

**Assessing Different Mechanisms of Community Engagement in
Urban Farms in Philadelphia, U.S.**

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Abstract

Previous research has indicated that urban agriculture offers a wide variety of health, economic, and social benefits for participants. Urban farms need to consider what factors and mechanisms allow them to engage more of their community to share these benefits. Examining four case studies of urban farms across Philadelphia, this paper strives to illuminate the lessons and themes of community engagement in urban agriculture. I draw upon information from prior research, online sources, in-person site visits, and semi-structured interviews with farm operators. The findings offer insight into how events and programming, marketing and outreach, leadership and vision, funding and partnerships, and physical design all interact to shape an urban farm's ability to engage with its community.

Keywords: urban agriculture, urban farm, nonprofit, urban development, urban regeneration, place-making, resiliency, poverty alleviation, neighborhood revitalization, community, social accessibility, social capital, community-building, community development, empowerment, food justice, food access, nutrition, sustainability, green space, environment, environmental stewardship, education, self-sufficiency, youth development, public space

Disciplines: Agricultural and Resource Economics | Urban Studies | Public Policy | Business

Table of Contents

Abstract	1
Introduction and Literature Review	4
What is Urban Agriculture?	5
Urban Agriculture: Motivations and Benefits	7
Why Philadelphia?	12
What is Community Engagement and Why Does it Matter?	15
Data Collection and Methodology	17
Philadelphia Case Studies	19
Overview of Case Studies	19
Mort Brooks Memorial Farm	22
Background and Mission	22
Community Engagement: Representation and Communication	24
Henry Got Crops Farm	27
Background and Mission	28
Community Engagement: Balancing Viability with Social Mission	30
Life Do Grow Farm	32
Background and Mission	33
Community Engagement: Programming for Community Needs	Error! Bookmark not defined.
Sankofa Farm	38
Background and Mission	39
Community Engagement: Developing an Identity	40
Community Engagement: Making Connections	42
Thematic Analysis	43
Mechanisms for Community Engagement	43

Physical Community Engagement	44
Directorial Community Engagement	48
Essentialities and Limitations of Partnerships	51
Discussion and Looking Forward	53
Limitations of Research	53
Challenges and Next Steps	54
Questions for Future Research	55
References	55
Resources	58
Appendices	60
Farm Site Checklist	60
Interview Questions	60

I. Introduction and Literature Review

A. What is Urban Agriculture?

Urban agriculture contains a multitude of definitions and typologies. Common categories of urban agriculture include individual gardens, community gardens, community farms, and commercial farms. One dynamic typology tested with 52 urban agriculture initiatives in Germany categorizes urban agriculture by its motivation (self-supply, socio-cultural, or commercial), its distribution level (micro, meso, and macro) and the level of actors involved (private households and individuals, associations and start-ups, or companies) (Krikser et al., 2016). Others characterize urban agriculture types by the participant's roles (owner, volunteer, or employer), the level of food distribution (consumed versus sold or donated), and site connectivity (private or common land) (Kirby et al., 2021). What most of these typologies share is the recognition that the roles of the people and the produce of an urban agriculture project help distinguish its specific type. Additionally, urban agriculture is often characterized not only by its form and function but by its higher motivations and social aims, which will be discussed in the following section.

By selecting case studies in Philadelphia, the larger political, historical, and economic context of urban agriculture in Philadelphia shapes the process and outcomes of this study. Thus, I model my definition of urban community farm by the definition used by Philadelphia's first-ever Urban Agriculture Comprehensive Plan, which is currently in the midst of being created and applied to urban agriculture projects city-wide. The city's project team defines two distinct characteristics of community farms as opposed to other urban agriculture types: (1) unified

management of planning and beds; (2) run by a community organization, group, or non-profit.¹

Beyond these characteristics, I consider an additional factor: food use and distribution, which further distinguishes a community farm from a private garden or private farm (produce is available for consumption to the general public, rather than only garden owners or grocery stores and restaurants).

Thus, for the purpose of this research, the definition of urban community farm can essentially be broken down into its three component words: (1) integrated into an *urban* landscape; (2) collectively managed by a larger *community* organization or non-profit; and (3) distributes its *produce* to individuals and groups outside of those involved in food growing or those using the produce for commercial gain. At this point, it is important to acknowledge that the multifunctionality and ambiguity inherent in many urban farms' operations allow for a high degree of overlap into other types of urban agriculture. For instance, several of the farms studied also have a connection to community gardens. Nevertheless, the presence of unified management and motives beyond gardener-specific food production establish my four case studies as examples of urban community farms.

This research seeks to investigate the challenges and successes of urban community farms, rather than other types of urban agriculture, for several reasons. One is that the majority of studies on the benefits of urban agriculture, as discussed below, focus on community gardens where individuals own and tend to their personal lots. Unlike community gardens, community

¹ (2019, December 3). *Philadelphia's Urban Agriculture Plan: Public Meeting No. 1*. <https://docs.google.com/presentation/d/e/2PACX-1vSdyCtS3sSdzaWYGfneeBFnsrTyP7x1zYGRXeU4o5boGdnzF81tZRYzyb9CInLpqgoCM1R6hkmO-fcH/pub?start=false&loop=true&delayms=3000&slide=id.p1>

farms possess a larger organizational structure with a variety of staff, directors, and partners often involved in selecting and pursuing common goals beyond food production and distribution, frequently with an educational focus. Thus, these farms are able to plan and implement a broader variety of campaigns, programs, and activities that cater to the general public, rather than individual gardeners. Certainly, not all urban gardens or farms need to aspire to greater social benefits. However, urban community farms by design have the motive to serve their community at large, and thus are the most appropriate target for this research, as they both (1) seek and benefit from mechanisms that obtain some degree of community engagement, which is the question asked in this study, and (2) offer the most relevant insights into how to improve community engagement practices, which can also be useful to other urban social enterprises.

B. Urban Agriculture: Motivations and Benefits

Cities face a complex web of political, economic, and social problems—poverty, food insecurity, unemployment, racial oppression—that urban agriculture may have the potential to help alleviate. The goals of urban agriculture projects often reflect an awareness and desire to address many of these challenges. For instance, some urban agriculture initiatives promote themselves as affordable and accessible providers of fresh produce in food deserts, or advocates for economic and racial justice, or sources of skills-training and job opportunities. A broad base of scholarship that examines a wide array of benefits stemming from urban agriculture solidifies some people's perception of urban agriculture as an urban panacea. Nevertheless, many of these potential benefits lack comprehensive empirical evaluation as they can be difficult to quantify and measure. Additionally, despite its wide variety of promoted benefits, urban agriculture as a

whole still struggles to be recognized as equally or more valuable than traditional land development in many cities, including Philadelphia.

This overview of the benefits of urban agriculture draws most notably from the work of Draper & Freedman (2010), which analyzes the benefits, purposes, and motivations of community gardening in the U.S., and Kirby et al. (2021), which examines motivations and social impacts across urban agriculture in the U.S. and Europe. Table 1 organizes these benefits by scale, from micro (affects direct participants) to meso (affects participants and members of the surrounding neighborhood) to macro (affects larger parts of the city).

Table 1

Synthesis of Possible Benefits of Urban Agriculture across the U.S.

Scale	Types and Characteristics of Benefits	References
Micro (direct participants)	<i>Educational and Professional</i>	(Allen et al., 2008; Blair, 2009; Doyle & Krasney, 2003; Ferris et al., 2001; Fusco, 2001; Graham et al., 2005; Graham & Zidenberg-Cherr, 2005; Hannah & Oh, 2000; Heim et al., 2009; Hermann et al., 2006; Henderson & Hartsfield, 2009; Hess & Winner, 2007; Klemmer et al., 2005; Koch et al., 2006; Krasny & Tidball, 2009; Kurtz, 2001; Langhout et al., 2002; Lautenschlager & Smith, 2007a, 2007b; Lineberger & Zajicek, 2000; McAleese & Rankin, 2007; Morris et al., 2001; Morris and Zidenberg-Cherr, 2002; O'Brien & Shoemaker, 2006; Ozer, 2007; Parmer et al., 2009; Poston et al., 2005; Pudup, 2008; Rahm, 2002; Robinson-O'Brien et al., 2009; Saldivar-Tanaka & Krasny, 2004; Smith & Motesenbocker, 2005; Twiss et al., 2003; Waliczek & Zajicek, 1999)
	Often oriented towards youth engagement	
	Offer employment and job-training opportunities	
	Teach ecological and food-growing skills	
	Improve interpersonal skills and increase self-sufficiency	
	Promote entrepreneurial skills and financial literacy through farm markets	
	<i>Food Production and Access</i>	
	Produce local food for consumption, sale, or donation	
	Improve food access, address food insecurity and food deserts	
	<i>Physical</i>	(Alaimo et al., 2008; Kunpeuk et al., 2020; Osei et al., 2017; Soga et al., 2017;
	Improve diets and nutrition	

