

Urban Agriculture

city of
CINCINNATI



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Executive Summary

Cincinnati already has a well-established urban agriculture community, as well as a foundation of resources and expertise to guide and support urban agriculture pursuits of citizens and organizations.

There is growing interest in urban agriculture here, as well as growing need for further support from the City itself, as we strive to make our regional and local food systems more resilient and equitable in the face of the urgency of climate crisis, supply chain challenges, and nutritional insecurity.

We Can Lead in Urban Agriculture

The city and the region have a long agricultural history and many institutions and experts supporting the growth of urban agriculture.

The City's Program Addresses Citizens' Needs

The Urban Agriculture Program administered by the Office of Environment and Sustainability is popular and serving a diverse range of residents.

Our Goals Push Us to Keep Growing

Past investment by the City, along with recent commitments in the Green Cincinnati Plan and Milan Urban Food Policy Pact, support continued prioritization of urban agriculture.

About the Report

Prepared for the Office of Environment
and Sustainability (OES)

OES commissioned the Greater Cincinnati Regional Food Policy Council, our region's convening body for food systems collaboration, to prepare this report over the fall and winter of 2022.

The report draws on data from the City's Urban Agriculture Program, public databases and research, the Central Ohio River Valley (CORV) Local Food Guide, archival data, and the extensive network of the Food Policy Council's partners and members.

Maddie Chera, Director of the Food Policy Council, prepared the report, under the guidance of Robin Henderson, OES's Program Manager for Urban Agriculture, Food Waste, and Food Policy.



**Greater Cincinnati Regional
Food Policy Council**

AN INITIATIVE OF
 **Green Umbrella**

About the Report

What It Can Do

- **Understand Change Over Time**

Previously the Green Umbrella Local Food Action Team, and subsequently, the Food Policy Council, have tracked indicators related to regional food production and consumption since 2010. Updating these records helps us monitor existing indicators of our region's food system resilience.

- **Expand Our Purview with Equity as a Focus**

New indicators can help us assess our performance from an equity perspective, so we can move resources to those organizations and neighborhoods that need it most.

- **Inform Decision-Making**

Approval and implementation of the Green Cincinnati Plan, the Milan Urban Food Policy Pact, City budgeting, and future Urban Agriculture funding are best served by being data-driven.



The Landscape

Agriculture Across Ohio

All data from 2017, date of last Census of Agriculture with fully analyzed and published results.

\$118 million

sales of OH produced food locally through retailers and restaurants*[^]

\$80 million

direct-to-consumer sales by Ohio producers*[^]



Farm Consolidation

Across Ohio, the number of farms has decreased by 70% over the last century.[‡]



Land Use

Ohio's acreage in production has dropped by 42% in the past century, too.[‡]



Farmer Demographics

34% of Ohio farmers are over 65 years old, and 58% find their primary occupation off-farm.[§]



The Landscape

Urban Agriculture Matters

Research has identified several roles urban agriculture can play in the post-industrial city:

- act as an answer to urban food deserts,
- serve as representations of ethnic identity,
- deliver social change and blight prevention,
- provide educational tools for students and community members,
- model creation of indirect economic opportunities in neighborhoods through hands-on training of transferable skills, and
- help minimize the food insecurity of underserved and underrepresented populations.*

What is "urban agriculture"?

There is no single definition (even by the U.S. Dept. of Agriculture), but urban agriculture can include community gardens maintained by neighbors, residential agriculture in backyards and on rooftops and balconies, projects connected to institutions like churches and schools, and commercial production by businesses growing within a city. Urban agriculture includes horticulture, animal husbandry, and other techniques like hydroponic, aeroponic, and aquaponic facilities, vertical production, and composting.△

The Landscape

Assets in Cincinnati

We have institutional resources and individual expertise to leverage, as well as connections beyond the City to agricultural networks, like OH Ecological Food and Farming Association, OH Farmers Market Network, and National Sustainable Agriculture Coalition.

City Support Through Policy and Funding

The City has financially supported urban ag efforts since 2010, and in 2019, City Council-approved motions (2017) led to the adoption of Chapter 1422 on Urban Agriculture within the Cincinnati Zoning Code.*

Civic Garden Center of Greater Cincinnati (CGC)

CGC was founded in 1942 during the Victory Gardens movement. It offers hands-on and virtual education for kids and adults and supports 65 community gardens in the tristate area.

