



Ensuring an Arable Future: Food Sovereignty in Detroit



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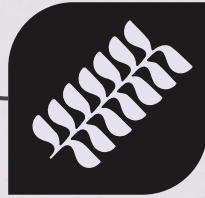


Presentation Overview



Defining

food sovereignty



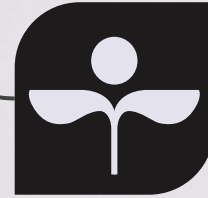
Connecting

recording the
experiences and
knowledge of
experts



Reflecting

our takeaways
from our
conversations



Envisioning


steps the city can
take to support the
efforts already
underway



01

Defining Food Sovereignty

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Food Sovereignty



- **Food sovereignty** is the right of peoples to healthy and culturally appropriate food produced through ecologically sound and sustainable methods, and their right to define their own food and agriculture systems. It puts those who produce, distribute and consume food at the heart of food systems and policies rather than the demands of markets and corporations. It defends the interests and inclusion of the next generation.
 - Declaration of Nyéléni, the first global forum on food sovereignty, Mali, 2007
- **Urban Farming** is an opportunity for community-supported agriculture within a city. These city farms are “used to empower urban communities by using agriculture as a platform to promote education, sustainability, and community while simultaneously reducing socioeconomic disparity.”
- **Food apartheid** is a system of segregation that divides those with access to an abundance of nutritious food and those who have been denied that access due to systemic injustice.
 - ReGeneration, 2023



Food Sovereignty



“Engaging agriculture to rebuild community yields increased access to healthy, affordable food options for city residents and opportunities that move toward economic autonomy and independence.

Not only do these efforts illustrate the strategies of collective agency and community resilience, but they harken back to earlier historical moments when African Americans turned to agriculture as a way to feed themselves, share resources, build community, and work toward freedom and liberation. The work of members of DBCFSN to create a food policy and a policy council and to establish D-Town Farm and the Detroit People’s Coop illustrates the value of working toward self-sufficiency and self-determination through the development of community-based food systems.”

-Monica White, ‘Drawing on the past toward a Food Sovereign Future’



02

Connecting

Who did we talk to,
What are their stories





Who We Talked To

Tepfirah Rushdan

Mark Covington

Malik Yakini

Jon Kent

Myrtle thompson

Raphael Write

Shakara Tyler

Wynona Bynum

Dolores Perales





Tepfirah Rushdan

Detroit's first Director of Urban Agriculture;
Co- Director at Keep Growing Detroit;
Co-founder of the Detroit Black Farmer Land Fund

- Land justice, work, land access work
- Black leadership in environmental work needed in Detroit



*"The systems are not rigged for us and are actually rigged against us... **breaking ourselves away from the systems, led me to agriculture**"...*

"It was easier for white farmers to get through the system. It was easier for them to have to have the capital."

*"We wanna make sure that, our agriculture is appropriately scaled so that it feels comfortable **for all** of the residents of the neighborhood."*

"We need to be putting as much compost in the ground as we can."



Malik Yakini

Executive Director, Detroit Black Community Food Security Network

- Black radical thought and action
- Commitment to justice
- Detroit has a rich cultural soil

*“**Lifetime struggle for freedom...** having the energy to engage in this struggle is **aided by eating high nutrient foods.**”*

*“Urban agriculture in and of itself is not necessarily radical, right?... It can be a very reformist activity that doesn't necessarily change power relationships. But clearly **we're interested in utilizing it as a way of explicitly building power in black communities, so that those communities have the power to determine our own destiny.**”*

*“If the city of Detroit would see... agriculture as an important use of land... would create policies that not only made **land accessible to black farmers**, but gave special favor to people who are helping to develop this **urban agriculture movement** that incentivized farmers in the city of Detroit.”*



myrtle thompson

Program Director at Freedom Freedom Growers;

- Liberation zone
- Growing food, teaching music and art
- Need young people to want to participate
- Experienced massive price increases of properties in the neighborhood

"You can tap into the soil but also tap into your soul."

"How can you own the land? But we can be good stewards, it takes care of us."

"Wanting improvements but don't want people to get moved out."

"Don't just fix the water pipes only for the gated communities."



