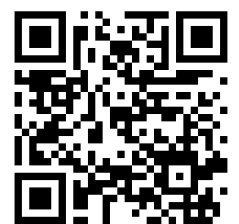


7 MDAR Grants:

Greenhouse
Infrastructure, Low
Tunnels, Irrigation,
Wash Station, Small
Tools and Production
Equipment

Gardening the Community (GTC) is a food justice organization engaged in youth development, urban agriculture and sustainable living to build healthy and racially equitable communities. GTC works to meet our community's food security needs through growing organic food on formerly empty lots, healthy food access, and organizing to create a more equitable food system. We emphasize youth leadership development, racial justice, and intergenerational relationship building in all of our work. Our programs, including a Youth Program, Urban Farms, Farm Share Program, and Farm Store, help address the high rates of poverty, food insecurity, blight, and lack of positive opportunities for youth. GTC serves Springfield's Mason Square neighborhood, a low income, predominantly Black and Latinx community.

GTC operates the only open year-round, urban community-based farm store in Massachusetts where residents can use their SNAP/HIP benefits. The farm store is the center for all of GTC's education and outreach efforts and has served thousands of local and county-wide households since it opened in 2019.



UMASS Lowell

Lowell, MA



Culturally Relevant Crops
and Seedlings Grown in
Teaching Greenhouse

43K sq. ft.
Crop
Production

5 MDAR Grants:
Greenhouse, Tools,
Production Materials,
Roof Top Gardens

The Rist Institute for Sustainability and Energy at the University of Massachusetts Lowell (UMass Lowell) is dedicated to hands-on research in sustainability, climate change, and renewable energy. Over the past decade, support from the **Massachusetts Department of Agricultural Resources (MDAR)** has been instrumental in developing programs that enhance environmental practices, improve food access, and engage communities with local food systems. Our Urban Agriculture Program, which started with our long-standing partnership with Mill City Grows, has expanded to include several close collaborations with local and sustainable organizations.

A flagship project of the Institute is the **Rist Urban Agriculture Greenhouse and Farm**. Constructed in 2017 and expanded in 2023, this 1,800 square foot greenhouse has doubled its production capacity and is used for both large-scale agricultural production and community and farm seedling production. It contributes to Mill City Grows' delivery of over 30,000 pounds of produce annually to local food pantries, mobile markets, institutions, and the university's dining halls.



The Food Project

Boston, MA



3 Farmers'
Markets,
6 Mobile
Stops

368
Volunteers

For more than thirty years, **The Food Project** has worked at the intersection of youth development, sustainable farming and food justice.

More than 2,000 young people have gone through our youth development programs on four farms across Eastern Massachusetts. These young people have cultivated and harvested more than 5.4 million pounds of fresh, sustainably-grown produce and distributed it through hunger relief organizations and local farmers markets.

We've also built and installed more than 1,800 raised bed gardens for community use and informed the development of Massachusetts' Healthy Incentives Program through early pilot programs.

4 MDAR Grants:
Greenhouse Upgrades,
Irrigation Systems, Market
Trailer, Low Tunnels



Wellspring Harvest Springfield, MA

Wellspring Harvest is a 12,600 square foot hydroponic greenhouse growing lettuce varieties and herbs for commercial, institutional and nonprofit customers across Massachusetts. As a worker cooperative, Wellspring Harvest's seven employees own and manage the greenhouse and share in company profits – creating jobs and wealth in our community. Annual sales of \$316,400 in 2023 were from the sale of 223,747 heads of lettuce, with projections to grow by over 25% in 2024 now that the greenhouse has reached full production.

Wellspring Harvest's growth has been made possible by two **MDAR Urban Agriculture and Food Security Infrastructure grants** which enabled the greenhouse to purchase essential equipment and upgrade environmental controls to increase production. The greenhouse also supports the Go Fresh Mobile Market which benefited from a third MDAR grant to support the delivery fresh produce to over 1,000 food insecure families a year across Springfield. SNAP recipients use their state Healthy Incentive Program benefits to purchase almost \$60,000 of produce annually from area farms.



3 MDAR Grants:

Hydroponic Greenhouse Infrastructure,
Electrical Upgrades, LED Light System



Charlestown Sprouts Community Garden

Charlestown, MA



68 families
Utilize
CSCG

2 MDAR Grants:
Compost Tumblers,
Expansion of
Growing Space



Charlestown Sprouts Community Garden serves as a welcoming natural space in the city for residents to grow their own food and connect with one another. Charlestown Sprouts was initially established over twenty years ago and has long been a place for low-income and immigrant gardeners to grow food for their households. It is located in an Environmental Justice census block. With funding from MDAR and others, Sprouts underwent a community-led redesign and rebuilding project between 2021-2023. As a result of this project, Charlestown Sprouts has been able to continue its mission of providing space for residents, especially low-income and immigrant residents, to grow healthy, culturally relevant food for their families. Sprouts currently serves 68 gardening families in long-lasting, accessible, sustainably designed plots, including six accessible beds for gardeners with mobility impairments. Sprouts is a vital source of nutrition for our gardeners, with over 90% using their gardens for food production and 50% reporting that all or nearly all of their fresh produce comes from their garden plot.

