

INTEGRATION, COLLABORATION, EDUCATION

A new municipal planning body helps foster urban agriculture in one of Canada's largest cities.

Vancouver is consistently rated one of the most beautiful and livable cities in the world. A culturally vibrant, ethnically diverse, and economically prosperous community, Vancouver is also located within one of the most productive agricultural zones in Canada. In fact, the city's mild year-round temperatures, fertile soil, and plentiful precipitation make it an ideal environment in which to grow a variety of vegetables and fruits. Combine these climatic conditions with municipal policies that encourage sustainable development and the result is a city in which urban agriculture is thriving.

Vancouver's drive to incorporate urban agriculture into the fabric of the city began in earnest two years ago when municipal council approved development

of a "just and sustainable" food system. To help ensure it fulfilled this pledge, the city approved a comprehensive Food Action Plan and created two staff positions—one permanent and one temporary—to support implementation of food-related policies.

Although these efforts helped urban agriculture secure a foothold in the city, a clear understanding of the link between local governance and food systems was not widespread.

"Community groups needed to educate municipal officials so that they understood the importance of urban agriculture," says Wendy Mendes, the city's food systems planner. "Once this goal was

accomplished, we could then begin to integrate the concept of urban agriculture into municipal planning and development processes."

INTEGRATING URBAN AGRICULTURE INTO BROADER SUSTAINABILITY AGENDAS

To build awareness and encourage integration, the city established the Vancouver Food Policy Council (VFPC). A voluntary group made up of farmers, nutritionists, food retailers, and representatives of community-based nongovernmental organizations and anti-poverty groups, the VFPC examines how the city's food system operates, and recommends ways to improve it. An elected, 18-member body, the VFPC also enjoys a formal role within city government, and is supported by a staff member who serves as liaison between the body and city officials.

"A primary role of the VFPC is to encourage and support the work of local organizations," says Mendes. "By clearing the way for urban agriculture and other food-related initiatives, the VFPC empowers community groups to achieve many worthwhile social, environmental, and economic objectives."

The support of the VFPC has been a crucial ingredient in the success of several recent urban agriculture initiatives, including the city's proposed Food Charter and the 100-Mile Breakfast. The product of extensive community consultation, the Food Charter expresses Vancouver's vision and principles related to food production, distribution, and

THE GROWING POPULARITY OF CITY FARMING

According to a recent survey, 42 percent of Vancouver residents grow vegetables, fruit, berries, nuts, or herbs in their yards, on their balconies, or in one of the 17 community gardens located on city property.





AN ETHNICALLY DIVERSE, ECONOMICALLY VIBRANT CITY

Located in the province of British Columbia, Vancouver is the largest city in Western Canada and the third largest in the country. Although the city itself is home to some 546 000 people, metropolitan Vancouver has a population of more than 2.2 million. Ethnically diverse, the city's residents of European descent are complemented by tens of thousands of citizens whose ancestry can be traced to countries throughout Asia. Economically vibrant, the city has built a thriving film and television industry; its bustling port is one of the continent's primary gateways to Asia; and it will serve as host city for the 2010 Winter Olympics.

access. The 100-Mile Breakfast, which featured only foods produced within a radius of 100 miles, conveyed to the mayor and members of council the economic, social and environmental benefits of growing and consuming food produced locally.

PROMOTING PARTNERSHIPS AND COLLABORATION

In addition to its work facilitating urban agriculture projects, the VFPC encourages collaboration between city departments, community organizations, and other groups. VFPC officials have found

these partnerships crucial because resources and policy tools necessary to address food-system issues often fall outside of the city's jurisdiction. The VFPC also promotes awareness of urban agriculture by conducting research, consulting with municipal staff, and holding public networking and information-sharing forums.

According to Mendes, the message is not only getting through, but it is also gaining momentum. "Vancouver enjoys a long history of leadership on progressive issues such as environmental

sustainability," she says. "Urban agriculture now forms an important part of the city's commitment to sustainable development." ::

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