

# THE NORTH AMERICAN URBAN AND PERI-URBAN AGRICULTURE ALLIANCE

November 2007

## 1) BACKGROUND AND PROBLEM STATEMENT

This is an exciting time for those involved in urban agriculture in North America. The desire of consumers for fresh, locally-produced food as an alternative to food transported over great distances to kitchen tables, restaurants and schools has led to more opportunities for food production in city neighborhoods, and on farmland outside cities. Proponents of urban agriculture point to the links that city farming makes to public health, issues of homelessness and elderly, urban/suburban land use, youth programming, and community/neighborhood development and job creation. In the bigger picture, the increased number of city and suburban farms in North America and globally can also begin to address the critical issues of climate change and efficient energy use.

A primary source of energy driving the urban and peri-urban agriculture movement in the US and Canada are organizations, such as The Stop Community Food Centre in Toronto, Philadelphia's Greensgrow Farms, Growing Power in Milwaukee and Chicago, the Kansas City Center for Urban Agriculture and Vancouver's My Own Back Yard, now practicing and refining the techniques of city farming. Yet, most efforts to link these actors with one another, and with disciplines that could play supportive roles, have had limited effectiveness, due in large part to the fact that no one entity has had the creation and maintenance of such linkages as its sole focus.

### Urban and Peri-urban Agriculture in North America

Urban and peri-urban agriculture (UPA) refers to the production, distribution and marketing of food and other products within the cores of metropolitan areas (comprising community and school gardens; backyard and rooftop horticulture; and innovative food-production methods, such as aquaponics, that maximize production in a small area), and at their edges (including farms supplying urban farmers markets, community supported agriculture, and family farms located in metropolitan greenbelts). Looked at broadly, UPA is a complex activity, addressing issues central to community food security, neighborhood development, environmental sustainability, land use planning, agricultural and food systems, farmland preservation, and other concerns.

UPA in Canada and the US is emerging as an alternative to the processed, calorie-rich food products offered consumers through the global food industry. Because large-scale corporate agriculture and the general availability of food is so entrenched in North America, UPA proponents must work hard to get their message across to specific constituencies. In the US, one critical constituency is the federal government. There is no federal program dedicated specifically to urban food production, despite the substantial activity found within metropolitan areas and metropolitan-adjacent counties – now estimated at over 40 percent of all agricultural production by value. The share of food production coming from metropolitan agriculture is comparable in Canada. The future of UPA in North America will be characterized in large part by the incorporation of immigrants and refugees into local agriculture, complementing the many farming projects based in urban communities of color. Together, these activities portray the high level of cultural diversity that characterizes UPA.

Reflecting the demographic shifts towards greater urbanization in the US and Canada, the UPA landscape in North America is changing rapidly. Thus an alliance of organizations and individuals directing this change is needed to monitor the dimensions of UPA, disseminate information on its methods and benefits to a wider audience, and engage key actors who may currently lack awareness of how UPA operates at many different levels. Ultimately, the intention of such an alliance is to enable UPA in North America to reach the potential that today's signs only hint at.

### Problems and Needs Addressed by the Proposed Alliance

An extensive but largely disjointed patchwork of individuals, organizations and institutions now represents UPA in North America. While some of these actors are aware of each other's work, there is no mechanism to facilitate timely communication and information sharing. Similarly, while various avenues of technical and anecdotal knowledge exist to further UPA, there is little integration that allows for the cross-fertilization of this knowledge in a way that mutually benefits all parties.

This fragmentation was identified by the Urban Agriculture Committee of the Community Food Security Coalition (CFSC) as a major hindrance to the development of urban agriculture in North America. After several years of discussion, a number of individuals affiliated with the Committee, along with members of other organizations such as Food Secure Canada (FSC) and the bi-national American Community Gardening Association (ACGA), have come to see the need for a new initiative that seeks to bridge three perceptual and practical divides:

- *geographic* (the United States and Canada, and ultimately Mexico and the Caribbean);
- *thematic* (reaching out beyond a base in community food security to engage everything from farmland preservation to energy use to climate-change prevention);
- *professional* (across several relevant disciplines and areas of specialization).

The concept of an international support network for urban and peri-urban agriculture can be seen elsewhere in the world; UPA proponents in Mexico and the rest of Latin America, for example, have an a communication network, AGUILA. The existing network most relevant to the Alliance is the International Network of Resource Centres on Urban Agriculture and Food Security (RUAF), based in the Netherlands but composed of partner organizations in developing nations in Africa, Asia and South America. Since 1999, RUAF has conducted activities using UPA to address food security, poverty reduction and employment generation, and to facilitate the integration of UPA into public policies and private action programs. The RUAF areas of networking, knowledge management, advocacy and capacity development are those envisioned by the proposed North American Alliance. More recently, a European Network on Urban and Peri-urban Agriculture has also emerged.

