

Urban Agriculture in Toronto

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Abstract

As the world's population continues to boom as may reach 11 billion people by 2050, more and more people learned about the significance of urban agriculture to help improve food security and food access all around the world, and Urban farming has been a growing trend in Toronto and other cities around the world. In this project, we are going to investigate Toronto's efforts in promoting urban agriculture within the city, and examine how effective the city's various urban agriculture projects, plans, and initiatives are. Although Toronto has always been a global model in urban city planning, the situation is not all rosy. Although Toronto citizens have always been keen on farming in their back yard, public awareness is lagging when it comes to their understanding of how urban agriculture can be an integral part of their city, and how urban agriculture is about food security in a much broader sense which is capable of bringing affordable food, creating jobs, enhancing people's health conditions, and protecting the environment. Also, the Canadian government does not have any incentives in promoting urban farming.

Keywords:

- Community farms
- Urban agriculture
- Farmers' markets
- Food security
- Sustainability

Introduction

There are various farms that are located within Toronto, examples of these include Rye's homegrown, Black Creek Community farm, Fresh City farms, Riverdale Farm, Albion Hills community farm, the Living city farm and evergreen brickworks. Furthermore, there are also numerous farms located in neighboring municipalities. Therefore, urban farms are fairly prominent within the greater Toronto area. However, due to the recent outbreak of Covid 19, these farms are shut down indefinitely until further notice as they are declared as recreational areas. This severely reduces the yield for this year. Furthermore, our results also show that there are no proposals, projects, or incentives in which the government of Ontario, or Toronto is providing to encourage urban agriculture and sustainability (MacRae, 2012).

Despite efforts being made and urban farms becoming more prominent in Toronto, there are a number of reasons as to why the current state of urban agriculture is unsustainable. Firstly, as aforementioned, there are no incentives provided by the government to encourage such actions, therefore, the scale of urban farms and its effects are relatively miniscule. Secondly, it is costly as Toronto's climate does not allow or permit for long term agriculture; Toronto's winter is relatively long and cold, hence during these times, crops will have to be grown indoors inside greenhouses, which is costly and if the government does not incentivize or help the situation, these small community farms are unable to function without the help of funds from the government or private

corporations (MacRae, 2012). Finally, due to urbanization and Toronto's changing demography, it makes large scale urban agriculture an unwise option; Small scale urban agriculture and gardening on rooftops and gardens is viable but, large scale agriculture is not. Despite the fact that the supply of land in Toronto for agriculture is not an insurmountable barrier, with land getting increasingly more expensive, and harder to obtain, as well as Toronto growing and sprawling at a rapid pace and a lack of government incentives, urban agriculture is simply not a good or possible investment (MacRae, 2012). Additionally, the current demand is causing housing prices to skyrocket and therefore, people usually choose the more profitable option.

Therefore, the future of urban agriculture is unsustainable and looks grim in Toronto, as it is relatively small scale, and difficult for people to kickstart. To make urban agriculture in Toronto more sustainable, it will require the help of the government and corporations as there is a lack of funding and supply of land for it.

Government projects

Other than farmers markets and urban farms, the government has also implemented a few policies and projects to help with urban agriculture. The first project is Community Food Works, where low income residents in Toronto get support with job skills – specifically cooking and food related, social networks, and educated on nutrition and healthy eating (Toronto Public Health, 2017). This initiative essentially aims to make the lower socioeconomic group more employable by teaching them new skills and help them get to know more people. The second initiative in which the government launched in 2018 is the “Mobile Good food Market” (City of Toronto, 2018), in which a food selling truck visits neighborhoods, and offer low-cost and high-quality produce. According to this initiative's official website Foodshare, 57,000 pounds of fruits and vegetables was delivered in 2018. These are the two main projects in which the government has implemented to help with urban food sustainability and food security.

Overall, the impact of these two initiatives with regards to urban food sustainability is minimal. Firstly, Community Food Works, despite making certain people more employable which may potentially lead to an increased wage and help them afford better nutrition, in the grand scheme of things, its impact was minimal as the amount of people in which it helped was very little; approximately 50 people were invited to the initiative. The second initiative “Mobile Good Food Market” is better than the first initiative comparatively as it helps urban food sustainability and food security to a bigger extent. However, there are also a few questions with regards to this initiative, such as its sources and its targets. If this initiative had a more specific source, a more specific target audience, and a long-term plan, then it would be more successful. Additionally, this initiative was only in action for 2018. Therefore, the evaluation government projects and proposals for urban food sustainability is that firstly, resources could and should be allocated better and fund better projects that make more impacts. Secondly, more long-term plans, and finally, more specific targets for example, the lower socioeconomic group as they have the biggest trouble in terms of having access to good nutrition.

Farmers Market

Other than some farms, there are also numerous farmers market that are located within downtown and some that are located up north near the greenbelt. Farmers market usually sell food derived from local and community farmers and are usually fresher than super markets but are usually more expensive than regionally-commercially produced goods as they are mostly organic, and do not benefit from economies of scale like massive producers from Walmart do. However, other than the cost for the food, these farmers market offer more benefits and is more sustainable than food sold in supermarkets:

- Food from farmers markets have less food miles
- Their soil is higher quality as they are organic, and less intense which puts less pressure on the soil

Similar to urban agriculture, the future of farmers market in Toronto is unsustainable as the food sold in the farmers market is still exclusive towards the lower socioeconomic group. The price of the food sold in farmer's market is relatively high and therefore, the lower socioeconomic group are unable to afford it in the long term. Again, to combat this issue, it will either require a subsidy or more supply of the food to lower the overall price (theoretical, based on a price and quantity graph).

