

# ASSESSING THE SOCIOECONOMIC AND ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT OF A MULTI-FARM CSA FOR URBAN GROWERS AND CITY RESIDENTS IN BUFFALO, NY

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In Collaboration With

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# TABLE OF CONTENTS



Executive Summary	1
Project Overview	2
Methodology	3
Key Findings	4
Challenges & Opportunities	6
Project Overview	7



# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY



This research project set out to explore how a collaborative, multi-farm Community Supported Agriculture (CSA) program could improve food access in Buffalo, NY while supporting small-scale urban farmers. Buffalo faces deep food insecurity, especially among Black and low-income communities, while local farmers struggle with unstable markets and limited profitability.

Led by Groundwork Market Garden and supported by the Greater Buffalo Urban Growers (GBUG), the project engaged six urban farms and three partner organizations. Together, they developed and piloted a 10-week CSA program that distributed 500 boxes of fresh produce to underserved residents across the city.



Despite challenges—including farm closures, loss of key collaborators, and logistical hurdles—the pilot demonstrated the viability and value of a multi-farm CSA model. Preliminary results suggest improved farmer collaboration, increased market access, and strong community interest in fresh, local food.



Receipients of shares at  
Senior Apartments in Buffalo

# PROJECT OVERVIEW



## Background

Buffalo, NY is among the most food-insecure cities in the U.S., with over 13% of residents and more than 20% of children facing food insecurity. These issues disproportionately affect Black residents, who are six times more likely than white residents to live in neighborhoods without a grocery store.

Simultaneously, the region's urban farmers face numerous barriers: inconsistent profitability, lack of access to capital, and limited marketing channels. Many farms are run by historically underserved producers, including Black, Hispanic, women, and LGBTQIA+ growers.

This project aimed to address both problems by piloting a multi-farm CSA model that could consolidate resources, streamline marketing, and equitably distribute fresh food throughout Buffalo's low-income neighborhoods.

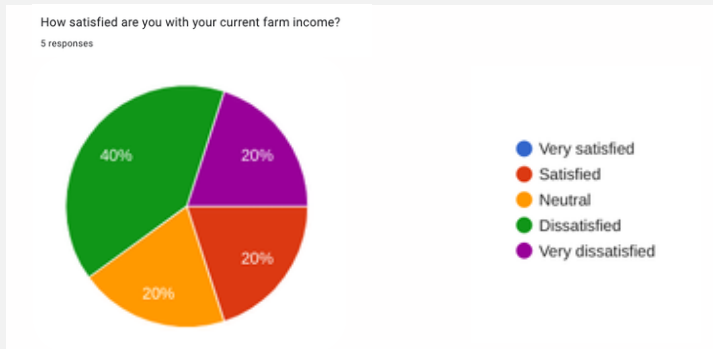
## Objectives

The project focused on four key research objectives:

1. Food Access & Affordability: Assess how CSA participation impacts residents' access to and ability to afford fresh, local food.
2. Farmer Profitability & Quality of Life: Evaluate changes in income, satisfaction, and working conditions for participating growers.
3. Environmental Stewardship: Determine whether participation enables or supports regenerative and conservation farming practices.
4. Operational Documentation: Record all financial, logistical, and organizational elements involved in implementing a multi-farm CSA.



# METHODOLOGY



Item	# of Units	Amt (un or #)	Value Per (un or #)	Total Value	Farm
Malabar Spinach	50	25	\$6	\$150	PFC
African Eggplant	50	46	\$3.50	\$161.00	PFC
Herbs	6	6	\$2.50	\$15.00	Brewster
Lettuce	5	5	\$4	\$20	Brewster
Beans	5	5	\$3.00	\$15.00	Brewster
Basil	20	20	\$2.50	\$50.00	MAP
Mushrooms	50	25	\$12	\$300	Flat 12
Herbs	24	24	\$2.50	\$60.00	GWMG
Shishito	16	16	\$4	\$64	GWMG
Green Tomato	2	2	\$4	\$8	GWMG
Cherry Tomato	22	22	\$4	\$88	GWMG
TOTAL COST:				\$931	

SHARE CONTENTS		
Item	Amt	Value
Malabar Spinach	1/2 #	\$3
African Eggplant	1#	\$3.00
Cucumber	1 un	\$1.50
Herb	1 oz bunch	\$2.50
Mushroom	1/2 #	\$6
Bean/Shishito/Bell/Cherry Tom	var.	\$4
Total:		\$20

## Data Collection

### Methods

A mixed-methods approach was used to assess outcomes.