	<p>Reduce body mass index (BMI)</p> <p>Promote healthy and active lifestyles</p> <p><i>Psychological</i></p> <p>Relieve stress and improve mental health</p> <p>Provide space for leisure, entertainment, and enjoyment of nature</p> <p>Offer opportunity to contribute to social impact and give back</p>	<p>Utter et al., 2016; Van Den Berg et al., 2010; Wagner & Tasciotti, 2018; Zick et al., 2013)</p> <p>(Dewi et al., 2017; Fulford & Thompson, 2013; Hewitt et al., 2013; Joyce & Warren, 2016; Korn et al., 2018; Shiue, 2016; Wood et al., 2016).</p>
Meso (local communities)	<p><i>Cultural</i></p> <p>Connect participants with culinary and cultural heritage</p> <p>Grow and educate about culturally significant food</p> <p>Help preserve, express, and affirm specific cultural identities (immigrants, refugees, indigenous peoples, people of color)</p> <p><i>Political</i></p> <p>Foster community resilience and empowerment</p> <p>Promote civic engagement and community organizing</p> <p>Advance social justice missions</p> <p>Advocate for land and food sovereignty (community control over decision-making)</p> <p><i>Social</i></p> <p>Improve sense of belonging and connectedness</p> <p>Produce social capital and strengthen collective efficacy</p> <p>Acts as a safe public gathering space</p> <p>Facilitate multi-ethnic, multicultural, and multi-generational interaction</p> <p>Collaborate with other local institutions (universities, non-profits, recreation centers, youth programs)</p>	<p>(Armstrong, 2000b; Hermann et al., 2006; Lautenschlager & Smith, 2007a; Lawson, 2007; Robinson-O'Brien et al., 2009; Saldivar-Tanaka & Krasny, 2004)</p> <p>(Armstrong, 2000b; Campbell & Salus, 2003; Glover, 2003; Henderson & Hartsfield, 2009; Lawson, 2007; Ohmer et al., 2009; Roubanis & Landis, 2007; Saldivar-Tanaka & Krasny, 2004; Schmelzkopf, 2002; Smith & Kurtz, 2003; Staeheli et al., 2002; Teig et al., 2009; Twiss et al., 2003)</p> <p>(Camps-Calvet et al., 2016; Langemeyer et al. 2016; Rogge & Theesfeld, 2018; Shimp et al., 2019; Sioen et al., 2017; Soga et al., 2017).</p>

Macro (city-wide)	<i>Environmental/Ecological</i>	(Ciftcioglu, 2017; Czembrowski et al., 2019; Landreth & Saito, 2014; Petit-Boix & Apul, 2018)
	Utilize and promote sustainable practices (composting, renewable energy, rain catchment systems)	
	Food system localization	
	Urban heat island effect mitigation	
	Improvement in air quality and biodiversity	
	Support conservation and preservation of open green space	(Feenstra, McGrew, & Campbell, 1999; Poulsen, Neff, & Winch, 2017; Voicu & Been, 2008)
	<i>Economic</i>	
	Increase property values and alleviate poverty	
	<i>Other</i>	(Allen et al., 2008; Fusco, 2001; Hannah & Oh, 2000; Henderson & Hartsfield, 2009; Kurtz, 2001; Ohmer et al., 2009; Shinew et al., 2004; Staeheli et al., 2002; Twiss et al., 2003)
	Beautify neighborhood	
	Reduce crime in surrounding regions	

Note. For a complete list of all references that cover one or more of the aforementioned benefits, please directly view the meta-analyses of Draper & Freedman (2010) and Kirby et al. (2021).

At some point, all of the benefits listed in the table have been researched as an impact of urban agriculture. Nevertheless, only a few have received extensive analysis and been shown to be significant. Indeed, it is difficult to generalize the effects of any single urban farm due to the variety of factors at play—goals, management and leadership, size, resource capacity, location, partnerships, and countless additional existing social, economic, and political limitations.

Vitiello & Wolf-Powers (2014), for instance, find that urban agriculture contributes to economic development less through the traditional policy goals of capital attraction, job creation, and tax ratable development and more through a variety of direct and indirect economic benefits stemming from improved human and social capital. In city discussions about the future of urban agriculture, there is often a disconnect between traditional policymakers' view of the temporary land-improvement value of urban agriculture and urban growers' appreciation of the many

community benefits and neighborhood spillover effects of urban agriculture (Rosan & Pearsall, 2017). In other words, urban agriculture's direct impact on economic and land value in a city is difficult to validate and generally less significant than the indirect economic gains generated from the social and psychological effects of urban agriculture.

The impact of urban agriculture on food insecurity is similarly tempered by a variety of factors and limitations. In a recent systematic review of 383 scholarly articles on urban agriculture and food security, Siegner et al. (2018) notes the deeper historical and structural challenges underlying unequal food access in cities, including poverty, structural racism, economic divestment, and lack of city support. They highlight that much of the current research on food access and urban agriculture is theoretical and focuses strictly on the productive capacity of urban agriculture, rather than observing the degree to which low-income urban populations actually access urban-produced foods, which is limited by unequal distribution, high cost, and the needs for cultural acceptability and nutrition education. In a spatial mapping of food practices in Philadelphia, Kremer & DeLiberty (2011) finds that 53% of farmers' markets are located in medium to high-income neighborhoods, further evidence of some of the socioeconomic barriers preventing urban agriculture from acting as a sole solution to food insecurity.

Siegner et al. (2018) articulates a shift away from focusing on the amount of food produced and distributed by an urban agriculture site towards a more holistic appreciation of how the education and social connection provided by urban agriculture can support food security:

It is important to communicate to policy makers that urban farms are producing a lot more than pounds of food; they are also “distributing” social goods, creating a “commons”, and providing connection to nature, community, and education (culinary,

nutrition and food literacy), and these in turn are part of improving community food security.

Ultimately, the arguments presented by these scholars regarding two of the most commonly recognized benefits of urban agriculture—economic development and food security—demonstrate that less measurable effects, like education and increased social interaction and greater sense of community belongingness and responsibility, deserve greater credit for the community gains facilitated by urban agriculture. This study intends to continue this work of de-emphasizing the direct economic and productive results of urban farms in favor of a more nuanced and holistic examination of the significant personal and social benefits of urban farms. In other words, the effects of urban farms on economic and food security are secondary to the educational, psychological, social, and communal effects of urban farms. I will then argue that community engagement lies at the center of these personal and social benefits, as the more community members are actively engaged in visiting and participating at a farm, the more an urban community farm can share and expand the impacts of the many additional benefits it provides.

C. Why Philadelphia?

Because every urban farm varies depending on its community, context, and goals, it is difficult to design case studies that represent the entire scope of urban farming. By focusing on farms located in Philadelphia, this study can better understand, compare, and contrast all four cases under the common political, social, and economic context of this particular city.

The city of Philadelphia was selected as the primary research location due to the unique political, social, and economic circumstances surrounding its long history of urban agriculture,

which began in the early 20th century. While a number of U.S. cities support urban agriculture—Detroit, Portland, Seattle, Austin, Boston, Minneapolis, to name a few—Philadelphia has to contend with a larger population, higher rates of poverty and food insecurity, and a complex history of urban development and the disenfranchisement of people of color. The continued existence and expansion of the urban agriculture movement in Philadelphia, despite these challenges, presents a unique opportunity to contemplate lessons and ideas for U.S. cities in similar circumstances.

Policymakers, researchers, and advocates have all played a unique role in shaping the emergence of urban agriculture in the city. In the last two decades, the city government has undertaken a number of projects related to urban agriculture—in 2009, Mayor Michael Nutter released *Greenworks*, a comprehensive sustainability plan for the city; updated in 2016 under Mayor Jim Kenney, *Greenworks* includes an Interdepartmental Urban Agriculture Task Force and increased involvement with the Philadelphia Food Policy Advisory Council, which contains a sub-committee on urban agriculture.² Meanwhile, scholars centered in Philadelphia have explored a range of questions related to urban agriculture, including the evolution of land-use politics, the alleviation of food insecurity, and the potential for economic development (Meenar & Hoover, 2012; Rosan & Pearsall, 2017; Vitiello & Wolf-Powers, 2014). Philadelphia-based universities also support urban agriculture projects through programs like Penn State Master Gardeners or the University of Pennsylvania's Agatston Urban Nutrition Initiative. Finally, a large network of nonprofits, advocacy groups, and other institutions—such as the Campaign to Take Back Vacant Land, Farm to City, the Food Organizing Collaborative, the Garden Justice

² Philadelphia Office of Sustainability. (2016). *Greenworks: A Vision for a Sustainable Philadelphia*. https://www.phila.gov/media/20161101174249/2016-Greenworks-Vision_Office-of-Sustainability.pdf

Legal Initiative, the Pennsylvania Horticultural Society, and the Philadelphia Urban Farm Network—have helped to develop and formalize support for urban gardens and farms.

In 2019, the city announced its first-ever citywide planning process to establish a long-term urban agriculture strategy, led by Ashley Richards, the new Director Of Urban Agriculture at Philadelphia Parks and Recreation (PPR).³ The plan, named *Growing from the Root*, is the product of many collaborations: funded by the William Penn Foundation, administered by the Mayor's Fund for Philadelphia and multiple departments across City Hall, and led by the city-planning practice Interface Studio LLC and Soil Generation, a Black and Brown-led grassroots coalition advocating for environmental and food justice and community self-determination. Soil Generation's major involvement in the project is especially significant, as it signifies the movement in Philadelphia for greater recognition of the race and class dynamics underlying decision-making in food and land policy.

The team's initial research, released during the first public urban agriculture planning meeting on December 3rd, 2019, summarizes the current state and presents a clear roadmap for the future of urban agriculture in the city. Philadelphia currently has over 418 active gardens and farms across 500 parcels, of which 67% lay in high poverty areas where people of color make up over half the population—further highlighting the racial and economic dimensions of urban agriculture.⁴ While new construction and development in the past decade has threatened land

³ Philadelphia Parks and Recreation. (2019, October 22). *City of Philadelphia Kicks Off First Urban Agriculture Planning Process*. <https://www.phila.gov/2019-10-22-city-of-philadelphia-kicks-off-first-urban-agriculture-planning-process/>

⁴ (2019, December 3). *Philadelphia's Urban Agriculture Plan: Public Meeting No. 1*. <https://docs.google.com/presentation/d/e/2PACX->

ownership to some urban farms and gardens, 14% of the 42,100 total estimated vacant lots and buildings in the city are publicly-owned and available for use.⁵ In light of this burgeoning urban agriculture plan and the considerable potential for the expansion and integration of urban agriculture in the city, the following research on community engagement in urban farms in Philadelphia can not only offer lessons to farm organizers and policymakers in other cities, but also support Philadelphia's own movement towards developing an inclusive, culturally conscious, and sustainable long-term strategy to support urban agriculture.

