Understanding Our Practices from Seed to Scrap: The 2012 Vancouver Urban Farming Forum

A Summary of What We Heard
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The 2012 Vancouver Urban Farming Forum

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Prepared by Zsuzsi Fodor & Shelby Tay  
Research Coordinators, Vancouver Urban Farming Society

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Vancity
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Funders
Vancity

Speakers & Keynote Listeners
Art Bomke
James O'Neill
Joanna Clark
Ngaio Hotte
Thien Phan

Volunteers & Collaborators
Alexander McNaughton
Amy Tran
Andrea Zittlau
Daniel Pierce
Karly Pinch
Marcie Caouette
Melanie Harding
Shelley Xu
Taraneh King

Vendors
Harvest Community Foods
Save On Meats
The Hive

VUFS Board of Directors
Alicia Baddorf
Camil Dumont
Emi Do
Gavin Wright
Joanna Clark
Karen Ageson
Kayla McIntyre
Ngaio Hotte
Sean Dory
Wes Regan

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Executive Summary

Introduction
The second annual Vancouver Urban Farming Forum was hosted under the leadership of the Vancouver Urban Farming Society (VUFS) on November 17, 2012. Building on the much larger 2011 forum, this year's gathering was much more focused and intimate to launch the Urban Farming Practices Research Project. After consultation with the urban farming community of practice, the following goals for the 2012 Forum Understanding Our Practices from Seed to Scrap were developed:

I. Develop a scan of existing and emerging urban farming practices in Vancouver from seed to scrap.
II. Build on the collective knowledge of what is working, what is not, and where the gaps are.
III. Offer space for meaningful small group dialogue.
IV. Uncover urban farmers' interests for the research project.

Forty people were in attendance, the majority of which were urban farmers from across Metro Vancouver with a high concentration of City of Vancouver farmers. Other attendees included members of the VUFS Board of Directors, farming advocates and organizers, volunteers, and City of Vancouver staff.

Urban Farming Policymaking
The Urban Farming Practices Research project's timing is aligned with the City of Vancouver's policymaking process for legalizing and regulating urban farming. The recently launched Vancouver Food Strategy and convening of the interdepartmental urban farming technical team at the City show commitment to the policymaking process. The Food Strategy presents actions for urban farming including changes to zoning, farm gate sales and other distribution mechanisms, business licensing for urban farms, healthy soil guidelines, tracking models, and supporting growth of the movement.

Baseline Findings on Urban Farming Practices
The forum was used as an opportunity to collect a baseline of what practices are happening in urban farming throughout the cycle from seed to scrap.

Preparation, Planning & Start of Season
We learned that there is a range in what urban farming are producing from a huge diversity of mostly vegetables and some specialty products. The remaining proportion of products accounts for everything from wild harvests to livestock, flowers, mushrooms, microgreens, hops, perennials, fruit, and berries. In preparing the soil as well as in to the season, we learned that the majority of work is done by hand with a few instances of tractor and rototiller use for special purposes. Urban farms in the City of Vancouver are less likely to be using mechanized tools compared to those in neighbouring municipalities. Decisions of what urban farms will grow is hugely based on what customers and community members want to eat following closely by what makes sense to grow under current farming conditions.

Land and What You Build On It
Land access and tenancy issues are at the forefront of Vancouver's urban farming movement with every entity creating their own unique arrangement. Several different land types are host to urban farms with 37.5% of farms surveyed growing on institutional land including schools, care facilities, and parks; 25% are using residential space; and the rest a mix of commercial, brownfield, and agricultural land within the ALR. Size is the most important criteria urban farmers use in finding land although the range in ideal parcel sizes varies greatly depending on the style of farming and what is being produced. More tenancies are between 3 and 5 years within the City of Vancouver regardless of the land type. As far as on-site infrastructures, greenhouses are by far the most common. The most needed structures are greenhouses and post-harvest structures such as harvest stations and cold storage.

Farm Crew & In the Field
The number of people working in each urban farm operation ranges from 3 to 37. Most urban farms surveyed are run with 2-5 people not including casual volunteers.

The majority of urban farms have done either a soil test or nutrient analysis before going in to production. As already mentioned, the majority of urban farm work is done by hand which extends into harvesting practices as well as pest and weed management.
Executive Summary (cont’d)

Storage, Transportation & Distribution
Urban farm related deliveries have a relatively low impact in neighbourhoods. The most common deliveries are compost, soil, and amendments which happen one to a few times a season, if that. As already identified there is an infrastructure gap in storage facilities for urban farms. Many operations have some sort of access to a fridge or cooler although it is usually not large enough or is located in a community kitchen or office space with multiple users. Some farms also mentioned using coolers, personal homes, trucks, garden sheds, root cellars or other businesses. In the majority of cases, it is either delivered or picked up immediately after harvest or being stored for one day or overnight.

To get around and move their product, roughly a third of urban farmers’ transportation needs are being met via a personal or business/organizational vehicle, another third by bike transportation (including cargo bikes, bike trailers and e-bikes), and the last third by a diverse combination of other modes.

Marketing & Sales
Word of mouth, social media, print materials, and e-mail distributions are the most popular forms of marketing for urban farmers who are overall incredibly diverse and creative in their strategies. The most common venues for urban farm food sales are CSAs, farmers markets, restaurants, and farmgate sales. The most number of urban farms sell to restaurants followed by CSA programs and farmers markets. Urban farmers are most interested in increasing their sales through CSA programs, to restaurants, and at farmgate.

Summary of Open Space Conversations
After having gone through some of the particular urban farming practices, we moved into group dialogues in a World Café format. Participants were free to move around to different tables to host dialogues on what they were most passionate to discuss. Below is a summary of some of the points of discussion and questions raised.

What urban farming practices are working really well?
- CSAs provide secure advance income and more financial security as well as shared risk.
- Farmgate sales involve limited transportation and marketing costs. Farmgate sales further decentralize access to food and they also provide an opportunity for outreach and demonstration.
- Size of Land: Larger pieces of land (no less than 500 square feet) provide reasonable yields at a manageable scale. If a farm has multiple pieces of land, soil conditions often vary, but this can also be of benefit to the farmer for growing different types of crops suited to varying soils.
- Community Development: Urban farms in residential neighbourhoods connect people from different cultural backgrounds
- Education: For some urban farms, the education component of their operations provides a steady stream of income over a year in addition to food sales. Even those that do not run education programs demonstrate great value in growing food, and inspire residents with options to use their space e.g. growing on boulevards.
- Co-operative: Several farms teamed up in 2012 as a co-op to sell at farmers markets by amalgamating produce, and assigning a coordinator, which enabled them to provide more variety and great presentation at the market.

Room to Grow
- Linking Consumers with Producers -- Need more incentives for people to buy locally and support local farmers and explore other options for selling and distributing produce in addition to Farmers Markets.
- Standardized Accounting & Business Practices -- Many urban farmers lack experience in business and accounting, marketing and branding, and maintaining records.
- Access to Soil Amendments and Testing -- Many urban farmers are driving long distances to get soil amendments. Meanwhile, there is substantial waste is leaving the city: how do we keep and use it locally? Many urban farmers do not have access to a vehicle, so determining how to transport compostables and amendments can be a challenge. Accessing soil testing is also cost prohibitive to urban farmers, yet an important practice in health and safety.
Executive Summary (cont’d)

Composting
- Need for clear rules as composting can create potential conflict between neighbours and urban farms due to smell and pest issues
- What types of composting systems are appropriate for the urban farming scale?
- What could in-vessel composting on site look like on a larger scale?
- What could a centralized composting system within the city look like?
- What could exist in terms of urban/rural composting cooperation?

Certification and Regulation
- Urban farmers are stretched as it is so if certification is to be successful, the process must not burden farmers
- Should government be financing efforts to certify inputs, inspection, etc.?

Food Justice and Anti-Oppression
- There is an absence of indigenous foods being grown e.g. focus on annual crops vs. roots and berries traditional to this region
- Need to consider how food is marketed and distributed and where markets or sites are situated
- Urban farmers would like to find ways to make their produce more accessible but not all are in a position where they are harvesting a surplus to even feed themselves
- Need anti-oppression, non-violent communication, and facilitation training for farm teams
- Whose traditional territory are we in and what does that mean for all our operations and decisions and exclusions?
- How do we honour, acknowledge and respect the stewardship of indigenous peoples? How do we move forward with reciprocity?
- There are people growing and selling within their communities – do we consider these folks urban farmers and should they be included in consultations?
- How to foster and support diversity in farm teams?
- Who is not at decision-making tables?

What is on your urban farming wish list?
- Public access to information where urban farms are allowed and how to get involved
- Safety and viability of keeping commercial urban livestock
- A one-stop shop urban farming volunteer and intern posting board and matchmaking service
- Using urban farms as places of intergenerational childcare
- More incubation, legal counsel, and business support for urban farms
- Clarity on insurance for urban farms following zoning changes
- Collaboration on shared refrigeration, processing facilities and storage, tools, equipment and purchasing power
- VUFS, co-operative, or other lobbying/advocacy support

Where is there (un)realized potential for farm-to-farm collaboration?
- Collaboration with non-city farms and education about how to transfer from city to rural farming
- Volunteer database with a ‘rate my volunteer’ function
- Standardized apprenticeship programs for interns to spend time on different farms
- Urban farmers could have their own farmers market midweek
- Modular shared cold storage and processing facilities decentralized across city ‘urban farmer locker room’
- Rent land to divert food waste keeping it in the city for composting and urban farm distribution

What is an area you would like to see researched and learn more about?
- What is under the umbrella of different levels of government in terms of health and safety?
- What are the regulations surrounding the practice of selling produce/products?
- What are the by-laws that speak to farmgate sales? What steps need to be taken to remove these hurdles? What are the consequences of breaking the by-laws?
- The yield, distribution and price data would inform planners in different departments
- Want to see quantifiable data in regards to why urban farms benefit cities/communities
- Economic assessments of urban farms and the economic impact that urban farming has and could have
- A handbook relating to how to record sales and/or a template for tracking
1. How Did We Get Here?

a. Introduction

When the 2012 Vancouver Urban Farming Forum came around it was hard to believe how quickly time had passed. That previous year saw the creation of new urban farms, the City of Vancouver’s inter-departmental urban farming technical team, and the Vancouver Urban Farming Society (VUFS); it was unquestionably an eventful one with unrelenting energy and progress.

Our first task as the VUFS Research Coordinators was to plan the follow up to last year’s wildly successful forum which we are grateful to have been trusted with executing. Before you is a summary of what happened and what we heard at the 2012 forum which we named Understanding Our Practices from Seed to Scrap, an homage to the urban farming practices research project we were embarking on under the leadership of the VUFS founding Board of Directors.

To learn more about the research project, contact the research team at research@urbanfarmers.ca.

Definitions

“Urban agriculture”: The practice of cultivating, processing and subsequently distributing food in, or around, a village, town or city.

“Urban farming” (working definition): A type of urban agriculture that produces food primarily to generate revenue. Revenue generating urban agriculture has also been termed commercial urban agriculture and entrepreneurial urban agriculture.

“Urban farm” (working definition): A portion of urban land where food is grown primarily for sale, or where the food is primarily consumed by someone other than the grower(s).

Characteristics of a typical urban farm (in Vancouver):

• Is revenue generating;
• Utilizes organic/sustainable practices;
• Utilizes spatially and temporally intensive growing methods;
• Often takes place on multiple sites;
• Often collaborative in nature - between individuals, farms, and organizations;
• Often electronically documented via a website, blog or other social media tools; and,
• Is, by definition if selling food, a business.

b. Milestones

Below is a timeline of key milestones in Vancouver urban farming leading up to the 2012 forum. For a fuller history of Vancouver’s urban farming network, head over to the 2011 Vancouver Urban Farming Forum Report and Advancing Urban Farming in Vancouver where it has been expertly captured.

November 22, 2010 Urban farmers, urban farming supporters, and food security advocates gathered in East Vancouver to introduce themselves and their projects to each other and to start the discussion on what urban farmers need to be successful. This inaugural meeting was the first time such a group of urban farmers had gathered together from the first time such a group of urban commercial food producers from Vancouver - taking this group of urban commercial food producers from operating mostly independently to an increased level of cooperation.

November, 2010 An urban farming listserve was formed which currently has over 334 members.

January, 2011 The November meeting was followed up by a brainstorming meeting in January on the heels of an inspiring intimate Q&A session with Will Allen of Growing Power in Milwaukee. The goal of the brainstorming meeting was to bring into focus a shared vision and context for urban farmers with which to move forward and begin to collectively identify our priorities for increasing the sustainability of urban farming in Vancouver.

April to September, 2011 Monthly urban farmer tours and gatherings at urban farms throughout the city. From April through September urban farmers gathered at these various farms to share ideas and food.

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On November 17, 2012 FORUM!
Understanding our Practices From Seed to Scrap

November 2011 Urban farmers, policy makers, and food security advocates gathered together to discuss urban farming in the context of land use, municipal policy, and best practices. Drawing on urban farming policy precedents from other West Coast cities such as Victoria, Seattle, and Lantzville – and in an effort to contribute to Vancouver’s goal of being the Greenest City in the World – this forum intended to help lay the framework for supportive urban farming policies in Vancouver and elsewhere.

June, 2012 Inaugural Vancouver Urban Farming Society Annual General Meeting

April, 2012 Monthly tours of urban farms, which both helped farmers to share their experiences and insights, and also offered the public the opportunity to meet their farmers.
c. Pre-Forum Survey Results

It was clear from initial consultations with the VUFS Board and members of the urban farming community of practice that there was interest in a smaller more hands on 2012 forum which would also create the foundation for the practices research project. In order to decide on the best use of our time together, we surveyed participants leading up to the forum and received 28 responses which told us the following:

What did you find most valuable at the 2011 Forum?

Top Responses
1. Connecting, Networking & Meeting Others
2. Brainstorming & Facilitated Group Sessions
3. Thinking & Learning About Municipal Role & Relationships
4. Speakers, Getting New Ideas about Urban Farming & Hearing Concerns of Urban Farmers

What did you find least valuable at the 2011 Forum?

Top Responses
1. Unfocused/Irrelevant/Repetitive Conversation
2. Urban Farmers Got Drowned Out/Were Not Heard
3. Not Enough Networking Time
4. Lack of Clarity on Next Steps

What are your top three reasons for attending the 2012 Forum?

Top Responses
1. Interest in Urban Farming Practices & Policy
2. Networking, Meeting, Connecting & Building Community
3. Including My Voice in the Conversation
4. Learning, Sharing & Telling Stories
5. Understand What is Happening in Vancouver Urban Farming
6. Improving Food Security
7. Getting to Details & Identifying Barriers

What was your top urban farming learning moment from the last year?

A Sample of Responses

On the 2011 Forum
- Listening to the guest speaker from Seattle at the 2011 forum about the reality of making a good living from urban farming.
- Listening to stories from urban farmers about their experiences and challenges.
- The entire 2011 forum. Absorbing everything that urban farmers and stakeholders had to say about land use and other relevant topics.

On Interns and Internships
- My internship with Yummy Yards.
- Interns are a blessing and a curse all at the same time (but more of a blessing).

On the Business Side of Things
- There is no one business model, each farm is unique.
- Seeing the support from influential people in the financial and investment industries.
- The necessity of a strategic plan and business plan to grow the entity into a profitable one.

On Infrastructure
- The lack of delivery availability in Vancouver because of cold-chain limitations and food safety.
- The need for proper storage before harvest time.

On Policy and Politics
- How to translate successes from the farm into Council Chambers.

On Knowledge Exchange
- Making tea medicines from plants we grew with local indigenous knowledge.

On Community Connections
- Every time a neighbour walked by Loutet Farm and told me how inspired they were to grow their own gardens after seeing all the great things we grow.
What are the top 3 things you can teach others in the urban farming community?

**Top Responses**

*Appeared 3 Times*
- Diversifying Your Business, Business Development & Fundraising
- Working with Government
- Tools for Community Engagement
- Communications & Marketing

*Appeared 2 Times*
- Identifying Areas in City Jurisdiction & Policy
- Explain Structure of Organic Certification and Existing Standards

*Appeared 1 Time*
- Ins and Outs of Farming on Institutional Land
- Distribution Practices
- Standardization
- Effective Market Pricing
- Honouring Diverse Food Traditions, Power Dynamics & Legacies of Colonialism
- Inclusion for Marginalized Populations
- How to Get Kids Engaged
- Record and Data Keeping
- High Density Production
- Compost Solutions
- Livestock Care & Processing
- Accounting & Financial Structures
- Relating to Rural Farming
- Direct Consumer Marketing Skills
- How to Ask for Support
- Smart Multi-Location Farming

What are the top 3 things you would like to learn from others in the urban farming community?

**Top Responses**

*Appeared 3 Times*
- Business Models

*Appeared 2 Times*
- How To Do Sales & Marketing
- How To Do Winter Growing & Sales
- Preferred Suppliers
- Distribution Practices & Points of Sale
- Mid-Scale & Neighbourhood Composting

*Appeared 1 Time*
- Reducing Barriers Between Farmers & Consumers
- How to Make Urban Farming Viable
- How Does Farming Fit in an Urban Setting
- Intensive Production Techniques
- Pest & Disease Management Approaches
- Identifying City Staff Jurisdiction
- Finances
- Soil Building
- Importance of Greenhouses to Urban Farmers
- Rooftop Farming
- Time Management
- People Management
- Processing Structures
- Indigenous Foodways and Garden Planting
- Anti-Oppression in Urban Farm Spaces
- Knowledge of Indigenous Plant Use
What is your vision for urban farming in Vancouver over the next year?
A Sample of Responses

On Policy, Land Use, and Legalization
• "I want it to be more viable for people and to see the City make it easier for people to use existing land for diverse uses outside of gardening i.e. keeping chickens, animals, and aquaponics."
• "A business license is created for urban farming and included in land use policy."
• "Urban farming becomes legal without regulatory impediments and costs."
• "Legalized backyard market farming."
• "It would be nice if urban farming could be legalized in the next year so people I care about who have stuck it out this long can be legitimized."
• "Build on every piece of land we can possibly find! Start working on making 50% of food grown here in the city."
• "Make it easier for farmers to do what they do - a free market and no or less policy and government intervention."

On Job Creation
• "The creation of city wide urban farming policy that enables it as a sustainable green food job."
• "I want to see the established enterprises thriving and proving that the model works and that this can be sustainable employment for people."

On Community Partnerships and Networks
• "More open community kitchen programs and each has its own farmer as a food source."
• "A network of community-based spaces and activities that reflect the diversity of Vancouver’s communities including diversities of culture, race, gender, income, sexuality, ethnicity, age, ability, and more as well as their needs and knowledge."
• "A tight knit and effective community of urban farmers and stakeholders centered around the work of the Vancouver Urban Farming Society."

On Public Involvement
• "A central online resource hub for urban farmers; edible gardens on city land; more paid opportunities for urban farmers and edible landscapers; Vancouverites understand what urban farming is and can differentiate it from community gardening."
• "Residents are involved not only as CSA share members, community gardeners, and farmers’ market patrons but also as continuous policy/vision discussion participants."
• "Creating at least a loose code of urban agriculture best practices and an improved public perception of urban agriculture."
2. Story of the Day

a. Goals & Approach to the 2012 Forum

Some of what we heard from the commercial urban farming community as apparent from the survey responses was that they wanted a smaller more focused workshop style forum that would begin to map out the specifics of urban farming practices in Vancouver, provide more focused dialogue opportunities, and move the research project forward in alignment with the City's urban farming policy making process. Given these shared priorities, we developed the following goals for the 2012 forum:

I. Develop a scan of existing and emerging urban farming practices in Vancouver from seed to scrap.
II. Build on the collective knowledge of what is working, what is not, and where the gaps are.
III. Offer space for meaningful small group dialogue.
IV. Uncover urban farmers' interests for the research project.

Our approach to hosting the 2012 Forum was to design it as a circular more intimate conversational space with an emphasis on urban farmers, their lived experiences, aspirations for the future, and ability to teach and learn from one another. The goal of the 2013 Urban Farming Forum will be to build on these conversations and further weave together the many other aspects of the urban agriculture landscape in Vancouver.

b. The Agenda

- Opening Remarks
- Aha! Moments
- The Amazing Urban Farming Race
- World Café
- Keynote Listeners
- Closing Plenary

c. Who Was There

Urban Farmers
18 Representing City of Vancouver Urban Farms
6 Representing Metro Vancouver Urban Farms

Urban Farming Supporters
5 Farming Advocates and Organizers
5 Volunteers
4 VUFS Non-Farming Director and Research Coordinators
2 City of Vancouver Staff
3. Getting Up to Speed

a. Updates from Vancouver Urban Farming Society: Ngaio Hotte

To start things off we welcomed Ngaio Hotte, founding President of the Vancouver Urban Farming Society (VUFS), to say a few words and give some highlights since the society's official inception in April 2012.

VUFS incorporated in April 2012 and had our first AGM to elect the founding Board of Directors. We received funding from the Vancity EnviroFund and hired Shelby & Zsuzsi to work on the practices research project which is officially launching at the forum today. This year's forum is smaller than last year to get at some more focused detail but we want to secure funding for a bigger forum in 2013.

b. Recap of the 2011 Vancouver Urban Farming Forum: Joanna Clark

Next, we heard from Joanna Clark, member of the VUFS BOD and one of the 2011 Urban Farming Forum organizers.

Last year’s forum was huge and provided a platform for City of Vancouver staff and urban farmers to come together to discuss challenges and barriers. We heard from speakers from other cities dealing with urban farming and had interactive conversation. The result was a report which was presented to the City with recommendations for both urban farmers and the municipality. The need for best practices became clear through this process.
c. Updates from the City of Vancouver: James O’Neill

The last speaker in our opening round was James O’Neill, a Social Planner at the City of Vancouver working on the food policy portfolio.

“The big project in the food policy team over the last year has been the Vancouver Food Strategy; a roadmap for food policy in Vancouver that brings all the different pieces together—including urban farming—into one document.”

James also described the relatively new interdepartmental urban farming technical team which is working to better understand and build the City’s capacity for addressing urban farming.

The Vancouver Food Strategy was unanimously passed by City Council in January 2013. It has 5 key goals and 71 actions with a number relating specifically to urban farming which are to:

I. Create policy to enable commercial food production (urban farming) as a defined use on zoned lands with appropriate limitations and mitigation strategies;

II. Explore possibilities for urban farmers to sell produce directly from an urban farm (farmgate sales) with appropriate limitations and mitigation strategies;

III. Enable alternative food retail and distribution models for urban farming produce such as community food markets, food distribution hubs and pre-approved Community Supported Agriculture (CSA) distribution sites in locations such as community centres, neighbourhood houses and schools;

IV. Create an urban farming business license category;

V. Create healthy soil guidelines for urban farms informed by environmental best practices;

VI. Create a baseline of existing models of urban farms, monitor changes, and integrate new models as they emerge; and,

VII. Increase the number of urban farms in Vancouver from 17 to 35 by the year 2020, ranging from backyard farms to mid-scale
4. Aha! Moments

So much learning happens from one year to the next in urban farming, especially as the community of practice is still relatively young, experimental, and innovative. We asked everyone in the circle to share an Aha! Moment from their 2012 farming season—or from the perspective of whatever role they play in the movement—as a way of transitioning into the participatory hands on sections of the day.

Aha! Moment: a sudden realization, inspiration, insight, recognition, or comprehension.
5. The Amazing Urban Farming Race

We really started to dig into our urban farming practices with what was - to our knowledge - the first ever Vancouver Urban Farming Race.

How It Worked:

- Six stations were set up around the room featuring different categories of urban farming practices: Preparation, Planning & Start of Season; Land and What Your Build on It; Farm Crew; In the Field; Storage, Transportation & Distribution; and, Marketing & Sales.
- Each farm represented was given their own distinct colour of sticky note to take around the different stations and answer the questions in their farm team.
- Non-farmer attendees were paired with a farm team to complete the race and learn about the practices of that one urban farm in more detail.

There were a total of 40 questions asked and answered by 16 different urban farms at the forum and 2 others who could not be at the forum but sent in their answers later. Here is the breakdown of who participated:

11 Farms have all their operations in the City of Vancouver
4 Farms have some operations in the City of Vancouver and others in neighbouring municipalities
3 Farms have all their operations outside of the City of Vancouver in neighbouring municipalities

18 Farms represented in total

It is important to know that not all the information gathered from this activity is included in this report as some of it needs to be further refined during the research project. We have chosen some of the juiciest data for your enjoyment here.

How the Information was Analyzed

The information gathered on the sticky notes from each farm team were analyzed in the following way:

1. Similar and identical answers were grouped together and counted.
2. A percentage was allocated for every answer depending on how often it appeared and how many farm teams answered that particular question.
3. The percentage of respondents for each question is given.
What does the process of working your soil look like?

100% Responded

50% All Hand
0% All Mechanized
50% Mix Hand & Mechanized

Mechanized tools being used:
50% Tractor
50% Rototiller

What we learned: The majority of the work is done by hand with a few instances of tractor and rototiller use for special purposes like start of season preparation. Urban farms in Vancouver are less likely to be using mechanized tools compared to those in neighbouring municipalities. A handful of operations are growing without soil.

What do you grow?

83.3% Responded

- Wild/weed harvests: 37%
- Livestock: 37%
- Flowers: 11.1%
- Mushrooms: 37%
- Microgreens: 7.4%
- Hops: 37%
- Perennial medicinal plants: 3.7%
- Annual vegetable varieties: 1.9%
- Fruit and berries: 11.1%

What we learned: There is a range in what urban farms are producing from a huge diversity of mostly vegetables to some specialty products.
How do you decide what to grow?

77.8% Responded

What we learned: Decisions of what to grow are hugely based on what customers and community members want to eat followed closely by what makes sense to grow under current farming conditions.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>System capabilities</th>
<th>3.3%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Turnover</td>
<td>3.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Seed saving agenda</td>
<td>3.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Do not require greenhouse</td>
<td>3.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Supporting health in community kitchen</td>
<td>3.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Quality</td>
<td>6.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Niche crop</td>
<td>3.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Taste and/or colour</td>
<td>10%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Demand/Community feedback: 23.3%
Yield/grows well/easily: 20%
Return/market value: 10%

Ability to feed year round: 3.3%
Experimentation: 3.3%
What can be stored/preserved: 3.3%
b. Land and What You Build On It

What kind of land are you growing on?

100% Responded

- Institutional 37.5%
- Residential 25%
- Commercial 20.0%
- Brownfields 8.3%
- ALR 8.3%

46.2% Farms growing on more than one land type
53.8% Farms growing on one land type

What we learned: There are lots of urban farms on institutional land including public lands (schools, care facilities, parks). Residential and commercial lands are also seeing a good share of urban farming -- overall, half are growing on one land type with the rest on multiple land types.

NB: This represents the number of operations growing on this land type and does not necessarily translate into the amount of each type of land under production.

What is your criteria for finding land?

77.8% Responded

- 25% Size
- 15.6% Sunlight Exposure
- 9.4% Access to Water
- 9.4% Tenant Agreement/Length of Lease
- 6.3% Road/Other Types of Access

The remaining 36% evenly accounts for:
- Preference for ALR land
- Access to electricity
- No noxious weeds
- Close to market
- Access to drainage
- Irrigation infrastructure
- Paved
- Close to home
- Education potential
- Walking distance to target community
- Proximity to other sites

What we learned: Size is the most important criteria urban farmers use in finding land although the range in ideal parcel sizes varies greatly depending on the style of farming and what is being produced. Minimum size requirements ranged from 160 square feet to 1 acre. Access to water and sun are also of utmost importance as well as the conditions of the lease/tenancy agreement.

How do you find land?

77.8% Responded

- 69.2% Word of Mouth/People Approaching the Farm
- 23.1% Request to Institutional Host
- 7.7% Craigslist

What we learned: Land is overwhelmingly acquired through word of mouth, relationships, and people approaching urban farms with offers of land.

What is your tenure on the land you farm?

72.2% Responded

What we learned: The longest tenure was for a farm on public/institutional land to review possibility of extending lease to 10 years after initial 5 years. This farm is outside the City of Vancouver. Within the City of Vancouver tenure ranges from one month to 5 years more typically.
What structures do you use in your operations?

66.7% Responded

In total the farms used...
11 Greenhouses
6 Sheds
5 Personal Residential Spaces
4 Institutional Spaces
2 Bee Hives
1 Carport
1 Water Catching System
1 Root Cellar
1 Cob Oven

What we learned: Greenhouses are by far the most common urban farm structures followed by sheds. Greenhouses ranged in size from 64 to 130 square feet. Sheds ranged in size from 30 to 40 square feet. A good number of urban farm operations also use their personal homes for various reasons such as storage, office space, and indoor seeding. Many also benefit from using various institutional spaces at their host organization such as classrooms, a sunroom, kitchen, office space, storage, and processing spaces.

What structures would you like to have?

61.1% Responded

Most commonly mentioned...
Bigger/Any Greenhouse
Cold Storage Facilities
Wash/Harvest station

Also mentioned...
Bee Hives
Shed
Aquaponics
Cob Oven
Outdoor & Certified Kitchen
Outdoor Ceremonial Gathering Space
Additional Hoop Houses
Chicken Coop
Vertical Growing Structure

What we learned: The impermanence of most land arrangements means it doesn’t make sense for urban farmers to invest in longer term structures they really need. The most needed structures are greenhouses and post-harvest structures such as harvest stations and cold storage.

How many people work in your operation?

100% Responded

What we learned: The number of people working in each urban farm operation as a whole ranges from 3 to 37. Most urban farms surveyed are run with 2-5 people working in various aspects of farm operations.

