

LOUISIANA URBAN AGRICULTURE, HB-761 AND YOU



WHAT IS HB-761?

HB 761 gives Louisiana cities and parishes the ability to create "Urban Agriculture Incentive Zones" (UAIZs). Owners of vacant land in a UAIZ can receive a significant reduction in property taxes, if they allow their land to be used for commercial or noncommercial agricultural use for a period of at least 5 years.

Here's how it works: Once a city or parish government permits UAIZs in their communities, property that is used for urban agriculture will be classified as "bona fide agricultural land." This classification decreases the amount of taxes owed on the land, making it easier for farmers to get access to land, as property owners are more likely to see agriculture as a desirable land use in exchange for lower taxes. It could also reduce expenses associated with renting property for farmers, if landowners reduce rent based on the tax savings.

WHY DOES HB-761 MATTER?

HB-761 provides a new way for farmers to have easier access to land by providing an incentive for landowners to use their land for urban agriculture. The potential of growing food on underutilized land has many benefits too:

- Production of healthier, locally sourced food in areas with poor access to quality fruits and vegetables;
- Transforming overgrown, blighted or unused lots into edible green spaces – which can also provide places for outdoor socializing and recreation;
- More personal interactions with growing food and educational opportunities about nutrition, health supportive cooking, and farming;
- New farms can mean new jobs, and sales of new products, creating a stronger local economy.

Urban farms now produce 20 percent of the world's food.¹ We can build more urban farms in Louisiana that are good for our economy, good for our health and good for our planet too!

Good for Our Local Economy

Small well-tended urban plots of land can yield surprising amounts of produce:

- In 2014 Detroit community, market, family and school gardens produced nearly 400,000 pounds (18,000 kg) of produce — enough to feed more than 600 people.²
- In Louisiana, the Grow Dat Youth Farm cultivates a yearly average of 10,000 pounds of produce³, and hydroponic urban farms in New Iberia are growing hundreds of pounds of produce for local farmers markets.⁴

Buying directly from farmers makes it more likely that money gets put right back into the local community.⁵ Re-circulating money – consumer to farmer to community and back again - leads to a healthier local economy.⁶

Community food projects funded by the United States Department of Agriculture provided an estimated 2,300 jobs and incubated over 3,600 micro-businesses.⁷ Louisiana urban areas have an opportunity to capture federal dollars and other healthy food financing dollars if it moves more agriculture activities into the cities.

Urban farming creates ways to save money - people can grow their own fruits vegetables, herbs and more, or buy them from nearby farms. Studies report that every \$1 invested in a community garden plot yields approximately \$6 worth of vegetables.⁸

Good for our health

Buying local fruit and vegetables often means buying what is "in season."⁹ Eating fruit and vegetables that are in season are fresher and more nutrient dense because they are not being transported long distances.

Residents in low-income communities, more often than not, must rely on convenience stores and neighborhood markets that disproportionately sell greater amounts of fatty, sugary, and processed foods (or "junk food"). This lack of access to healthy food makes it difficult for families to eat well, leading to higher rates of obesity, diabetes, and heart disease. Building more urban farms can help people access healthier and fresh food.

Good for our planet

- Transporting food over long distances burns fossil fuels polluting the environment. For example, California strawberries travel 1,975 miles¹⁰ to reach Louisiana generating 3.233 metric tons of CO₂¹¹; whereas local strawberries only travel 51 miles generating 0.083 metric tons of CO₂ emissions.¹² (That's 96% less CO₂ emissions!)¹³
- Produce sometimes travels for up to two weeks before it arrives in grocery stores! It usually requires additional packaging and may have been genetically modified,¹⁴ sprayed or injected with chemicals in order to survive the trip.
- Local fruit and vegetables don't have to use preservatives to keep the food fresh, require less packaging, and emit far less CO₂ during transport.¹⁵
- Americans throw away 96 billion pounds of food waste annually at a cost of over \$1 billion in disposal.¹⁶ Existing city infrastructure has the potential to support the expansion of gardening as a strategy to increase food resources and contribute to food security for neighborhoods that wish to grow locally and eliminate the food waste that results from transportation shrinkage.

