



# FOOD *for* THE CITIES

## Land tenure and food production

### Challenges...



FAO/G. Bizzarri

Cities grow. Demand for food increases, but areas suitable for agriculture diminish. New urban populations seek access to cultivable land. Land values rise as demand for non-agricultural use grows. The environment is extremely competitive and players in urban and

peri-urban food production may not have a loud voice. They compete with a wide variety of interests on access to land for agricultural use and their cultivations are seldom protected by secure tenure arrangements. Land tenure

issues are potentially a major constraint for urban and peri-urban food production. Populations of cities tend to rapidly increase during emergencies and conflicts. Food security problems escalate and the need for temporary, flexible, land use rights to enable agricultural use is a part of any solution. The already challenging tenure structures typical of conflict situations are further complicated by the high level of demand for land, by lack of clarity on ownership and access rights and by absentee landholders. Monitoring of land use is extremely difficult and the situation almost inevitably leads to violations of rights, whatever the intentions of the parties. In emergency situations there is often a need to introduce temporary tenure arrangements, which allow the temporary utilisation of vacant land for food production and livelihood maintenance, as well as for the temporary settlement of the displaced population.

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### FAO's response...



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As a starting point for long term improvement, land tenure arrangements for urban food production can be addressed in a land policy that recognises and provides for urban agriculture. Although it is always a balance, productive land needs to be

protected through zoning and regulations. NGOs may play a vital negotiating role in such a process. Temporary arrangements need to be well documented and if possible documented by permits. They should respect prior land uses and tenures, which requires that existing land tenure and use,

land records and physical structures are protected and conserved. This may be necessary, for example, for the eventual administration of restitution of land or compensation. In some cases it may be necessary to resort to retrospective tools (like spatial imagery) for restructuring the land tenure structures. FAO has strong global experience in land tenure analysis, policy formulation and design of strategies to improve access to land and other natural resources and to increase tenure security for environmentally sound and sustainable development.

## Land tenure arrangements

Urban agriculture is often carried out under tenure arrangements based on customary or informal tenures. Typically, these are mutual benefiting short term agreements, but just as often access is simply gained by squatting, without any form of agreement, on temporarily available idle land. The complexity and flexibility of tenure arrangements in dynamic, developing country situations, where security of tenure is often sought both via a web of social relations and via statutory systems, leads to significant land tenure challenges. Land use restrictions are the last in the line of worries of the poor. Such customary or informal tenure arrangements are typically flexible, enabling land users to react to changing conditions. They are not normally recognised formally in statutes and thus can usually be disregarded when the built area expands. The low formal recognition of land rights in urban cultivation results in low

security of tenure, thus diminishing food security, livelihood possibilities and social stability. Changing this situation through statutory recognition and recording of informal and multiple tenure systems is challenging because exact clarification of such rights often runs counter to their nature. In addition, the rules, procedures and fees of registration may be too costly for the more vulnerable parts of the population.

A measure of security of tenure can be provided, however, by recognising temporary rights per cultivation season and/or by recognising and administering in an equitable way rights of access to idle cultivable land, provided that the primary landholder's interest is not harmed. Such an approach could embody a mechanism to compensate the cultivator for inputs should the landholder exercise the right to the reversion and interrupt a cultivation season.



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## Zoning and demarcation

In a more structured environment progress can be made by using the planning tools and processes in force in the jurisdiction. Areas for agricultural use on the urban fringe could be zoned, or specified forms of urban agriculture accepted as a legitimate form of urban land use. Furthermore, innovative techniques such as rooftop gardening could be legalised and regulated. Mechanisms for enabling more innovative approaches to making urban land available for agricultural production could include imaginative approaches to land banking, creation of incentives through taxation and associated relief, and the establishment of garden plots/allotments for food growing. Some public areas could also be used for "landscape friendly" food production.



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**Food for the Cities - Multidisciplinary Area**  
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