NB: These numbers represent the number of people (staff, contractors and interns) with a mix of part-time and full-time – they do not translate into a Full Time Equivalent (FTE) and do not include casual volunteers engaged throughout the season.
d. In the Field

Do you do soil testing?
94.4% Responded

How do you manage your weed issues?
94.4% Responded

45% Remove by Hand/With Hand Tools
20% Mulch & Cover Cropping
15% Do Not Have Weed Issues

The remaining 20% evenly accounts for:
Flame Weeding
Aeration
Integrated Animal Systems
Integrated Pest Management

Describe any issues you have with pests.
94.4% Responded

Most Commonly Reported Pests
23.7% Aphids
21.2% Slugs
10.5% Cabbage Moths
10.5% Rats & Mice
7.9% Flea Beetles
5.3% Birds

The remaining 20.9% evenly accounts for:
Green caterpillars
Snails
Cutworm
Dust Flies
Root Maggots
Wireworms
Fungus
Voles

What do you use to harvest?
83.3% Responded

100% of farms that responded harvest by hand using simple hand tools (knives, scissors, trowels, etc.)

What kind of tools and equipment do you have?
94.4% Responded

40.5% Hand Tools
16.2% Rakes/Shovels/Pitchfork/Hoes
8.1% Wheelbarrow
5.4% Seeding Tools
5.4% Rototiller
5.4% Tractor
5.4% Weedwhacker
2.7% Mycology Lab
2.7% Secateurs
2.7% Flame Weeder
2.7% Power Tools
2.7% Aquaponics Equipment
**What kind of major deliveries do you have to the farm?**

94.4% Responded

- 33.3% Compost/Soil/Amendments
- 10.3% Straw Bales
- 7.7% Wood Chips
- 7.7% Seedlings
- 7.7% Building Materials
- 5.1% Tents/Tables/Other Market Supplies

*The remaining 18.2% evenly accounts for:*

- Pallets
- Mulch
- Harvest Equipment
- Chicken Feed
- Irrigation
- Sand
- Lumber

**Where do you store your harvest? How do you keep your crops cool in between harvest and sale?**

100% Responded

*What we learned: Many operations have some sort of access to a fridge or cooler although it is usually not large enough or is located in a community kitchen or office space with multiple users. 20% reported that they did not use storage or harvested close to time of sale. Some farms also mentioned using coolers, personal homes, trucks, garden sheds, root cellars or other businesses. At least three farm operations expressed sharing storage/cooler space with a local business or other farms.*

**For how long are you storing in between?**

88.9% Responded

*What we learned: The largest group of deliveries to the farm are related to growing mediums and soil fertility which are infrequent e.g. one to a few times a season, if that.*

**Maximum Reported Storage Times**

- 41.2% 1 Day/Overnight
- 25% 0 Hours
- 16.2% 2 Days
- 8.3% 0-2 Hours
- 8.3% 2-4 Hours

*What we learned: Harvest is not being stored for more than 2 days before point of sale/distribution. In the majority of cases, it is either delivered or picked up immediately after harvest or being stored for one day or overnight.*

**What kind of transportation do you use?**

94.4% Responded

- 38.0% Van/Truck/Car
- 34.4% Bike/E-Bike/Bike trailer
- 6.9% Feet (delivery in person)
- 6.9% Co-op vehicle

*Also mentioned:*

- 3.4% Purolator
- 3.4% Shift Urban Cargo Delivery
- 3.4% Wheelbarrow
- 3.4% Skytrain/bus
f. Marketing & Sales

How do you do your marketing?

100% Responded

19.7% Word of Mouth
16.4% Social Media
14.8% Brochures/Posters/Flyers
13.1% E-mail/Listservs
11.5% Website
8.2% Face-to-Face Interactions/Visiting in Neighbourhood
8.2% Media
4.9% Farmers Market
4.9% Newsletter

Also mentioned...
Trade Shows
Speaking Engagements
Visible Branding e.g. Trucks and T-Shirts
On-Site Signage
Waitlists from other Organizations
Neighbourhood Houses/Community Centres
Approaching Restaurants with Samples

What we learned: Word of mouth, social media, print materials, and e-mail distributions are the most popular forms of marketing for urban farmers who are overall incredibly diverse and creative in their strategies.

Number of Farms that are doing...

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Area</th>
<th>Farms</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Restaurants</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CSA</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Farmers Markets</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Farm Gate</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wholesale</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Retail</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Donations</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Website Sales</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Special Events</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

What we learned: The most common venues for urban farm food sales are CSAs, farmers markets, restaurants, and farmgate sales. The most number of urban farms sell to restaurants followed by CSA programs and farmers markets.

How do you sell your food?

88.9% Responded

Which areas of sale do urban farmers want to increase?

83.3% Responded

Most commonly mentioned...
CSA
Restaurants
Farmgate

Also mentioned...
Wholesale
Events
Institutional Sales
Co-op Sales

What we learned: Urban farmers are most interested in increasing their sales through CSA programs, to restaurants, and at farmgate.

NB: The proportions shown above represent the % that farmers reported their food going to but does not translate into the actual amount of food produced as each farm may produce vastly different amounts relative to the proportion.
6. Open Space Conversations

After having gone through some of the particular urban farming practices, we moved into group dialogues in a World Café format. Participants were free to move around to different tables, each of which table had either a pre-determined question or were left blank for attendees to host dialogues on what they were most passionate to discuss. Volunteer notetakers were stationed at each table to capture the conversations which are summarized here.

**Topics**

a. What is Working Well  
b. Room to Grow  
c. Composting  
d. Certification  
e. Food Justice and Anti-Oppression  
f. Urban Farming Wish List  
g. Farm-to-Farm Collaboration  
h. Researching Practices
a. What urban farming practices are working really well?

**CSA (Top Response):** CSAs provide secure advance income and more financial security as well as shared risk. The CSA model gives the farmer an opportunity to coordinate the scale of their growing for the year based on numbers of share members which makes it easier to plan for the growing season. CSAs can lead to lower transportation and distribution costs for the farmer if most members pick up their shares from one location. Marketing is concentrated at the beginning of the season but can result in lower marketing costs over the duration of the season.

**Farmgate Sales:** Farmgate sales involve limited (often zero) transportation costs. Promotion happens through word of mouth, which can also reduce marketing costs. Farmgate sales further decentralize access to food and they also provide an opportunity for outreach and demonstration.

**Size of Land:** Larger pieces of land (no less than 500 square feet) provide reasonable yields at a manageable scale. If a farm has multiple pieces of land, soil conditions often vary, but this can also be of benefit to the farmer for growing different types of crops suited to varying soils.

**Community Development:** Urban farms in residential neighbourhoods connect people from different cultural backgrounds (often with language barriers). Urban farmers have experienced connecting with neighbours who would demonstrate their way of growing or how they use certain crops without speaking a shared language. Community gardens and urban farms build a sense of connectedness and belonging in neighbourhoods. In some cases, residents or CSA share members visit regularly, keep an eye on the crops, and defend the area from theft or vandalism.

**Education:** For some urban farms, the education component of their operations provides a steady stream of income over a year in addition to food sales. Even those that do not run education programs demonstrate great value in growing food, and inspire residents with options to use their space e.g. growing on boulevards.

**Co-operative:** Several farms teamed up in 2012 as a co-op to sell at farmers markets by amalgamating produce, and assigning a coordinator, which enabled them to provide more variety and great presentation at the market.

**Creativity:** Many different models are emerging in urban farming in the Metro Vancouver region. Farmers are being creative to find ways of addressing problems within their own particular context.
b. Room to Grow

Issues Raised:

Linking Consumers with Producers

There are few incentives for people to buy locally and support local farmers. Farmers markets take time to establish and not everyone can access them so there is a need to explore other options for selling and distributing produce.

Responses Discussed

- Pocket/Community Food Markets & Neighbourhood Food Hubs
- Incentives for already established businesses to sell local products
- Platform where farmers can offer what products they have available to local businesses
- More farmgate sales from web-based tools e.g. web-based map to locate urban farms, where products are available, and CSA pickup locations
- Partnerships with existing businesses for distribution
- Central point of contact for sales and procurement

Standardized Accounting & Business Practices

Many urban farmers lack experience in business and accounting, marketing and branding, and maintaining records -- practices which are being learned on the job.

