Sustainable crop and food systems in cities

Urban and peri-urban horticulture (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. UPH is a key component of robust and resilient urban food systems and empowers the urban poor. FAO provides support to Member Countries to meet the challenges of massive and rapid urbanization in terms of achieving food security and nutrition goals.

What FAO does

FAO supports the transformation of UPH into a recognized urban land use and economic activity. It should be integrated into national and local agricultural development strategies, food and nutrition programmes, and urban planning. FAO’s technical programmes provide support to Member Countries, local governments and stakeholders in designing context-specific intervention strategies.

FAO’s Food for the Cities Programme carries out preliminary assessments and appraisals of the local food system in collaboration with local partners and stakeholders. It indexes and maps areas of intervention within a city region – including an urban centre, peri-urban and rural areas surrounding cities – to best address local needs and priorities. Special attention is given to improving the access to adequate food for vulnerable urban populations and market access for smallholder producers in urban, peri-urban and rural areas.

The assessment analyzes changes in food systems, existing food policies and urban development to better adapt strategies to local conditions. It develops local action plans in different policy areas, including urban food security, nutrition and health, local economy, urban environment, land use planning or social development policies. FAO fosters participatory multi-stakeholder dialogue and ensures dissemination of knowledge and best practices.

FAO’s Growing Greener Cities Programme helps governments and city administrations to optimize their policies, institutional frameworks and support services for urban and peri-urban horticulture. FAO assists governments to ensure political and institutional commitment by promoting secure land and water for horticulture, good product quality while protecting the environment, participation by all stakeholders in the urban and peri-urban horticulture sector, and new markets for fruit and vegetables. Their consumption is promoted through nutrition education and national platforms for the promotion of fruit and vegetables for health.
Background

Today, more than 50 percent of the world’s population is living in urban areas, and it is expected to rise to 70 percent by 2050. This 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 double burden 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 these challenges. However, 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.

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. Beyond food production and social benefits, urban agriculture integrates a number of ecological benefits by reducing city waste, preserving biodiversity, improving air quality and microclimate, and overall reducing the environmental impact related to both food transport and storage.

KEY RELEVANT ON-GOING PROCESSES

Food systems are now becoming 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 is engaging more than 120 cities in building food systems based on the pillars of sustainability and social justice. The 3rd United Nations Conference on Housing and Sustainable Urban Development (Habitat III) is guiding efforts around the urbanization process for the next 20 years through the release of the New Urban Agenda in October 2016, which focuses on the implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals.