SUSTAINING URBAN FARMING RESEARCH STUDY:

Listening to Urban Farmers About Income, Quality of Life, and Policy

2026



VIEW OF THE URBAN FARM INCUBATOR, UPPER MARLBORO, MD

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Purpose and Background

This research study was funded by the Northeast SARE grant program, as part of a larger grant that funded an apprenticeship program to provide further training to the graduates of ECO City Farms' Beginning Farmer Training Program. The study was developed to support and inform these farmer trainees by investigating well-established urban farms' viability, income sources, and farming's effects on quality of life. With input from urban farmer graduates who desire to start farm enterprises, we developed this study to understand the realities and constraints of for-profit urban farming. Since much of the recent funding for urban farming has been focused on education and training programs to help people launch urban farm businesses, we wanted to learn if it is possible to earn a livable wage through urban farming in the Mid-Atlantic / Northeast region, and ask about the impact of government policy, other organizational supports, or what else has proven most helpful to them in the long term. The goal of the study was to listen to and amplify the experiences of these farmers to inform both policymakers and those seeking to launch their own farms.

Research Team

Our research team consisted of 3 ECO City Farms staff, 3 urban farmers who graduated from our urban farm apprenticeship program, and 2 members of the University of Maryland's Center for Health Equity. ECO City Farms held the grant and led the research process, data collection, and reporting. The University of Maryland facilitated IRB compliance and throughout the project consulted on design, recruitment, and data analysis.

- **Jocelyn Tidwell,** M.Ed, Lead Researcher
- **Kayla Agonoy and Margaret Morgan-Hubbard,** administrative and grant management
- **Preeya Waite, Nicole Marjorie Williams and Aisha Mohammed,** Urban farmers and apprenticeship program graduates, co-interviewers and data analysis
- **Dr. Stephen B Thomas and Meg Jordan,** UMD Center for Health Equity, IRB & project consultants

To the Farmers

We also want to thank and acknowledge the 16 farms who participated. We are grateful for their time, candor, and the essential work that they do each day to produce food for their communities.

Methods and Recruitment

Criteria To Participate

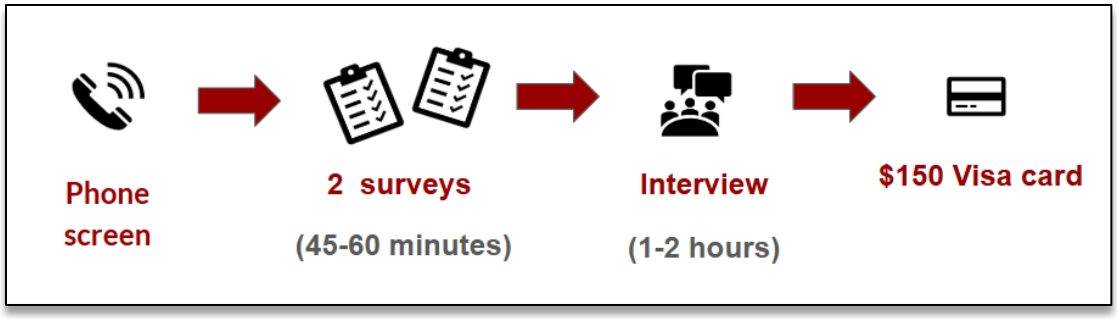
In our review, we found no standard definition of urban farming. Urban farms represent an incredibly wide variety of business models that produce many different products. For the purpose of this study, we chose inclusion criteria that would most closely represent the sort of farms our program graduates seek to launch. We limited the study to small scale, established food producers incorporated under for-profit structures. All of the following criteria had to be met by the participating farmers:



- *Well-established* (5+ years for-profit urban farming experience in an ownership role)
- *Small-scale* (Less than 10 acres in production)
- *Urban* (located in the Northeast SARE region in an urban area, defined as within 10 miles of a city with a 25,000+ population)
- *Growing food* (50% or more of the business' products must be edible crops or value-added food products made solely from farm-grown crops)

Process to Participate

After a brief phone screen to confirm eligibility, farmers completed two online surveys with questions focused on their farm finances, quality of life, and demographics. Each farmer then answered follow up questions during a 1–2 hours interview on zoom which were each co-facilitated by the lead researcher and one of the urban farming apprenticeship graduates. After the interview, each farmer received either a check or visa gift card for their time (3-4 hours total).



The surveys and interview protocol were reviewed by several local groups who work with urban farmers and then pilot tested with two local farmers who were not eligible to participate

in the research due to being too newly launched. Feedback from pilot testers led to an increase of the gift card incentive, clarifying the wording on some survey questions, asking for income as a range rather than exact number and extending those ranges beyond $100K, asking about the farmers motivations for farming, limiting participation to farm owners (instead of farm workers / employees since their quality of life issues differ), and clarifying what counts as producing food by including value-added products. Thank you to our pilot testers for their essential insights and feedback.

Recruitment

We used purposive, network-assisted ("snowball") sampling. A total of 16 farms participated in the study. While some farms had more than one owner (and all owners were invited to participate in the interview), in each instance, we interviewed only one owner who represented their own views. All interviews took place between January 2025 and March 2026. While 38 farmers expressed interest in the study, 22 of those screened were not eligible. The most common reasons for ineligibility were being a non-profit farm (n=7) or operating for less than 5 years (n=6). While several farmers learned about the study through personal connections to the research team, most were recruited through wide-spread efforts to share the announcement on national and regional agriculture list-servs, food councils, and online forums. We advertised digitally in webinars, physically at agricultural conferences, and by sending information directly to extension agents in each eligible state and other agricultural technical assistance providers. A few farmers had some connection to or knowledge of the organizations or individual team members involved in the research, introducing the potential for confirmation bias, etc. However, when asked how they heard about the study, most participating farmers named a group or individual that the research team had not known or directly contacted, meaning recruitment ultimately included a much wider audience.

Limitations and Suggestions for Future Research

With a study size of only 16 farms these results are not broadly generalizable, but are representative of diverse cross-section of for-profit, food-producing urban farmers. In this report, our analysis is structured to faithfully and accurately represent themes within the responses.

We doubled-coded interview notes and checked all data and quotes against audio transcripts. However, this community-engaged descriptive study was not designed to generate population estimates, test causal relationships, or evaluate the financial performance of the broader urban-farming sector.

We recommend further research inquiry into questions of profitability and a systematic study of the various regulations, policies, fees, and tax structures that apply to urban farming businesses across the Northeast SARE region. We also suggest a more thorough comparison of the differences between non-profit and for-profit urban farms.



We intentionally limited this study to urban farmers incorporated under for-profit models, since that is what most of our beginning farmer training program graduates anticipate pursuing. However, as confirmed through feedback and in our Urban Farm Mapping project (appendix to this study), these for-profit farmers are a tiny fraction of what are called "urban farms." Most function under non-profit or municipal structures (such as schools, religious organizations, parks departments, etc.) and may not be focused on producing food at scale.



Some farmers remained hesitant to divulge total income and/or sales income data, filling out those parts of the surveys in unintended ways that muddy the survey data. When asked about their hesitancy in the interview portion, they redirected focus away from gross income towards consideration of profit margin, which in many cases was negligible or non-existent (even in one instance when annual sales of farm products were above $150K). Some farmers had difficulty parsing out personal income from the farm, total sales, and profit margin due to the complexity of their operations, accounting for grant funding and in-kind resources, etc. Given the long period covered by the financial reporting (2021-2024), recall and temporal variability may have been a factor.