Responses Discussed

- Opportunities for business management training and practices
- There are precedents for agriculture extension offices which offer skills training and other supports
- Other organizations/business now take on some of the role of technology/knowledge transfer, more grassroots organizations could identify needs and offer resources
- Perhaps UBC Farm could offer these services as an urban farm with more resources

Access to Soil Amendments & Testing

Many urban farmers are driving long distances to get soil amendments. Meanwhile, there is substantial waste is leaving the city: how do we keep and use it locally? Many urban farmers do not have access to a vehicle, so determining how to transport compostables and amendments can be a challenge. Accessing soil testing is also cost prohibitive to urban farmers yet an important practice in health and safety.

Responses Discussed

- There is a business opportunity to start a composting facility or a collaborative composting co-op in the city but this might pose land use issues
- Mapping exercise on identifying where to pick up coffee grounds, manure, etc.
- There is talk at UBC about doing a soil assessment document as well as farmer training and consulting funded by grants at no cost to farmers
- Collaborative approach to soil testing and amendment with an expert shared by multiple farms
- Need better access to soil amendments to keep food waste in the city and save on transportation - there is also a need for custom amendments
- Mapping of input resources (Investment Agriculture Foundation small grant?)
- Central production and distribution of inputs e.g. compost, nutrients, lime
- Systematize acquisition of inputs (compost, seed etc.) and recycling of nutrients
- Need to find out what is needed and what quantity
c. Composting

**Benefits**
- Composting is an integral part of farming with green matter input being converted into a 'compost credit' output
- Composting as a form of resource recovery involves looking at organic matter as a resource instead of a waste product but it must be scale appropriate
- The reduction in green matter through composting or mulching is also a good strategy to reduce exporting green waste from sites

**Challenges**
- Urban farmers have experienced some challenges by being bound by municipal, regional and provincial regulations
- There is a need for clear rules as composting can create potential conflict between neighbourhoods and urban farmers due to smell and pest issues

**Questions to Explore**
- What types of composting systems are appropriate for the urban farming scale?
- What could in-vessel composting on site look like on a larger scale?
- What could a centralized composting system within the city look like?
- What could exist in terms of urban/rural composting cooperation?

**Potential Opportunities**
- VUFS could convene a composting task force to focus on this issue
- Farmers working together may be able to collaborate to save on dumping and transport fees - there is also collaboration potential between small-scale worm composters and urban farmers
- Some innovative composter designs are being developed which may be more suitable for urban environments

d. Certification and Regulation

**Urban farming in Vancouver is not yet widely recognized as an industry. Is certification needed at this point?**

**Potential Benefits**
- More direct marketing opportunities
- Increased legitimacy
- Pricing which reflects true inputs of work and resources
- Opening up of potential markets

**Potential Challenges**
- Urban farmers are stretched as it is so if certification is to be successful, the process must not burden farmers beyond their limited available energy, time, and money
- Financing for certification was identified as a potential challenge - should government be financing efforts to certify inputs, inspection, etc.?

**Models**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Professional inspection</th>
<th>Accreditation of a certification body</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Volunteer inspection</td>
<td>Peer, community oversight</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Affidavit</td>
<td>No third party oversight</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Knowledge-based</td>
<td>Regular upgrades, no land inspection</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Pathways to Legitimizing Urban Farming**
- Demonstrate that product and practices are non-toxic
- Share soil management practices
- Establish organic standards
- Consider social structures - managing labour and neighbour/community relations
Land and where the food is being grown
• Whose traditional territory are we in? And, what does it mean for all our operations and decisions and exclusions if we want to acknowledge this?
• How do we honour, acknowledge and respect the stewardship of indigenous peoples who have supported and cared for the land that we have the honour to work on? How do we move forward in reciprocity, especially with respect to the land and in our relationships?
+ Need to be careful that we don’t paralyze ourselves in our explorations of anti-oppression, that we can navigate and work on it
+ Could host programs from diverse communities in our farm sites and spaces

Food being grown
• There is an absence of indigenous foods being grown e.g. focus on annual crops rather than roots and berries traditional to this region
• There are many cultural foods from around the world that are grown here and some that cannot be
  + Would hosting community consultations about what foods people want to be purchasing be possible?
• Accessibility issues
  + Need to consider how food is marketed and distributed, and where markets or sites are situated
  + Are there ways to sell food to residents in areas where the food grown?
  + Urban farmers would like to find ways to make their produce more accessible, but at the same time not all are in a position where they are harvesting a surplus to even feed themselves

People growing the food
• There are people growing and selling within their communities (in backyards, small scale) - do we consider these folks to be urban farmers and should they be included them in consultations and discussions?
• How can we support people farming for a wage as well as for themselves and in the neighbourhoods they live?
• How to foster and support diversity in farm teams and community?

People who influence decisions being made
• Concerns about voice - who is and is not at decision-making tables?
• Our practices around hiring and skills development - how to help other young leaders and members of diverse communities take on these decision-making roles?

Relationships and interactions among us
• How do we set food justice and anti-oppression as an integrated part of all our work and not just a special interest?
• Need anti-oppression, non-violent communication and facilitation training for crew/team and be mindful of engagement and conversations about it
  + Design specific training tailored for farmers? Accessing existing trainings e.g. Power of Hope?
• Build relationships with organizations that do this training

Where do we go from here?
• Urban farming forum down the road that brings greater diversity!
  + What relationship building needs to happen over the next few years to get here?
• Leadership - need to invest in more young indigenous leaders to support people to be leaders in their own food systems work
• Find who is doing this well and existing models e.g. Farm Start Ontario has programs with recent immigrants

e. How do we orient our work within food justice and anti-oppression?
f. What is on your Urban Farming Wish List?

Access to Land
Once there have been spaces and regions identified as feasible for farms, having a way for the public to access this information would help people better understand how they can participate - showing what land is available will show the potential for urban farming. It would be useful to have resources which illustrate:
- Landowners who want to donate their land linking to people who want to farm it
- Metro Vancouver scope
- Areas which are zoned for urban farming

Existing resources include smallfarmer.ca and City Farmer's garden share list.

Expanding Farming Opportunities
- Urban livestock - can we make it safe and viable to have animals like chickens, pigs, etc. to be raised within the city?
- Urban food forests and perennial crops - can we turn borders of golf courses into food forests?

Volunteers & Interns
It was suggested that VUFS host an internship posting board and ultimately be a one-stop shop for all of the relevant information. This could also include a volunteer knowledge database - matching skillsets with needs and matching volunteers with farms.

Public Engagement
- How do you engage the public so that there is a larger scale conversion and acceptance of urban farming?
- Be able to integrate kids into urban farming - finding ways to take care of kids with the loss of the intergenerational childcare
- Re-contextualizing the food experience for children is essential to the future of food security

Education, Training & Mentorship
The urban farming community has grown to a point where they don't need to invent the wheel each time but they are in the dark in terms of knowing how to manage taxes and what tax opportunities there are for small farms. More incubation, legal counsel, and business support for urban farmers is needed: “We spend 90% of our time farming working in the business instead of on the business,” said one participant.
- Workshop with a farm accountant
- Support for building a business plan

Funding & Organizational Models
With urban farmers adopting a range of organizational models, there was a lot of discussion about not-for-profit vs. for-profit ventures and between CSA and market models.
- Where are the funding discrepancies? Non-profit farming is not necessarily sustainable if funding disappears
- How do we create the synergies so that people who have successfully created a charitable model can share their charitable status with others?
- Reliant on volunteer hours
- Disproportionate amount of funding goes to non-profits, making it difficult to grow a for-profit business - for-profit socially intended ventures need the support and funding to grow to be a meaningful part of the economy
- Wish for unrestricted funding
  + Incubator fund in place for when food scarcity becomes an issue, support the growth of food security initiatives
  + $50 million fund - bring someone on as a fundraiser to build the fund

Insurance
Currently, farmers can get insurance for land in the Agricultural Land Reserve (ALR) but not for city plots (not zoned as farmland). Once it becomes legal to operate a farm within city limits, then insurance will be available. There is a need to get rid of the grey area.

