



May 16, 2019

2018 Farm Bill Primer: Support for Urban Agriculture

Over the past decade, food policy in the United States has responded to ongoing shifts in consumer preferences and producer trends that favor local and regional food systems while also supporting traditional farm enterprises. This support for local and regional farming has helped to increase agricultural production in urban areas within and surrounding major U.S. cities. The 2018 farm bill (Agriculture Improvement Act of 2018, P.L. 115-334) provides additional support for urban, indoor, and other emerging agricultural production, creating new programs and authorities and providing additional funding for such operations. The law also combines and expands existing programs administered by the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) to provide financial and resource management support for local and regional food production.

Urban Farming Operations

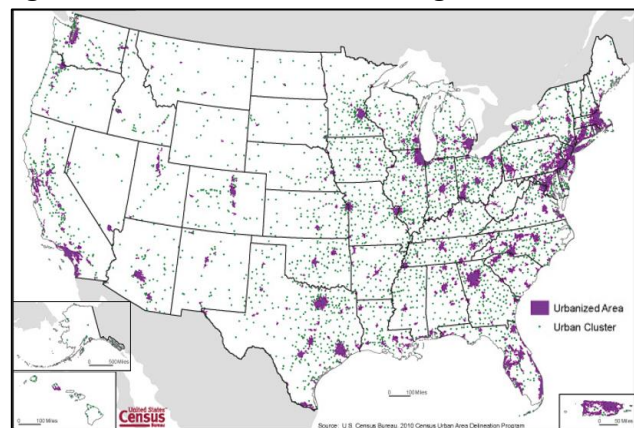
Urban farming operations represent a diverse range of systems and practices. They encompass large-scale innovative systems and capital-intensive operations, vertical and rooftop farms, hydroponic greenhouses (e.g., soilless systems), and aquaponic facilities (e.g., growing fish and plants together in an integrated system). Urban farming also includes a range of operations such as vacant city lots, city parks, churchyards, schoolyards, backyards, and community gardens. This diversity has resulted in a lack of consensus about what constitutes an urban farm. *Urban agriculture* is not specifically defined in statute, and the 2018 farm bill refers to this farming demographic as *urban, indoor, and other emerging agricultural production* but without specifically defining this term.

Given the diversity in the types of urban farming operations, existing data limitations, and lack of consensus about what constitutes an urban or peri-urban farm, USDA does not report data and statistics on the number of urban farming operations in the United States. To address such data needs, the 2018 farm bill directs USDA to conduct a “follow-up study” to its most recent Census of Agriculture to examine U.S. urban farming operations in 2017 (§7212). This study shall provide information about community gardens and farms located in urban areas, suburbs, and urban clusters; rooftop farms; outdoor vertical production; green walls; indoor farms; greenhouses; high-tech vertical technology farms; and hydroponic, aeroponic (e.g., growing plants in an air or mist system without soil), and aquaponic facilities, among other innovations in agricultural production, as determined by USDA. The enacted law authorizes additional total appropriations of \$14 million (FY2019-FY2021) for USDA’s follow-up study to the 2017 agricultural census.

The U.S. Census Bureau identifies two types of urban areas: (1) Urbanized Areas of 50,000 or more people and (2) Urban Clusters of between 2,500 and 50,000 people

(Figure 1). An urban area represents densely developed territory encompassing residential, commercial, and other nonresidential urban land uses. In contrast, rural areas encompass all population, housing, and territory not included within an urban area. Results from the most recent 2010 U.S. Census indicate that the nation’s urban population increased by 12% from 2000 to 2010, outpacing the nation’s overall growth of 10% for the same period.

Figure 1. Census Bureau Urban Designations, 2010



Source: U.S. Census Bureau, <https://www.census.gov/>.

Provisions in the 2018 Farm Bill

The 2018 farm bill builds on previous support for urban, indoor, and emerging production systems as provided in the previous two farm bills—the Agricultural Act of 2014 (P.L. 113-79) and the Food, Conservation, and Energy Act of 2008 (P.L. 110-246) to support local and regional food production. These farm programs are administered by USDA and may be grouped into the following broad categories: marketing and promotion, business assistance and agricultural research, rural and community development, nutrition and education, and farmland conservation. Examples include USDA farmers’ market programs, rural cooperative grants, child nutrition programs, and USDA research and cooperative extension service. For more information, see CRS In Focus IF10232, *U.S. Farm Policy: Local and Regional Food Systems*.

Many of the provisions in the 2018 farm bill that support urban agriculture were derived from, or initially originated in, legislation introduced in the 115th Congress, including the Urban Agriculture Act of 2018 (S. 3005) and the Urban Agriculture Production Act of 2017 (H.R. 3699). These efforts follow other previously introduced legislation in the 114th Congress (S. 3420, H.R. 6481) and the 113th Congress (H.R. 5616, H.R. 1933).

The enacted 2018 farm bill creates new authorities specific to urban agriculture (§12302), including:

- an Office of Urban Agriculture and Innovative Production at USDA to encourage and promote urban, indoor, and other emerging agricultural practices;
- an Urban Agriculture and Innovative Production Advisory Committee;
- USDA grant authority to support the development of urban agriculture and innovative production;
- pilot projects to operate in counties with a high concentration of urban or suburban farms; and
- USDA reporting requirements.