Farmers referenced a wide variety of regulations, policies, taxes and fees that municipalities levy on their businesses. While we represent what came up in our interviews and the effects on these specific farmers, we did not undertake a systematic study of regulations, policies and tax structures for urban farmers. However, in several of the interviews, farmers expressed curiosity about the frameworks used in other jurisdictions and wished to better understand how urban farms are treated in different states, counties, cities, etc. to bolster their own efforts.

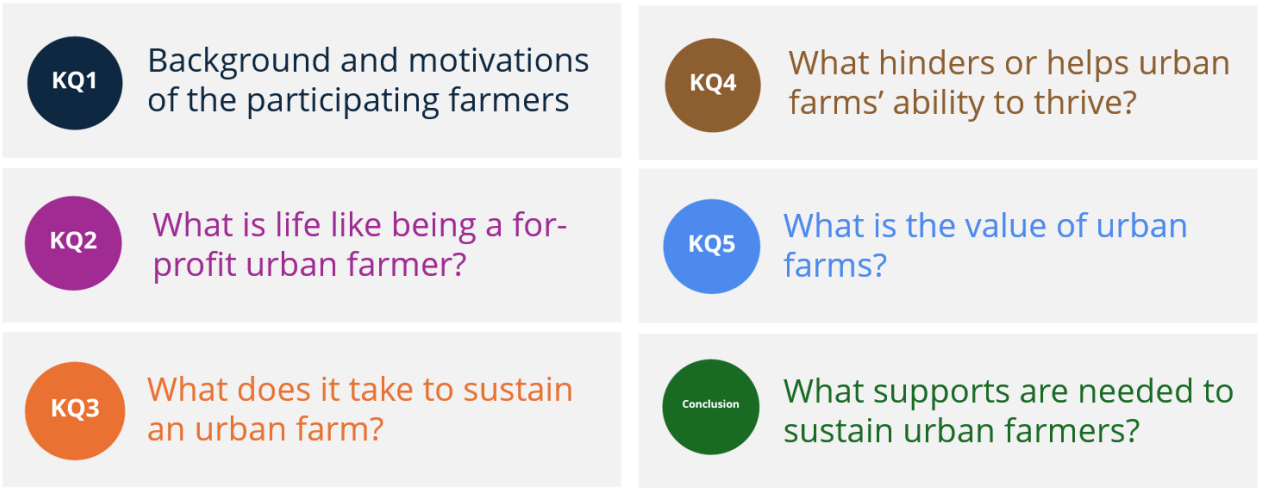


Participants consistently described producing public benefits for which their businesses were not compensated, and recommended policy interventions of support. While we represent their rationale for these supports, further study would be needed to estimate the cost, eligibility criteria, administrative mechanism, expected production effects, or unintended consequences of implementing those suggestions. Since the scope of this study did not include

a valuation of the public-good contributions of the farms, efforts to quantify the economic value of stormwater management, land remediation, education, food donations, neighborhood maintenance, or public health benefits would be beneficial.

Themes of the Responses and Key Questions

The report is organized according to the key questions of the research. Each section includes a summary and an expanded discussion of the stronger themes in the responses.



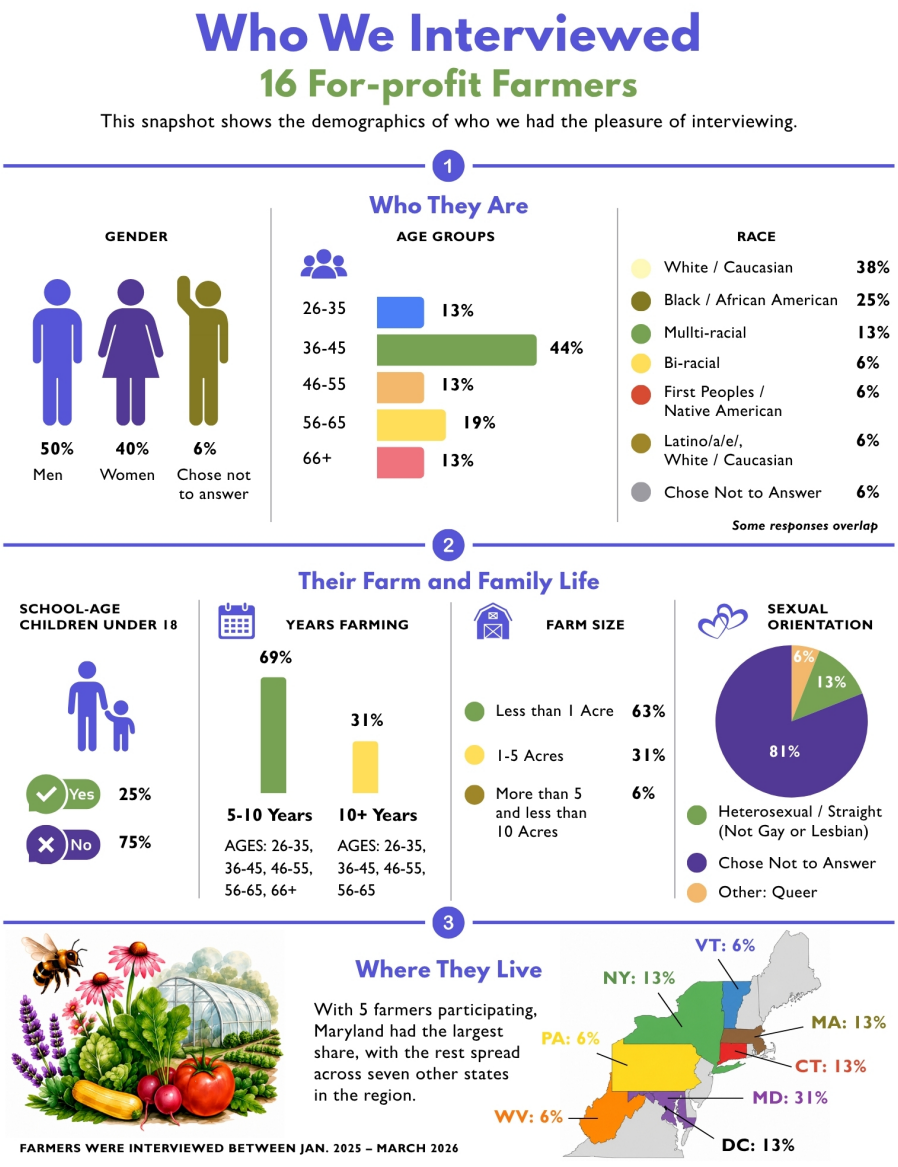
Executive Summary

KQ1 Key Question 1: Background and Motivations of the Participating Farmers

- Various strategies of land access strategies were used, almost always related to either home ownership or relationships (personal or professional) with the landowners.

What's your relationship to the land where you farm?	
44% (n=7)	Own
38% (n=6)	Rent / lease
31% (n=5)	Unpaid agreement with landowner
12% (n=2)	Paid by landowner
44% (n=7)	Farming on same property as farmer residence
**categories not mutually exclusive*	

- When we asked about motivations for farming, farmers indicated they choose this as work which aligns with their passion (for engaging work, for being outdoors in nature, “love what I do,” etc.) and identity (“It’s a calling,” a way to connect to family and larger history of farming or to keep and pass down this essential societal knowledge “it’s a noble profession”)
- Farmers valued having control, both in the sense of how to organize their working life but also in being able to provide a guarantee of "clean" food (nutritious and free of contaminants) for themselves and their community / customers.
- All farmers named motivations related to health. This was defined as health for their families and community through an improved or alternate food system as well as healthy ecosystem change, stewarding their land and environment. Farmers often linked the health of people and the health of the land together.
- We spoke with a small number of farmers (n=16), but they represent a wide variety of demographic characteristics, farm sizes, and models. Farmers participated from 8 of the 13 states / districts in the Northeast SARE region.