Turner Farm Community Garden Program

The program is committed to connecting people to their food & growing strong communities through sustainable biological agricultural practices, collaborative work, experiential learning and civic engagement.

Formal Education and Training

In addition to CGC, University of Cincinnati and Cincinnati State both offer Horticulture programs, and other groups, including Turner Farm, Gorman Heritage Farm and the Greater Cincinnati Regional Food Policy Council support additional training opportunities.

By the Numbers

Urban Agriculture Mini-Grants

Equity is a priority. Equity indicators were added to tracking in FY2022.

38%

of 2022 applicants represent organizations whose leaders identify as Black or a Person of Color (POC)



70%

is the average percentage of low income population based on 2022 applicant garden locations

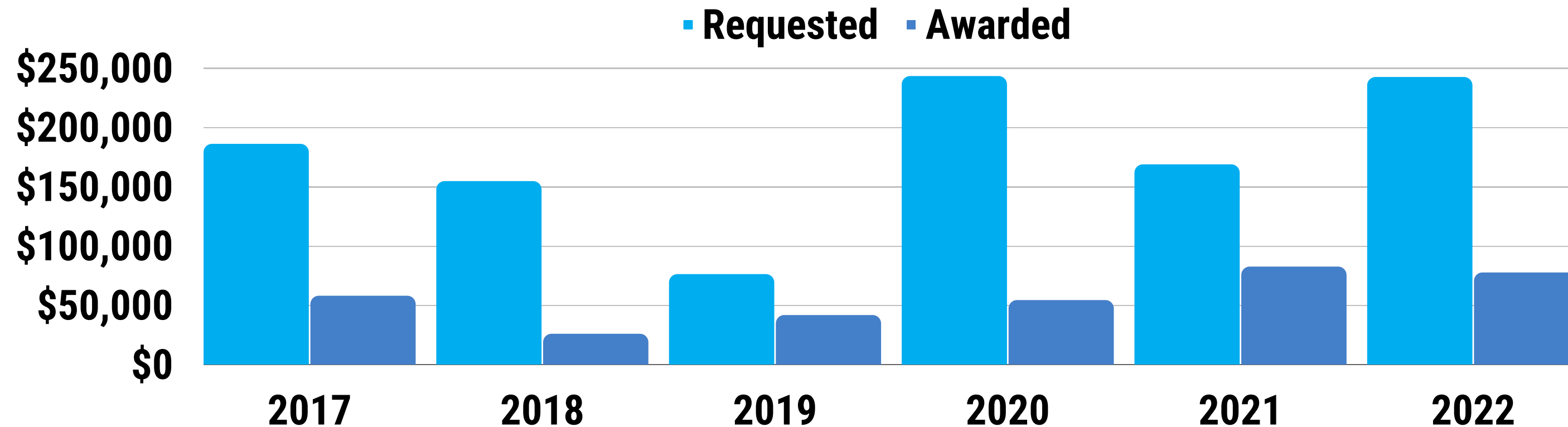
72%

of 2022 applicants serve more than 50% Black or POC community members

By the Numbers

Urban Agriculture Mini-Grants

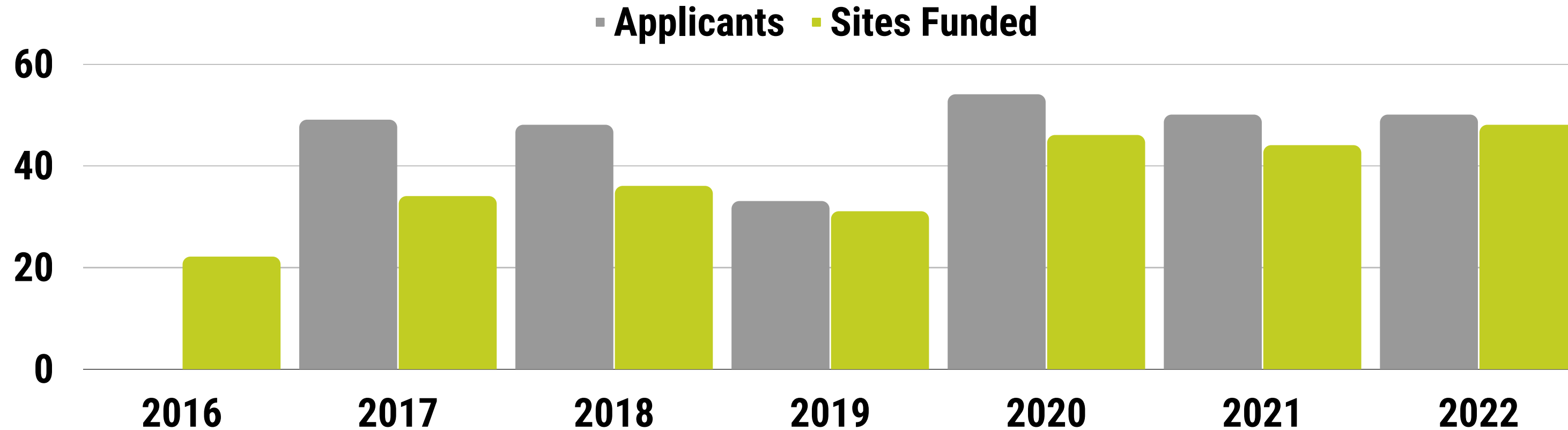
There is great interest in and need for City support. Program applicants request much more than the program can fund, so there is room to grow.



By the Numbers

Urban Agriculture Mini-Grants

There is great interest in and need for City support. The program distributes funds to nearly as many sites as apply, attempting to address that need.



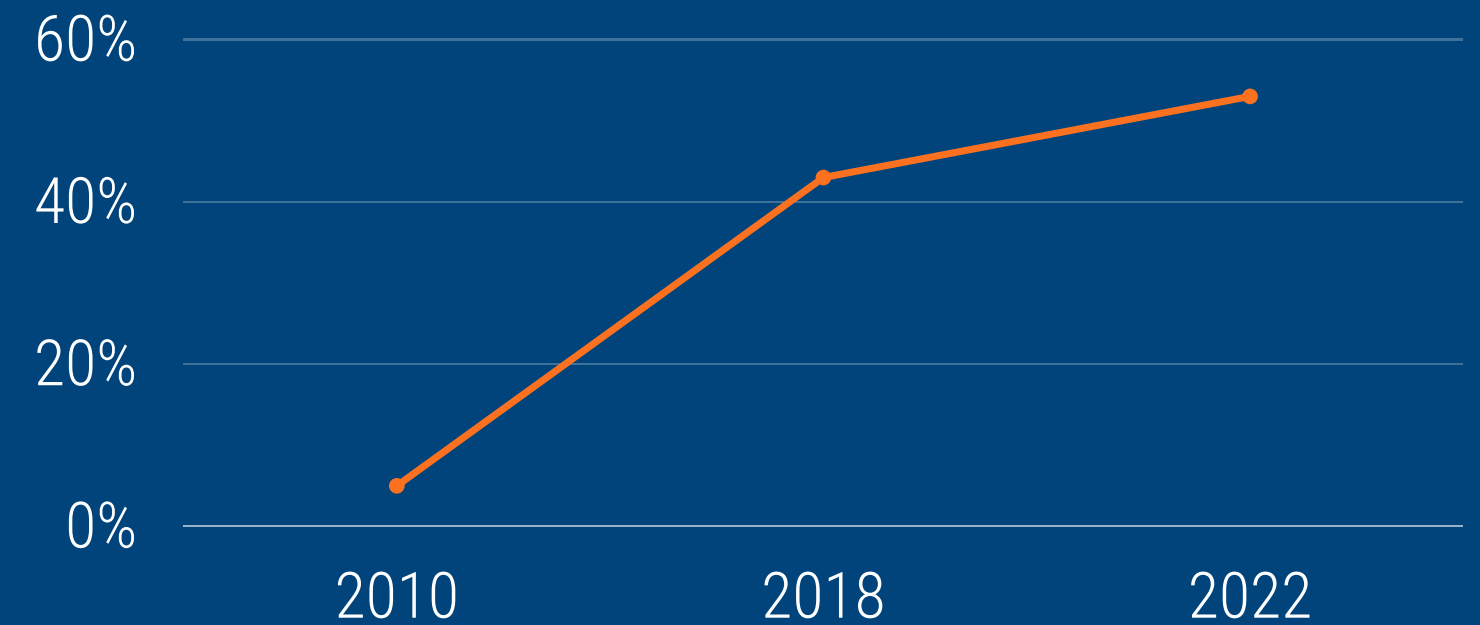
Note that this data is drawn from the Central Ohio River Valley Local Food Guide and is therefore limited by self-reporting of local food businesses and outlets.

