

## Urban Agriculture Keeps Spreading

### Urban agriculture is a “growing means” to advance sustainability.

Surprise! A grant fund formed to advance urban sustainability—Partners for Places—is seeing more food systems and urban agriculture proposals than any other topic. When USDN collaborated with the Funders’ Network for Smart Growth and Livable Communities and national foundations to develop a matching grant program that helps U.S. and Canadian cities and their local foundation partners collaborate to implement proven sustainability practices, the program provided a great opportunity to support the spread of innovations.

In the first five grant rounds, many of the proposals that the local partners proposed to Partners for Places focused on urban food systems. Scrutinizing all of the funded projects together revealed why: food systems are a powerful entry point to more broadly advancing sustainability. The funded projects address many key aspects of sustainability. Some bring them all together.

- **Community Resilience:** Funding went to *Boston* to study gaps in the city’s food resilience and address them through substantive policy and programmatic changes on a city level.
- **Community Health:** *Sarasota County FL* received a grant to enhance access to, awareness of, and sustainable production of fresh produce through integrated community garden improvements, mobile produce delivery, and nutrition education. *Chattanooga* received a grant for a Mobile Food Market to deliver fresh and locally grown produce to low-income families in neighborhoods with poor access to fruits and vegetables. A grant to *Hamilton* in Ontario, Canada, addresses health, sustainable environments, and food insecurity in the McQuesten neighborhood.
- **Community and Economic Development:** *Providence RI* has used two grants to convert vacant, city-owned properties to urban agriculture sites and to support low-income farmers to expand urban agriculture. *Salt Lake City* partners received a grant to establish community gardens on city-owned and managed land, increase access to fresh local produce, and reduce barriers to urban food production. The grant to *Bridgeport CT* was for Reservoir Community Farm, a partnership to demonstrate the potential of urban farming. *Milwaukee* received a grant for the expansion of its urban agriculture infrastructure to support local food production and distribution and to empower residents to transform neighborhoods by re-purposing vacant lots into community assets supporting local, healthy food production and distribution.
- **Broad Civic Engagement:** A grant to *Miami-Dade County* catalyzed community-led, community-funded urban agriculture and healthy foods projects through crowd funding. A grant to *Appleton WI* funded the first season of a community-based urban farm, park, and job-training program built on a discarded golf course that will engage the community in sustainable practices.
- **Community Leadership Development:** Partners for Places awarded *Indianapolis* funding to work through the Indy Food Council to strengthen Indianapolis’ food system. A grant to *Philadelphia* will improve Philadelphia’s food system by sustaining and expanding the project and policy work of the Food Policy Advisory Council.

The breadth of concerns that cities can address through food systems work explains much of the emphasis in Partners for Places grantmaking. In 2012, the USDN Innovation Fund supported a group of members to create a report called [“City Food Policy and Programs: Lessons Harvested From an Emerging Field.”](#) It points out that as recently as a decade ago, food was all but ignored at the city level in North America, but now this is no longer the case. The report quotes Vandana Shiva who said in *Stolen Harvest*, “Food democracy is the new agenda for democracy and human rights. It is the new agenda for ecological sustainability and social justice.” To date, Partners for Places and local foundations have together invested more than \$1.2 million in food systems projects. The new agenda is alive and well in our cities, thanks to Partners for Places.