KQ2

Key Question 2: What is lifelike being a for-profit urban farmer?

Does farming improve or decrease your quality of life?	
50% (n=8)	Greatly improves
44% (n=7)	Slightly improves
6% (n=1)	Neither improves nor decreases

- Farming's overall effect on quality of life was positive for all but one farmer. While isolation was mentioned as a risk by several farmers, most saw farming as an avenue

to meet and engage with other people (63% n=10) and to continue to learn and/or teach (63% n=10) – two elements that were greatly valued as boosters of quality of life.

How satisfied are you with your farm's income?	
6% (n=1)	Extremely Satisfied (* this farm's goal is barter / subsistence homesteading)
38% (n=6)	Somewhat Satisfied
38% (n=6)	Somewhat Dissatisfied
18% (n=3)	Extremely Dissatisfied

- However, nearly 70% (n=11) of the farmers mentioned stress or worry related to finances, and most were dissatisfied by farm income. Some cited cash flow issues and lack of control of many variables, even those using indoor farming spaces (greenhouses, indoor mushrooms or microgreens). That lack of control both in the financial sense and in being able to pace the work contributed to the largest theme in quality-of-life measures – the need for time off to rest and recharge. 81% (n=13) of the farmers spoke of the importance of (and struggles to get) time away from farming. Farmers made a connection between lack of time to "do the things [that] define me as a person" and "not think about work" with lowered quality of life.
- Some other issues impacting quality of life were managing aging, injury risk, and risk of exposure to toxicity through contaminated soils (one farmer traced their lead poisoning to work remediating the farm property). However, the physical work and natural setting also had a strong positive effect on both physical and mental health for most farmers (63% n=10).



Key Question 3: What does it take to sustain an Urban Farm?

- Community-based support was a factor for all farms. Whether through volunteers, in-kind support or consistent sales to personal networks of family and friends, or being sent grant announcements or other opportunities, the farmers were all able to name ways they benefitted from local community support.
- However, 44% (n=7) of the farmers specifically spoke of struggles to charge a price for vegetables that reflects the true cost of production. While they felt community support for their farm, what people are willing / able to pay for their crops doesn't reflect the artisanal quality of the food. Most participants reported that direct vegetable sales alone did not consistently cover the full costs of production, labor, and owner compensation.

- Other themes among the choices the farmers make in running their businesses: They prioritize diversification of products and sales channels. They often used personal seed money and reinvest revenue back into the business. Also schedule flexibility is key — both for personal / family needs and for growing the business with the baked-in fluctuations of the work.
- Relationships within agriculture are paramount to success and farmers spoke of how the support of extension agents and other technical assistance professionals has large, positive impacts on their ability to access resources. Farmers spoke of the importance of technical support from ag industry agents (i.e. University extension, Departments of Ag at the national, state and county level, and agencies, non-profits, other farmers and farming networks). In some cases, farmers felt that “farming is a secret society" and specifically worked to gain knowledge of or join boards and grant-making bodies to better succeed by cultivating those relationships.
- Labor struggles were a common theme, with 88% (n=14) of farms paying someone other than the owner wages at least some of the time. Many also used strategies other than hired labor for getting the labor needed -such as volunteers, interns, and family members. The farms struggled to train unskilled, inefficient workers and to attract skilled labor given they could not offer healthcare and benefits. Balancing production volume and costs as they attempt to scale often requires extreme flexibility on the part of workers.



Key Question 4: What hinders or helps urban farms’ ability to thrive?

- Farmers consider security (healthcare, retirement, providing basics and good food for self / family as a quality-of-life measure, but their responses indicate that farming can undermine achieving some of those. Obtaining affordable and sufficient health coverage for themselves and for employees was often mentioned as a high priority.
- Farmers mentioned the effects of zoning, regulations, and policy. Some positive, but many negative. 4 farmers spoke of the worry that efforts to change would result in unintended negative consequences. Farmers stressed the importance of the officials, agents and offices they need to coordinate with. Half reported they felt their business was not understood, valued or provided for and struggling with either uninformed or otherwise unhelpful agents. The effect of grants cannot be overstated. Grants are a fundamental part of the equation (along with loans - including "loans"

from personal capital) of the financial picture for all farms in the study. Most commonly, farmers received grants designed to pay for infrastructure, equipment, and labor.

- Farmers experienced several difficulties with grants, including barriers with submission timelines and requirements, eligibility, bias, reporting metrics, and funding dispersement mechanisms (reimbursement) that rendered them ineffective.
- The study focused exclusively on for-profit farms; however, discussion of non-profit farming was unexpectedly pervasive. Almost all farms at some point discussed the effect of being a for-profit farm instead of a non-profit one and described various relationships they had developed with non-profit organizations in order to scale and stabilize their business, including the quarter of the farms which have either begun to transition to a non-profit entirely, started a non-profit "wing" in addition to their for-profit business, or are considering doing so within the next two years.



Key Question 5: What is the value of urban farms?

- They are responsive to demand for local food which the farms provide along with other community benefits. Food stays in the community, through local networks, donations and food assistance organization contracts, and in supporting other local businesses / restaurants. 56% (n=9) donate food for free through various practices.
- Urban farms remediate and revitalize underutilized spaces, providing a strong net benefit to local jurisdictions and clean open spaces for events and education.
- Some farms seek to be a provider of "good jobs" which they define as year-round, stable work with time-off, healthcare benefits and bonuses / regular pay increases.



KQ1: Background and Motivations of the Participating Farmers

Theme 1: Purpose, "Calling" and Legacy

Several of the farmers spoke to the sense that farming is a means to connect them with the history of farming and leave a legacy of caring for the land and producing the food people depend on. Half described this vocation as their "purpose" or "calling" or a chance to make "the world a better place," make a "valuable contribution," or have a "positive impact on other's lives." All farmers with school-age children (25% n=4) mentioned the importance of farming

for their children's development. Others said that the legacy of teaching children to farm or the next generation in general was important to securing a healthy future for the community.

Theme 2: Identity and Lifestyle

75% (n=12) of the farmers spoke of the farm operations as fitting with their ideal lifestyle, as a passion or part of their identity. Even when discussing challenges, 25% (n=4) of the farmers reiterated "I could choose something else, but I love what I do." Through their farm work, most felt connected with the natural world in ways that improved their quality of life and motivated them to continue farming. Having agency and control over how to organize one's life was named by half of the farmers as a motivating factor. This was described variously as the freedom to build a schedule flexible to family needs, to take on engaging work, to be outside, to choose regenerative or non-toxic methods for producing food, and to make entrepreneurial decisions about how to build their farms.

"Farming is a revolutionary act." – Farm 15

Theme 3: Healthy Food and Environment

"We can't have an economy without a proper ecology" – Farm 12

"With our society's relationship with nature and food, I thought how can I live morally? It was that simple … I just wanted to live a clean life I could be proud of from feeding myself in a way I do not harm nature." – Farm 10

Each of the farmers spoke of the need to produce food in a way that is healthy for people (whether high nutritional value, "clean" / free from pollutants, or through dignified work processes) and healthy for the environment (through organic, regenerative, or sustainable farming practices) with the goal of creating more capacity in the system to sustain healthy community life. They valued developing a local food system responsive to unique needs of neighbors, labeling this a "fiduciary relationship" or "reciprocal relationship" of trust that goes beyond a sales transaction. Control over food production was important to guarantee (for themselves, family and customers) that the food would be "clean" — both in being nutritious and free of pollutants and chemicals. 81% (n=13) of the farms specifically mentioned "clean" food as a motivating factor.