By the Numbers

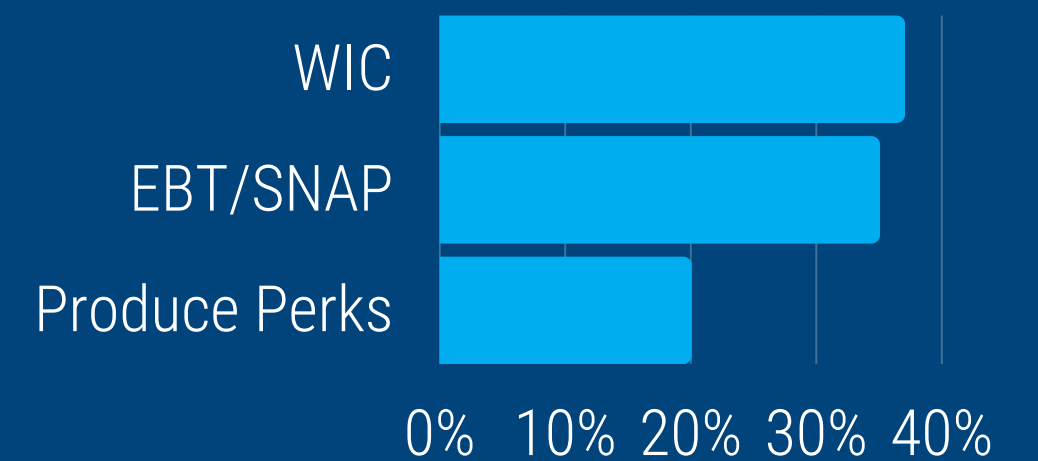
Farms, Markets, and More

- 66** farms in the area supply the citizens of Cincinnati and neighboring towns
- 42** supply a range of produce
- 26** offer meat
- 24** Community Supported Agriculture (CSA) programs offer weekly "shares" of local food to supporter/subscribers
- 49** farmers markets offer fresh food and community in neighborhoods and nearby towns, including 14 year-round

More and More Farmers Markets Accept Assistance



Many of the 49 markets open in 2022 accepted assistance.



By the Numbers

Community Gardens and Nutrition Incentives

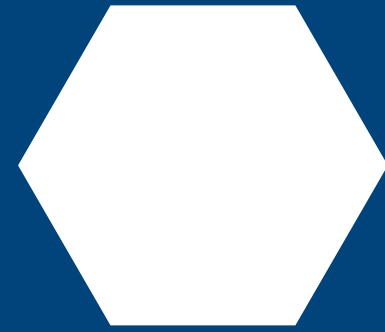
65

community gardens are affiliated with the Civic Garden Center of Greater Cincinnati

(a portion of these are usually supported with City Urban Agriculture grants, varying year-to-year)

180

urban agriculture sites have sought funding from the City's Urban Agriculture funding throughout the program's history



31+

locations throughout the region currently served by Produce Perks Midwest (Healthy Harvest Mobile Market only counts once, but travels to multiple locations)

\$401K+

in fruit and vegetable purchases supported through Produce Perks Midwest programming across Southwest Ohio

\$1.1M+

economic activity generated across the region through Produce Perks Midwest programming*