Site Observation

As a result of the coronavirus outbreak, the site observation of price comparison between international and locally produced foods were done online. Results show all supermarkets offer internationally produced goods to a certain extent. Lower-mid end supermarkets such as Walmart, no frills, Metro, Great Canadian Superstore, and food basics almost only offer locally produced meat and vegetables. The only international goods offered within the aforementioned supermarkets were spices and delis. Furthermore, only certain supermarkets (mostly higher end) offers the choice of internationally produced meat and vegetables. However, despite the fact that lower end supermarkets almost only offer locally produced food, they are mostly derived from big commercial sellers and that they do not supply from smaller scale local farmers. Small scale farmers' food is only available in farmers markets. There is also a speculation towards lower end grocery stores offering more processed food, due to the current situation of not being able to physically go to the store to observe, this fact cannot be verified, however, with the data that is accessible to us as of right now, this does not seem to be the case.

Methods

The data we will be collecting will be online focused due to the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic. Various online research, both academic and non-academic will be assessed to provide a framework to various organizations for implementation. A focus is primarily on the notions of urban agriculture, government projects, farmers' markets, as well as site observations. Data

observations must also note the complexities between geography, topology and environment and the interactions to reduce inconsistencies in application of good public policies. The substantive value of this research paper enables the Toronto regions to have a framework in which best practices for urban agriculture is considered and implemented, for decision makers to implement into their own uses. Such meta analysis can also be used for further work by other groups to determine other trends.

The data we will be connecting will be primarily local and online in nature. For example, reaching out to various community groups and their current and ideal projections of food sustainability in cities, and to review current and future regulations that enable more urban agriculture. In addition, the Farmer's Market can also be utilized to determine locations in which locally sourced food is cultivated and made, with the notion that some of the foods in the market may not be urban.

Conclusion

To conclude, the overall framework and model for urban food sustainability in Toronto is not promising in the long run. Despite the fact that results show that food and nutrition in general in Toronto is affordable to everyone to a certain extent with supermarkets selling at all price ranges for everyone, there are a lot of problems with regards to urban food sustainability in Toronto; specifically urban agriculture, exclusivity, and a misallocation or lack of allocation of resources. Firstly, despite having various urban farms, results show that the government of Toronto or Ontario are not providing incentives to encourage and promote urban agriculture. As a result, it is very small scale as there is a lack of investment and costly and difficult for people to kickstart. The second problem is exclusivity towards the lower socioeconomic group. Nutrition in farmers market and more upscale grocery stores are unaffordable towards the lower socioeconomic class and therefore they have to get their food from lower end grocery stores. There is an argument that lower end groceries stores offer more processed food, however, this could not be verified currently as they are currently inaccessible, but if it is true, this will have adverse effects on their health in the long term. Finally, there is a misallocation and lack of allocation towards urban food sustainability in Toronto in general. The first government initiative of Community food works highlights the fact that not only is the project helping very little people, but it is also a wrong approach as instead of increasing people's wealth to afford nutrition, the government should instead make nutrition affordable to everyone. Moreover, despite the second initiative of Mobile Good Food Market making bigger impacts, the initiative itself is too broad and lacks a proper target, thus once again inefficient. Additionally, the fact that there are only two projects proposed by the government to combat urban food sustainability shows how there's a severe lack of resources allocated in this matter. Therefore, in order to improve the current nutrition situation in Toronto, all of the problems listed in this report would have to be addressed to.

Recommendations

There are numerous recommendations that are derived from readings and our own research. Firstly, to encourage urban agriculture, the government will need to implement more policies that helps with funding, and providing land (MacRae, 2012). Land provision is essential in order to encourage large-scale urban agriculture. In terms of land provision, there are two main targets, small-scale farmers or large-scale corporations. If land is distributed to large scale corporations, then funding and integrating is not required as large-scale corporations have the funds, machinery, knowledge and man power to operate; all they need is a space for production and infrastructures. However, if the target is small-scaled farmers, then funding is mandatory as small-scaled farmers do not have the funds to kickstart and operate a large-scale urban farm. Funding in this case could be in the form of subsidies in which agricultural tools and products could be paid by the government. This could be obtained from reducing imports, in which the excess money could be used to help the farmers instead.

Secondly, to reduce exclusivity in terms of nutrition, similarly, the government could implement a subsidy for the lower socioeconomic group for farmers markets, or other certified locally produced high-quality food. The funds for this subsidy could be obtained from implementing a tariff or tax on international food. This will firstly, dissuade people from buying international food which is less sustainable, whilst encouraging people to buy local food which is more sustainable and secondly, fund for the lower socioeconomic group if people still choose to buy international food.

Finally, in terms of allocating resources towards urban food sustainability, the government needs to first of all, allocate resources towards the right social group – which is the lower socioeconomic group. Secondly, the government needs to implement plans that are more long term and have a bigger impact. Finally, they need to allocate more resources into this issue, as currently there is a lack of allocation of resources as seen in the fact that there are only two projects addressed to this problem. An example of an existing initiative improvised using the practices listed above could be the Mobile Good Food Markets in which it only sells food to people in the lower socioeconomic group. Furthermore, the prices of the food are low and subsidized by the government - with the food coming from urban farms.

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