Goal of "growing where food is being consumed and also trying to mitigate the impacts of the built environment on the natural world." – Farm 5

Theme 4: Land Access and Challenges

Farmers found many outlets to acquire land. 44% (n=7) of the farmers own at least some of the land where they farm, and some access at least part of their land through home ownership, with the same number (n=7) farming on the property where they live (these groups overlap but are not all the same farms). While two of the farmers inherited or purchased land from family, most sought opportunities in the wider community to find land. Two farms cheaply purchased "rundown" city lots (one as the single bidder in an auction and the other by a negotiated transfer). Two of the other farms spoke of developing relationships with municipalities or non-profit trusts to access buildings and land held by them which had no other viable uses. Two farmers mentioned that they were able to rent land because the property owners wanted a tenant to keep it in agricultural use to avoid re-classification (and consequently having to pay back taxes at a higher, non-agricultural property tax rate).

Regardless of how a farmer acquires land, they cannot move forward with their business goals without it, but there are specific challenges faced to get space and produce quality food.

> *"It was not loved land. Now it is, but it's still struggle even after 10 years of building up soil" – Farm 14*

Because it's not always easy to find or purchase land, when the opportunity presents itself, farmers seem to jump on it. This means gaining access to land may take years to have everything in place. The soil requires testing and can be contaminated (one farmer attributes their lead poisoning to their work remediating the contaminated city lot). Even without toxins, the farmers noted the soil within city limits is often lacking in organic matter and nutrients. Water access may be challenging; one farmer spoke of how expensive it was

Farm Property Location: City vs Peri-Urban	
63% (n=10)	Within city limits
25% (n=4)	Peri-urban
12% (n=2)	Both: One farm is on a property that straddles the city line. Another farm leases 2 peri-urban acres, but also uses city home's yard and basement

to use city water and their struggles with neighbors who would interfere with the connection, while another farmer paid to dig a well, but the water is salty and causes issues. Farmers spoke of finding ways to maximize their growing spaces to use "every inch." From vertical gardening, rooftops, and indoor farming, they sought out creative ways to grow and scale up their productivity.

KQ2

KQ2: What is lifelike being a for-profit urban farmer?

Theme 1: Quality of Life Benefits

Many of the farmers attributed health benefits (physical and mental) of working outdoors, in nature as improvements to their quality of life. Farmers spoke of the physical fitness and mental health improvements gained while working the farm being more beneficial than a gym membership or describing it as "my therapy." However, they also spoke of managing the wear and tear on their bodies, managing physical limitations such as aging (not only the retiree farmers, but also those in middle age) and the risks and consequences of injuries. 63% (n=10) of the farmers talked about the improvement to quality of life through the opportunity to engage with other people, including other farmers or people learning about farming, and to keep learning through their farm work. These were seen as essential elements for maintaining quality of life. Responses were mixed regarding the effect on mental health, with the uncertainties of weather and finances causing stress and anxiety, but also the physical work and results / impact on community and self-sufficiency providing significant relief from depression, peacefulness and deep satisfaction.

Theme 2: Financial Stress

"I always trust that things will work out when it comes to money, but realistically looking at it from a different mindset, it's like … you're ***about to crash into a wall [financially] …*** *I'm not actually worried about that because I'll always be okay. I need very little to be content and happy … but long term, I'm not making nearly enough money." – Farm 3 (reported farm sales of $100K+ each year 2021-2024, and qualifies for Medicaid health insurance)*

Annual Gross Farm Sales 2024 (most recent reported year)	
Not reported	6% (n=1)
Less than $10K	18% (n=3)
$10-40K	31% (n=5)
$40-70K	6% (n=1)
$70-100K	12% (n=2)
$100-500K	25% (n=4)

Farm Income Trends 2021-2024	
Not reported	6% (n=1)
Stayed within same bracket	38% (n=6)
Increase of 1 or 2 brackets	56% (n=9)

What percentage of income is farm-based vs off-farm?		
25% (n=4)	Majority from Farm-Based sources	(3 = 90-100%, 1 = 70%)
69% (n=11)	Majority from Off-Farm sources	(6 = 85-100%, 5 = 60-80%)
6% (n=1)	No answer (stated reason was the farm is a strong net loss / no profit)	

Across the different models of farming, farmers spoke of a stressful sense of financial precarity with hard to balance cash flow due to the seasonal nature of the work or just being "at the mercy of nature." While at least 3 of the farmers mentioned a decrease in quality of life due to financial stresses related to the farming business, one farmer indicated that they perceived financial life as distinct from their overall quality of life. Many stated that their financial goals were modest "to cover expenses" and "not farming to get rich," their definitions of success and what it means for their quality of life often centered on concepts like being "rich with things." These stresses and sense of financial precarity cut across income brackets, even including farms that reported income in the highest bracket, and despite all farms reporting either steady sales or increases year over year. None of the farmers reported a decrease in farm income; however, as several farmers noted, strong sales do not necessarily translate to profits. Sales can remain steady or rise nominally while costs, debt and losses rise faster.

> *"When it's satisfying, it's very satisfying … I'm very satisfied with my business and my work, but in terms of what I'm taking home right now, I have to be honest that I'm not yet making the money that I want to."*
> *– Farm 15*

Theme 3: Time Off and Work-Life Balance

"Being able to take a weekend … a winter break … umbrella time off. Time for rest, for the body, for the mind, for the soul. That is something I place a high value on. That allows me to do things that sort of like define me as a person." – Farm 5

Managing stress and the demands of the work were a difficult balancing act for most of the farmers. Mentioned by 81% (n=13) of farmers, the need for and difficulty with finding time off was a central factor for quality of life. Being able to find time to take off that they can afford (both in terms of money and time away from the business) seems to be the biggest hurdle. For farmers with school-age kids, childcare is a central part of how the farmers build their schedule, balance their time across farm and family needs. Success for these farmers seemed to come from having the farm work flexible enough to be able to work around family needs.

> *"In terms of time away from the farm, I'm grateful for the time I do have because I know farmers who have told me they haven't had a day off, a single day off, in years." – Farm 7*

Theme 4: Pandemic Effects

Since this study covered the years of 2021-2024, we asked farmers about the effects of the COVID pandemic. The pandemic caused permanent changes to the business model of 38% (n=6) of the farms (reduced wholesale restaurant accounts, increased contracts for food access programs, and reduced direct interaction with customers) which continue to resonate. Half of the farmers (n=8) noted the surge of interest in eating locally and growing food. However, for at least 3 of the farms, the pandemic separated them from usual methods to interact with and maintain their customer base, and this had a negative impact (in one case lasting). One farmer said that a grant they received to develop a website was in acknowledgement that farmers would need to develop new marketing materials to connect with customers in new ways. Several of the farms felt insulated from the effects by off-farm income or were so newly launched at the time they were unable to compare effects.

KQ3: What does it take to sustain an Urban Farm?

Theme 1: Community Contributes to Farm Success

"Our farm has been built by and with the community." – Farm 14

Farmers described benefiting from community support in multiple ways. Many host volunteer days that engage and educate people on how to build farm infrastructure, but which can function as a way to complete those desired projects that support their business. Most farms (69% n=11) reported “informal sales to family and friends” which indicates a network of direct, personal support for the farm business. All farms reported receiving some in-kind support.