D. What is Community Engagement and Why Does it Matter?

Researchers across disciplines have examined the importance of community engagement in facilitating the efficacy of public-facing services like community planning and development, medical research, and urban green spaces. For instance, community planners have considered the importance of thoughtful communication and cultural and political awareness when involving various stakeholders for “effective, democratic community-building” (Briggs, 1998). Urban studies scholars the concept of community development, where residents voluntarily engage in cooperative efforts to improve the economic, social, and physical conditions of their community, as a means to improve quality of life (Lyon & Driskell, 2012). In the medical field, structured methods of obtaining community engagement from stakeholders have been found to improve the design, implementation, and distribution of research (Joosten et al., 2015).

[1vSdyCtS3sSdzaWYGfneeBFnsrTyP7x1zYGRXeU4o5boGdnzF81tZRYzyb9CInLpqgoCM1R6hkmO-fcH/pub?start=false&loop=true&delayms=3000&slide=id.p1](https://www.researchgate.net/publication/300011111/figure/fig/1vSdyCtS3sSdzaWYGfneeBFnsrTyP7x1zYGRXeU4o5boGdnzF81tZRYzyb9CInLpqgoCM1R6hkmO-fcH/pub?start=false&loop=true&delayms=3000&slide=id.p1)

⁵ Ibid.

Community engagement in urban green spaces has been studied mainly through the lens of community gardens (in which residents own and maintain private lots). Community gardens present a “neighborhood commons” for urban residents of various ages and races to work together and socialize, more than urban life would otherwise allow (Glover et al., 2004; Linn, 1999). Many social capital variables (knowing neighbors, feeling responsible for a neighborhood, being aware of neighborhood organization, intergenerational relationships, social support) may be significantly associated with participation in community gardening and community meetings (Alaimo et al., 2010). Such improved social interaction and citizen participation can amplify individual participants’ civic and democratic values, and increase neighborhood and organizational collective efficacy (Glover et al., 2005; Ohmer & Beck, 2006). In other words, once achieved, community engagement in all of its specific facets—increased social capital, ability to organize and advocate, improved community capacity—create the foundation for additional improvements in quality of life. While less research specifically considers community benefits unique to urban farms, the many commonalities between urban community gardens and urban community farms (collaborative work, social gathering space, neighborhood beautification) suggest that a better understanding of how community engagement functions in urban farms can provide similar insight into how urban farms can benefit their neighborhoods.

For the purpose of this research, community engagement generally encompasses a community’s sense of being welcomed, included, and served by a local organization and their reciprocal desire to participate in and invest in that organization. Rather than categorizing or measuring community engagement, this study focuses on identifying and examining the mechanisms by which community engagement can be pursued—communication and

representation, service of the community's needs, an inclusive and welcoming environment—which will be discussed in detail in the analysis following the case studies.

II. Data Collection and Methodology

This paper draws upon scholarly, peer-reviewed journal articles with a focus on community urban agriculture to form the basis of its understanding of urban agriculture, Philadelphia, and community engagement. Additionally, I collected data to develop in-depth case studies of four different urban farms in various regions of Philadelphia from a variety of sources including online materials, public documents, farm newsletters, and local newspaper articles.

I also conducted six field visits to urban farms and gardens in Philadelphia, participating in community events and observing the design and operations of the farm. During these visits, I utilized a site analysis checklist (located in the appendix) inspired by the World Health Organization's Checklist of Essential Features of Age-friendly Cities.⁶ This checklist allowed me to identify notable design features related to community engagement—such as indoor and outdoor gathering spaces, restroom availability, and clear paths and signage—which are included in the thematic analysis.

Finally, I conducted seven semi-structured interviews of representatives from each urban farm. A general interview script—which I further adapted to fit each farm's unique circumstances—can be found in the appendix. As the relationship between social enterprises like urban farms and outside researchers is complicated and delicate, I found Chicago Beyond's

⁶ World Health Organization. (2007). *Checklist of Essential Features of Age-friendly Cities*. https://www.who.int/ageing/publications/Age_friendly_cities_checklist.pdf

guide book entitled *Why Am I Always Being Researched?* extremely useful in developing informative, equitable, and meaningful questions to connect with urban farm leaders.⁷ Since published documentation alone does not sufficiently encapsulate each farm's complex history of adjustments and evolutions due to changes in funding, leadership, and the surrounding neighborhood, these semi-structured interviews provided important context and firsthand knowledge for each case study.

The structure of the following four case studies of Philadelphia urban farms was adapted from Jeffrey Hou, Julie M. Johnson, and Laura J. Lawson's work in *Greening Cities, Growing Communities*, which analyzes the design, development, and sustainability of six urban community gardens in Seattle. Following their example, I apply a common framework to each case to organize important ideas, facilitate comparison, and foster a broader understanding of urban farms in Philadelphia. Each case study has the following components:

Location

Size

Date Established

Neighborhood Statistics (population size, median household income, racial composition)

Key Words

Background and Mission

Lessons in Community Engagement

Following the four case studies is a thematic analysis of the mechanisms that influence how urban farms define and engage their communities.

⁷ Chicago Beyond. (2019). *Why Am I Always Being Researched?: Chicago Beyond Equity Series, Vol 1*.

III. Philadelphia Case Studies

A. Overview of Case Studies

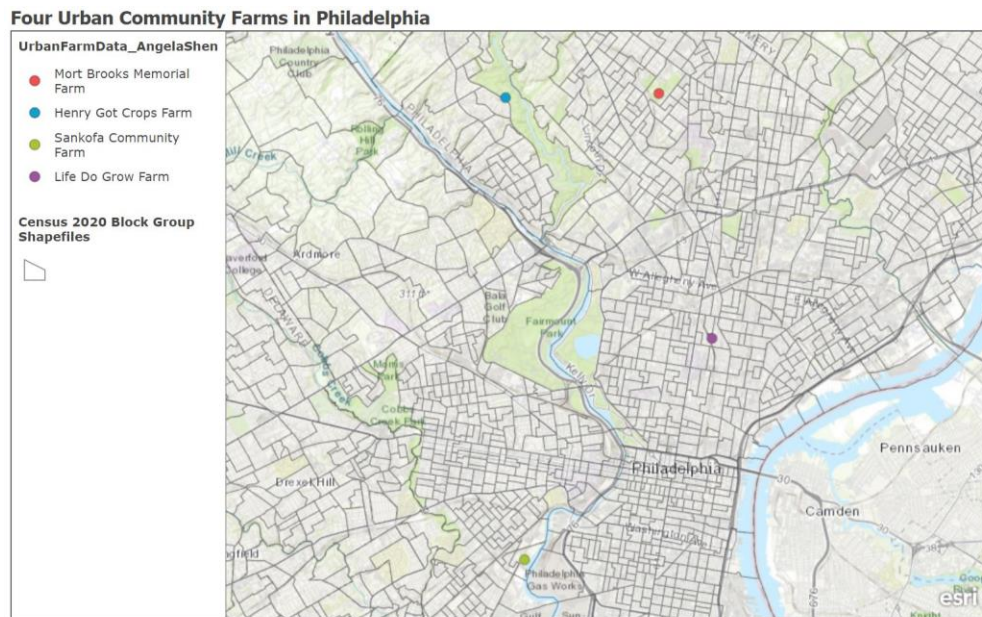
It is impossible to represent the full diversity of urban farming in any set of individual cases. With this understood, the four case studies were deliberately selected to provide a nuanced perspective on the heterogeneity in approaches to urban farming and community engagement. Specifically, these four organizations were selected for (1) *credibility* (they have well-established operations and are able to provide comprehensive data) and (2) *uniqueness* (their approach to community engagement has some distinct qualities that can illustrate important themes or lessons). Case studies are arranged chronologically to demonstrate evolution in the ideas about the main motivations and operations of urban farms.

The four selected farms and their corresponding neighborhoods are as follows: Mort Brooks Memorial Farm, between East Germantown and East Mount Airy; Henry Got Crops Farm, in Roxborough; Life Do Grow Farm, in Hartranft; and Sankofa Community Farm, near Kingsessing and Elmwood. Figure 1 displays how the four farms are distributed in Philadelphia. Figure 2 depicts the racial distribution of the surrounding neighborhood for each of these urban farms, compared to the racial distribution of Philadelphia. With the exception of Henry Got Crops in Roxborough, each of the selected farms has a higher proportion of Black residents compared to Philadelphia overall. This statistic is important to note because as (Rosan & Pearsall, 2017) observes, previous urban agriculture initiatives have sometimes been led by young, mostly white professionals not originally from the neighborhood, which can create friction within communities. Nevertheless, at least two farms discussed here—Life Do Grow and

Sankofa —have Black leadership and represent growing racial and cultural consciousness within the contemporary urban agriculture community.