HOW CAN YOU HELP?

Spread the word! Contact your state legislators – tell them to support urban agriculture through an urban agriculture incentives bill!

You can call them by contacting the Louisiana House switchboard (225-342-6945) and the Senate switchboard (225-342-2040) and asking for your Senator and Representative. Let them know that you support HB 761.

Don't know who your state legislators are? Go to <https://www.legis.la.gov/legis/FindMyLegislators.aspx> for a list based on your address.

Contact Emily Posner at eposner@recirculatingfarms.org with any questions or to learn more about how you can help make more urban agriculture happen in your community!



REFERENCES

- ¹ Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations ("FAO"). *Urban Agriculture*, <http://www.fao.org/urban-agriculture/en/> (last visited May 8, 2015).
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- ⁴ See Tina Dirmann, *New Creole Market Embraces Hydroponic Farming Co-Ops in Iberia Parish*, LOUISIANA FOUNDATION (Apr. 2, 2014), available at <http://ourhomelouisiana.org/new-creole-market-embraces-hydroponic-farming-co-ops-in-iberia-parish-2/>.
- ⁵ Judith D. Schwartz, *Buying Local: How it Boosts the Economy*, TIME.COM (June 11, 2009), <http://content.time.com/time/business/article/0,8599,1903632,00.html> (last visited Mar. 10, 2015).
- ⁶ Nandi Robinson, *Why Buy Local? Assessment of the Economic Advantages of Shopping at Locally Owned Businesses*, (Sep. 2010), <http://ced.msu.edu/upload/reports/why%20buy%20local.pdf>.
- ⁷ Michelle Kobayashi, *The Activities and Impacts of Community Food Projects 2005-2009*. United States Department of Agriculture, http://www.hungerfreecommunities.org/wp-content/uploads/2011/09/CPF_Activities_Impacts_2005-09.pdf (last visited May 8, 2015).
- ⁸ Ingrid Kirst et al. *Gardening for Your Health*. PRAIRIE FIRE (Mar. 2012), <http://www.prairiefirenewspaper.com/2012/03/gardening-for-your-health> (last visited May 8, 2015).
- ⁹ U.S. Dept of Agriculture, "Eating on a Better Budget", (Dec. 2011), <http://choosemyplate.gov/food-groups/downloads/TenTips/DGTipsheet16EatingBetterOnABudget.pdf>.
- ¹⁰ Based on mapped distance from Ojai, CA, to New Orleans, LA.
- ¹¹ See <http://www.freightemissionscalculator.com/> (last visited Mar. 10, 2015).
- ¹² Based on mapped distance from Ponchatoula, LA, to New Orleans, LA.
- ¹³ Percentage Calculator found at <http://percentcalculator.com/?gclid=Cj0KEQjwifWnBRCB5PT57KSVw-kBEiQASV7aRPJcNxEWnkNxuWwWyAqQ4LBTYamTOPIFF60MUjysAaAgnK8P8HAQ>, last visited Mar. 10, 2015).
- ¹⁴ America Revealed, "The Edible Backyard", available at <http://www.pbs.org/america-revealed/teachers/lesson-plan/5/> last visited Mar. 10, 2015).
- ¹⁵ That is in comparison of the average 1800 mile transport of food to the varying definition/distance of local that does not exceed 200 miles. The 2008 Farm Act defines local as not exceeding 400 miles from origin, available at http://www.ers.usda.gov/media/122868/err97_1.pdf (last visited March 10, 2015).
- ¹⁶ See *Feeding the Hungry and Reducing Solid Waste Through Food Recovery*, http://www.epa.gov/epawaste/conservation/wast_not.pdf (last visited May 8, 2015).

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