Shakara Tyler

Board President at the Detroit Black Community Food Security Network;
Board member of the Detroit People's Food Co-op;
Co-founder of the Detroit Black Farmer Land Fund;
Member of the Black Dirt Farm Collective

- Grew up around food and once she became a mother started growing food for her family.
- Centers blackness, black love, black joy, indigenous sovereignty, and standing in solidarity with indigenous peoples
- Sees urban agriculture as healing, embodiment of motherhood through fostering the land and growing natural food to provide healthier options for the community.

*"And so you have to be in **community with people** and you have to work together because of how capitalism has made us internalize the oppressor."*

*"When folks are displaced or dispossessed of their homelands or ancestral homelands, they **take the culture with them and they start farms and land connections** wherever they end up. And so that, to me, is the **epitome of urban agriculture**"*



Dolores Perales



Co Director at Cadillac Urban Gardens;
Grants Coordinator at CHASS Center

- South West Detroit Native- majority Hispanic population and heavily industrialized
- Focuses on the correlation between the environment and health impacting the quality of life through the lens of food systems
- Bridging the gap between environmental justice and public health and food security
- Green spaces like urban gardens are a place of healing and rest

“Within that healthcare sector, they're just giving you medications or items to address the [underlying] problem without realizing there's a whole other side that may be the root of the problem.”

“I have vivid memories of walking with my mom. All these little kids with her like literally like pulling up, pulling on their leg, walking to a liquor store, picking up eggs and milk and bread, and then walking back to the place that we were staying at.”



Mark Covington

Founder/Executive Director at Georgia Street Community Collective

- Wanted to clean up these vacant lots that people had started dumping garbage on
- Beekeeping & grants
- Challenging experience to buy land
- The city shows off the accomplishments of urban farmers without adequately supporting them



“We had about 25 youth in the garden that summer... but I wanted to do more. I didn't want it to just be growing season.”

“I'm an advocate for them rebuilding houses..., but I don't want gentrification. I don't want to price people out.”



Jon Kent

Co-Founder of Sanctuary Farms; Founder of Sacred spaces

- Felt like he had to leave the city to be successful; from working in urban agriculture, has reconnected with Detroit
- Contributing to closing the food loop - compost
- Urban agriculture as an opportunity to give back to community

Envisions:

- ★ Equitable access to food, nature, and the arts
- ★ Affordable homes with opportunities for homesteading as reparations
- ★ Funding the community organizations currently leading urban agriculture work

“Urban agriculture has offered me the ability to feed myself, my family, and my community, physically but also spiritually.”

“This is an act of self-determination, and hopefully this will turn into something that is reparational.”



Raphael Wright

Founder of Neighborhood Grocery,
Detroit's equity crowd-funded grocery store

- Saw the correlation for communities who have access to their own food and the **difference between surviving and thriving**
- Noted that most support from banks and media came after opening rather than throughout the process
- Still learning to navigate grant process
- Support from Ross class at UM for marketing studies helped save so much money, but would have been even more helpful further in advance

"Neighbors need this store."

"My goal is to be hyper-local."

*"If you have everything there, that's a **community**, and that **starts with food.**"*

"Food can provide educational and economic lessons."



Winona Bynum

Executive Director at Detroit Food Policy Council

- Created a strong relationship since with food since she was young and the importance of why it should be more accessible to communities of color
- Working with water departments to understand the benefit that urban agriculture has on sewer systems and water mitigation
- Collaborates with local departments to assess soil health and farming potential

Envisions:

- ★ reparational justice as a redistribution of land from white landowners

*“Urban Ag is something that **adds value**, and that it has to have its own category. In some kind of way it has to be recognized differently.”*





Reflecting

Takeaways from
conversations





Conversation Takeaways

possibilities

- liberation
- Black power
- self-determination
- peace

community

- relationships
- conversations
- healing

intergenerational

- feeding family
- youth involvement
- storytelling

methods

- Black-led
- autonomous
- guerilla gardening

land

- abundance
- need access
- indigenous solidarity

water

- high-cost
- mitigation
- commodity v. need

capital

- grants
- crowdfunding
- department reconfiguration

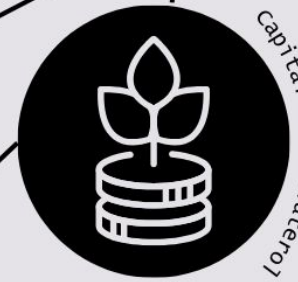
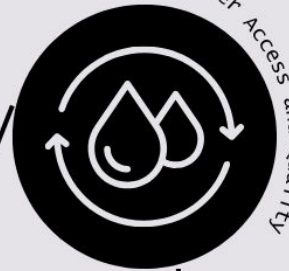


