

# FROM CRISIS TO PROSPERITY

Rosario transforms urban agriculture from a crisis response to an integral dimension of urban life.

At the height of Argentina's 2001 economic crisis, the country had defaulted on its debt, gross domestic product was shrinking, the unemployment rate had reached 25 percent, the Argentine peso had lost 75 percent of its value, and the rate of inflation was climbing to an unprecedented high. The people of Rosario, the country's third-largest city,

were hit particularly hard by the crisis: more than 800 000 people, or some 60 percent of the city's entire population, were thrust into poverty.

With their country's economy in shambles, the citizens of Rosario had to adapt to survive. Many began cultivating available plots of land throughout the city to ensure a steady supply of food for themselves and their families. Recognizing the value of this novel practice to alleviate suffering and ensure food security, local authorities removed restrictive bylaws to make public lands available for farming. The city also provided many fledgling urban farmers with tools, seeds, and other essential supplies.

## SOLIDIFYING URBAN AGRICULTURE

To support this nascent activity, the city created the Programa de Agricultura Urbana (PAU). A cooperative venture that unites urban farmers, municipal officials, agricultural experts, and representatives



## CORE OF THE CORRIDOR

*Rosario is the largest city in the Argentine province of Santa Fe and the third most populous urban area in the country. Located some 300 kilometres northwest of Buenos Aires, on the western shore of the Paraná River, Rosario forms the core of Argentina's industrial corridor. Accordingly, the city is the major railroad terminal and shipping centre for northeastern Argentina.*

THE PROGRAM NOT ONLY HELPED URBAN FARMERS FEED THEMSELVES, THEIR FAMILIES, AND THEIR NEIGHBOURS, BUT IT ALSO CREATED SOME STABILITY AND BROUGHT RENEWED HOPE TO THEIR LIVES.

of nongovernmental organizations, PAU quickly helped urban farmers secure and protect agricultural spaces, take advantage of value-added agricultural products, and establish new markets and market systems. Soon, seven farmers' markets and more than 800 community gardens—supporting some 10 000 farmers and their families—had sprouted up throughout the city.

“Urban farmers were grateful for the support that the program was able to provide,” says Raul Terille of the Centre for Agro-Ecological Production Studies. “After months of crisis and uncertainty, the program not only helped urban farmers feed themselves, their families, and their neighbours, but it also created some stability and brought renewed hope to their lives.”

**TURNING A TEMPORARY RESPONSE INTO A PERMANENT FIXTURE**

Although the economic crisis has passed, challenges remain for Rosario and its urban farmers. Many government officials remain unaware of the permanent value of urban agriculture. New urban farmers, especially those arriving in the city from rural areas, must be integrated more efficiently into existing urban agriculture initiatives. But perhaps most importantly, urban agriculture must become a fixture in ongoing municipal planning processes.

“The city is now in a far better position—the economic crisis has passed,” says Terille. “Today, the main challenge for us is to establish urban agriculture as a permanent economic activity within the city.”

Research and advocacy are key tools to accomplish this goal. Studies—funded in part by the International Development Research Centre—are now underway to evaluate current urban agriculture projects and establish ideal sites and work

agendas for future projects. Data related to income and food production will also be used to convince policymakers of the economic and civic value of urban agriculture, generate funds for new projects, and raise overall community awareness.

Even though research will be an essential contributor to the ongoing success of urban agriculture in Rosario, Raul Terille does not require data and statistics to realize that the work of PAU is paying off: “Urban farmers tell me that they are not only pleased to have the opportunity to generate income and feed their families, but also, after years of feeling marginalized, they are making a genuine contribution to their city and are finally being recognized for it.” ::

-----

**Raul Terille**  
*Centro de Estudios de Producciones Agroecologicas*  
*Tucuman 2668*  
*Rosario, Santa Fe, Argentina*  
*Tel: 54-341-4331736*  
*Fax: 54-341-4802326*  
*raulterril@arnet.com.ar*

**Antonio Lattuca**  
*Director of Urban Agriculture Program*  
*Secretary of Social Promotion*  
*Municipality of Rosario*  
*Buenos Aires 711, Rosario (Santa Fe) 2000, Argentina*  
*Tel: 54-341-4802444 (ext. 131)*  
*alattuc1@rosario.gov.ar*

**BREAKING NEW GROUND IN MOLINO BLANCO**

One of the recent landmark accomplishments of Rosario's Programa de Agricultura Urbana is Molino Blanco, a local housing project for low-income families. What separates Molino Blanco from other residential areas is how urban agriculture has been used to improve the community. Of note, the community recently participated in the design and construction of a large garden park. The garden provides not only food, employment, and income for many residents, but also recreational paths and soccer fields.