The most common were volunteers (n= 5) and land (n=4). Other items included mulch, building materials and design help, pest control, and legal assistance. Some farmers noted that labor was one of the greatest expenses to manage and spoke of the benefit of having volunteers to help. However, this is not universal since two farmers acknowledged the complexity of using volunteers to support a for-profit business in light of certain labor laws, as described in the theme related to labor below. For those who feel burnt out or are injured, relying on their community is how they are finding relief, while continuing to move their farm goals in the desired direction. In one striking example, a farmer was injured and "not able to walk for half the year" but still "ended up increasing revenue 30%" due to community support – through labor and their commitments to purchasing his crops.

Theme 2: Vegetable Sales Often Not Enough to Sustain a Farm

"The price points that people are willing to pay are not reflective of their belief or understanding of the importance of what we do. I have a good customer base and there's not too much fussing about my prices, but I get push back from some people and I really would like to charge more for some of the things that I grow...they see an heirloom tomato selling for $5 or $5.50 a pound compared to $3 a pound [in the store]. I've had people walk away...I don't think people understand what it costs and what it takes to produce." – Farm 15

"None of it is profitable. Everything I grow costs me more to sell than I can grow it for" – Farm 1 (2024 farm sales = $170K)

"The least profitable thing we do is grow vegetables. That's why we do all the other things, so we can continue to grow vegetables." – Farm 14

While all of the farmers saw growing food as valuable to the community, and even central to their business model, most (63% n=10) don't see it as possible to sustain a business from vegetable sales given that the prices needed to cover the cost of this quality and type of production are not what community customers are willing or able to pay. They see a clear value proposition but also recognize "people want cheap abundant food" which undermines the stability of their farm businesses.

Theme 3: Diversify Income Streams

To counter the low prices for vegetables, three of the farms directly stated that product diversification was key to their success. An additional five farms named their strategies for products more profitable than vegetable sales: seedlings (n=3) and gardening services

"if it wasn't for them (food bank program), I wouldn't be in business" – Farm 3 Contract for food bank paid quickly and in advance

(n=2). Most of the farms mentioned strategies for farm income beyond raw agricultural products, and several said these were the most profitable part of their farm business. About half of the farms offered educational classes or farm-based events, fitting with their stated goals of educating people. 25% (n=4) of the farms listed events as one of their top 3 sources of income. 25% (n=4) of the farms called out the importance of seedlings, as something customers desire and are willing to pay the cost of production for.

> *"I live in a community where people use [SNAP] a lot, so I could get another stream of income or another set of customers ... to purchase my goods ... and seedlings as well." – Farm 9*

Another form of diversification within the vegetable sales themselves was to look to the Community Supported Agriculture (CSA) model and/or wholesale contacts that would pay for product in advance and help balance the cash flow. For at least one farm, having the wholesale food bank contract made the difference in being able to make payroll or not. Farmers were mixed on the profitability of selling at farmers markets; some spoke of farmers markets being "more of a risk, like gambling actually" (Farm 2) because "you're relying on people to show up, rain or shine." (Farm 5). However, others found it a good way to connect with customers and sustain sales, and 25% (n=4) of the farms accepted nutrition benefits (e.g. SNAP / EBT) through their participation in an authorized farmers market. Half of the farms accept some form of nutrition benefits (SNAP, WIC and / or FMNP), and one farm was in the process of applying for SNAP authorization.

Growing Vegetables Profitably: Farm 15 and Farm 5 Case Studies

Only two of the farmers focused on vegetable production were having success scaling up, recouping capital invested, and starting to pay themselves a salary.

Farm 15 grows on 2 peri-urban acres leased from a personal friend and uses home property for propagation. The $10K annual lease includes access to a road and a farm building (maintained by property owner who invested $30-40K towards this recently) and has water / electricity access already in place. After 5 years building a CSA and farmers market sales, they have just reclaimed their initial $50K personal investment and will start to take a "humble" salary. They also reported receiving at least $45K in various grants during that period from local and state sources and strong support from their local agriculture professionals.

Farm 5 began over ten years ago by arranging free access to grow vegetables at office and residential buildings and then selling those vegetables at local markets and a CSA, but "the model just didn't work" with income unpredictability, high staff turnover due to seasonal work, and the logistical difficulty of aggregating crops from many small sites. "We couldn't support employees year-round" and were just "breaking even while underpaying … The value of the food we were growing on each individual site was not enough to sustain [the business]." After 5 years, they switched to a service model. They still manage the spaces with a focus on food production in the same way as before. However, now the buildings pay for this service which is seen as an attractive amenity since the vegetables are offered as a free perk for building tenants and staff. Annually, the business grows over 170K servings of vegetables, with roughly 25% of those donated to local hunger relief. The cost of the service is offset by local tax credits for stormwater and green building incentives and so the program is seen as a net positive. After 4 years under the new model, the owners are now salaried making a living wage, and there has been no staff turnover in 3 years of offering year-round positions. They manage dozens of sites and continue to expand.

Theme 4: Labor Strategies & Challenges to Scaling Up

"I'm pretty close to maxed out with how many clients I can take on and manage on my own and would need to start hiring somebody to take much more on. And it's just a chicken and egg thing. Do I try to get those clients first and then hire somebody into a situation where that income is coming in to pay them, or do you hire the capacity to take on those clients, and then go out and find them? Just both are scary, that's all" – Farm 8

All but two farms (88%) paid someone to do farm labor at least some of the time, including the 31% (n=5) of the farms that said they don't pay themselves as owners. Even the three farm owners who do pay themselves wages said that "labor is the biggest expense" for the business, adding to the financial strain. About half of the farmers used personal funds (retirement funds, personal savings, etc.) or the sales proceeds from the business to invest in the business, often in lieu of taking any wages as the owner.

"Having an employee helped grow the business so much because there is only so much, I can do myself" – Farm 14, on funding first employee with business competition winnings

There were many strategies mentioned that the farm used to find labor other than hiring a farm worker. 3 farms (18%) also talked about the labor their family members contributed. Use of volunteers (56% n=9) or apprentices / interns (18% n=3) to provide significant farm labor were the most common. Farmers expressed mixed feelings about using volunteers – one called it not "ethical" and another farm that uses volunteers acknowledged that it is technically not allowed by labor laws. Even while farmers spoke of the value to community of the volunteer experience, they also often noted inefficiency in the work accomplished.

Many of the farmers had the desire to be able to hire skilled, efficient workers, but 56% (n=9) spoke of the struggle to attract and retain them. Farmers were willing to train unskilled workers but often found the gap of skill and efficiency was hard to overcome and was disruptive to reaching the productivity needed to sustain the business. 18% (n=3) of the farmers spoke of difficulty overcoming the clash between workers "idealized" or "romanticized" expectations with the realities of working in tough physical conditions (i.e. weather, repetitive tasks). To overcome this issue, two of the farmers mentioned turning to skilled immigrant labor (such as the H2A program) to be able to reach reliable levels of efficiency. At least 3 farmers spoke of settling for young, unskilled labor because they currently "can't offer careers" meaning they were not able to offer the kind of stability and benefits the skilled workers need to be able to accept positions helping build the farm businesses.

The farmers described the conundrum of wanting to expand and grow more food but needing

more labor to do that, which requires more income to pay that labor. The challenge of needing part-time, highly flexible labor during the period of scaling up the business until it can sustain a full-time position was mentioned as a challenge by 31% (n=5) of the farms.