Figure 1

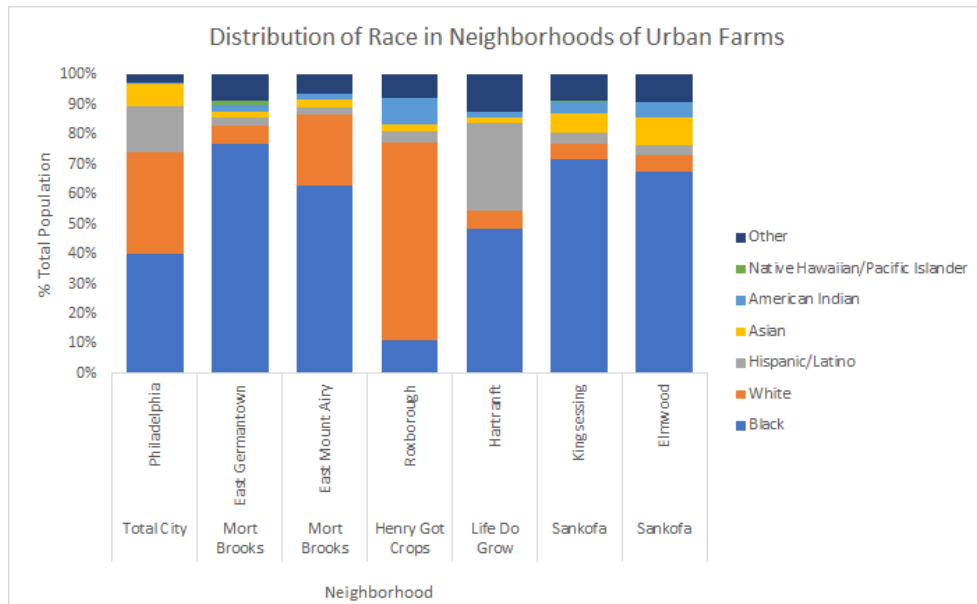
Map of Location of Four Selected Urban Farms in Philadelphia



City of Philadelphia, State of New Jersey, Esri, HERE, Garmin, USGS, NGA, EPA, USDA, NPS

Figure 2

Racial Distribution of the Neighborhoods of the Four Selected Urban Farms Compared to the Total Philadelphia Population



For a deeper understanding of each farm's local constituents, Figure 3 provides a breakdown of the population size and median household income of each farm's respective neighborhoods. Neighborhood data and boundaries come from U.S. Census block groups.

Figure 3

Population Size and Median Household Income of Neighborhoods of Urban Farms

Associated Farm	Neighborhood	Pop Size	Med Household Income
Total City	Philadelphia	1584064	\$47,474.00
Mort Brooks	East Germantown	36938	\$45,773.00
Mort Brooks	East Mount Airy	20914	\$73,297.00
Henry Got Crops	Roxborough	40437	\$88,347.00
Life Do Grow	Hartranft	35955	\$20,457.00
Sankofa	Kingsessing	35934	\$38,456.00
Sankofa	Elmwood	77247	\$34,768.00

B. Mort Brooks Memorial Farm

Location: Ardleigh St. and E.Washington Lane, The Farm at Awbury Arboretum, Philadelphia

Established: 2000

Size: 2 acres

Neighborhood Statistics:

East Germantown: Population of 36,938 with median household income of \$45,773.

Ethnic/racial composition: 77.0% Black, 5.8% White, 3.1% Hispanic/Latino, 1.6% Asian, 2.4% American Indian, 1.4% Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander, 8.7% other.⁸

East Mount Airy: Population of 20,914 with median household income of \$73,297.

Ethnic/racial composition: 62.7% Black, 23.9% White, 2.5% Hispanic/Latino, 2.7% Asian, 1.7% American Indian, 6.5% other.⁹

Key Words: nutrition and health, food access, education

Background and Mission

Mort Brooks Memorial Farm belongs to the Weavers Way Co-op (<https://weaversway.coop/>), a member-owned cooperative grocery that operates both Mort Brooks Memorial Farm and Henry Got Crops Farm. Established in 2000 by volunteers, Mort Brooks Farm hired a full-time farmer in 2007, when WWC committed to making the farm

⁸ City Data. (2019). *Philadelphia, Pennsylvania Neighborhood Map*. <https://www.city-data.com/nbmaps/neigh-Philadelphia-Pennsylvania.html#N58>

⁹ Ibid.

commercially viable. The farm grows a wide variety of local, pesticide-free produce available to co-op members and the general public.

Weavers' Way (WWC) practices Community Supported Agriculture (CSA), a food distribution system in which consumers pay upfront for a "share" in the farm in return for its later harvest. Separate but related is Weavers Way's membership program, which requires an equity investment of \$400 distributed through a maximum of fourteen years and unlocks discounts, special services, and volunteer opportunities at the co-op's two farms. Individuals who qualify for government support like the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF), or Medicaid can become WWC members at a discount through the Food For All program

As a part of WWC, Mort Brooks farm adheres to the values of the International Cooperative Principles, which include equality, democracy, autonomy, education, and social responsibility. While the primary role of Mort Brooks farm is to provide fresh produce to WWC's members and stores, it also features an educational arm through the nonprofit Food Moxie, in which community members volunteer and learn about growing healthy food.

Mort Brooks is unique in that it is part of the 16-acre Farm at Awbury (<https://awbury.org/farm/>), previously known as the Agricultural Village, which itself belongs to the 56-acre Awbury Arboretum in Northwest Philadelphia. The Farm at Awbury hosts a variety of groups including the Penn State Extension Master Gardeners, the Philadelphia Guild of Handweavers, the Philadelphia Beekeepers Guild, and the Philly Goat Project. Compared to the larger Arboretum, the farm is not as widely known by neighbors who are not members of the co-op. Nonetheless, the Farm at Awbury's own journey to strengthen its relationship with the

surrounding community also provides insight into potential challenges and solutions for public green spaces navigating local power dynamics.

Figure 4.

Weavers' Way's Preparation and Kitchen Station Next to Mort Brooks Memorial Farm.

Community Engagement: Representation and Communication

Due to its existence as a partnership between the Farm at Awbury and Weavers' Way Co-op, Mort Brooks Memorial Farm can be understood as serving both WWC members and CSA

shareholders as well as visitors of the Arboretum from the larger Northwest Philadelphia community.

As a self-selected group of people investing money and potentially farm labor into the co-op, WWC members and shareholders by definition remain actively engaged with the farm's goals and



operations. On the other hand, the Farm and its surrounding Arboretum must make a larger effort to continually communicate and engage with its broad range of constituents.

In the spring of 2021, the Farm at Awbury received neighborhood backlash for plans to build a Discovery Center and parking lot without consulting residents of the community.¹⁰ Critics of the plan expressed concerns over lack of representation (according to the article published by the *Philadelphia Inquirer* in May, only three of seventeen members of the Board of Directors were Black) and a general disconnect between the good intentions of the Arboretum and the lack of inclusivity and collaboration experienced by neighbors.¹¹

As a result, the Arboretum put its development plans on hold and has introduced several new mechanisms to ensure proper community representation. In July of 2021, the Awbury Arboretum Association published the results of its Diversity and Inclusion Assessment, which was overseen by a hired diversity consultant and distributed through neighborhood leaders, e-newsletters, social media, and events.¹² The survey asks participants to answer questions or rate statements like “What might make you feel more welcome at Awbury Arboretum?” and “I believe Awbury Arboretum is a good neighbor to the Germantown and East Mt. Airy communities.” Following the survey results, the Arboretum chose to expand its Ambassadors Program, reform its Board nominating process to be more transparent and welcoming, and create

¹⁰ Russ, V. (2021, May 11). *Philadelphia's Awbury Arboretum wants to build a welcome center. Neighbors are fighting the plan.* Philadelphia Inquirer. <https://www.inquirer.com/news/awbury-arboretum-new-building-haines-field-philadelphia-20210511.html>

¹¹ Ibid.

¹² Awbury Arboretum. (2021). *Awbury Arboretum Diversity & Inclusion Assessment Community Survey Results.* https://mcusercontent.com/b7581d9d98c60e6234c6205b8/files/f3446a3b-4fde-03db-3bdb-33366b9eca8f/Community_Survey_Results_Summary_7_7_2021.pdf

a Community Planning Committee to give local residents greater power in deciding the Arboretum's project and programs.

This disharmony between the Awbury Arboretum and members of its surrounding neighborhoods demonstrates several lessons about community engagement. According to the results of the Diversity and Inclusion survey, the majority of nearby residents of all races and ethnicities show appreciation for the programs and features offered by the Arboretum and view it as a beautiful and peaceful natural space. The Farm at Awbury, specifically, offers a wide variety of free and public programs for all ages, from concerts to wellness classes to “Sunday Fun Days” with family-friendly interactive events. In other words, the farm's events and activities did not generate friction in the community; instead, complaints and suggestions for improvement mainly revolved around community relations, outreach, and representation. Thus, meaningful community engagement lies not only in direct programming design but also leadership and decision-making of the urban farm—who gets to give input on what, and whose desires shape the future of the farm.

The Arboretum's response—first conducting a survey to understand the source of friction and then establishing a process of regular Community Planning Committee meetings and reforming its Board nomination structure—provides an example of how an urban farm can potentially improve community relations and representation. Grace Wicks, the Director of Community Engagement at the Farm at Awbury, articulates the importance of listening and communicating with all of the farm's constituents: “I know what I would like this place to be. But this place is not for me, it's for everyone. So how do we create a sampling of everyone and survey them to create more communally-defined goals, vision, purpose, and activities at the

farm, and move forward from there? How do we communicate and get on the same page, so that future plans reflect the stakeholders?” (Interview 2).