By the Numbers

Over Time

- Local Food Production and Distribution Took a Hit During COVID-19

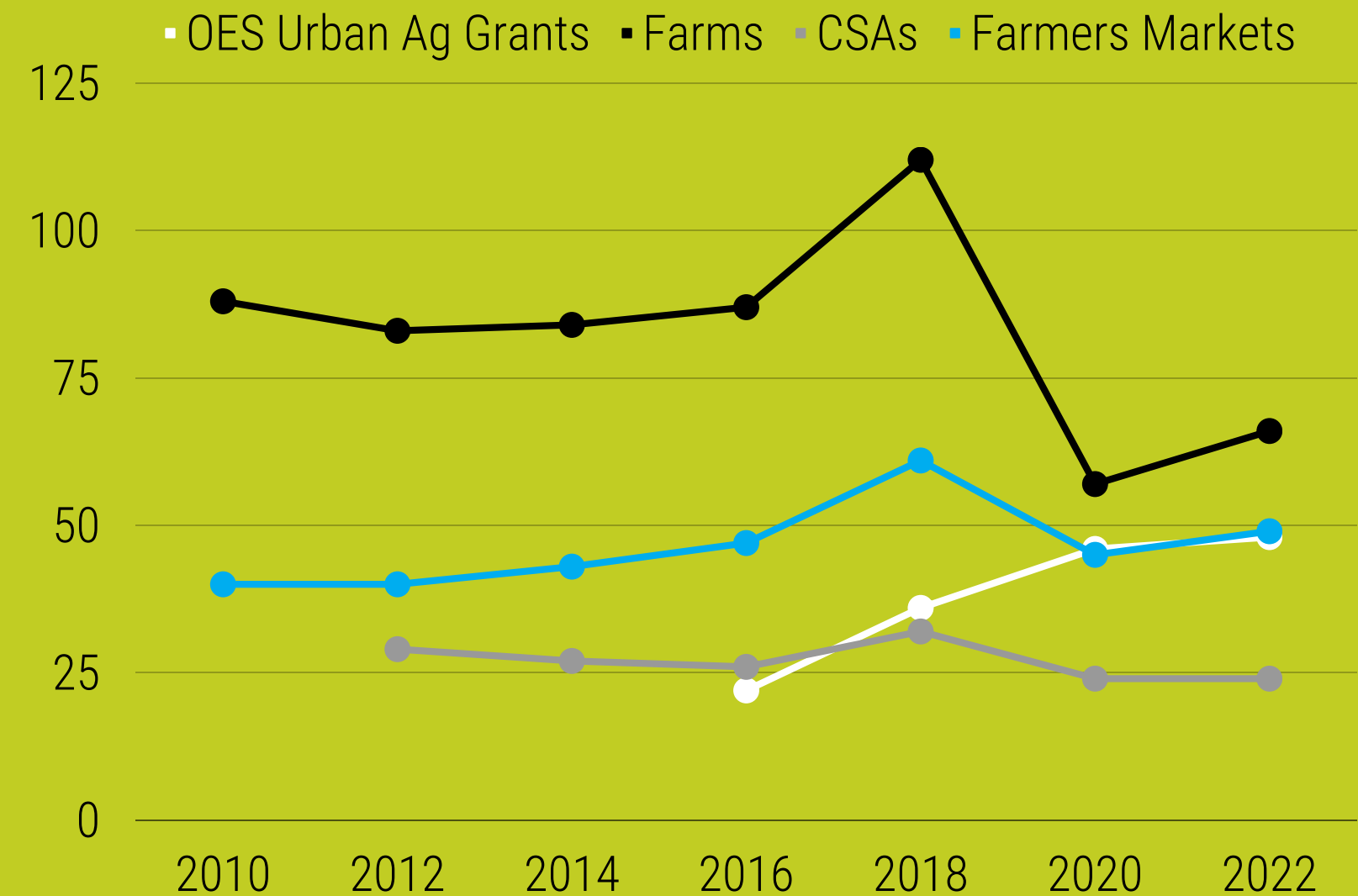
Prior to the pandemic, local food had been enjoying a relative boom.

- Cincinnati's Urban Agriculture Program Continues to Grow

Even during COVID-19, OES continued to address expanding need and to support local food production and distribution in city neighborhoods.

Note that this data is drawn from the Central Ohio River Valley Local Food Guide and is therefore limited by self-reporting of local food businesses and outlets.

OES support of urban agriculture grew, while other access points dipped.



