



Environmental Justice Showcase Community Urban Agriculture Project Factsheet

Environmental Justice Showcase Community Pilot:

EPA Region 7 has identified several neighborhoods throughout the urban core of Kansas City, Mo., and Kan., as environmental justice (EJ) communities. These neighborhoods are also part of the Region 7 Environmental Justice Showcase Community pilot project. This is a national initiative to address environmental justice challenges in ten U.S. urban areas. Leaders from these communities were asked to identify their top environmental concerns as well as their solutions to these problems. Some of the main environmental concerns the communities identified were vacant and abandoned properties, unhealthy homes, stormwater runoff, flooding, illegal dumping, and improper waste disposal.

Areas of emphasis:

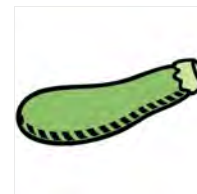
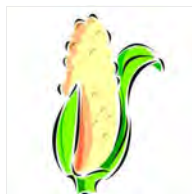
The Region 7 EJ Showcase Community project focuses on three key areas to address environmental concerns and demonstrate results such as increased community engagement, clearly visible environmental improvements, and increased capacity in the community to address environmental and health-related challenges. The following have been identified as key areas for the Showcase Community Project:

1. Healthy Communities (including healthy homes, healthy schools, and other quality of life concerns);
2. Urban Waters (water where people live, work and play, including: surface water and water conservation); and
3. Vacant and Abandoned Property (including: brownfields, land revitalization, and urban agriculture).

Urban Agriculture:

Urban agriculture was identified by EJ Showcase communities as a possible solution to some of their concerns regarding vacant and abandoned land. Urban agriculture can be defined as a small business that is located within or very close to a town, a city, or a metropolitan area which grows or raises food and non-food products. These products are then processed and distributed very close to where they were produced, usually within the same urban area and often within the same neighborhood or city block. Generally, urban agricultural methods focus on recycling nutrients, improving soil, and encouraging plant and animal growth without the use of hazardous chemicals. When looking at available urban land in the Region 7 Showcase area, it is important to note the following features:

- available open spaces in the urban areas almost always have unknown soil conditions, due to land-use history;
- vacant properties in urban areas are almost always a source of blight;
- vacant or unused lots in urban areas often serve as illegal dumping grounds; and
- unused urban lots increase storm water runoff due to the presence of compacted soil on previously developed land.





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Project Purpose and Goals:

The purpose of the Urban Agriculture EJ Showcase Community project is to provide technical support on urban farming to communities which face challenges including poverty, environmental stressors, and difficulties in starting urban agriculture projects. Given the potential for contaminated soil, it is necessary to test the soil to be sure that contaminants are not present in levels which are harmful to human health. Soil testing will only be done at sites which are identified as priority sites by the community and satisfy pre-established criteria. Soil samples will be taken by a contractor and testing will be completed in the EPA Region 7 lab. Contaminants tested for will include pesticides, lead, arsenic, and other potentially harmful metals. Test results will be shared with and explained to the community. If possible, best management practices will be used at sites where traditional organic agriculture cannot take place due to the presence of high levels of certain contaminants.

Once sites are selected, tested, and determined safe for use, community members who work at the sites will be assisted with technical support through one-on-one assistance and group workshops. This technical support will focus on topics such as produce growth without chemicals, garden maintenance, and care for garden land, as well as market evaluation and business planning for those who intend to sell their crop.

Site Selection:

The Region 7 EJ staff developed a process to help with site selection. Each site will be evaluated using the following criteria:

- soil condition based on previous land use;
- ownership and location of the vacant lot;
- water supply and availability;
- site accessibility and safety;
- community capacity; and
- business/ sales potential in the case of market production.

These criteria will help with selecting sites which are both suitable for agriculture and sustainable for long term use by the community.

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URBAN AG CONNECTIONS

Studies on urban agriculture show that, over time, urban gardens tend to strengthen neighborhoods, create bonds, empower citizens and increase community activism.

Addressing the lack of food in 'food deserts', and the negative health effects associated with food scarcity has recently become a national priority. First Lady Michelle Obama spoke at the NAACP convention in Kansas City on July 12, in promotion of her "Let's Move" campaign which aims at fighting childhood obesity. She acknowledged that without equal access to fresh fruits and vegetables, obesity would continue to plague low income and disadvantaged populations disproportionately.

The Green Impact Zone, a 150 block area in Kansas City's Urban Core which has been identified for revitalization, contains many showcase neighborhoods, and it is characteristic of EJ neighborhoods as a whole. Almost 25 percent of lots are vacant, and another 15 percent have vacant structures. The unemployment rate is as high as 50 percent in some areas. Average home prices hover around \$30,000, and the average annual household income is \$13,000.

It has been demonstrated in Kansas City that Urban Agriculture can be successful at combating food deserts, urban blight, and environmental injustice; however, community need exceeds current capacity and supply.