

# Sowing Seeds in the City



Elizabeth Hodges Snyder • Kristen McIvor  
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Editors

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Human Dimensions

 Springer

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ISBN 978-94-017-7454-3

ISBN 978-94-017-7456-7 (eBook)

DOI 10.1007/978-94-017-7456-7

Library of Congress Control Number: 2016939230

Springer Dordrecht Heidelberg New York London

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Printed on acid-free paper

Springer Science+Business Media B.V. Dordrecht is part of Springer Science+Business Media  
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***Book 1 Quotes (in lieu of dedications)***

***Part I***

*“A lifetime of accomplishments of which the  
dirt knows none,  
only in death can one truly return  
Return the carrots, the apples and potatoes,  
The chickens, the cows, the fish and  
tomatoes.”*

–Poi Dog Pondering

*“Well I love that dirty water”*

–Standells

***Part II***

*“Let me tell ya ‘bout the birds and the bees  
And the flowers and the trees”*

–Herbert Newman

***Part III***

*On the roof’s the only place I know  
Where you just have to wish to make it so  
Let’s go up on the roof (Up on the roof)*

–Drifters

*Well, you get the cherry, Jerry  
Now look, don’t be so picky, Mickey  
Cause everybody eats when they come to my  
house*

–Cab Calloway

***Book II Quotes (in lieu of dedications)***

***Part I***

*Then the farmer he left town, and the place  
was broken-down,  
And the pigweeds and the thistles they were  
rife,  
But the land in fallow lay, it was waiting for  
the day  
When dreams and hands would bring it back  
to life.*

–folk song from the late 1800s

***Part II***

*Now I'm a farmer, and I'm digging, digging,  
digging, digging, digging  
It's alarming how charming it is to be  
a-farming  
How calming and balming the effect of the  
air*

–Pete Townsend, The Who

***Part III***

*If you're after getting the honey, hey  
Then you don't go killing all the bees*

–Joe Strummer

***Part IV***

*I love fatback on mustard greens*

*Gobbled up an onion like a peach I've seen*

*A pot of hot collards made a monkey out of  
full grown men*

*John cakes bigger than a catcher's mitt*

*Butter on a biscuit and a plate of hot grits*

*Soak 'em in molasses, let 'em run on down  
your chin*

*I'm hungry for home, I been gone too long*

*—Rodney Crowell*

# Preface

For the first time in history, the majority of the world's population is living in cities. It is likely, then, that a smaller percentage of us than ever before are involved in the production of food. From fields of study as diverse as ecosystem services, public health, and hunger relief, it is recognized that the negative impacts of our current food system are serious. While there is not yet general agreement about the best path forward, it is clear that urban agriculture is emerging as a response to the food production, access, and utilization challenges throughout the world.

Urban agriculture encompasses a wide range of activities. Most broadly, urban agriculture refers to growing and raising food crops and animals in an urban setting for the purpose of feeding local populations. However, most urban agricultural efforts to date are not organized in the same manner as traditional agriculture – with a sole proprietor growing foods for market. While this may change in the future, one of the dominant features of many of the activities reported on in this book is the fact that they are community endeavors, many led and managed by volunteers.

This characteristic creates new and different ways in which humans are interacting with food production and each other and therefore creates new opportunities for our food system to impact our social lives, with profound consequences for our personal and community health. “What distinguishes a community garden from a private garden is the fact that it is in some sense a public garden in terms of ownership, access, and degree of democratic control” (Ferris et al. 2001). The term “community” in community gardening refers to the fact that this approach to food production involves the convergence of multiple individuals, joining together in diverse settings (e.g., schools, neighborhoods, city blocks, faith communities, prisons, nursing homes, and hospitals), to grow – among other things – food. Well-designed community gardens are used by, and beneficial for, individuals of any age, race, ethnicity, and socioeconomic status, as well as the disabled and nondisabled alike (Draper and Freedman 2010). While not all of the efforts described here are community gardens, they all explore the human elements of urban agricultural projects that involve the community in some aspect of food growing and distribution.

There is an incredible diversity of people and creativity involved in this work. This volume was born out of a desire to connect these people to each other and to

what is happening on the ground. We are also hoping to clarify what is known and not known and in the process assist in building a stronger movement to support greater health for ourselves and our environment through a different type of food system. To date, the primary proponents of urban agriculture have been outside of the traditional scientific and policy arenas. We are hopeful that will begin to change.