Civic Garden Center of Greater Cincinnati

With the highest population of Hispanic immigrants in Cincinnati, The Carthage Community Garden has overcome some barriers of growing your own food in a new country. Immigrants from Guatemala, Nepal, Mexico, and Honduras are among the experienced growers at this garden and what keeps the comradery building is Ann's ability to bring these communities together as they share the same passion for growing local food. Educating gardeners who are dedicated to their own ways of growing food can be difficult, but she makes a continued effort to not only educate, but to learn new gardening techniques and cultural crops important to new Americans. Food brings us together and having the ability to grow our own is essential.

Spotlights & Stories



Ann Ivanic

Spotlights & Stories



Students at Gamble Elementary fill up seedling starters in their outdoor learning area.

Gamble Montessori Elementary School

Students get outside in an outdoor learning area, which includes an outdoor classroom and a garden space.

In Fall 2021, lessons included:

- what plants need to grow
- the plant cycle
- the nitrogen cycle
- “planted seeds for our day” by growing around and saying a positive affirmation

Turner Farm Community Garden Program: Price Hill & Three Sisters



Price Hill Community Garden

- Participation of immigrant and refugee families through the Santa Maria Community Services Women's Group
- Teaching organic gardening best practices through classroom-based and in-garden classes
- Emphasizing collaborative work and shared harvests
- Family-centered gardening programs at PH Branch Library
- Cultivation support and shared harvests at PH Recreation Center People's Garden & Orchard

Three Sisters Garden

- Hispanic families with a focus on their culinary traditions
- Innovative high-yield organic farming technique
- A collaboration with Price Hill Will

Spotlights & Stories



Spotlights & Stories



Aiken Students prepare and plant garden beds

Aiken High School Agriculture Career Tech Pathway

Aiken's School-Based Community Garden is an outside classroom laboratory created by students.

The course curriculum includes studies in Agriculture, Food, and Natural Resources; Animal and Plant Science; Global Economics and Food Markets; and Nursery and Greenhouse Management.

University of Cincinnati Urban Agriculture course



In Fall 2022, students in this course visited and worked at Tikkun Farms, Civic Garden Center, Walnut Hills Redevelopment Foundation, and 80 Acre Farms. They donated and planted more than 400 plants in community gardens and logged over 25 worker hours in the community.



Spotlights & Stories



Spotlights & Stories



"Healthy soil is the confluence of earth, atmosphere and us."

Rose Hill Farm Spring Grove Village

Rose Hill Farm in Spring Grove Village was created by David Chal and his family in 2020 based on biodynamic principles of managing the farm as a holistic system, striving to enhance the health of each natural process and synergize the life of the whole. They sell seasonal vegetables grown with purpose and harvested at the peak of freshness, taste, and nutrition

Needs & Recommendations

Milan Urban Food Policy Pact Workstream: **Governance**

Actions from the Pact:

facilitate collaboration across city agencies and departments; strengthen urban stakeholder participation; support local and grassroots initiatives; develop urban food policies and plans and a disaster risk reduction strategy

Lead Cohesive Food Systems Planning & Coordination

Create a role within the City government focused on aligned allocation of resources in support of a resilient food system, including urban agriculture, emergency food distribution, food business startup funding, and more. Integrate food metrics into CincyInsights.



Needs & Recommendations

Milan Urban Food Policy Pact Workstream: **Sustainable Diets & Nutrition**

Use City Money to Serve Healthy, Local Food to City Employees

Adopt values-based purchasing and healthy catering guidelines, prioritizing the purchase and service of locally produced and healthy food products throughout City operations and include community-supported agriculture (CSA) in the City's Healthy Lifestyle benefits.

Actions from the Pact:

address non-communicable diseases associated with poor diets; develop sustainable dietary guidelines; explore regulatory and voluntary instruments to promote sustainable diets in public facilities; commit to achieving universal access to safe drinking water

Needs & Recommendations

Milan Urban Food Policy Pact Workstream: **Social & Economic Equity**

Actions from the Pact:

use forms of social protection systems such as cash and food transfers, food banks, community food kitchens, emergency food pantries, etc., to provide access to healthy food for all citizens; encourage and support social and solidarity activities; promote networks and support grassroots activities; promote participatory education, training and research

Prioritize Small and BIPOC-Owned Food Businesses

Fund training for small and marginalized producers and value-added businesses, including on administrative topics like tax requirements and incorporation, and on food safety practices and planning. Prioritize land access for BIPOC-owned operations.