Theme 5: Relationships are Key

"We gave a farm tour... and the USDA and NRCS was there. The food policy director was there ... [non-profit ag organizations and local city] council members were there. The Department of Parks and Rec was there ... Those opportunities to have in-person conversations about farming ... about our challenges, about our successes, those opportunities really matter. That's all I was trying to say. So, it's not like we get funding because we are good storytellers, or we get funding because people pity the underserved or the historically underrepresented. Like there's real, dynamic partnerships happening at all levels, and people are like fighting for us." – Farm 2

The farmers relied deeply on mentors, technical assistance professionals and support networks; these relationships are vital for growth and learning. Farmers named agents from NRCS, FSA, Extension, and their state and county agriculture departments as key relationships that supported them in establishing and expanding their businesses. One farmer said in order to be successful, "you have to have a benefactor."

"The ag professional community - the Extension, FSA - we built relationships with them, and I lean on them all the time and they've helped me immensely" – Farm 14

The farmers also relied on relationships with food councils, agricultural organizations and listservs, Informal networks with other farmers and the community members provide emotional and practical support, often filling gaps left by formal systems. Of special note, even if they were running independent businesses, we saw a distinct lack of a sense of competition among urban farmers. 44% (n=7) of the farmers spoke directly of operating in collective ways –sharing tools, farming techniques, grant announcements and even the funding itself in one case. Strong connections with other farmers showed up as a quality-of-life indicator as well, with one farmer also recommending more support for farmers to stay connected to one another as what farmers need to sustain themselves in the profession.

KQ4

KQ4: What hinders or helps urban farms' ability to thrive?

Theme 1: Healthcare and Effect on Security

"I wouldn't be able to make it (without off farm job) because of healthcare. My job provides healthcare." – Farm 11

"If I didn't have Medicare, I'd be in trouble." – Farm 16

"My farmer friend was in the hospital for a week for exhaustion." – Farm 3

"It's not how much you make, it's how far your dollar goes. I don't need to make much. I just need to be able to afford the things that I need, the most basic essentials, so when you can't afford $800 a month healthcare, that's a problem … that's a third of my income" – Farm 14

Farmers spoke of maintaining health to avoid needing doctors and using farming as exercise and vegetables as medicine. Farmers used various strategies to access healthcare, including spouse employer plans and private plans, but more frequently subsidized plans such as Medicare / Medicaid or Affordable Care Act marketplace plans. Several farmers noted their ability to maintain healthcare access was subject to factors beyond their control - rising prices, and changing eligibility (due to employment, children aging out, subsidy fluctuations). Farming itself did not provide a safety net or guaranteed way to access healthcare, as it was too expensive to create employer sponsored plan, but some farmers noted how essential health insurance was to being able to manage the risks of running their own farm businesses, including time off for injury. Two of the farmers shared they also want a level of success that builds a financially sound future for themselves and enables them to attract better quality workers by being able to ensure employees can access healthcare benefits. 31% (n=5) called for the provision of guaranteed access to affordable, subsidized healthcare for farm business owners and farm workers.

Sources of Farmers' Healthcare *percentages rounded*	
31% (n=5)	Marketplace / state exchange
25% (n=4)	Medicare / Medicaid
18% (n=3)	Off-farm job
12% (n=2)	Private health insurance plan
6% (n=1)	Retirement plan
6% (n=1)	Other: health stipend

Theme 2: Zoning, permits, and regulation & neighbors

"You're under a microscope when you're an urban farm … Everybody's looking at everything that we do, so we have to do everything perfectly in compliance and to do everything perfectly in compliance is extremely expensive." – Farm 6

"I can see why people don't own a business because they want you to go through every hoop under the sun … and if you are out in the field farming, you don't know or have the wherewithal sometimes to [do it all]. I need a sales tax ID. I need to register with my town. Then I've got to have a cover crop plan. And then I've got to apply for each farmers market and have insurance and then go through the Department of Ag to get certified. It's just like a million things you have to do and then you make $100 at the farmers market … It's a deterrent … I almost gave up." – Farm 9

Farmers felt like they fell in a regulatory and zoning gap where they don't get the resources or perks of being a farmer or acknowledgement of their different needs / ways of operating.

"I kept an email [that explained county codes relevant to the farm operation] and sent it to over 5 different people over the course of 5 years, because none of them knew the code. And I'm like, this is a lack of your expertise. Why am I educating you on what should be your job?" – Farm 10

Half of the famers (n=8) described difficult experiences with dismissive, uncooperative or unknowledgeable officials or technical assistance professionals. Five farmers spoke of having explain to officials and technical assistance professionals how their business fits within current regulations and needing to repeatedly advocate for treatment as agricultural businesses. One farmer spoke of the consequences of working with an advisor for farmers who didn't understand how taxes and recent state payroll changes would affect his farm leading to lost time and revenue. One farmer ran into tax complications with grant funding after incorrect advice from an agent. One farmer listed that she sold plants and received a state registration notice with a fee which represented an out-sized proportion of her small-scale plant sales. Two of the farmers experienced threatening and unnecessarily harsh treatment related to code enforcement.

While farmers talked about the support offered by some neighbors, 25% of farmers (n=4) also highlighted how neighbors could use the regulatory framework in ways that harassed

and interfered with operating their businesses though they were following all the rules but were simply disliked. One farmer's neighbors blocked access to the property, and the farmer "had seven code enforcement officials show up at our door within one week." Two other farmers did not report problems but tacitly acknowledged this dynamic and their efforts to "keep them happy" to avoid "getting in trouble."

"The county will tell you – county code enforcement is done by neighbors. Otherwise, you can get away with a lot if nobody complains" – Farm 1

In order to make effective changes, policymakers must build trust and a process for feedback from farmers and a mechanism to make nuanced changes to the policy and regulatory landscape. 4 of the famers (25%) expressed deep ambivalence about gaining the attention of policy makers, even when describing policy and systems changes that were needed. They worried that the solutions would not be nuanced and careful enough to fix the problem without creating a worse situation of more oversight, fees or regulations. One farm exemplified this by discussing how their most profitable enterprise (overnight agrotourism equaling 30% of farm income) was shut down by local restriction of a statewide regulation to allows this practice to apply only farms in the county with over 25 acres, despite examples of regulation in other counties more inclusive of smaller farms. Experiences like those led some of the farmers to believe the less involvement the better, confessing "at best, the city ignores us" and "[the city] is silent. So that is a benefit."

Theme 3: Benefits of Grants

"I spend 30 minutes a day researching grants because that's the fastest way to upscale" – Farm 11

"I probably wouldn't be here if it weren't for those grants" – Farm 3

Every farm received grant funding (*one farmer uses equipment that was technically funded not directly to his business but through a grant he wrote and received through a non-profit that he also helps run). Grants were crucial for the business development of all the farms interviewed. Most common (88%, n=14) was grant-funded equipment and infrastructure such as high tunnel / greenhouses, pollinator habitat, irrigation, deer fencing, tools and walk behind tractors, signage, raised beds walk-in coolers, commercial kitchen space, mushroom lab, wash station, and other permanent improvements. The NRCS high tunnel grant was the most common, received by at least 25% of the farmers, and this grant got high praise for being a reasonable and effective grant process.

Labor was another common item farmers used funding to pay for (31% n=5). Three farmers received funding to pay for apprentices, and another hosted an intern who was paid through their school directly. In addition, one farm chose to use the winnings from a small business competition to fund their first full-time worker.

Farmers most valued this type of "all-purpose" funding that came with few stipulations on how it could be used. Another farmer received a grant meant to spur small businesses (not just farms) offered through an energy company. Others received payments for emergency relief for droughts, floods or other disruptions.

Farmers also reported receiving grants for marketing materials and building websites, for mental health support, childcare (through a small business grant which was used to pay a family member). Farmers with dependent children are keenly aware of the balancing act of financial tradeoffs they had to engage in.