NUBIA

Boston, MA



8K sq. ft of
Food
Production



Youth
Training and
Education

4 MDAR Grants:
Drip Irrigation,
Walk-in Cooler,
Walk-behind Tiller

NUBIA farms is a nonprofit organization located in Boston and was founded in 2008 to reduce the impact of food insecurity in the Boston Metropolitan area and create an environment where families are able to learn how to be self-sufficient. Through sustainable gardening along with educational classes, Nubia has been able to shape local communities. Nubia is a small and nimble organization run by an Executive Director, who is the grower, along with its many volunteers. We grow food in 3 gardens in Roxbury and Dorchester and partner with The Food Project to also grow in Lincoln. In total we have approximately an acre of land and grow a variety of food including hot peppers, eggplant, zucchini, tomatoes, garlic, herbs, green beans, mallow, arugula, lettuce, and more. Our focus is on providing food to low income families and operate a farm stand in Cambridge, and at the Allston-Brighton farmer's market. Our customers are mainly SNAP, HIP and WIC recipients, who rely on Nubia for fresh food on a weekly basis, with total sales of over \$27,500 per year.

Round Table

Boston, MA



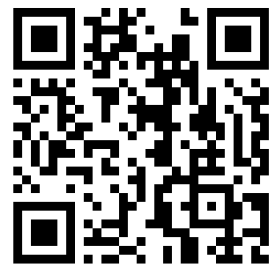
Round Table, Inc., is committed to and engaged in practical, environmental, cost-effective solutions that advance urban food production in and around the surrounding area of the Mary Ellen McCormack Housing Development and Moakley Park. Since our beginning we have embarked on several small-scale pilot project's that involve feeding and providing nutritious meals to children, and families, by growing our own vegetables, and addressing the challenges of food access and small-scale farming in a densely populated area.

Currently we have brought together over 70 volunteers who take care of the 3 community gardens. And the gardens have gotten really big, the estimated amount of garden area being cultivated over the years amounts to nearly 25,000 square feet. We created a Farmers Market that offers H.I.P and SNAP incentives. We have created summer job for community residents, we have raised consciousness and helped build an agricultural community that is becoming self-resourceful.



Thousands of Pounds
of Food Grown by
Residents

3 MDAR Grants:
Site Expansion, Raised
Bed Materials, 2nd Site
Build-out



We Grow Microgreens

Roslindale, MA



**11 Farmers'
Markets**

**Built 59
Raised Beds
for Boston
Residents**

We Grow Microgreens, LLC is a small, minority-owned, commercial urban farm located in the City of Boston. The farm's mission is to promote sustainable local agriculture through the growth and sale of highly nutritious microgreens, edible flowers, culturally relevant herbs, vegetables, tea leaves, and medicinal plants. Additionally, it aims to educate consumers and chefs on the nutritional value of its produce. It prides itself on empowering local youth to actively participate in local agriculture through jobs and educational programming. What makes We Grow Microgreens, LLC unique is that their plants are grown with natural sunlight. The glass greenhouse is energy and water-conserving, with a condensing boiler to heat the flood benches, an insulated foundation, translucent solar panels, a shade curtain, roof vents, an energy-efficient heating system, and a roof rainwater collection system for watering the microgreens, herbs, and plants.

4 MDAR Grants:
Greenhouse Infrastructure, High Tunnel
Build-out, Production Equipment



Eastie Farm

East Boston, MA



Over 40
Youth
Trained

Partners With
50 Farms to
Aggregate
Produce

Eastie Farm demonstrates how partnership and collaboration between urban and rural farms can help foster an equitable, local food system that's healthy for the individual, the community, and the world. Our work with small rural farms helps them ensure their own operational sustainability, gets healthy local produce for our customers, puts consumers in touch with those who grow their food, helps increase food security in our community, and uplifts our own community economically. Eastie Farm works towards a livable climate by centering the climate justice community that it is situated in. We work towards a local, equitable food system beginning with food security, supporting small farmers in the state, which strengthens the economy of the state's agricultural system, educating consumers about healthy nutrition, bringing consumers closer to those who grow their food, and supporting the health of the natural ecosystem that feeds us.

1 MDAR;
Geo-Thermal Greenhouse
Build-out, Infrastructure



Plymouth County Sheriff's Office

Plymouth, MA

The Plymouth County Sheriff's Office provides humane care and custody of individuals sent by the courts. Rehabilitative programs are central to the mission of the Sheriff. The Sheriff's Environmental Justice Education Center's Aquaponics/Hydroponics is an example of an educational program that provides vocational training to the people in our custody and the community at large. All food is donated and program participants make a difference in the lives of thousands of people struggling with food insecurity.