Needs & Recommendations

Milan Urban Food Policy Pact Workstream: **Food Production**

Actions from the Pact:

promote and strengthen urban and peri-urban sustainable food production; apply an ecosystem approach to guide holistic and integrated land use planning and management enabling secure access to land for sustainable food production; provide services to food producers in and around cities; support short food chains; improve waste and water management and reuse in agriculture

Invest in Youth and Workforce Development

Support young people in training for and pursuing food production and processing careers by creating and funding a workforce development program specifically for agriculture, which would also help meet urban agriculture's primary resource need.



Needs & Recommendations

Milan Urban Food Policy Pact Workstream:
Food Supply and Distribution

Make Access Easy and Invest in Infrastructure

Prioritize support of community-driven projects to increase food access throughout the city, including hyper-localized food hubs, increased cold storage, specialized distribution networks, and ease of permitting for farmers markets.

Actions from the Pact:

review and strengthen food control systems; ensure seasonal and local food consumption by linking peri-urban and near rural areas transport and logistics; develop green public procurement and trade policy to facilitate short food supply chains; support for municipal public markets



Needs & Recommendations

Milan Urban Food Policy Pact Workstream: **Food Waste**

Actions from the Pact:

adopt a circular economy approach; raise awareness of food loss and waste; recover and redistribute food



Support Food Waste Reporting and Composting Efforts

Consider policy that mandates reporting of food waste as the first step toward waste reduction. Invest in neighborhood-level composting projects and food transformation & redistribution efforts, emphasizing the benefits to residents.

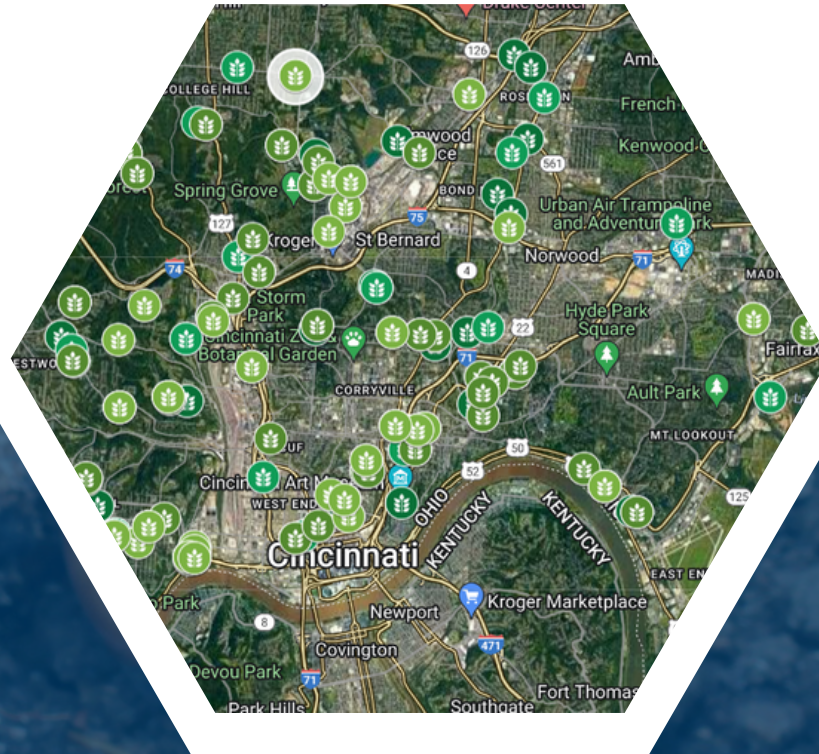
Next Steps

Build on the foundation we already have and use the City's tools and resources to make our regional food system more resilient.



Expand Existing Programming

Grow the City Urban Agriculture Program through the addition of support staff and increased funding earmarked for annual urban agriculture grants and training.