For now, the Alliance is drawing on the strong cross-border relationships built between American and Canadian UPA advocates at conferences and other meetings, dating back to the 2004 ACGA Conference in Toronto. These relationships led to a consensus, surfacing at the October 2006 CFSC/FSC meeting in Vancouver, BC, that the continued emergence of UPA in the region depends on a formal coalescing of the movement's disparate voices.

While the Alliance will draw on the work of existing US and Canadian organizations, it envisions a broader significance not addressed by these groups and their more focused missions. The Alliance will act on the awareness of practitioners and advocates that UPA is multi-functional. Beginning from a base in community food security, the Alliance will bridge the perceptual and practical divides of geography, theme and profession to maximize the benefits of UPA.

## 2) THE CONCEPT OF THE ALLIANCE

The Alliance concept is based on the following mission statement:

*The aim of this initiative is to form an alliance encompassing a wide and culturally diverse range of actors and stakeholders involved in urban and peri-urban agriculture in North America, to share knowledge and best practices amongst them and to foster linkages externally, so as to give voice to its advocates and recognition and legitimacy to its activities.*

Six principal goals have been identified for the Alliance:

- To create an alliance bringing together UPA actors and stakeholders across North America.
- To expand this alliance by reaching out to as broad a range of actors and stakeholders as possible, so as to bridge existing professional, thematic and geographic divides.
- To generate and share UPA knowledge and best practices.
- To be a strong and coherent voice for UPA through advocacy, outreach and policy-making.
- To mainstream and give recognition and legitimacy to UPA, integrating it into the public consciousness in the North American region.
- To foster external linkages, particularly with rural agriculture in North America and with UPA in other regions of the world.

To achieve these general goals, a number of specific objectives have been developed:

- To actively initiate dialogue with relevant professions and other pertinent constituencies.

- To begin the process of regional integration for UPA, starting with Canada and the US, and gradually broadening the reach to other parts of North America.
- To work towards the integration of this regional alliance into the International Network of Resource Centres on Urban Agriculture and Food Security (RUAF).
- To instigate the production, gathering and analysis of relevant data on UPA.
- To create a clearinghouse for resources, including academic research, drawing on all of the outputs of UPA that have been generated so far.
- To compile and distribute best practices, drawing on existing UPA examples.
- To act as a consultant advancing UPA's contributions and creating favorable policy environments.

### **Expected Membership of the Alliance**

Alliance membership will include individuals and organizations interested in and practicing UPA currently and in the future. But membership will extend beyond UPA practitioners. The Alliance hopes to draw from a wide range of professions, including ones that have not dealt explicitly with UPA. These include: planners, architects and landscape architects; nutritionists and public health professionals; natural resources and energy experts; geographers, sociologists and economists; builders and developers; chefs; and horticultural therapists.

Members could come from a wide spectrum of organizations and institutions in and outside of government. Some may deal with agriculture, food security, gardening (including farmers' markets associations, farmers' groups, community-supported agriculture associations); others may be farmland preservation groups or land trusts. Various quasi-public bodies may serve as future sources of Alliance members: alternative agricultural coalitions, and soil and water conservation bodies, among others. Public sector entities may include municipal parks and recreation authorities, public works departments, community development agencies and planning councils. In the for-profit sector, interested members may be waste/compost operators, greenhouse manufacturers, nurseries, etc. A number of Alliance members may also come from faith groups, youth leaders, and students active in alternative agriculture.

In all forms, Alliance membership will strive to display and give voice to the ethnic and cultural diversity of all those practicing UPA in Canada and the US.

