

The Case for Urban Agriculture

Contrary to popular belief that large commercial farms dominate food production, urban agriculture is increasing worldwide. In 1995, 45% of the world's population lived in cities. By 2020, 60% of the world's population will live in cities. In the next 25 years, cities will account for nearly all population growth. More and more urban or peri-urban dwellers are attempting to grow at least some of their own food. This is the essence of urban agriculture.

Urban Agriculture is defined in short as the growing of plants and the raising of animals within and around towns and cities. UA has many advantages. It has a high degree of adaptability and diversity, as populations increase and economic conditions change. UA complements rural food production by increasing food intake and improving quality. It increases economic development, through potential family savings on food commodities, and stimulates "spinoff" micro-industries. It has positive social impacts, including recreation, education, and greater social inclusion for disadvantaged groups. It also contributes to positive environmental management and the general greening of the city.

What are the advantages of urban agriculture within the Capital Region District:

1) Our location: Vancouver Island is food insecure. If off-island transport systems failed for an extended time, food shortages would occur. If the Malahat was blocked, we in the CRD would be even more isolated. An economic upheaval would have a profound effect. Our location is beautiful but our food security status is perilous.

2) Quality of food: Who would argue that locally grown food is not of better taste and nutritional quality than that shipped in from afar? There is no comparison between mega-farm suppliers to the vegetables and fruits grown in our yards, on our patios, or in a community garden.

3) Overall wellness: Seeing plants grow, whether pansies, peppers, or pears, is pleasing to the soul. Planting, cultivating, and harvesting offers exercise, fresh air, and a sense of accomplishment. For many, especially the elderly living within the CRD, it provides a form of recreation and a social outlet.

4) Our environment: We would have "sticker shock" if could somehow calculate the energy expended in producing, harvesting, shipping, and marketing the typical fruit or vegetable in our green grocer isle. As well, the environmental degradation due to certain large-scale mono-culture practices is well-documented.

Urban and peri-urban agriculture in the CRD is here to stay. The question is only how it is to be managed. The good news is that, when supported and properly administered, UA will contribute to Victoria's food security and overall well being. I encourage each one of us to get involved: 1) By advocating for CRD policies favorable to urban agriculture; 2) By planting for ourselves a bed of herbs, row of vegetables, a container garden; 3) By supporting locally grown produce – from the farmgate, pocket markets around town, community gardens, household gardens, and local farmers markets.

Together, we can make a difference, as well as reap local benefits that are good for body, soul and spirit.

By Monty Crisp

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