Track Performance

Incorporate indicators into CincyInsights with attention to Milan Urban Food Policy Pact metrics and the priorities of the Green Cincinnati Plan.



Connect Opportunities

Utilize various platforms to engage with residents about food issues and support projects that connect resident needs like food, housing, and transportation.

Resources

- **Cincinnati Urban Agriculture Program**

Seeks to convert vacant parcels into agricultural spaces, such as community gardens, foraging sites and market garden businesses, as well as provide financial support to such sites.

- **Greater Cincinnati Regional Food Policy Council**

An initiative of Green Umbrella, working through collective impact to advance the vision of a resilient regional food system.

- **CPS Outside**

An impact team of Green Umbrella formed in Fall 2019 to work towards the vision that all Cincinnati Public Schools' students have equitable access to outdoor experiences and environmental education.

- **The Common Orchard Project**

A project incubated by Green Umbrella, working to install and maintain hundreds of small orchard plantings and growing “commonly held” resources by educating communities on fresh food and urban land management.

- **Environmental Resilience Institute Case Study**

Our Zoning Code Amendment for urban agriculture in Cincinnati featured by national program hosted at Indiana University.

- **Civic Garden Center of Greater Cincinnati**

A regionally recognized nonprofit model that has been teaching people how to grow food and care for the environment since our founding in 1942 during the Victory Gardens movement.

- **University of Cincinnati BS in Horticulture**

Students learn the relationship between horticulture and ecological processes and develop a forward-looking approach toward the environment.

- **Cincinnati State Sustainable Agriculture Management Certificate**

A program that leads to career opportunities in specialty crop growing operations, farmers' markets, and other urban agriculture initiatives, with students involved in continuous hands-on learning at a local farm throughout the program.



- **A Cincinnati Food & Farming History**

This interactive, hyperlinked timeline documents some of the major food, farming, and business-related histories of the Ohio, Kentucky, and Indiana Tri-State region

- **Edible Ohio Valley**

A quarterly magazine about the people that grow, raise, and produce food close to home around Cincinnati and Dayton, Ohio, Northern Kentucky, and Southeast Indiana.

- **Central Ohio River Valley Local Food Guide**

The first local food guide was published in 2008 by a group at Imago Earth Center. A small but dedicated team has annually published a guide to local food resources for the region since then.

- **Ohio Food Policy Network**

A grassroots network that represents interested people and organizations who share values and a common vision for the food system in Ohio.



- **Ohio Ecological Food and Farming Association**

Since 1979, cultivating a future in which sustainable and organic farmers thrive, local food nourishes our communities, and agricultural practices protect and enhance our environment.

- **USDA Urban Agriculture**

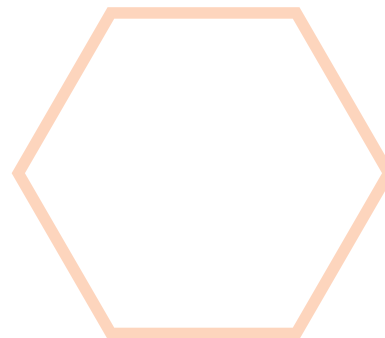
The 2018 Farm Bill established the Office of Urban Agriculture and Innovative Production (UAIP) to better focus on the needs of urban farmers. USDA's Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) leads the USDA-wide office.

- **National Sustainable Agriculture Coalition**

An alliance of grassroots organizations that advocates for federal policy reform to advance the sustainability of agriculture, food systems, natural resources, and rural communities.

- **Additional Reading**

Peer-reviewed research articles and institutional reports on urban agriculture.





Acknowledgments

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Recognition and gratitude go to the original and past stewards of this land, the descendants of whom are among those who continue to care for and cultivate our area today. We acknowledge the Hopewell, Adena, Miami, Shawnee, and Osage peoples, whose unceded and stolen territories included the land which is now Cincinnati. In addition, we recognize the many generations of people, including farmers and food system workers with Black, Indigenous, Latinx, immigrant, Appalachian, women, LGBTQIA+, and other identities, who have built up our regional food system in the Central Ohio River Valley. We continue to bear a responsibility to each other and to local ecological systems, and by practicing resilient urban agriculture together, we have strength in unity.



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