As the Awbury Arboretum evolves in its relationship to its community, the Farm at Awbury is also exploring better ways to market its events and offerings. Previous marketing mechanisms were mostly digital—social media, website updates, and email newsletters—and often less effective at reaching older individuals. Thus, the Farm at Awbury is adopting new methods that initiate direct interaction with neighborhood residents: placing fliers in local schools, libraries, and grocery stores; collaborating with well-connected neighborhood leaders to share information by word-of-mouth; and establishing a phone tree for quick and easy communication (Interview 2). As with the Community Planning Committee meetings, these personalized approaches present new opportunities to build trust within the community.

C. Henry Got Crops Farm

Location: 7095 Henry Ave., W.B. Saul Agricultural High School, Philadelphia

Established: 2009

Size: 4.5 acres

Neighborhood Statistics:

Roxborough: Population of 40,437 with median household income of \$88,347.

Ethnic/racial composition: 11.2% Black, 66.2% White, 3.5% Hispanic/Latino, 2.3% Asian, 9.0% American Indian, 7.8% other.¹³

Key Words: nutrition and health, education, youth leadership, professional development, soft skills

Background and Mission

Founded in 2009, Henry Got Crops is a collaboration between Weavers Way Co-op, Food Moxie, Philadelphia Parks and Recreation, and Walter B. Saul Agricultural High School. As implied by its name (which was selected by students of the high school), the farm is located on Henry Avenue on land owned by Philadelphia Parks and Recreation. The farm provides produce for the co-op's groceries and markets, and also serves students of Saul High School and the surrounding neighborhood of Roxborough. Since Roxborough is a higher-income neighborhood in Philadelphia, the educational and social enterprise component of the farm focuses on high school students and teachers as the primary stakeholders of the farm, alongside Weavers' Way.

First opened in 1943, W.B. Saul High School is the largest agricultural magnet school in the United States, with students coming from all over Philadelphia for career and technical education in Animal Sciences, Food Sciences, Horticulture, or Natural Resource Management.¹⁴

¹³ City Data. (2019). *Philadelphia, Pennsylvania Neighborhood Map*. (2019). <https://www.city-data.com/nbmaps/neigh-Philadelphia-Pennsylvania.html#N58>

¹⁴ Walter B. Saul High School. (2021). *Saul at a Glance*. <https://saul.philasd.org/about-us/saul-at-a-glance/>

According to the U.S. News and World Report, the school has around 500 students in total, with total minority enrollment at 83%, and 100% of students considered economically disadvantaged.¹⁵ Students from Saul benefit from the primary mission of Henry Got Crops Farm, which is to provide education, experience, and opportunities in agriculture and natural resource management. Alongside hands-on fieldwork, students do related writing and research and learn entrepreneurial and financial skills from participating in the farm market. Food Moxie (<http://www.foodmoxie.org/saul/>), the non-profit arm of the whole collaboration, provides additional out-of-school programs for youth and professional development.

By collaborating with Saul High School and Food Moxie through Henry Got Crops, Weavers Way Co-op satisfies its educational values. Farm manager Nina Berryman describes the partnership as symbiotic, explaining, “It's beneficial for [Weavers Way] to access the community of Saul High School students—as we have a mission of being an educational farm—and the space and infrastructure on their campus. Then, students and teachers can access the learning laboratory of the farm without the stress of managing a vegetable farm and affiliated market, because we take care of that” (Interview 5). Many urban farms engage in similar collaborations with local organizations that allow the farm to realize its goals as a social enterprise.

Figure 5

Rows of Produce at Henry Got Crops Farm

¹⁵ U.S. News and World Report. (2021). *Saul WB Agricultural School*. Retrieved August 01, 2021, from <https://www.usnews.com/education/best-high-schools/pennsylvania/districts/philadelphia-city-school-district/saul-w-b-agricultural-school-17242>



Community Engagement: Balancing Viability with Social Mission

Henry Got Crops farm serves two well-defined communities of people: the students of Saul High School, and participants of Weavers Way Co-op. While the general public can also shop at the market and occasionally participate in volunteer opportunities advertised through the WWC newsletter or social media, the farm primarily targets students and WWC members.

The challenge of how to balance the different needs of the high school and the co-op can be seen in how produce from the farm is distributed. The farm's harvests can be sold to WWC grocery stores, the Saul High School cafeteria, local restaurants, and at the on-site market. The limited amount of available produce leads to difficult decisions about the farm's priorities: "There's more demand in all of those outlets than [the farm has] product, so [the farm has] to balance it based on quantity and what's been promised. People subscribe to the CSA before the season starts, so [Weavers Way has] to fulfill that promise and serve them first" (Interview 5). Though Henry Got Crops is not intended for profit and receives financial support from the larger

co-op, the farm still places considerable emphasis on decreasing the amount of outside support it uses. WWC Farm Manager Nina Berryman explains:

A lot of urban farms are solely grant-funded and solely educational in mission. While we are educational in mission, we also have a pretty strong business focus. We definitely have to make decisions about efficiency and profitability and streamlining that other firms might not need to, if they're just focused on education. We're trying to do both, simultaneously (Interview 5).

Indeed, some aspects of the farm's operations that help achieve its educational purpose may not be most practical for maximizing productivity and earnings. Jessica McAtamney presents her perspective as a former teacher at Saul who played a major role in establishing the farm:

[The farm] is not necessarily financially successful or viable, because Weavers Way supports us, and there's a ton more people than you would ever find in a normal working, growing space, and we're operating without chemicals. These are a lot of additional inputs that you wouldn't have in a situation that does not have our mission or vision (Interview 1).

Even with two clearly defined and relatively small groups of target constituents, Henry Got Crops has still had to work to find balance between its responsibilities to the co-op and to high school students. For farms with broader social goals oriented towards a larger extent of the community, this complicated interplay of perspectives and priorities is magnified. Moreover, this tension between achieving social good and maintaining financial sustainability persists in many urban farms, which must produce regular yields while also operating additional programs towards its larger mission.

Figure 6

Farm Market at Henry Got Crops



D. Life Do Grow Farm

Location: 2315 N 11th Street, Philadelphia

Established: 2010

Size: 1 acre

Neighborhood Statistics:

Hartranft: Population of 35,955 with median household income of \$20,457. Ethnic/racial composition: 48.4% Black, 6.0% White, 29.6% Hispanic/Latino, 1.7% Asian, 1.9% American Indian, 12.3% other.¹⁶

Key Words: Resilience, collective liberation, holistic wellness, food justice, equity, sustainability

Background and Mission

Founded in 2010 by members of the community and students from Temple University, Urban Creators is a grassroots organization that operates Life Do Grow Farm (<https://phillyurbancreators.squarespace.com/life-do-grow-farm>) in North Central Philadelphia. Life Do Grow is an off-grid sustainability campus, generating all energy from solar panels and gathering all water from rain catchment systems. While the actual farmland is approximately an acre in size, Urban Creators has facilitated the revitalization of three additional acres of land across the city, including three community gardens and nine school gardens (<https://urbancreators.org/impact/>).

Urban Creators advertises itself not only as an urban farm, but also as a public park, outdoor classroom, community marketplace, art and culture venue, and co-creation space for local artists and businesses. Over the years, Urban Creators has undertaken a variety of ventures and initiatives: hosting music festivals and art performances, consulting for local sustainability and garden projects, and providing various training and development programs. The organization

¹⁶ City Data. (2019). *Philadelphia, Pennsylvania Neighborhood Map*. (2019). <https://www.city-data.com/nbmaps/neigh-Philadelphia-Pennsylvania.html#N58>.

prioritizes holistic wellness and political empowerment, aspiring to not only provide nutritious and affordable produce, but also act as a community space for education, artistic expression, and personal development.

As the farm's rent-free lease is set to expire in February 2022, Urban Creators is currently working to gain ownership of its land through the Philadelphia Land Bank.¹⁷ Like many urban farms, Life Do Grow faces legal and bureaucratic barriers to becoming permanently recognized by the city, despite over ten years of contribution to its neighborhood. Nevertheless, the organization continues to provide healthy produce and a variety of programs to the public, even hoping to expand into other cities.

Figure 7

Inside Life Do Grow Farm



¹⁷ Lubrano, A. (2020, Nov 24). *An Urban Farm Feeding the Poorest Part of Philly Fights to Stay Alive and Growing*. <https://www.msn.com/en-us/news/us/an-urban-farm-feeding-the-poorest-part-of-philly-fights-to-stay-alive-and-growing/ar-BB1bj8Rm>

Community Engagement: Programming for Community Needs

Life Do Grow Farm is the result of careful planning, fundraising, and door-to-door organizing. A 2013 article interviewing some of Urban Creators' original founders, including Alex Epstein and Jeaninne Kayembe, notes that the project united the efforts of community members and university students and helped "dissolve some of the tension between the Temple University community and residents of the surrounding neighborhood."¹⁸ Thus, the very leadership and collaboration that first creates the farm can serve as a mechanism to improve community relations between different groups of people. As resources and models for urban farms—including those based in Philadelphia, like Urban Creators' own Educational Resource Library—become more widely available, new urban farm leaders can take a similarly thoughtful approach involving community members in every step of the farm's creation process.