Working Collectively
Finding ways to collaborate was a major theme in all of the discussions. Some issues and opportunities discussed included:
- Potential for collaboration and collectives to work together, shared refrigeration, processing facilities, storage, tools, mulch, compost etc.
- Kibbutz model with purchasing power and shared equipment
- VUFS or cooperative as a lobbying/advocacy tool for access to community space
- Farmers are busy most of the year with the farming, need someone to speak and lobby for them
- Allocating space for seed saving in relation to food security and desire to be food self-sufficient
g. Where is there (un)realized potential for farm-to-farm collaboration?

**Education & Engagement**
- Collaboration with non-city farms and education about how to transfer from city to rural farming
- Knowledge/skills barter, mentorship
- Internship programs
  - Volunteer database
  - “Rate my volunteer” aspect to a labour pool/volunteer database and vice versa
  - Standardized apprenticeship programs for interns to visit and spent time on different farms

**Marketing & Advocacy**
- Farmers market advocacy ideas:
  - Different pricing for stalls at developing markets vs. established markets such as the Trout Lake Market - established markets could subsidize new markets
  - “What do we need to do to accommodate small scale farmers?” is what Vancouver Farmers Markets (VFM) should be asking
  - Decentralized markets outside of VFM
- Urban farmers could have their own farmers market midweek

**Centralized Processing, Distribution, Marketing & Sales**
- Cold storage and processing facilities
  - Would be ideal to have everything be modular and feature a couple of cold storage fridges for rent in decentralized locations around the city
  - Could take the form of a farmer locker room (as midterm measure pre-New City Market) - would have freezer, fridges, cold storage, compost vessel, dehydrator food truck, tool shed, etc.
  - Similar to shared cold storage, there is potential for shared farm infrastructure - if one farm is investing in cold storage/processing facilities could make it accessible to other farmers as shareholders/renters
  - A consideration is the scale of the farm as it can sometimes be better to have facilities on site
  - Potential collaboration with food bank where they could act as the hub as they have a large capacity, and could benefit from left over produce e.g. volunteers pick up produce from SOLEFood and take all excess for community kitchens
- Compost facilities ideas
  - Rent land to divert food waste keeping it in the city for composting and urban farm distribution
  - Rent train car to ship compost to the interior for heated finishing of product
- Cooperation
  - Tool sharing
  - Bulk purchasing - share purchasing research/ experiences for things like remay
  - Delivery services
  - Cooperative model - e.g. co-marketing so only one person needs to be at farmers market
Regulations & Safety

• The intersection of municipal practices and health - how can we maintain safety without strangling practice?
• Food safe vs. market safe - would like to see clarity around what is and is not safe - what is under the umbrella of different levels of governance in terms of health and safety?
• Farm sales are very successful for not only selling produce but also educating the public. What are the regulations surrounding the practice of selling produce/products?
• What are the by-laws that speak to farmgate sales? What steps need to be taken to remove these hurdles? What are the consequences of breaking the by-laws?
• Farmers are not constrained by municipal boundaries - they may grow in one and sell in another. How does this impact the regions?

Gathering Census Information

• Continue the urban farming census - farmers need help identifying best practices and cannot do this themselves
• The yield, distribution and price (YDP) data would inform planners in different departments such as land use
• Need a regional look at what is happening in other municipalities
• Want to see quantifiable data in regards to why urban farms benefit cities/communities
• Economic assessments of urban farms, and the economic impact that urban farming has and could have - have this info/document be accessible for farmers

Farmer Training & Education

• A handbook relating to how to record sales and/or a template for tracking - this could inform the census and make it easier to gather the data
• Classes/workshops for farmers on how to record sales, costs, etc.
• Online database for sharing information but primarily to aggregate your own data against other farms - Does this raise privacy issues?

h. What is an area you would like to see researched and learn more about?

Taraneh King | Graphic Facilitation

“From what I observed, you are doing a lot of things well, and it’s important to rejoice on what you’ve accomplished. In the bigger picture, you’re doing great things, so don’t lose sight of that.”
7. Keynote Listeners

Throughout the day we had two keynote listeners in our midst. Rather than a keynote speaker who speaks at the beginning of an event, the listeners participated in the day and were invited towards the end to share their reflections on a few key questions:

- What stands out for you as a learning from the day?
- What urban farming practices in Vancouver hold a lot of promise/are already experiencing success?
- How do you see your role in Vancouver’s urban farming movement?

Thien Phan, City of Vancouver:

Thien, talked about how inspirational it was to be sitting in the group and seeing how people are coming together and finding ways to collaborate. “There is a lot of momentum. Not only is there the people power, but there is also the need for policy, especially municipal policy, to keep up with the rapid change that is happening on the ground with urban farming – innovation, sharing, infrastructure, and knowledge.”

She presented the question: “How do we do a better job of creating policy that is forward thinking and flexible and makes sense for what is actually happening – due diligence in creating policy?”

Thien reflected on how there is a need for the City to understand from an urban farming perspective what is needed. She also noted that navigating the City bureaucracy can be puzzling, so knowing who to contact, and how to address different issues is helpful.

She highlighted that there is a clear need for infrastructure and to coordinate efficiencies, land use, and capital costs asking, “In terms of sales and marketing, business and economics – how do we use social media and the internet to find gains?”

Art Bomke, University of British Columbia:

Art talked about how during forum discussions about policy and the City of Vancouver, he thought about times in the past where critical decisions have been made. For example, the Municipality of Delta had forward looking people who made things possible.

Art stressed that, “windows open, windows close – when you have an open window, put as much stuff through it as you can! At some point, there might be a political shift, and things won’t be the same, so don’t take it for granted. Don’t get discouraged when politics change – there is still the ALR, even though no politicians since then would have put it through, no one will get rid of it.”

Art also brought up the previous discussion about using a credit card machine for transactions, and how it’s good to still pay cash or barter to ensure the money goes to the farmer.

Art also reflected on the discussion of challenges faced by urban farmers, particularly difficulties and time acquiring inputs. “There is strength in working together to share cost to buy inputs. Work to identify needs and agree to think about collaboration in purchasing. As a community, you have a larger amount of power and influence, and this needs to be leveraged.”
8. Group Reflections from the Day

The group came together in plenary after the Open Space for open dialogue in the circle. The key themes that emerged were working with the City of Vancouver, certification and best practices, food justice, and the urban farming community. What follows are the highlights of what was brought up.