### **Five-Year Vision**

By 2012, the Alliance is expected to have the following characteristics:

- It is a functioning organization with stable staffing and diversified, sustainable funding.
- It is serving an umbrella function in bringing together a diverse individual and organizational membership that bridges geographical, thematic and professional divides.
- It is known as the "go-to" organization on UPA in North America.
- It is organizing a biennial regional (at least bi-national) conference on UPA.
- It is facilitating regularly-scheduled learning exchanges and training opportunities.
- It offers advisory services to its members and to other pertinent stakeholders on a regular basis.
- It serves as an active policy voice, advocating for UPA in North America and working towards mainstreaming it as a legitimate and well-recognized set of activities functioning within a favorable policy environment.
- It is forming linkages with the academic community, to develop grounded knowledge on UPA.
- It participates in the regular production of publications on UPA (journals, monographs, policy papers, book series, etc.).
- It is collaborating actively with other key national/bi-national bodies pertinent to UPA.
- It is developing and implementing innovative UPA-related activities jointly with local groups.
- It is generating, gathering, analyzing and disseminating vital data on UPA.
- It functions as a UPA knowledge hub (library, databases, web portal, digitized documentation, etc.).
- It provides regular communication channels for its members (listserv, conference calls, blogs, etc.).
- It establishes dialogues with key actors in related professional areas.
- It is connected with similar organizations in other parts of the world, to integrate UPA in North America with the growing global UPA movement, particularly through RUAF.

### 3) CURRENT CAPACITIES AND RESOURCES OF THE ALLIANCE

#### Coordinators

Since October 2006, much of the early work to create the Alliance has been performed by three volunteer coordinators, each with experience in promoting urban agriculture in North America and worldwide:

*Martin Bailkey* – A resident of Madison, Wisconsin, Martin is a writer, editor and consultant on community food systems. He is the Vice-Chair of the Dane County Food Council and the former Chair of the Community Food Security Coalition's Urban Agriculture Committee. He received his Ph.D. in Urban and Regional Planning from the University of Wisconsin-Madison.

*James Kuhns* – A food security specialist from Toronto, Ontario, James is currently the President of the American Community Gardening Association, Managing Editor at Foodforethought.net (formerly *Foodnews*), and a member of the Toronto Food Policy Council. He holds a MSc in Agricultural Development from the University of London.

*Joe Nasr* – An independent scholar, lecturer and consultant, Joe has worked on urban agriculture and food issues globally since the early 1990s. He co-founded The Urban Agriculture Network and maintains several worldwide affiliations, including the Centre for Studies in Food Security at Ryerson University in Toronto and The Urban Agriculture Network. He received a Ph.D. in City and Regional Planning from the University of Pennsylvania.

The three coordinators will continue in their volunteer roles through 2007, and represent the start of the Alliance's long-term staffing.

#### Founding Group

Developing a bi-national UPA Alliance is to be an inclusive process involving a representative group of stakeholders. The following have made commitments to join the coordinators in forming a Founding Group to define the objectives, parameters and structure of the Alliance:

- Lizzie Ayer, Wyckoff Farm Museum, Brooklyn, New York
- Rodger Cooley, Heifer International, Chicago, Illinois
- Daniel Dermitzel, Kansas City Center for Urban Agriculture
- Michelle Glowa, Growing Hope, Ypsilanti, Michigan
- Betsy Johnson, South End/Lower Roxbury Open Space Land Trust, Boston, Massachusetts & CFSC Urban Agriculture Committee
- Mike Levenston, City Farmer, Vancouver, British Columbia
- Paris Marshall Smith, Richmond Fruit Tree Project, Richmond, British Columbia
- Derek Masselink, Masselink Environmental Design, Pender Island, British Columbia
- Jason O'Brien, Richmond Food Security Task Force, Richmond, British Columbia
- Julie Osborn, Community Farms and Gardens, San Diego, California
- Cynthia Price, Greater Grand Rapids Food System Council & CFSC Urban Agriculture Committee
- Kristin Reynolds, Ph.D. Candidate (Geography), University of California, Davis
- Rebecca Schiff, Mountain Ridge Consultants, Cochrane, Alberta
- Jac Smit, The Urban Agriculture Network, Silver Spring, Maryland
- Rhonda Teitel-Payne, The Stop Community Food Centre, Toronto, Ontario

#### Initial Organizational Partners

Four organizations have provided resources and support to establish the Alliance, and are expected to continue to do so in its formative stage:

*American Community Gardening Association (ACGA)*, Columbus, OH – The ACGA is a bi-national non-profit organization of professionals, volunteers and supporters of community greening in urban and rural

communities. The ACGA has supported the Alliance by funding conference calls of the founding group, and by scheduling an information session on the Alliance at its 2007 Annual Conference in Boston.

*Community Food Security Coalition (CFSC)*, Venice, CA – CFSC serves as the Alliance’s initial fiscal sponsor. It is a non-profit body that brings together over 325 member organizations dedicated to building strong, sustainable, local and regional food systems that ensure access to affordable, nutritious, and culturally appropriate food for all people at all times. CFSC hosted the initial Alliance gathering at its 2006 Vancouver joint meeting with Food Secure Canada and will provide the Alliance with start-up space on its website ([www.foodsecurity.org](http://www.foodsecurity.org)). The CFSC’s Urban Agriculture Committee has served as the prime incubator for the Alliance, hosting conference calls and facilitating e-mail correspondence.