The 2018 farm bill authorizes annual appropriations of \$25 million (FY2019-FY2023) to support these efforts.

The 2018 farm bill also creates the Urban, Indoor, and Other Emerging Agricultural Production, Research, Education, and Extension Initiative (§7212). The initiative authorizes new competitive grants—in consultation with the Urban Agriculture and Innovative Production Advisory Committee—to support research and extension activities to enhance urban, indoor, and other emerging agricultural production. These include facilitating urban agricultural production, harvesting, transportation, packaging, and marketing; assessing and developing strategies to remediate contaminated sites; identifying and promoting the horticultural, social, and economic factors that contribute to successful urban, indoor, and other emerging agricultural production; and exploring new technologies that minimize energy, lighting systems, water, and other inputs. USDA may prioritize proposals involving cooperation with multiple entities and states and regions with significant interest in urban farms and indoor production. The 2018 farm bill authorizes mandatory funding of \$10 million through the Commodity Credit Corporation for FY2019 to remain available until expended, along with \$10 million in annual authorized appropriations (FY2019-FY2023).

In addition to provisions specifically supporting urban agriculture, the 2018 farm bill expands certain existing farm bill provisions supporting local and regional farming that may also support urban farming. For example, the enacted law creates the Local Agriculture Market Program (LAMP), which combines and expands the existing Farmers' Market and Local Food Promotion Program and the Value-Added Agricultural Product Market Development Grants Program (§10102). LAMP authorizes USDA to provide competitive grants to support a range of local production initiatives. Other support for urban agriculture may also be available through the 2018 farm bill's expanded support for new and beginning farmers and ranchers as part of the new Farming Opportunities Training and Outreach (FOTO) program (§12301). FOTO similarly combines and expands certain existing USDA programs and authorizes USDA to make competitive grants supporting training, education, outreach, and technical assistance initiatives. Finally, the enacted law includes other provisions in other titles of the 2018 farm bill that may broadly support urban agriculture (see **text box**).

Considerations for Congress

USDA has not yet implemented many of the provisions in the 2018 farm bill. In addition, for urban agriculture, a determination of where within USDA the authorities and the new Office of Urban Agriculture and Innovative Production will be housed has not been announced. The

complexity and scale of the 2018 farm bill's new and modified provisions supporting urban agriculture—requiring agency reorganization, establishing an advisory committee, implementing additional grant authorities and pilot projects, merging existing farm programs with expanded funding and mission areas, and evaluating 2017 Census of Agriculture data to profile urban farmers, among other USDA requirements—may prove challenging. Congress may wish to track USDA's progress in implementing these provisions as part of its farm bill oversight.

Provisions Related to Urban Agriculture in the 2018 Farm Bill (P.L. 115-334)

- **Urban Agriculture** (§12302). Establishes an Office of Urban Agriculture and Innovative Production at USDA, an Urban Agriculture and Innovative Production Advisory Committee, a new grant authority for USDA, new USDA pilot projects, and new USDA reporting requirements. Authorizes annual appropriations of \$25 million (FY2019-FY2023).
- **Urban, Indoor, and Other Emerging Agricultural Production Research, Education, and Extension Initiative** (§7212). Authorizes competitive grants to facilitate urban agricultural production, harvesting, transportation, and marketing, among other activities. Provides \$10 million in mandatory funding (FY2019) and authorizes \$10 million in annual appropriations through FY2023. Directs USDA to study urban agriculture as part of the 2017 Census of Agriculture.
- **Local Agriculture Market Program (LAMP)** (§10102). Combines and expands the existing Farmers' Market and Local Food Promotion Program and the Value-Added Agricultural Product Market Development Grants to create LAMP with expanded funding and administrative functions. Provides \$50 million annually in mandatory funds.
- **Conservation Innovation Grants and Payments** (§2307). Expands existing competitive grants to cover partnering with farmers to develop innovative practices for "urban, indoor, or other emerging agricultural operations," including initiatives for "testing new or innovative conservation approaches." Provides \$25 million annually through FY2023 from mandatory funds for the Environmental Quality Incentives Program.
- **Research and Development Authority** (§11122). Amends the Federal Crop Insurance Act to require a feasibility study to evaluate the effectiveness of policies for agricultural production systems including urban and small-scale production.
- **Noninsured Crop Assistance Program (NAP)** (§1601). Amends NAP to establish a streamlined process for the submission of records and acreage reports for agricultural production systems including urban and small-scale production.
- **Gus Schumacher Nutrition Incentive Program** (§4205). Increases federal funding for bonus incentives for Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program fruit and vegetable purchases, with a portion of the funds for a produce prescription program.
- **Micro-Grants for Food Security** (§4206). Authorizes appropriations for Micro-Grants for Food Security for specified agricultural activities in certain states and territories.
- **Other Nutrition (Title IV) Provisions**. Reauthorizes through FY2023 (1) the Senior Farmers' Market Nutrition Program, without change (§4201), and (2) the Community Food Projects grant program but reduces its funding (§4017).

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