



Sustainable crop and food systems in an urbanizing world

At present, more than 50 percent of the world's population is living in urban areas, a figure that is expected to rise to 70 percent by 2050, especially in the developing world (UN, 2014). This means that 6.8 billion people in urban areas will rely on food produced by potentially less farmers in rural areas. Sustainable crop production and food systems with strong rural-urban linkages, which can provide for rapidly expanding cities, will be needed to achieve food security and nutrition goals by 2030.

What we do

FAO supports member countries to meet the challenges of an urbanizing world by promoting the integration of Urban and Peri-urban Horticulture (UPH) into national and local agricultural development strategies, food and nutrition programmes and urban planning. UPH is the cultivation of a wide range of crops – including fruit, vegetables, roots, tubers and ornamental plants – within cities and towns and in their surrounding areas. It is a key component of robust and resilient urban food systems which empower the urban poor. UPH is already widely practised in developing countries, accounting for more than half of the fruit and vegetable production in cities in Burundi, Cape Verde, Malawi, Mali, Mozambique and Zambia.

FAO's Growing Greener Cities Programme assists governments to ensure political and institutional commitment to promote sustainable production and consumption, while protecting the environment. This includes securing land and water for horticulture, ensuring good product quality, encouraging the participation by all stakeholders in the urban and peri-urban horticulture sector, and improving access to markets for fruit and vegetables. This is complemented by innovative technologies to benefit small-scale producers. In Sucre, Bolivia, for example, urban and peri-urban family farmers produce 550 kg of vegetables per year in an area of 24 m² – 60 percent of which is consumed at household level and the rest sold to markets, generating income.



Sustainable urban food systems should be integrated into urban policy and planning, allowing for people-centred solutions to improve the livelihoods of the urban poor.

FAO's Food for the Cities Programme strengthens rural-urban linkages by providing assistance to local governments to assess food systems. This helps to identify gaps, bottlenecks and opportunities that ultimately contribute to sustainable planning and informed decision-making, prioritizing investments, and designing sustainable food policies and strategies to improve local food systems. FAO also supports local authorities to establish dynamic and sustainable food systems with strong rural-urban linkages.

FAO helps to develop local action plans in different policy areas. It fosters participatory multi-stakeholder dialogue and ensures dissemination of knowledge and good practices, such as microgardens, home gardens schemes, and more.

Understanding the context

The urbanization trend presents a challenge for supply of and access to fresh food in cities and their surrounding areas. Food and nutrition insecurity, social and economic inequality, and environmental and natural resource degradation are the most pressing issues.

Urbanization can be accompanied by high levels of poverty, unemployment and food insecurity. The urban poor spend most of their income just to feed themselves and are suffering the consequences of malnutrition (under-nourishment and obesity). Governments can facilitate the integration of urban and peri-urban agriculture into urban and regional planning.

Cities are often seen as having a limited role in overcoming the challenges described above. Cities and their food systems affect surrounding and adjacent rural areas in terms of land use, food production, environmental management, transport and distribution, marketing, consumption and waste generation.



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A brighter future for the world's developing cities is both imperative and possible. Historically, cities have been places of opportunities. The challenge is to steer urbanization from its current, unsustainable path, towards sustainable, greener cities.

KEY RELEVANT ON-GOING PROCESSES

Food security and food systems have become a priority in the urban agenda. Different international initiatives and events are advocating for commitment among cities and other stakeholders.

- **The Milan Urban Food Policy Pact (MUFPP)** is engaging more than 130 cities from around the world to build food systems based on the pillars of sustainability, equity and social justice. FAO is collaborating with the Municipality of Milan by providing technical support for the MUFPP process to build a monitoring framework of its implementation and to foster a city-to-city cooperation and knowledge exchange mechanism of good practices for sustainable food systems.
- **The 3rd United Nations Conference on Housing and Sustainable Urban Development (Habitat III)** took place in October 2016 which set out the New Urban Agenda for the next 20 years. It focuses on the implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals, acknowledging the interlinkage between these goals.

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