



The Philadelphia Food Policy Advisory Council (FPAC) facilitates the development of responsible policies that improve access for all Philadelphia residents to culturally appropriate, nutritionally sound, and affordable food that is grown locally through environmentally sustainable practices.

Philadelphia Food Policy Advisory Council Testimony in support of Urban Agriculture

Thank you Chairwoman Reynolds-Brown, Councilman Taubenberger, and all the members of the Committee for the opportunity to testify today. My name is Amy Laura Cahn. I am a staff attorney with the Public Interest Law Center and director of our Garden Justice Legal Initiative. I also sit on the board of the Neighborhood Gardens Trust. I am here on behalf of the Philadelphia Food Policy Advisory Council (FPAC) as FPAC's Co-Chair.

Philadelphia is fortunate to have a robust tradition of urban agriculture—rooted in our African-American, immigrant, and refugee communities and nurtured across the city by residents for generations. In the words of our city's many growers, urban agriculture heals communities and gives them a path to self-reliance. Urban agriculture means empowerment and making your voice heard. It means getting to choose what nourishes you and your community.

Urban agriculture is Bhutanese refugees cultivating Thai Roselle in South Philly. It is beehives in Mount Airy; elders and youth tending an 80-year-old garden in Grays Ferry; thousands of pounds of produce shared with families who do not have enough to eat; young people selling vegetables to neighbors in Kensington, Mantua, Kingsessing, and across North Philadelphia; fruit trees and berry bushes tended by and feeding residents and passersby; thousands of gallons of stormwater managed; a network of farmers—across race, class, and generation—supplying markets and restaurants and exploring opportunities for cooperative ownership.

We have at least 470 gardens on almost 600 parcels, distributed citywide and concentrated in historically disinvested neighborhoods. Of these parcels, almost half are publicly owned surplus. Over one third are privately-owned, many tax delinquent and abandoned. Slightly less than 30% are owned by our nonprofit and faith-based sectors or Parks or School District land.

Hundreds of these spaces emerged as neighbors transformed abandoned and disinvested places into vibrant community assets. And hundreds of these spaces are still at risk of being lost. This simultaneous push pull of possibility and precariousness reflects the overall picture of urban agriculture today in Philadelphia.

Zoning changes in 2012 made gardening and farming permissible activities on most land in the city; the Philadelphia Land Bank Law of 2013 identified urban agriculture as a priority community beneficial use for vacant land; and, just this spring, City Council voted to approve a stormwater fee exemption for gardens. FPAC applauds City Council and the Administration for these critical victories.



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But we are simultaneously losing and gaining ground in the effort to ensure all Philadelphians have access to fresh, healthy, and affordable food.

Many cities across the country have committed to urban agriculture: The City of Chicago is investing a one million dollar U.S. Department of Agriculture grant in land trusts, cooperatives, and training and capacity building for urban farmers; the cities of San Francisco, Seattle, and New York are making urban agriculture more accessible by establishing coordinating offices, which support growers with resources, tools, and education; and many cities facilitate new projects by pre-approving land for urban agriculture projects.

We implore our city to take leadership in ways like these. FPAC asks City Council to consider the following recommendations:

- 1) Commit to creating 1 to 5 acres of new urban agriculture space (which may include destination gardens or market farms) in every City Council district. This could mean designating specific public parcels or creating an urban agriculture zoning overlay.
- 2) Create and fund an office to support and coordinate the City's ongoing urban agriculture work, including covering land transfer costs and contributing to infrastructural or capital costs for urban agriculture projects.
- 3) Contribute City Council District capital and activities funds toward urban agriculture projects.
- 4) Appoint an urban agriculture advocate to the Philadelphia Land Bank Board and support the Philadelphia Land Bank and conservatorship as tools for garden preservation.
- 5) Explore incentives for urban agriculture projects, such as property tax credits for private owners who make their property available for growing.

Thank you for considering FPAC's recommendations and for the opportunity to testify today. I look forward to answering any questions you may have.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Amy Laura Cahn".

Amy Laura Cahn
FPAC Co-Chair
Public Interest Law Center

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Nancy Kohn".

Nancy Kohn
FPAC Urban Agriculture Subcommittee Co-Chair
Pennsylvania Horticultural Society

The FPAC Urban Agriculture Subcommittee guides the City of Philadelphia to develop and implement innovative laws and policies to support the conversion of Philadelphia's vacant and underutilized lands into sustainable community assets that increase food security and sovereignty for all Philadelphia residents. The subcommittee engages diverse stakeholders to inform recommendations and make current policies more transparent.



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Gardens by parcel and council district	Total garden parcels	Public Ownership	Private Ownership	NonProfit Ownership
District 1	36	17	13	6
District 2	44	15	17	12
District 3	114	55	49	10
District 4	31	16	10	5
District 5	177	82	58	37
District 6	2	1	1	0
District 7	113	72	26	15
District 8	39	21	14	4
District 9	7	5	2	0
District 10	5	1	3	1
TOTAL	568	285	193	90

62 gardens on Parks & Rec Land
223 on Public Surplus parcels
193 on Privately owned parcels
90 on Nonprofit owned parcels

Data provided in collaboration by Villanova University, Haverford College, the Public Interest Law Center, Neighborhood Gardens Trust, and the Pennsylvania Horticultural Society.