> *Small business "all-purpose grant that just wanted a small follow up like 'what'd you use the money on?' It was great that they didn't limit me on how I could spend the money. I bought tools and fruit trees" to eventually expand the farm's products. – Farm 15*

They felt some indirect funding benefits from increased local purchasing from food assistance organizations given more funding in response to the pandemic.

Theme 4: Difficulties with Grants

> *"Sometimes the grants, regardless of what level they come from, can just be band-aids when farmers are experiencing those ebbs and flows of hardship." – Farm 2*

The farmers raised several concerns and difficulties they experience with grants programs which fell in the following categories:

Timelines and submission requirements: Famers pointed out that many grant applications are due in the height of the growing season. To compensate, 3 of the farmers spoke of pre-writing grants in the winter season. However, requirements could change or as in one reported case, new supporting documentation can be added, leading to farmers still not able to submit applications. Other times, the systems were too restrictive and difficult to navigate with famers finding out after applications closed that their file size was too large, etc. Some felt only organizations with staff or those who could hire a grant writer would be successful in competing for this funding. They called for a redesign of the cycles and submission process to better foster farmer participation.

Eligibility and "middlemen" organizations: Several farmers spoke of frustrations in having to work through an agency or non-profit organization to access grant money because as for-profit businesses they were not eligible to apply on their own. They felt it would be more efficient to have the "middleman" removed in order to secure grant funding directly from national, state and local governments. At times, the farmers saw these organizations as self-dealing or favoring their friends, developers and people outside the community, instead of the local farmer in need. Meaning, others see gains with no local impact.

Bias: 18% (n=3) farmers of color spoke about biases they encountered when seeking funding, with 2 of them noting the reduction or elimination of grant programs that would have benefited their farms. In another case, the famer felt the bias was against their agricultural practice (sustainable / organic), and resubmitted the same application (to a committee of all conventional farmers) the following year, removing those references and receiving the funding. At times, in the institutional relationships that shape farm sustainability, access and fairness are recurring concerns. At least 2 famers spoke of joining local boards and serving as grant reviewers to be able to understand local grant dynamics and better position themselves.

> *"Farming is … a secret society. Most of the people that are applying for the grants are either well-known or they know some of the people that's connected, and I'm meaning the local grants, not so much national. So, most of the time, I feel like the pick the people they already know … a friend of a friend." – Farm 11*

Reimbursement grants: At times the farmers had difficulty matching funding to the most pressing needs to help expand their businesses. One described the patchwork of grants as "band-aid" solutions. Even when receiving funding, several farmers mentioned issues with reimbursement grants. In one case, the farmer was funded for a small tractor, but due to lack of capital and the inability to secure a loan, he had to use that funding for smaller hand tools instead under the reimbursement terms.

Invasive grant conditions: When asked what make the farmer decide not to pursue a grant, farmers noted overly broad and at times invasive conditions placed on funding. Examples included limiting flexibility as the farm develops by requiring infrastructure remain in place for years ("what if I need to move it or use the space differently?") and granting access to the farm property for inspections that were not clearly defined or limited in scope ("I don't have anything to hide, but I am a private person. I don't really like people coming on my land.").

Reporting metrics and methods: Several farms discussed burdensome reporting requirements that they felt wouldn't reliably "prove" the effectiveness of the funding given the confounding

> *"I got a [walk in] cooler and that was very nice. But I'll tell you the **days** that it takes for to tell them how many pounds went through the cooler How many dollars went through the cooler? More than the pounds and dollars than were going through my other cooler before … but this was a bad year for us from a weather standpoint… The biggest loss was this year of all the years that I've been farming … So, the yield is down this year after I got the cooler. So, the numbers are not going to make them happy." – Farm 1*

variables in play. One farmer had to submit structural plans that mapped out where each screw bought with grant funding was used. Also, farmers felt the true impact was hard to quantify in grant reports, "a lot of little stories get lost in that." One wanted to be able to submit pictures and videos. In all, there seemed to be consternation and a desire to realign the perceived mismatch between metrics asked for by funders and what farmers were able to collect to demonstrate fulfillment of the objectives.

Theme 5: Perspectives on Non-Profit Farms and Ag Organizations

This study was intentionally limited to for-profit urban farmers to better understand their particular motivations and experiences. However, given the prevalence of urban farming projects currently organized under non-profit or municipal structures, for-profit urban farms seem to comprise the minority. For example, as shown in the Urban Farm Mapping project (viewable on the ECO City Farms website) that the research team undertook, of the 113 entries on the New Jersey Urban Agriculture Web Map as of Spring 2026, only 9 entries are listed as urban farms, all of which are non-profit entities.

> *"Because the USDA grant says you have to have a non-profit organization to apply for this grant … then it's not actually for urban farmers. It's for urban agriculture organizations whose business is not growing food, it's programming." – Farm 14*

> *"Because my business is a for-profit, and the greenhouse [that I lease] is owned by a non-profit, sometimes it's a little challenging figuring out if grants [and] loan programs apply or not." – Farm 8*

Therefore, it is not surprising that many of the farmers made comments about the interaction of for-profit and non-profit urban farming ventures. The for-profit farmers voiced difficulty accessing some grants that are open only to non-profit farmers, feeling that non-profit farmers have the advantage of dedicated staff to search for, write and manage the grants. At the same time, the goals of a non-profit farm were described as diverging from the central purpose of the for-profit farms (i.e. producing food as scale).

This was the only point of competition mentioned in the interviews – one farmer described it as a "scarcity mindset" leading their local non-profits to compete with her for grants rather than collaborating as she sought a non-profit partner. Eventually, she started her own "non-profit wing" of the farm instead. Another farmer described these gatekeeping behaviors as "like crabs in a bucket." Many of the farmers spoke of how felt they had to create relationships with non-profit farms / organizations to gain access to grant funds. In addition, 25% (n=4) of the farms have either begun to transition entirely, started a non-profit "wing" in addition to their for-profit business, or are considering doing so within the next two years.

> *"If you don't have a non-profit attached it seems almost impossible... to just do vegetables growing on a small scale on an urban lot. It's just ... the math isn't mathing as the kids say ... There are no for-profit farms in [the city] anymore without a non-profit attached. They've all closed*
> *– Farm 14*

Some of the reasons to transition or advantages were that non-profits could use volunteers without running afoul of labor laws (a labor source seen as essential and part of the community model of several of the farms), being eligible for more funding directly (even with the tradeoff of more administrative work), tax benefits, and accessing land (in one case, if the farm transitioned to non-profit they would be able to sign a low-cost decades-long lease rather than being restricted to risky short-term leases with the landowner).

KQ5

KQ5: What is the value of urban farms?

Theme 1: Urban Farms Bring Valued Food to the Local Economy

When asked about their motivations for farming, 38% (n=6) of the farmers described the lack of access to this healthy, locally produced food as a failure of a broken system and indicated that their businesses on the whole aim to provide an alternative to the current food system the overcomes its shortcomings on prioritizing community and environmental health. Over half of the farms (56% n=9) described methods they provide free food to their local communities through donations to organizations and individuals, providing a free CSA box option and giving free shares to neighbors of the farms.

