

# Urban Agriculture in Pennsylvania: Assessing Best Practices for Historically Marginalized Farmers

NE SARE Project #GNE18-190

## Overview

Initiatives and policy have encouraged sustainable agriculture in cities across the U.S., yet farmers and growers still experience multiple environmental, economic, and social challenges unique to their urban context. These include access to land and water resources, poor soil quality, and space constraints. For agriculturalists who identify as racial, ethnic, and gender minorities, these challenges are often compounded by historical and current systems that have institutionalized racism, persistent socio-economic disadvantage, and unequal access to resources critical for growing food.

## Barriers to Sustainability

**Little research has examined how urban farmers and gardeners navigate these challenges and craft successful sustainability strategies.** To fill this gap, this project aimed to develop evidence-based recommendations for practices and procedures that encourage sustainable urban agriculture and improved productivity and profitability for historically marginalized farmers and growers in the Northeast.



## Study Location

All data for this project was collected in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania – a city regularly ranked within the top areas for progressive urban agriculture policy in the United States.

## KEY TAKEAWAYS:

1. **There are intersecting issues throughout U.S. agricultural systems** that affect urban women farmer's land access, tenure, education, networking organizations, and opportunities for mentorship.
2. Rather than growing solo, some women establish farms or gardens and create **formal partnerships with local non-governmental organizations, elementary schools, and/or faith-based institutions**
3. Educational programs and services offered by urban agriculture non-governmental organizations provide **supportive spaces for women growers to build community and gain confidence**

## Methods

Data for this research was collected via

- **30 interviews** with women farmers, growers, food activists, and agricultural educators
- **15 weeks** of participant observation at agricultural and environmental workshops, volunteer days, working group meetings, and networking events
- **Urban Farmer & Grower Survey** with 23 respondents
- **Photovoice stories from 18 farmers and growers** Photovoice is a community-based research tool that asks participants to use photography to represent and reflect on lived experiences and use their images to document needs, promote dialogue and influence policy

## KEY TAKEAWAYS (cont.):

4.

**Urban agriculture has contributed to the sustainability of Pittsburgh's neighborhoods** by:

- Creating opportunities for community development
- Increasing opportunities for resident education and leadership
- Empowering growers and their families

5.

There are **several constraints to sustainable production for marginalized urban farmers:**

- Bureaucratic red tape
- Community support
- Operator finances
- Inconsistent volunteers
- Isolation
- Lack of mentorship
- Lack of (relevant) information
- Land access and tenure
- Marketing & communication

6.

The following **areas necessitate greater attention from researchers and extension educators:**

- Baseline information on policies, programs, services, & their effects on growers and communities
- Best cover crops for raised beds
- Location-specific & solution-oriented experiments
- Low-cost & organic methods of soil restoration
- Marketing & distribution strategies for small-scale farms

7.

**Policy and practice updates are needed to create equitable spaces** for historically underserved farmers:

- Improved workshops & trainings
- Accessible timing & venue
- Reduced/free soil testing
- Standardized, online application systems
- Increased advertisement for resource, finance, and leadership opportunities

## Photovoice Story Examples



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### "Collaboration"

We work not as an island; we work in partnership with many allies. We receive donations from private individuals and gifts of time, labor, and in-kind resources.



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### "Building Together"

## Full Report and Other Resources

- ❖ NE SARE Final Project Report  
[www.projects.sare.org/sare\\_project/gne18-190/](http://www.projects.sare.org/sare_project/gne18-190/)
- ❖ Photovoice digital gallery  
[www.thefemalefarmerphotovoiceproject.org](http://www.thefemalefarmerphotovoiceproject.org)

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