Life Do Grow defines its community as residents within a two to three block radius, especially neighborhood youth and elders (Interview 4). The farm's Community Outreach team does its best to adapt and design programs according to the changing circumstances and needs of constituents. For instance, the team sends out an annual Community Food Survey, which asks questions like "What other uses of Life Do Grow, or public space/land in our neighborhood, could be a resource to the community?" and "Who else in the neighborhood should we include in our outreach, planning and development?"¹⁹ Results from the survey help determine what fresh

¹⁸ Ricci, D. (2013, May 3). *Home Grown: Life Do Grow Turns Philly's Empty Lots into Urban Gardens*. <https://www.phillymag.com/be-well-philly/2013/05/03/home-grown-life-grow-turns-phillys-empty-lots-urban-gardens/>

¹⁹ Urban Creators. (2021). *Community Survey 2021*. Retrieved August 01, 2021, from <https://docs.google.com/forms/d/e/1FAIpQLScNc5Sy74i8Nzj-MAVP-UIGPCCKr-ahYqJr98te9pNQni5ApQ/viewform>

produce, educational workshops, volunteer opportunities, and communal events the farm provides. Many of the farm's surveys and workshops focus on raising awareness about the concept of food sovereignty, a community's control over the decision-making around its own food system. Continuing with the theme of local sovereignty, the farm hosts in-person and virtual Community Design Process meetings for community members to share ideas for the future and establish the farm's core values and priorities.

Urban Creator's ability to adapt to changing community demands is further illustrated by its quick and impactful response to the pandemic. In a partnership initiated by 12th Street Catering, Life Do Grow farm operated a Mobile Market during the COVID-19 pandemic to distribute throughout the city "approximately 61,000lbs of produce, 32,310 fresh meals, 21,300 diapers, 94,872 feminine hygiene products, 350 books, and hundreds of PPE items, according to an Impact Summary on their website (<https://urbancreators.org/impact/>).

Through similar partnerships, the farm has also provided employment and leadership opportunities, political and workforce training, and mentorship to students through programs like the Urban Innovation Program or the Don't Fall Down in the Hood program. In 2015, the organization received a U.S. Department of Justice grant to collaborate with the Mural Arts Guild to train formerly incarcerated young adults, resulting in reduced rates of recidivism among participants. In 2021, Urban Creators collaborated with the Philadelphia Opioid Response Unit to train young people as "peacemakers" to promote harm reduction through education about overdose prevention.²⁰

²⁰ Whelan, A. (2021, Apr 22). *Fatal Overdoses Among Black Philadelphians Soared During the Pandemic*. <https://www.inquirer.com/news/overdoses-black-philadelphians-opioid-crisis-covid-19-20210422.html>

This impressive list of past projects and partnerships demonstrate how Life Do Grow's commitment to broader communal values like equity and resilience allow it to serve a diverse array of community needs. Indeed, out of the four cases discussed, Life Do Grow Farm seems to seek to address the broadest range of social issues. Its Impact Summary from 2021 includes metrics on food production, as well as youth and volunteer engagement, public art events, crime reduction, local entrepreneurship, and economic development. However, many of these projects were temporary and limited by the expectations set by external grants. Urban Creators has started to recognize and address how traditional sponsorships and grants can be unsustainable and limits the organization's long-term planning and decision-making power. In an announcement on its website, Urban Creators explains:

[In 2019, we] experienced a great deal of trauma in our immediate community, and began to recognize the limitations of our organization's capacity to build true equity. We began to realize that as a non-profit, there are constraints to the ways in which we can respond to the changing needs of our community, there are no pathways towards ownership of any kind, and our existence remains largely dependent on outside funding.

As a result, Urban Creators is now transitioning from a traditional non-profit to a form of collaborative ownership more similar to a co-op, offering memberships to small businesses, organizations, arts, and organizers. This narrowed focus on promoting the long-term growth of local creators demonstrates a desire to grow beyond the temporary, often externally-driven projects of the organization's past towards a more self-sustaining, internally-motivated operational model that can expand and deepen Urban Creators' role in its community. Furthermore, this transition highlights the tradeoff of achieving breadth versus depth of

community engagement, a challenge closely connected with the continual compromise that urban farms make between financial viability and social impact.

E. Sankofa Farm

Location: 5400 Lindbergh Blvd., Bartram's Garden, Philadelphia

Established: 2012 as the Community Farm and Food Resource Center, changed to Sankofa Community Farm in 2017

Size: 4 acres

Neighborhood Statistics:

Elmwood: Population of 77,247 with median household income of \$34,768. Ethnic/racial composition: 67.6% Black, 5.5% White, 3.4% Hispanic/Latino, 9.3% Asian, 5.0% American Indian, 9.2% other.²¹

Kingsessing: Population of 35,934 with median household income of \$38,456. Ethnic/racial composition: 71.8% Black, 5.5% White, 3.4% Hispanic/Latino, 9.3% Asian, 5.0% American Indian, 0.7% Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander, 9.2% other.²²

Key Words: African focus, local leadership, youth development, education, community-building, food sovereignty, food history, food culture

²¹ City Data. (2019). *Philadelphia, Pennsylvania Neighborhood Map*. (2019). <https://www.city-data.com/nbmaps/neigh-Philadelphia-Pennsylvania.html#N58>.

²² Ibid.

Background and Mission

Sankofa Community Farm (<https://www.bartramsgarden.org/farm/>) was founded in 2012 as the Community Farm and Food Resource Center, a product of the collaboration between the Philadelphia Parks and Recreation Department, Bartram's Garden, the University of Pennsylvania's Agatston Urban Nutrition Initiative (AUNI), and the Pennsylvania Horticultural Society (PHS). Its land, owned by the city and located on public transportation lines, allows the farm to connect with residents of West and Southwest Philadelphia. Originally focused on increasing local access to healthy, nutritious food, the farm re-oriented towards broader values of food sovereignty, cultural education, and community empowerment when it launched as a separate entity from the University in 2017, under the leadership of co-directors Chris Bolden-Newsome and Ty Holmberg.

During this transition, the farm was renamed to Sankofa Community Farm. "Sankofa" is a word derived from King Adinkera of the Akan people of West Africa to represent the act of "going back and fetching what you left behind" (Interview 6). This name change represents a larger shift in the farm's mission towards centering the African diasporic identity by recognizing historical and cultural relationships to the land. The farm's idea of food sovereignty integrates

“culinary access to food, cultural access to food, affordability, and proximity,” as well as communities taking control of their own food systems (Interview 6).

Figure 8

Entrance to Sankofa Community Farm

Community Engagement: Developing an Identity



Ever since its transformation in name and mission, Sankofa has taken great care to define its desired community. Co-director Holmberg explains, “We’re a spiritually rooted farm, we’re an

intergenerational farm, we are African diaspora-centric. We are a multiracial space, and we center Black leadership and the experience of Black people” (Interview 6). This conscious choice to emphasize African American culture and history in the realm of food and agriculture plays a major role in directing the farm’s goals and practices for community engagement.

The farm provides a range of engagement opportunities, from single-day to long-term. Its extensive youth internship program called the Big Incredible Gardeners (BIG), which allows twenty to twenty-five youth to work year-round on the farm and learn about the history and

culture of the African Diaspora.²³ The farm also includes a community garden, where locals can purchase garden beds to grow their own produce, and will even install raised garden beds at residents' private homes. Finally, Sankofa hosts over 1,500 volunteers annually: smaller, more consistent volunteers participate during the week, and the public can join volunteer days on the second and fourth days of each month. Part of the experience of volunteers, regardless of age or race, is to learn and appreciate African culinary heritage and the healing power of the land. Thus, at the beginning of each volunteer shift, a staff member explains Sankofa's name and values and highlights the spiritual significance of the volunteers' labor.

The farm's produce, distributed through neighborhood farm stands, grocery partnerships, and donations, is similarly chosen in order to cater to the farm's larger goal of supporting African American culture. In a promotional video for the farm, Assistant Farm Manager Qiana Ganges elaborates:

The mission is about education...introducing [participants] to some of the cultural crops specific to people of African descent, like the okra that we grow here, and showing that it can be affordable to eat our cultural foods, that are very nourishing to our souls and help connect us to our history.²⁴

Sankofa Community Farm's consistent, intentional reinforcement of its mission towards uplifting a specific, well-defined community allows it to design programs and events that directly

²³ Locewick, C. (2018, Sept 27). *A Safe Place to Grow*. The Philadelphia Citizen. <https://thephiladelphiacitizen.org/a-safe-place-to-grow/>

²⁴ Mediasmith. (2017, Nov 6). *Sankofa Community Farm at Bartram's Garden*. Vimeo. <https://vimeo.com/241622480>

and effectively align with its goals. While all four farms discussed are educational in aim, Sankofa places the most emphasis on learning not just practical skills—how to grow plants, run a farm market, work in teams, and become self-sufficient—but also abstract concepts about cultural identity and spiritual rootedness. Learning from Sankofa, Urban farms aspiring to provide participants with spiritual, emotional, and psychological benefits beyond food access could implement more direct rituals and conversations with participants about what spiritual, emotional, and moral takeaways people can gain at the farm.

Figure 9



A Volunteer Group at Sankofa

Community Farm

***Community Engagement: Making
Connections***

To maintain its close connections to the community, Sankofa Community Farm takes a diverse array of approaches to market its activities and programs to the public. At its farm market, staff and volunteers distribute hand-held fliers and offer an opt-in texting alert system for upcoming events. The farm also has a street team that directly goes into Southwest Philadelphia to speak to residents and distribute fliers. While events are advertised through social media, Sankofa’s main method of marketing is “definitely word-of-mouth, in order to really target [Sankofa’s] community in Southwest” through in-person interactions and the Bartram’s Garden’s

Southwest Leadership Circle, a group of well-respected Black community leaders who help spread the word about events and govern decisions about the farm's future (Interview 6).