It is well known that Michelle Obama, the nation's First Lady, is a supporter of these initiatives and has built a garden at the White House to teach kids (among others) about better health through increased vegetable consumption. Our introductory chapter is written by the former White House pastry chef and is a personal reflection on his experience in that garden and the effect it is having on our country and the children who have experienced it directly.

Part I addresses the potential and promise of urban agriculture to address food security and resilience in cities from a diversity of perspectives. Can urban agriculture feed our cities? Parts II and III focus on the different dimensions of human health. Part II focuses on the individual and community health benefits of urban agriculture – ranging from physical nutrition to social capital to increased nature contact. Part III focuses on what is perhaps the biggest question around personal risk in urban agriculture – what about contaminated soil? Here, top scientists discuss both the actual risk and strategies for communicating about it.

Part IV concentrates on the ways in which urban agriculture impacts our civic life together, and covers the theoretical (and applied) concepts of democracy, ethics, and sovereignty. Part V is a compilation of research efforts that demonstrate ways that urban agriculture is affecting our communities.

Finally, Parts VI and VII explore the ways that organizations are involved with making this work happen. Part VI showcases several nonprofits, whereas Part VII focuses on the ways that cities, universities, entrepreneurs, and religious groups are engaging with urban agriculture.

This book represents our best attempt to gather together in one place the diversity of the work happening related to urban agriculture and the human impacts of that work. That said, there was no way to capture it all, and there are many omissions – but it is our hope that this work will generate conversations across disciplines and sectors and lead to a more cohesive and comprehensive movement.

We would like to thank all the contributors and all who are engaged in the work of making urban agriculture real and relevant in cities everywhere.

Anchorage, AK, USA  
Puyallup, WA, USA  
Seattle, WA, USA

Elizabeth Hodges Snyder  
Kristen McIvor  
Sally Brown

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# About the Editors

**Elizabeth Hodges Snyder** is an assistant professor of public health and the Master of Public Health Program coordinator at the University of Alaska Anchorage. She also serves as cochair of the Alaska Food Policy Council (AFPC). Dr. Snyder is trained in environmental health (MPH, Global Environmental Health, Emory University, 2004) and soil and water science (PhD, Soil and Water Science, University of Florida, 2009). Her career began with a focus on environmental contaminant fate and transport and human and ecological risk assessment, but her research program and teaching agenda have since evolved to address the fields of food security and health impact assessment. She has coauthored several works on food security in Alaska; supervises graduate student projects addressing food access, availability, and utilization; and advocates for strengthened rural and urban food systems. Originally from Florida, Dr. Snyder has adjusted well to the climate of Alaska – successfully raising backyard chickens, utilizing vertical drip irrigation to produce greenhouse tomatoes, growing beautiful peonies, chasing moose out of her raised beds, and instilling in her children a love for Alaska-grown carrots made sugar-sweet in the cold soil.

**Kristen McIvor** is the director of Harvest Pierce County, a program of the Pierce Conservation District. Their mission is to invest in people to foster and sustain an equitable and healthy community-based food system throughout Pierce County. She is also an adjunct professor at Antioch University Seattle where she teaches classes on food systems. Dr. McIvor got her MS at Antioch in environment and community and her PhD at the University of Washington. Her academic work has focused on improving soils in urban areas to support the growing of food, and much of her time is spent working with community groups to do just that. She lives in the drippy Pacific Northwest and loves its mild climate for year-round growing. In her spare time, she gets her hands dirty as often as she can and loves preparing and sharing the bounty of her garden with her family and friends.

**Sally Brown** is a research associate professor at the University of Washington School of Forest and Environmental Science. She is a fellow in the Soil Science Society of America, was a two-term member of the National Academy of Science Standing Committee on Soil Science, and is a member on the National Academy of Science Committee on the Bioavailability of Contaminants in Soils and Sediments. She has won multiple awards for her work on residual use in soils. Dr. Brown writes a monthly column for *BioCycle Magazine*, a journal that focuses on sustainable management of organics. She has a BA in political science from Williams College (1980) and an MS (1993) and PhD (1996) from the University of Maryland. Before returning to graduate school, she worked as a chef in New York City, New Orleans, and Connecticut. In 1986 she started a business delivering locally grown vegetables to stores and restaurants in New York City and Connecticut. She currently grows greens, onions, potatoes, and currants on two plots near her home with the assistance of her husband and TAGRO, the biosolids-based soil amendment from Tacoma, WA.