Expanding the use of vacant land for urban agriculture in Champaign

Uniting the built, social, and natural environments

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Study area conditions

- **Food desert**: In this area, grocery stores that sell fresh fruits and vegetables, and other healthy foods cannot be found within a 1 mile radius. Convenience stores and fast food restaurants are abundant.

- **Below poverty line**: The percentage of families that live below the poverty line in the study area is 22 percent. This is almost double the average, 12 percent, in the City of Champaign.

- **Unemployed**: The unemployment rate in the study area is 11 percent, which is 34 percent higher than the average, 7 percent, in the City of Champaign. The population of this area is mainly young adults between 24 and 49 years old.

- **SNAP**: Twenty percent of the residents in this area receive Social Security assistance, 6 percent with supplemental security income, 4 percent with cash public assistance, and 67 percent are part of the SNAP program.

- **Vacant land**: There are 2,227 vacant lots in the City of Champaign. The highest concentration of vacant per acre is located in this area (0.2 acres). This means there are 332 acres of potential land which would produce enough food for 14,500 people.

Vacant land analysis in sample area

- **800,000**: Income generated
- **240,000**: Lbs of produce
- **1,500**: Jobs created

Access to healthy food

- Nutrition education
- Healthy eating
- Physical activity

Empowerment/Inclusion

- Youth development
- Food security
- Side spaces

Conservation

- Stormwater management
- Biodiversity
- Soil improvement

Economic development

- Food affordability
- Economic stimulation
- Job growth

Recommendations

- **Make vacant space productive**: The first initiative should be cataloging how much idle space is in the city. Unused urban space is a wasted opportunity, and an asset denied to the community.

- **Include urban agriculture as a land use**: Urban agriculture is not recognized as a valid land-use category. To gain the full benefit from urban agriculture activities, this must change. This should be incorporated into City Zoning Regulations and Building Codes.

- **Develop occupancy permits**: This solves the key problem of access to land for the urban poor. Temporary occupancy permits can be encouraged by policy measures to make the renting of available and suitable space attractive to public and private landowners.

- **Use participatory policy-making**: Involve a broad base of stakeholders and municipal authorities will result in a more equitable decision-making process that promotes engagement on all levels.