Indeed, creating and maintaining social connections is viewed as a major purpose of the farm: providing space for people to gather, form relationships, and politically organize. Co-director Chris Bolden-Newsome outlines the complex network of social ties that the farm brings together: "Connect our community—elders, youth, and families, restoring that critical, integral deep relationship with the land and with the earth ... As well as connecting folks with the resources to create situations of sovereignty and of self-reliance."²⁵ This awareness of the role of urban farms as a public space and a community connector reflects the many potential social and communal benefits of urban agriculture.

IV. Thematic Analysis

A. Mechanisms for Community Engagement

Scholars have previously criticized certain movements within urban agriculture as taking a mostly White, top-down approach that fails to adequately represent and include community members (Meenar & Hoover, 2012; Rosan & Pearsall, 2017). Without direct representation and leadership from members of the neighborhood, urban farm operators can struggle to balance their own ideas of what would be best for the community and what the community actually wants. Ideas about sovereignty, self-representation, and self-determination represent the growing

²⁵ Mediasmith. (2017, Nov 6). *Sankofa Community Farm at Bartram's Garden*. Vimeo. <https://vimeo.com/241622480>

movement in urban agriculture circles to educate, empower, and include community members in all aspects of decision-making regarding their local food systems.

The four case studies examined here demonstrate that an argument for community engagement at every level within urban agriculture has practical value. Without effective representation and constant communication regarding the community's needs and desires, urban farms simply cannot effectively serve their communities and achieve their social missions. However, finding feasible ways to implement social impact can be difficult, especially as farms confront considerable constraints on resources and labor. Additionally, the dual role of community urban farms as both an agricultural and a social enterprise inevitably results in decision-making trade-offs regarding farm productivity and profitability versus farm education and programming.

To effectively analyze the cases of each of the four farms through the lens of community engagement, as well as to highlight insights and solutions that each farm offers, community engagement will thus be distilled into two primary levels: (1) physical (how the average community member is involved in visiting, volunteering, and growing at the farm); and (2) directorial (how the community has influence in management, decision-making, and leadership at the farm).

Physical Community Engagement

(1) Physical Space and Site Design

An urban farm's relationship to its community begins with its physical presence in the neighborhood. The design of the site, from its location to its common spaces and signage,

presents visitors a message about how welcoming and attractive the farm is. Additionally, the farm's visual characteristics help establish its unique identity. Based on site visits to various urban farms in Philadelphia including the four discussed here, the following table presents a framework to contemplate some site design features that improve the physical inclusivity of an urban farm. Each of the four farms has provisions for each of these categories. Especially notable or unique characteristics of a specific farm have been highlighted as examples in the table.

Table 2 *Site Characteristics Supporting Community Engagement in Urban Farms.*

Location	Site Characteristics	Farm Examples
Exterior	<i>Accessibility</i> Explicit and visible space for free parking Roads and access for various types of transportation (cars, bicycles, pedestrians, public transportation)	<i>Sankofa Community Farm: Offers a bike map and comprehensive driving directions on Bartram's Garden's website. Also a stop on the #36 SEPTA trolley.</i>
	<i>Boundary</i> Use of fences and vegetation to designate farm boundaries Outside signage that identifies the farm Other visual cues that communicate the farm's identity and values	<i>Life Do Grow: Collaborates with local artists to create murals, mosaics, paintings, and other art pieces that reflect the farm's mission and add to its physical beauty.</i>
Interior	<i>Circulation</i> Distinct pathways marked by signs and/or included in maps	
	<i>Informational/Marketing</i> Bulletins, notice boards, kiosks, and other areas where information and fliers can be posted Informative tags or labels that identify various types of produce	<i>Farm at Awbury: Maintains an interactive "touch me" herb garden and smooth paths that are disability-friendly</i>
	<i>Public Facilities</i>	<i>Henry Got Crops: Includes</i>

Public restrooms
 Indoor/outdoor kitchen or sink area
 Educational/classroom spaces
 Indoor seating
 Outdoor seating (picnic tables, benches,
 lawn chairs, stools, etc)

an indoor Learning Lab for students, as well as a building for its farm market.

Life Do Grow: Built a geodesic dome (thin-shell structure with unique hemispherical appearance and sustainable design) that contains tables, seating, and fans. Also offers wooden lawn chairs and hammocks.



Figure 10

*Colorful Kitchen
 and Common
 Space at Life Do
 Grow Farm*

(2) Events

and Programming

Urban farms offer a wide variety of events and programs to the public. Many urban farms host regular farm markets to sell their fresh produce. They also accept volunteers, frequently designating specific volunteering times and dates open to the public. Finally, many urban farms integrate their educational values into workshops, classes, and youth development programs. Additionally, urban farms can host community events like festivals, concerts, and gatherings and support the programs of their local partners.

All of these events and programs can be tailored to the needs of the community. For instance, Life Do Grow surveys community members to decide what produce to grow and ultimately sell at their farm market. Educational programs are tailored to the needs of the target audience—for instance, interactive workshops on science and ecology for families with young children, versus skills-training for unemployed populations. Festivals, concerts, and other events intended for leisure and entertainment can attract a broader group of community members who may not have interest in farming. The Farm at Awbury's many non-farm-related attractions, like Sunday Fun Days or the Philly Goat Project, help introduce Mort Brooks Memorial Farm to a much larger group of visitors from around the city.

(3) Marketing and Outreach

Once the farm's physical space and programming has been established, the farm must still grapple with the question of how to advertise its offerings to the community. Though most marketing focuses on a specific activity or event at the farm, the farm should also consider its greater messaging and general perception in the neighborhood.

One prominent theme is that digital outreach, including websites, social media, and e-mail often miss many segments of the community. Though all four farms maintain an online presence, most recognize that neighbors, especially those who are older, may not feel comfortable accessing digital platforms, or may not take the initiative to seek out and subscribe to newsletters or social media pages. Instead, direct and personal communication play an important role in spreading the word about a farm. For example, Sankofa's street team walks around the neighborhood speaking to residents and distributing information through a word-of-mouth approach. Additionally, Sankofa and the Farm at Awbury's efforts to build relationships

with local leaders present a uniquely effective and community-oriented way to strengthen organizational credibility and circulate information about upcoming events.

Directorial Community Engagement

(1) Leadership and Management

The staff and board at each urban farm play a major role in directing the farm's vision and implementing the farm's values. Thus, one way to easily increase an urban farm's connection with its community is to ensure that farm's leaders are also members of the community, and not outsiders. Here, concepts of community self-representation and sovereignty are especially relevant, as urban farms can educate and empower neighbors to care about the decision-making process around their food systems.

Urban farms can begin by forming strong relationships with key leaders of the community, individuals who are well-known and well-respected due to their age and status. The Southwest Leadership Circle of Bartram's Garden, for instance, gives prominent community members a regular advisory role in the governance of Bartram's Garden and Sankofa Farm.

The procedure of appointing or hiring staff and board can also be designed with accessibility and inclusivity in mind. Part of the Farm at Awbury's recent reformation of its board nomination procedure, for example, gives community members a voice alongside incumbent board members when approving the board nomination slate. Nevertheless, only members of the Awbury Arboretum Association (\$35/year for an individual and \$60/year for a family) can attend annual board meetings and vote on the Board of Directors, restricting access

from lower-income families in the community. This leads into the next aspect of directorial community engagement, members and direct shareholders.

(2) Members and Direct Shareholders

The challenge of navigating the needs of members versus the needs of the entire community persists in all four farms discussed, a manifestation of the larger struggle between a farm's social goals and its financial sustainability. With Urban Creators' transition towards a membership-based financing model similar to that of a co-op, all four urban farms use a membership model with paid benefits. Mort Brooks and Henry Got Crops both fall under Weavers' Way Co-op, which has CSA members (at least \$30/year until \$400 is paid) and shareholders (\$480 for a small share, \$875 for a large share). Mort Brooks also resides in Awbury Arboretum, which has its own membership system (\$35/year for an individual and \$60/year for a family). Similarly, Bartram's Garden, which contains Sankofa Farm, offers memberships (\$50/individual to packages up to \$250+) with various incentives. These memberships add a complex dimension of community representation: while the option of becoming a member allows some community members to become direct stakeholders in the farm with greater political influence in the farm's operations, the paid nature of the membership (though all four farms are otherwise free with events open to the public) necessarily excludes people without the financial capacity and personal interest to actively support the farm.

(3) Listening to Community Needs

Thus, even with leaders and direct stakeholders from the community, an urban farm has more work to do to engage the rest of the community, who tend to have less personal and financial investment in the farm but are still important recipients of the farm's educational and

social mission. Thus, urban farms must find mechanisms to regularly and consistently communicate with neighborhood residents, receiving and potentially implementing their feedback and ideas.

Mass surveys, distributed both digitally and in-person, can help a farm begin to better understand the community's needs by asking direct questions like "How do you feel about the farm?" and "What programs/events would you like to see at the farm?" and "Who do you think needs to be included/consulted in future planning of the farm?" However, these surveys may find it difficult to reach a significant sample of the population, and will likely suffer from sampling issues like bias or unrepresentativeness. Such relatively shallow and impersonal surveys can be supplemented by more in-depth conversations with residents of the community, ranging from one-on-one interviews to small group meetings or town halls. All of these efforts to gauge and fulfil community needs, however, require considerable time and effort that regular staff at urban farms, with their broad array of responsibilities and tasks, may not be able to provide.