On Working with the City of Vancouver

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Thoughts &amp; Ideas</th>
<th>Questions to Explore</th>
</tr>
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</table>
| City facilitated incubation of urban farms would be instrumental in helping demystify the barriers that urban farmers are facing in growth and expansion. As the models shift and change, it would be a huge asset to have an incubation type support including money to demonstrate effective appreciation for what urban farming can accomplish. | • When it comes to best practices what can the City support? How much can urban farmers influence what there are?
• Recognizing that certification is expensive and an extra burden for urban farmers, can government reduce some of the burden that the industry otherwise carriers on its own?
• Can there be policy for any public procurement of high produce volumes which obligates a percentage to be sourced from local producers? |

On Certification and ‘Best Practices’

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Thoughts &amp; Ideas</th>
<th>Questions to Explore</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>As urban farms get bigger it will be important to maintain the trust that currently exists between customers and smaller farms. We are feeding a lot of people through sustainable organic principles that aren't regulated. Finding what the line is will be important – VUFS can play some role in that trust as groups grow. It really only takes one bad actor to hurt the reputation of the collective so there is some protection in having some commitment to best practices which can be different from organic certification. There are doable ways to facilitate people to commit to best practices. By creating a baseline of best practices, then we can create a more sustainable method rather than being polarized and generic. Best practices is a good model. Certification can be useful and certifiers can be a valuable resource but it might not be the best fit for urban farming. There are a lot of things that accompany best practices and it can serve to educate farmers so they are addressing all aspects of urban farming, not just the ecological ones. There is such an opportunity for measuring and creating the story of their different farms. Measuring inputs, outputs, and making sure this narrative is recorded to respond to issues that might come up.</td>
<td>• Some of the language we are using is murky and so it's important to define and ensure that everyone is on the same page – what do we mean when we say baseline, certification, or best practices?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### On Food Justice

#### Thoughts & Ideas

As urban farmers we come from a certain privilege and background which has impacts - access to resources is often influenced by ethnicity. Most of the urban farming conversations are happening in English with a certain demographic - excluding what may be happening within other communities.

Urban farms can be a heart of the community, connecting people in cities to where their food comes from and what it looks like.

#### Questions to Explore

- A challenge for the forum of next year – can we bring together other voices, reach out to those who we don’t always talk to, cross those boundaries, and get out of the echo chamber of talking to the same people?

### On the Urban Farming Community

#### Thoughts & Ideas

A lot of work has gone in to establishing this society and community and we need to take advantage of it - using the community to get collaboration and centralization happening i.e. shared processing and storage space for compost, sharing resources and people, farm learning days where we go to different farms.

Sometimes people have questions that they only want to be posed to farmers - suggestion to have a forum or discussion group not just through the e-mail list which can be difficult to sort and track.

#### Questions to Explore

- How can the society (VUFS) work to benefit all of us going forward?
- How do we connect? How many people are comfortable connecting online, or do people prefer to connect in person? Can we continue to have these conversations in online spaces?
9. Post-Forum Survey Results

Mirroring our pre-forum survey, we asked for feedback from participants following the event. This is what the 5 people who responded told us:

**Most valuable takeaways from the day:**

“Networking; feeling solidarity and community around the work I do, which can be a pretty solitary/small-scale thing; great food and atmosphere; good learning.”

“I enjoyed the focused dialogue circles and the big wrap up at the end. The group discussions definitely could have gone longer, even if that meant the day being longer and more tiring. I would have liked the opportunity to float around the tables more and not feel like I was missing so much. It was great to share our thoughts at the end of the day.”

“Overall I really loved the format of the whole day.”

“Networking by identifying problems and realizing many of the solutions are in our little group. Touching base with other urban farmers and friends.”

“I was really excited by a group of folks proposing the idea of putting together an anti-oppression training toolkit specifically for sharing and using among the community of urban farmers in Vancouver!”

“One of the things I discussed with another farmer was having a CSA debrief from this past season with urban farmers who have both ran the program and those who are interested in doing one next year. This would be a great topic to include in best practices document. There’s a lot of farms doing this out there but having something specifically laid out for Vancouver urban farmers would be helpful.”

**What could have been left out or improved:**

Three people mentioned that having the DJ didn’t add to the day. One person mentioned that there were too many cards at some of the urban farm race tables creating bottlenecks, and that less time could have been spent on the urban farm race and that they could have done survey ahead of time.

**We know that the “in between” time is some of the most valuable allowing participants to catch up, make connections, and hatch new ideas. Here is some of what happened in these conversations:**

“Networking by identifying problems and realizing many of the solutions are in our little group. Touching base with other urban farmers and friends.”

“I was really excited by a group of folks proposing the idea of putting together an anti-oppression training toolkit specifically for sharing and using among the community of urban farmers in Vancouver!”

“The intergenerational factor really excites me. It is great to have the support of people like Art Bomke and Michael Levenston who have been at this for longer than a lot of us have been alive. They have a lot of valuable knowledge to pass on to us and I think it’s important for us to keep them in the loop.”

**What gave you hope:**

“How young the group was. I’m glad there were folks of all ages sharing their knowledge and guidance, but the majority were young and that to me is a huge part of what makes this movement innovative, exciting, and something that will have real momentum! I was also inspired by all the farms/organizations in attendance and represented, which can be rare to have all in one place like that... that made me feel hopeful, that people are prioritizing this work and the spirit of collaboration.”

**The things you said you wanted to see next included:**

- Outline of best practices for open review and discussion among farmers
- Direct contact with urban farmer by VUFS to vision for the society and future projects
- Engagement with groups that are not part of the ‘choir’ and more urban farmer presence

10. Now What?

The VUFS BOD and research team is moving ahead with the Practices Research Project which will continue to take on a community based and capacity building approach. Between the forum and August/September 2013 we will be:

- Interviewing Urban Farmers & Conducting Focus Groups
- Hosting Urban Farm Tours, Urban Farmer Professional Development Workshops & Events
- Hosting a Follow Up Forum to Present and Discuss the Research
- Collaborating with the City of Vancouver on its Urban Farming Policy Development

We would love to connect with you throughout this research process.

Contact us:
research@urbanfarmers.ca
www.urbanfarmers.ca
# Appendix A: Participating Urban Farms

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Farm Name</th>
<th>Website</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Barefoot Farms</td>
<td><a href="http://www.barefootfarms.ca">http://www.barefootfarms.ca</a></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Farmers on 57th</td>
<td><a href="http://farmerson57th.wikispaces.com">http://farmerson57th.wikispaces.com</a></td>
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<tr>
<td>Fresh Roots Urban Farm Society</td>
<td><a href="http://www.freshroots.ca">http://www.freshroots.ca</a></td>
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<tr>
<td>Hastings Urban Farm*</td>
<td><a href="https://www.facebook.com/pages/Hastings-Folk-Garden-Society/286343024770976">https://www.facebook.com/pages/Hastings-Folk-Garden-Society/286343024770976</a></td>
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<tr>
<td>Home Harvest Farms</td>
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<tr>
<td>Inner City Farms</td>
<td><a href="http://innercityfarms.com">http://innercityfarms.com</a></td>
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<tr>
<td>Institute for Aboriginal Health Garden</td>
<td><a href="http://www">http://www</a> lah.ubc.ca/research/community-education-and-demonstration-research-garden</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Loutet Farm (Edible Garden Project)</td>
<td><a href="http://www.ediblegardenproject.com/what-we-do/loutet-farm">http://www.ediblegardenproject.com/what-we-do/loutet-farm</a></td>
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<tr>
<td>Mushboo</td>
<td><a href="http://www.mushboo.com">http://www.mushboo.com</a></td>
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<tr>
<td>The Local Food Pedalers (My Urban Farm)</td>
<td><a href="http://foodpedalers.ca">http://foodpedalers.ca</a></td>
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<td>Sole Food</td>
<td><a href="http://solefoodfarms.com">http://solefoodfarms.com</a></td>
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<td>Southlands Heritage Farm</td>
<td><a href="http://www.southlandsfarms.com">http://www.southlandsfarms.com</a></td>
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<tr>
<td>The World in a Garden</td>
<td><a href="http://theworldinagarden.com">http://theworldinagarden.com</a></td>
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<td>UBC Farm</td>
<td><a href="http://ubcfarm.ubc.ca">http://ubcfarm.ubc.ca</a></td>
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<td>Urban Digs Farm</td>
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<td>Victory Gardens</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yummy Yards*</td>
<td><a href="http://www.yummyyards.ca">http://www.yummyyards.ca</a></td>
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</tbody>
</table>

*Responses for these farms collected following the Urban Farming Forum event*