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## Stimulating Innovation in Urban Agriculture

**Urban agriculture is a dynamic concept, given the wide range of urban situations and stakeholders. This diversity is one of its main attributes. Urban farming systems are in constant development as urban farmers adapt their existing practices or come up with new ones. Innovation is continuously taking place.**

### Editorial

Attention to urban agriculture is increasing in cities around the world. Previous UA-Magazines have looked at its multiple functions, its role in community building, experiences with policy development for urban agriculture and support to urban farmer organisations. Taking this line further, this issue looks at how urban farmers can be supported in their efforts to improve their livelihoods.

Urban farming systems need to be adapted to specific urban conditions such as confined space, closeness to consumers, and health considerations due to closeness of farming to people. Farmers who have recently migrated to cities bring along their rural farming knowledge that may not always apply in the urban settings in which they find themselves. Urban poor or entrepreneurs who are without a farming tradition may lack relevant knowledge. But there is little formal support to upgrading their knowledge and improving their farming practices. Because urban agricul-

ture normally falls outside the mandate of conventional agriculture research institutes, little research has been done into the development of urban farming. Agricultural extension organisations usually give little attention to the urban areas. As discussed in UA-Magazine 17, the degree of organisation of urban farmers is often low.

However, urban farmers are not waiting until researchers find solutions for them. As in rural areas, farmers in cities are constantly adapting to changing circumstances and are experimenting and innovating on their own. How can this innovativeness be supported?

Throughout this issue, the difference in use of the words “innovation” and “innovations” should be noted. *Innovation* (without an s) is an ongoing process of generating and applying knowledge to bring about improvement in a production system (and/or related up- and downstream activities), in a way that the process can eventually be replicated in other localities. *Innovations* (with an s) are the outcomes of innovation processes. They can be *technical*, referring to strongly improved or new products or services and improvements in the production process and practices. Or they can be



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*non-technical*, such as improvements in the strategy or organisation of a group of farmers. In addition, a *system innovation* refers to improvements in the relations between various actors, e.g. chain development, which is often a combination of technical, organisational and market developments. Finally, *innovation capacity* (or innovativeness) refers to the creativity and ingenuity of farmers and other local actors, and their capacity to engage in innovation processes and thus continue adapting to changing conditions.

Some articles in this issue merely promote innovations (and some acknowledge the importance of doing this in a participatory way), while others do this by stimulating the innovation capacity of the farmers themselves. Supporting local innovation starts with identifying endogenous innovations developed by farmers and other local actors, as an entry point to more equal partnership in a process of participatory research and development (“participatory innovation”) involving more than one type of stakeholder. This activity is aimed at: 1) stimulating and disseminating local innovations that are more widely applicable; 2) enhancing local capacities to interact in vibrant processes of participatory innovation; and 3) integrating this approach to research and development into mainstream institutions, in this particular case, into institutions concerned with urban development.

This issue of *Urban Agriculture Magazine* is a collaborative effort of the RUAUF Cities Farming for the Future Programme; PROLINNOVA (Promoting Local Innovation), an international learning and advocacy network that currently involves governmental and non-governmental organisations in 16 countries in Africa, Asia and Latin America on promoting local innovation in ecologically-oriented agriculture

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and natural resource management ([www.prolinnova.net](http://www.prolinnova.net)); and Urban Harvest, a system-wide initiative of the Consultative Group of International Agricultural Research (CGIAR) to direct and coordinate the collective knowledge and technologies of the Future Harvest Centres towards strengthening urban and periurban agriculture (<http://www.cipotato.org/urbanharvest/home.htm>). More information is provided on page 61.

The issue starts with two articles that systematise rural and urban experiences in enhancing local innovation processes. In the first introductory article, Will Critchley, Chesha Wettasinha and Ann Waters-Bayer of PROLINNOVA present lessons learnt in a series of programmes that sought to scale up and institutionalise participatory approaches to innovation development in agriculture and natural resource management. The authors consider how the lessons from primarily rural settings can be applied in cities. They argue that, to be able to fully support local creativity and innovation in agricultural research and development, researchers and other development actors need to recognise and become involved in a joint process with farmers aimed at improving their innovations. The focus is on understanding how farmers innovate and learning how to facilitate the interaction of farmers with other holders of complementary knowledge and skills.

The second introductory article, by Henk de Zeeuw of ETC-Urban Agriculture (the coordinator RUAUF-Cities Farming for the Future programme) and Gordon Prain of the International Potato Centre (the coordinator of the Urban Harvest programme), discusses how specific urban conditions influence the process of innovation in urban farming. Multiple livelihood strategies, less community cohesion, fewer possibilities for integrated farming, lower availability of indigenous knowledge, presence of urban markets requiring quick responses and the need to develop specialised production systems, all call for site-specific attention to innovation processes in urban farming. The urban setting, the authors argue, offers numerous opportunities and challenges for technical, organisational and institutional innovation. They draw several “lessons learnt”, gained by RUAUF’s Cities Farming for the