Community surveys and meetings generally have more influence in determining the larger goals of the farm and not day-to-day logistics. In the midst of a major transition of structure and values, farms like Urban Creators and the Awbury Arboretum are especially suited to conducting some form of community-planning meetings. Urban farms that have a clear, established mission that stakeholders agree upon tend to have an easier time designing and executing programs with community engagement. For instance, Henry Got Crops can focus its resources on serving the educational needs of its specific target audience: students from Saul High School. While Sankofa Community Farm serves a much wider community, the farm makes an effort to consistently reinforce a singular, distinct set of values (centered on African diaspora,

spiritually rooted, intergenerational) that helps shape the experience of all of the farm's participants. With a strong and agreed-upon idea of its purpose and priorities, an urban farm can better represent itself to the community and to potential partners, funders, and the city.

B. Essentialities and Limitations of Partnerships

None of the four farms discussed have been able to sustain their operations completely independently. In fact, partners play an important role in obtaining land and funding—two components crucial for a farm's viability.

Due in part to city policy that views urban farms as a temporary use of land before more valuable re-development takes place, most urban farms do not have full ownership of their land (Rosan & Pearsall, 2017). Henry Got Crops, for instance, resides on the land of W.B. Saul High School, which is ultimately owned by Philadelphia Parks and Recreation. Mort Brooks Memorial Farm lives inside the larger public green space of Awbury Arboretum, much like Sankofa Community Farm exists as part of Bartram's Garden. Life Do Grow farm holds a rent-free city lease of its land, but like many urban farms on temporary leases, must now grapple with the uncertainty and bureaucratic challenges of how to keep its land after its lease expires in 2022. Land availability is less of a challenge—at least 6,000 currently vacant lots in Philadelphia are publicly owned and ready for disposition—but complicated bureaucratic requirements and threats of new development make accessing this land difficult, though organizations like the Philadelphia Land Bank and the Campaign to Take Back Vacant Land are making progress to mitigate these challenges.²⁶

²⁶ (2019, December 3). *Philadelphia's Urban Agriculture Plan: Public Meeting No. 1*. <https://docs.google.com/presentation/d/e/2PACX->

Each of the four farms benefits from a diverse array of funding sources, including direct sales of farm produce but also grants, subsidies, donations, and more. These additional funders can sometimes obligate urban farms to fulfil new responsibilities that do not necessarily align with the farm's primary mission. For example, Henry Got Crops benefits tremendously from the support of Weavers Way Co-op, but needs to tailor its operations not only to the desires of the students, the school, and the nearby neighborhood, but also to shareholders of Weavers Way, who may not belong to any of the former three groups. Though Life Do Grow farm's many grants and partnerships allowed it to continue its focus on social services rather than commercial viability, Urban Creators' recent decision to transition to a financing model more similar to a co-operative demonstrates the lack of consistency and control that such temporary funds can produce.

Each urban farm's approach to community engagement must be contemplated in the context of the major influence of its partners and funders. As part of larger public-facing organizations, Mort Brooks Memorial Farm and Sankofa Community Farm are inevitably affected by how their communities view Awbury Arboretum and Bartram's Garden, respectively. Mort Brooks and Henry Got Crops have to prioritize their commitments to the paying members of Weavers Way. Life Do Grow farm, meanwhile, may face additional conditions for any programs or projects supported by outside grants. Such complex dependencies are not unique, and many urban farms must balance differing sets of priorities of various groups of collaborators and shareholders, while also staying true to the ultimate motivations of the farm.

V. Discussion and Looking Forward

A. Limitations of Research

This research was conducted over the course of three months. Due to such significant constraints on resources and time, this paper only provides detailed information from four urban farms in Philadelphia. While each farm represents a different group of stakeholders and provides unique lessons in community engagement, a variety of other urban farms in Philadelphia have been left out, including but not limited to Manatawa Farm, Mill Creek Farm, FNC Community Learning Farms, and Nice Roots Farm. Moreover, future research that follows the progression of an urban farm over multiple harvest cycles may provide a more nuanced perspective on the seasonal operational adjustments of each farm.

Another important question is, how unique are these case studies to the physical, political, and social contexts of Philadelphia? Philadelphia has a long history of urban agriculture, and benefits from established networks of governmental agencies, non-profit organizations, advocacy groups, and experienced growers. Nevertheless, many challenges that Philadelphia urban farms face—financial viability, racial and class dynamics, land use and ownership, effective community engagement—are common to similar farms in other U.S. cities. As many of these farms are located in neighborhoods with lower median household income than the city average, the challenge of attracting funding sources while also remaining financially accessible can be especially difficult. Additionally, farms like Sankofa and Life Do Grow illustrate the importance and impact of highlighting Black and Brown experiences within the urban agriculture space. While these case studies are not likely to be replicated or generalized to many different contexts, they provide useful lessons and ideas for how urban farms and even

other urban social enterprises in the United States can develop and execute approaches that meet the needs of their localities.

B. Challenges and Next Steps

The formalization of urban agriculture in city planning policy is complex and challenging, yet necessary. Land-use reforms, distribution of grants and other funds, and increased coordination between government initiatives and farms are all ways that the city government can hope to support urban agriculture.

City officials can learn from the development process of Philadelphia's Urban Agriculture Plan, which acknowledges the history, culture, and issues of racial and economic equity that underlie urban agriculture. Cities can take care to integrate the voices of Black and Brown-led grassroots local food movements into the policy planning and implementation of urban agriculture, similar to the role of Soil Generation in Philadelphia. Additionally, government leaders can also learn from the themes of community self-representation and self-determination, which are necessary on an individual scale for urban farms to effectively support their communities, but are also useful on a higher level for city policies and plans to meaningfully support the growth of urban agriculture.

The creation of Philadelphia's first Urban Agriculture plan demonstrates the city's interest in further understanding and integrating urban agriculture into future policy. Nevertheless, whatever strategy is established will require a considerable amount of detailed organization and inter-departmental collaboration to be implemented. Any meaningful change is likely to be gradual and needs city officials to appreciate and prioritize the benefits of urban agriculture for their city.

C. Questions for Future Research

By its multifunctional nature, urban agriculture presents a considerable opportunity for research in a variety of disciplines including environmental studies, agronomy, urban studies, economics, political science, anthropology, and sociology. More work that examines and quantifies the impacts of urban farming outside of direct food production or profit would not only help expand our understanding of the complex array of benefits it provides, but also help urban farmers communicate the importance of their work to policymakers and grantmakers and gain greater recognition and institutional support. For instance, using additional neighborhood data on employment and educational levels, future research could seek to understand the characteristics of each farm's target communities and measure the farm's impact on these factors. Sociological and urban planning metrics for evaluating social capital and support networks could easily be applied to the effects of urban farms on their communities. Additional analyses focused on the role of policymakers, partners, and funders in shaping urban farms can also shed light on effective support mechanisms for urban agriculture. Finally, critical conversations about the role of race and class in defining urban food systems are necessary for the formation of a comprehensive understanding of the contexts, challenges, and values of urban farms.

VII. References

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IX. Resources

For greater context and more information, see the following websites:

<http://www.farmingphilly.com/>

<https://groundedinphilly.org/resources/>

<https://phdcphila.org/>

<https://phillyfpac.org/urban-agriculture/>

<https://urbancreators.org/resources/>

X. Appendices

A. Farm Site Checklist

Accessibility	X	Notes
<i>Entrance and Access</i>		
Pedestrian		
Vehicle		
Parking		
<i>Security</i>		
Gates (lock)		
Surveillance		
<i>Travel</i>		
Road Types and Suitability		
Safety		
Public Transport		
<i>Boundary</i>		
Fencing		
Vegetation		
Land form		
Water		
Sign Posting		
Other Visual Cues		

Farm	X	Notes
<i>Practical</i>		
Toolshed		
Storage		
Compost/Mulch		
Waste Disposal		
Delivery Area		
Water/Irrigation		
Other		
<i>Additional</i>		
Orchard/Nursery		
Gardens		
Art		
Other		

Interior	X	Notes
<i>Circulation</i>		
Paths (width)		
Sign Posting		
Disability Access		
Landscape/Water		
<i>Seating</i>		
Outdoor		
Indoor		
Picnic Tables		
<i>Events/Activities</i>		
Marketing		
Notice Board/Kiosk		
Signs		
Kiosk		
Staff		
Multilingual/cultural		
<i>Facilities</i>		
Public Restrooms		
Indoor/Outdoor Kitchen		
Sinks/Cleaning		
Educational		
Kids/Youth		
Indoor Common Area		
Outdoor Common Area		
Other		

Notes:

Details
 Sufficiency
 Maintenance
 Safety
 Visibility

Who is present?
 Surrounding neighborhood?
 Affordability?
 Hours, rules?
 Activities and events advertised?
 Unique identity/values conveyed?

C. Interview Questions

Note: Prior to each interview, a script was read that clearly articulated the purpose of the study, explained how information from the interview would be used, and obtained consent for recording and use of the interview. Actual interview transcriptions will not be shared or kept for future use.

The following list of questions is only a general guideline of what questions were asked.

Questions were changed, removed, or added depending on the circumstances of the specific farm and responses given by the interviewee during the interview.

1. Could you describe what you do at [FARM NAME]?
2. What are [FARM NAME]'s main goals and values, and how did those come about?
3. Who in the community does [FARM NAME] see yourself most trying to serve? How do you define your community?
 - a. How do you go about attracting and serving those people?
 - b. Who do you recruit to participate? How do you recruit them?
 - c. Are there any specific programs or events that stand out to you?
 - d. Has the community changed over time? If so, how did that affect how [FARM NAME] engages with it?
4. Do you collaborate with other neighborhood and community organizations? If so, who?
5. How do you go about this collaboration?
6. What are your main sources of revenue? How does this affect the way you engage with the community?
7. 6. What are your future goals for [FARM NAME]?