Activities included:

- Surveys: Two surveys were created—one for farmers, one for consumers. These collected data on demographics, production practices, food access, purchasing behavior, and perceived quality of life.
- Program Tracking: The team recorded detailed operational metrics, including:
  - Labor hours
  - Program expenses
  - CSA income
  - Crops grown and distributed
  - Number of farms and shares



In addition to the aforementioned data collection, qualitative notes & observations were also recorded throughout the process to highlight challenges, insights, and community responses.



# KEY FINDINGS



## CSA Implementation

- 500 boxes distributed over 10 weeks (July–September 2024)
- 2,354 pounds of produce shared (average ~5 lbs/box)
- 14,236 servings provided (~28 servings per box)
- Distribution sites included senior housing, public housing, and community events
- Neighborhoods served: ZIP codes 14201, 14206, 14208, 14210, 14211, 14212

## Pilot Program Costs

Food Purchase	\$ 10,339.87
Materials/Supplies	\$ 1,000.00
Labor	\$ 5,000.00
Stipend- Delivery	\$ 2,500.00
Stipend- Farmer	\$ 5,000.00
Administration	\$ 2,000.00
<b>Program Total</b>	<b>\$ 25,839.87</b>



# KEY FINDINGS



## Farmer Survey

As part of the project evaluation, five participating farms responded to a survey that captured demographic, financial, environmental, and quality of life data. Here's a summary of key findings:

### Who Responded

- Farms ranged in size from under 0.5 acres to 3 acres
- Most farmers identified as women or people of color
- The majority of respondents relied on farming as their primary income source

### Sales & CSA Participation

- Gross farm sales ranged from \$12,000 to \$460,000
- The percentage of total farm sales attributed to the CSA was relatively low (~0.0073%–3%), indicating the CSA functioned as a supplemental income source
- Despite modest earnings from the CSA, all respondents indicated a strong likelihood to participate again, with 4 out of 5 rating their interest as “5” on a 5-point scale

### Environmental Practices

- 2 of 5 farmers reported that participation in the CSA helped them improve or implement sustainable practices such as:
  - Crop rotation
  - Cover cropping
  - Farm planning

### Quality of Life & Job Satisfaction

- 3 of 5 reported improved mental health, reduced stress, or greater job satisfaction
- Comments emphasized the emotional reward of serving community members and the value of being part of a collective initiative

### Suggestions for Improvement

Farmers suggested:

- More streamlined produce collection logistics
- Mid-season check-ins and clearer communication
- Better integration of CSA into their overall sales strategy

# CHALLENGES & OPPORTUNITIES



- Four farms initially interested closed during the planning phase due to financial/personal hardships
- A key community partner passed away suddenly, forcing last-minute changes to the CSA distribution plan
- Inconsistent delivery locations made it difficult to collect pre/post consumer data



Despite these setbacks, the CSA ran successfully with community support and alternative partnerships.

This pilot reinforced both the need and potential for cooperative CSA models in urban areas. Observations of trends throughout the project suggest the following opportunities & takeaways:

- Flexibility is essential when working with small farms under financial pressure.
- Collective planning and trust-building take time but yield significant benefits.
- Equity-focused marketing strategies, such as subsidized or free shares, can expand reach and social impact.
- Stable distribution points and longer-term commitments would improve data reliability and participant engagement in future iterations.

The CSA also helped highlight deeper structural challenges—like urban land insecurity, mobility & transportation deficits, and a lack of financial buffers—that need broader policy support to resolve.



# CONCLUSION



This two-year study explored the viability and impact of a collaborative, multi-farm CSA model in Buffalo, NY. In response to intersecting issues of urban food insecurity and farm sustainability, the project successfully brought together six urban farms and three partner organizations to launch a 10-week pilot CSA. The program delivered 500 produce boxes—totaling over 2,300 pounds of food and 14,000+ servings—to households in Buffalo’s most underserved neighborhoods.

Despite financial and logistical challenges, the pilot demonstrated that collective marketing and shared operations can work for small urban farms. Farmers reported greater satisfaction, peer support, and knowledge of cooperative models. Some farms were also able to implement new sustainable practices. While some data collection goals proved difficult to achieve due to distribution logistics, the project met its core objectives and delivered meaningful community benefit.



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