*Centre for Studies in Food Security (CSFS)* at Ryerson University, Toronto, ON – The CSFS is one of the few global centers combining research, teaching and other activities focused on food security. It is currently exploring new pedagogical opportunities in the area of urban agriculture by developing new distance-learning courses. The CSFS has agreed to host the proposed urban agriculture library and work on its digitization, part of the Alliance’s UPA clearinghouse plan.

*The Urban Agriculture Network (TUAN)* – TUAN is an acknowledged pioneer in urban agriculture. The organization was established fifteen years ago as a non-profit organization seeking to focus attention on food production, economic development and environmental enhancement in cities and urban regions – areas previously neglected by urban and agricultural development agencies. TUAN President Jac Smit is active in the Alliance’s founding group. TUAN will be providing its library, a significant repository of urban agriculture documents, as the principal building block for the Alliance’s clearinghouse.

#### **4) PRESENT AND PLANNED ACTIVITIES**

##### **Past and Current Activities – 2006-2007**

The following actions to conceive and organize the Alliance have occurred since October 2006:

- A Founding Statement has been drafted.
- Alliance-building events have been held at various conferences; either organizational discussions (at CFSC conferences in Vancouver and Baltimore) or information presentations (at The Food Project Urban Agriculture Conference and ACGA Annual Conference, both in Boston, in April and August 2007).
- Collective discussions have occurred during the monthly conference calls of the CFSC Urban Agriculture Committee, and special Alliance-focused calls.
- The three coordinators have met every two months on average to plan the Alliance’s establishment.
- A Founding Group has been assembled.
- Discussions have been held with advisors and supporters expected to form part of a future Alliance Advisory Council.
- An electronic listserv has been created (<http://lists.riseup.net/www/info/na.urbanag.alliance>).
- Meetings have been held with leaders of the American Planning Association, the American Society of Landscape Architects, and the National Association of State Foresters, to introduce the Alliance and explore common grounds with relevant professional bodies.

In October 2007, the Alliance was awarded \$90,000 from the Cedar Tree Foundation in Boston to support its proposed slate of activities during 2007-2008. This generous grant is expected to be supplemented by grants from other funding sources in the US and Canada.

##### **Proposed Activities – 2007 & 2008**

Starting in 2007 and continuing into 2008, the Alliance Founding Group will initially work on the following:

- Setting up the basic aspects of the organization/governance of the Alliance.
- Fleshing out the responsibilities and expectations of Alliance membership.

- Engaging the initial members of the Alliance, and working to broaden the membership by bringing in new participants from underrepresented constituencies.
- Developing initial projects – particularly a new UPA clearinghouse – and establishing relations with potential partners, both organizations and individuals.
- Addressing issues of organizational sustainability.
- Developing basic communication mechanisms (web presence, listserv, conference calls).
- Identifying, preparing and submitting grant applications to foundations and other funding sources.

These initial tasks will create three action areas that will form the basic structure of the Alliance:

#### Organizational Development

- Continuing the initial work on the development of a database of members, organizations and institutions involved in UPA in the US and Canada.
- Formalizing staffing and administrative functions.
- Holding a retreat for the Alliance's Founding Group to evaluate what has been done so far, crystallize its longer-term vision, and developing an action plan to guide it over the coming years.

#### Networking Capacity

- Making presentations and holding poster sessions at key professional gatherings.
- Organizing a significant public event to formally launch the Alliance and bring some of the initial members and others interested in UPA face to face, to share knowledge and plan the further steps of the Alliance.
- Continuing outreach to key individuals and organizations.
- Developing additional communication channels for members, such as member conference calls and enhanced website usage.
- Beginning the facilitation of educational exchanges on UPA for Alliance members.

#### Establishment of Clearinghouse

- Creating a documentation and dissemination hub for information and knowledge on UPA, based on a virtual and physical library of past and current information on UPA policy and practice information.
- Creating an independent website for the Alliance, intended to become *the place* that practitioners, policymakers, related organizations and other interested parties refer to for UPA issues in North America.
- Establishing an advisory service offering advice and support for UPA initiatives and policies.

These three action areas – Organizational Development, Networking Capacity and the Clearinghouse – are expected to form the framework for more long-term activities conducted by the Alliance by, with and for its membership.

## 5) CONTACTS

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