> *"I did a lot of giving, probably more giving than what I should have … I do know how to run a business, but I feel like I let my heart get in the way." – Farm 11*

When looking at sales channels, a similar story of local impact emerges. As a consequence of the pandemic, half of the farmers reported a surge of interest in eating local or growing food at home that had positive effects on their business, such as increased sales of CSA shares and desire for plant starts and growing at home. The diverse sales channels demonstrated their local impact; the most common sales channels reported were informal sales to family and friends (69% n=11) and wholesale accounts (69% n =11). Restaurant sales were the most common wholesale accounts (44% n=7) and in the interviews, 25% (n=4) of the farms talked about contracts to supply food banks as convenient, aligned with their motivations for farming, and in at least one case, more profitable than farmers market sales (because of reduced post-harvest costs). Half of the farms sold at farmers markets. All of this speaks to the community-centric focus and impact of the farm-produced food and the symbiotic relationship between farms and the local community and other businesses and organizations.

Theme 2: Urban Farms Improve Environment and Revitalize Underutilized Spaces

"We have open space … a community walking path that we built … Basically I feel like I'm maintaining a park that everybody enjoys, and I go broke with." – Farm 6

75% (n=12) of the farmers spoke directly to the need to produce food in a way that is healthy for the environment with the goal of creating more capacity in the system to sustain healthy community life. Farmers are willing to use spaces that otherwise would be untended to and left vacant, such as green spaces, unused lots, and historical buildings / properties with limited other applications. The farms are doing valuable work remediating those spaces and the land to improve the environment and make it healthier for local people. The farmers spoke of the environmental benefits they bring to their cities in open green space, reduced stormwater runoff, trash pickup and site maintenance, and reduced pollution / remediating contaminated sites.

> *"Finding access to land is really difficult and sort of more traditional growing space is really, really difficult." – Farm 5*

Theme 3: Urban Farms Provide Education / Training and Seek to Offer "Good Jobs"

"I'm trying to let people make careers out of this" – Farm 5

In a farmer's life, connecting with the people in their community beyond a sales transaction is extremely important. Farmers are finding ways to make their farm a valuable resource for the community. 75% (n=12) of the farms talked about educational events and/or working with volunteers to teach others how to grow food. From events, volunteer days, tours, educational opportunities, they are learning to present their farm as a solution to many food related needs and be a vital resource to connecting neighbors to healthy, real food. This almost always goes beyond informal training, since 88% (n=14) of the farms mentioned paying someone besides the owner for farm labor. 25% (n=4) of the farmers noted that have an explicit goal of being to grow their businesses enough to provide "good jobs" for local workers. They defined this as jobs that include healthcare, a living wage, time off, and good working conditions. It's clear these farms desire to become drivers in the local economy if they can find ways to overcome the challenges to do so.

Conclusion: What Supports are Needed to Sustain Urban Farmers?

"We have to view [urban farming] as a public good that needs to be invested in and supported. Otherwise, I don't think it can flourish" – Farm 5

Urban Farms as a Public Good in Need of Systematic Support

As has been noted, the farms are aware of how their communities offer a lot of support to them through in-kind donations of materials and volunteer labor, fundraising and visiting, and buying products, but this support is often not able to provide the scale and consistency of support these businesses need to flourish.

Organized, larger scale support is needed, according to 69% (n=11) of the farmers who participated. Several pointed out that many parts of agriculture are recognized as public goods. 44% (n=7) of them specifically described their work as a "public good," "civic service," or for "the common good" and the "good of the community." Urban farms produce market goods, but they also produce uncompensated public value. Under the present system, much of the cost of that public value is transferred onto farmers, their families, their bodies, and their personal financial security.

Most of the farmers described producing public benefits for which their businesses were not compensated. This study did not include a public-goods valuation, however, several discrete examples of the impacts of this dynamic were mentioned in the data:

- Businesses often absorbed the cost of environmental remediation, food donations, neighborhood maintenance, and community engagement and education.
- Owners forgoing wages, in some cases for years
- Personal savings and retirement funds provided operating capital
- Spouses or off-farm jobs provided health insurance
- Reliance on free or relationship-dependent land access
- High-quality training provided for volunteers, interns, apprentices, and farm workers, which led to careers in agriculture for several farm workers

As these farmers see their work as fundamentally and primarily a public good, they also believe they should have access to proportionate systemic municipal and governmental support to alleviate this public value gap.

Farmer Recommendations for a Framework of Systemic Support	
50% (n=8)	Ongoing financial support (subsidies, stipends, universal wage, etc.)
31% (n=5)	Healthcare (guaranteed affordable access, for owners and farm workers)
25% (n=4)	Funding interns and apprenticeships
12% (n=2)	Waivers or reductions on fees and certain regulations
Single farmer responses: Universal Pre-K, marketing and tax prep support	

In closing, the farmers themselves made the most persuasive and articulate case for why they are calling for these systematic financial and policy support for small-scale farmers:

Farming "is extremely hard to access unless you have financial support that goes way beyond anything the farm will produce … How does a beginning gardener, even if you have easy access to land for free, even then, how to you get equipment to get going so you are a little bit efficient? … The USDA and the federal government's priorities need to be adjusted so that something more comes to the small farmers who are trying to get going." – Farm 1

"The things that are valuable, that matter, and are going to be the legacy we leave for future generations, you can't make money on that" – Farm 2

Calling for exemptions or reductions in permit and filing fees for small scale farms: [For the county / state], "it's not a lot of money, but it is helping us. Because you are growing a farm, you are growing food trying to meet the needs of communities where there might be lack, so I think giving us a waiver on some things, or a reduced rate" is merited." – Farm 4

"Personally, I know a lot of people who would love to be in urban agriculture but have either decided not to or have decided to leave, because they are unable to support themselves financially when it comes to housing, healthcare, all the things you need to live. So, I think support for that is paramount" – Farm 5

"This is the impossible dream … And I know that you guys are training farmers to do something analogous to what I am doing, and it sounds like you want to provide a bit more support to them, but I think you are leading them down a path of demise. There are not the supports in place for urban farming as for-profit farmers. They don't exist and the time of change that I am talking about most likely is not going to happen and these poor farmers that you are training to be farmers might make a little bit of cash, but they are going to have to be teachers and manage their little farms on their summer vacations and if the crop doesn't align, then they are not going to grow that." – Farm 6

"We're probably growing on less than one acre, and we've brought in from vegetable sales and all that, like $100,000 in a year, but what does that actually afford you once you've paid the expenses and the labor and the taxes? … You should be able to farm and make a living do it. We need farmers. It's the most basic of things … Politicians want to talk money, so I would like

them to know that urban agriculture bolsters the local economy, it creates jobs. If you support it, and you encourage it, it'll be good for not only community health, but economic health, environmental health. Urban farms help deal with stormwater runoff and all different things. There are many benefits. And I also want them to know that most farmers, like myself, are doing it because we love it, and also because we are not being supported, sometimes we have to rely on government programs. As a farmer, I've been on Medicaid and food stamps and that seems backwards to think that a farmer would need food stamps, but when you need employees, and you need to pay them, and your farm is not making enough to pay yourself. It's not because farmers are bad businesspeople. Like you want to see my business plan? You want to look at my books? We've thought about this and are actively trying to find ways to make this more profitable. We want our employees to have healthcare and retirement accounts. That should be the bare minimum."

– Farm 14

"We all have to eat … and it's a noble profession to decide to do and I think that farmers should be guaranteed a salary outside of what they sell. The government should provide a salary, a base salary for farmers, and let them earn what they can off their crops too. Because people are already not paying enough for the food that they buy from us, and we need more farmers … I think we would see more farmers growing more food for our local communities if there were provided salaries, like a base level … that takes so much pressure off of the business and the farmer itself because then more of our critical living expenses are covered … that would energize more farmers to grow more food and to be more secure in the lives they are living."

– Farm 15

Visit ecocityfarms.org to see more data from the study.