Collaborative Food Sovereignty Map



*Not a comprehensive map

Agricultural Institutional Power Map





04

Envisioning

Recommendations for steps to
a future of food sovereignty



Recommendations

01

Revision of the Land Tax Act to protect all stages of food sovereignty

02

Additions to the Animal Keeping Ordinance

03

Enhanced Land Purchasing Accessibility and Transparency

04

Reformation of Brownfield Funding

05

Administrative and Communication Best Practices





Revision of the Land Value Tax Plan to Support All Stages of Food Sovereignty



We recommend that husbandry space is added to the plan as a low-tax area type in addition to properties with buildings and community land spaces. We advise that gardens that are not large enough to be considered urban farms and raised bed gardens on parking lots are added as spaces within this husbandry space category.

- Additionally, we suggest that the city of Detroit specify the uses of said garden spaces so that negative agents cannot purchase land without the intent of allowing it to contribute to community growth.
- Finally, the departments that are tasked with the operation of taxation and permits need to establish clear communication channels for community members to understand its processes.

Land Tax Benefits

- Adjusting Tax rate for all neighborhoods (17%)
- Public Designated Spots can have more security over ownership of lots





Additions to the Animal Keeping Ordinance

We recommend including quails within the animal keeping ordinance in addition to the other animals already included.

Advantages of having quails compared to chickens:

- Smaller
- Mature faster and reach egg-laying age sooner
- Resistant to certain poultry diseases
- Efficient feed conversion

We also **suggest including rabbits within a future expansion** to the ordinance.

Strengths of cuniculture

- High nutritional value (protein, amino acids, and minerals)
- High reproductive rate, with short gestation periods and large litters
- Can be kept in small spaces
- Efficient feed conversion





Enhanced Land Purchasing Accessibility and Transparency



"We need clear, transparent, consistently interpreted and enforced policies around the purchase of land."

"Still don't have title and deed to the lots we grow on."

"Every time we put in an application to buy, they would not let us buy."

We suggest that the city ensures enhanced transparency in the Detroit Land Bank Authority (DLBA) land purchasing process and establishes additional urban agriculture specific opportunities for Detroit residents to acquire land in coordination with community feedback.

- **Transparent pricing** system
- Additional urban agriculture focused **pathways to land ownership**
- Provide **reasons for denied applications**
- Include urban **agriculture data in quarterly reports**



Reform Brownfield Redevelopment for Urban Ag



Community Level:

Work with an attorney to **make the case** for urban agriculture as an eligible activity under the current Brownfield legislation.

City Level:

More intentionally **codify urban agriculture as a use eligible for brownfield redevelopment grants**

State Level:

More intentionally **codify urban agriculture as a use eligible for brownfield redevelopment grants** and **allocate restricted brownfield redevelopment funds** to Urban Agriculture related projects





Communication Best Practices and Strategic Hiring



Communication:

We recommend that **all relevant city staff be trained and held to a standard of communication** with Urban Farmers including:

Transparency about any lack of knowledge on behalf of staff

Onus on City Government to **learn more about urban agriculture and compensate experts** for any education they provide

Regular Check-ins and **consensual site visits** with the community about what they need from the City

Strategic Hiring:

City-level institutions would benefit from **more urban-agriculture focused administrative staff** starting with:

- A Detroit Land Bank Urban Agriculture Administrator
- An Urban Agriculture Administrator for the Buildings, Safety Engineering, and Environmental Department who is focused on improving the permitting, inspection, and acquisition process at an administrative level





Next Steps: Additional Policy Considerations



Short Term

- Adjusted pricing and credit system for agricultural water use
- Addition of other small animals within husbandry ordinance for farmers with regulatory policies around animal care

Long Term

- Policies to prevent resident displacement amidst development
- Paths to communal land ownership to support undocumented community members in Detroit



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Thank You!

Do you have any questions?

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