Youth and
Volunteer
Training in
Aquaponics

Hundreds of
Lbs. of Produce
Donated

1 MDAR Grant:
Aquaponics Center
Build-out



Mack Park Farm

Salem, MA



250
Households
Reached

6 Farmers'
Markets

The Mack Park Farm is a community farm in a municipal park managed by the City of Salem's Health & Wellness Coordinator and two local farmers contracted by the city. Five Salem High School students are also paid by the Salem YMCA to work at the Mack Park Farm during the summer in addition to the YMCA's own garden, GreenSpace.

The farm is located on a half-acre area of Mack Park and includes an 8,400 square-foot fenced farm surrounded by six food forest and pollinator guilds. The farm grows many varieties of produce and the guilds surrounding the farm contain fruit trees, berry bushes, perennial herbs and native plants that are open to the public for picking. An average of 6,500 pounds of food is grown per season and provided for free to The Salem Pantry and at biweekly free farmers' markets at the farm. The produce we grow reflects the desires of the community and The Salem Pantry. Salem's population is about 19% Hispanic, predominantly Dominican, and foods like eggplant, tomatoes, multiple varieties of peppers, are very popular.

2 MDAR Grants:
Walk-in Cooler, Water
Catchment System



Codman Square NDC

Dorchester MA



OASIS (Opportunity, Affirmation, Sustainability, Inspiration, Success) on Ballou is a 22,000 sq foot parcel located at 100 Ballou Ave in Dorchester, which **Codman Square Neighborhood Development Corporation** (CSNDC), operates as an urban farm. Launched in 2015, Oasis on Ballou uses green and sustainable urban farming techniques to address the critical issues of healthy food access and economic opportunity in the Woodrow-Mountain neighborhood of Codman Square, a neighborhood previously classified as a food “cold spot”. This neighborhood is home to primarily African American and Afro-Caribbean residents (81%) who are low to moderate income. OASIS on Ballou is the only public green space in the area. CSNDC sells the harvest at local farmers markets, through CSA’s, and to the Daily Table (a local nonprofit supermarket). Additionally, CSNDC donates produce to food pantries, and otherwise seeks to distribute the wealth of the local urban agriculture site to the residents and community that surrounds the farm. By both farming and selling the produce in this immediate neighborhood, OASIS creates interest in and easy access to locally grown fresh food. Volunteers are trained to run and maintain the farm. The farm is also used as a training site and creates employment opportunities for justice involved men of color. Since its founding, Oasis on Ballou Urban Farm has grown the capacity to produce thousands of lbs of produce annually and has hired over 15 re-entry citizens as staff, providing them with valuable farm cultivation and management skills.

Trained Over
200 Volunteers

2,500 Families
Served

4 MDAR Grants:
Site Expansion, Drip
Irrigation, Wash Station
Cold Storage



All Farmers Springfield, MA



In 2017, refugee and immigrant farmers in the Greater Springfield area envisioned a community farm where they could raise their children in cultural farming practices and offer mutual support as they cultivate the land to feed local families. We formed **All Farmers**—a nonprofit led by farmers to meet these collective priorities, and set to work to bring this dream to fruition.

Through a five-year process driven by the farmers, and a broad coalition of support ranging from urban agriculture, to farmland, wetlands, and habitat conservation, to public health, this dream is now a reality. In 2023, All Farmers acquired over 60 acres of prime farmland within minutes of Downtown Springfield. In 2024, 41 families began farming on site, as we finish preparing the remainder of the property and install vital shared farm infrastructure.

This project is the first MDAR Urban Agriculture award for farmland acquisition and an important step towards building equity in the local food system. Ownership of the land is crucial to giving farmers stability and security, and is even more important for farmers with a history of upheaval and displacement.

11 Farmers'
Markets

400 Farmers
& Growers

1 MDAR Grant:
Funding for Land
Purchase



MOVING FORWARD IN URBAN AGRICULTURE



MDAR's support of urban growers, who are meeting the needs of their communities, while also addressing the challenges of food production in urban centers is steadfast. The strength in this sector depends on its partnerships and diversified approaches to food access. To successfully address issues of food security in low to moderate income communities and the uncertainty of climate change, we will need to expand our collective approach to include more institutional and municipal investments and an openness to creative space uses.

The key: A wholistic approach that also meets the demands of diverse cultures, a friendlier and realistic take on zoning ordinances and the expansion of technology, such as hydroponics, vertical growing and aquaponics. Partnerships between institutions and urban farms, such as UMASS Lowell and Mill City Grows should be studied and replicated. Innovation at healthcare Institutions includes incorporating rooftop farms on site, such as Boston Medical Center, as well as partnering with urban farmers to host "freight farms".

A growing trend of partnerships between rural and urban farmers could be expanded upon, as it is mutually beneficial and benefits urban communities with a more robust selection of fresh, nutritious food. In closing, continued, strategic investments, including research on the impacts of urban agriculture within our regional food systems and advancing new models of food production in non-traditional spaces will ensure its sustainability. MDAR is looking forward to supporting the advancement of Urban Agriculture with our partners.





**You will find complete information
and updates at
MDAR's
Urban Agriculture Program**