## IN THIS ISSUE

- 03 Promoting Local Innovation in Rural Agriculture: experience and lessons for urban settings
- 08 “Where’s Muck there’s Money”: a cautionary tale from Jamaica
- 09 Enhancing Technical, Organizational and Institutional Innovation in Urban Agriculture
- 16 Innovative Wastewater Recycling in an Indian Village: linking the rural with the urban
- 17 In Search of Safer Irrigation Water for Urban Vegetable Farming in Ghana
- 20 Innovations in Greenhouse Rainwater Harvesting system in Beijing, China
- 22 Family Business Garden as an Innovative Enterprise in Urban Agriculture
- 25 SPIN Farming: improving revenues on one acre plots
- 27 Technologies for the Production of Edible Plant Species in Bogota, Colombia
- 30 Micro-gardens in Dakar
- 32 From Eradication to Innovation: towards healthy, profitable pig-raising in Lima
- 34 Innovativeness of Dutch vineyards
- 36 Cleaning, Greening and Feeding Cities: Local initiatives in recycling waste in Kampala, Uganda
- 39 Urban Agriculture in Msunduzi Municipality, South Africa
- 41 Solid Waste Recycling in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia; Making a business of waste management
- 44 Enhancing Local Knowledge in Urban Livestock Breeding in Bukavu, DR Congo
- 46 Innovations in Producer-Market Linkages: Urban field schools and organic markets in Lima
- 49 Urban Agriculture as Social Justice Change Agent and Economic Engine
- 52 Selected Appropriate Technologies for Urban and Periurban agriculture
- 55 The Suburban Farm: An innovative model for civic agriculture
- 57 Innovations in Urban Livestock Keeping in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia

Continued on page 7



and development in urban agriculture. Furthermore, this will be possible only where urban agriculture is legalised. However, there may be opportunities to access municipal funds for supporting local innovators in urban settings, especially if these innovators are at the same time helping to solve urban problems, such as waste disposal (see Van Beek and Rutt, this issue).

- Those supporting urban development generally have little or no background in agriculture and natural resource management, and will inevitably need relevant training – in addition to capacity building in recognising and supporting local innovativeness, just as it is also needed by rural development agents. Lobbying and policy advocacy will also be required so that promoting local innovation in agriculture is recognised as an approach to urban development.
- With many research institutes being located in or near cities, distance has made it difficult to get researchers to work together with local innovators in rural areas. With urban farmers being literally on the doorsteps of the researchers, it may be less of a challenge to get them involved in participatory innovation processes in urban farming.
- Cities are areas where many young people with relatively good education often find themselves without regular work. The energy and ideas of youth could be harnessed in programmes that stimulate people to search for creative ways of using the multitude of resources available in cities.
- In areas where programmes promoting rural innovation are in the vicinity of cities, there would be good opportunities to link emerging urban agriculture programmes to learn from the principles being applied in the rural settings.
- Currently, many donors are interested in supporting innovative approaches to creating ‘green cities’, so looking for, and building on, local innovation in urban agriculture is an opportunity not to be missed: the time is ripe.

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### Training in Local Innovation for “Focus City” Researchers, Change Agents and Community Leaders

On the 29<sup>th</sup> and 30<sup>th</sup> November a course was held at Makerere University, Kampala, Uganda for Researchers, “Change Agents” and Community Leaders under the Focus City (or “Sustainable Neighbourhoods in Focus – Kampala”) project. The training was given by William Critchley, Ronald Lutalo and Sabina Di Prima under the PROLINNOVA programme. Attended by 10 men and 8 women, the course

was targeted at local innovation in urban agriculture, and focused on improving skills in the processes of identification, selection, characterization and joint experimentation. Dr Shuaib Lwasa, the project coordinator, expressed his satisfaction with the course, and looks forward to continued collaboration with PROLINNOVA.  
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#### From page 2

Future (CFF) and CIP’s Urban Harvest programmes, about ways to support urban producers engaged in innovation processes. Two articles in this issue are from the Urban Harvest programme.

Following these two introductory articles, this issue presents 19 case studies on agricultural innovation in cities around the world. This issue of the UA-Magazine takes stock of a broad range of experiences related to innovation by urban farmers and the efforts of other actors to support the farmers’ initiatives. It explains concepts and gives examples of farmers’ innovation and how it is being stimulated. Contributions are on technical innovations in vegetable farming for confined spaces (for example in Colombia and Sri Lanka), social innovation as in community based agriculture (as shown in examples from USA and South Africa) or innovation in marketing and entrepreneurial agriculture (as presented in the articles on USA (SPIN) and Ethiopia). Also technical innovations

in water use (from Ghana and China), in livestock production (from Democratic Republic of Congo and Peru), and waste recycling (Uganda and Ethiopia) are presented. These experiences show that technical innovations often have to go together with organisational or institutional innovations (as is argued by de Zeeuw and Prain in this issue and illustrated by the articles on the development of Farmer Field Schools in Peru and new ways of urban planning in the USA). Special emphasis in this issue is given to the use of participatory methodologies for promoting innovation in urban farming systems. Together, these articles cover a wide spectrum of experiences from a total of 18 countries in the North and the South.

We would appreciate your comments on the articles in this issue and welcome further reports on your own experiences in stimulating innovation in urban agriculture.