

# Sofia, Bulgaria

## growing cities – growing food

### Background information:

**Location:** West Bulgaria

**Climate:**  
mean annual temperature: 10° C

**Total Population:** 1,18 million

**Population Density:** 908 pers/km<sup>2</sup>

**Size of the city:** 1,326 km<sup>2</sup>

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*Yard in the periphery of Sofia (North) where Vegetables or animals for self-supply are grown.*



*Open air market in Sofia.*



*Livestock grazing in the town periphery in the new residential complexes.*

### The main urban agricultural systems

The most typical crops grown around Sofia are cabbage, potatoes, onion and beetroot. Fruit supply mainly comes from other regions of the country. Urban farmers are mainly people who live in the peri-urban areas or in the villages around Sofia, but in the city they include many retired people or employees who practise yard farming after work.

#### There are two basic forms:

1) Private commercial farms within the borders of the city and in the neighboring villages, producing meat, fruit and vegetables. Some of these farms are linked with micro-enterprises for food processing. In the 1970s food production was decentralized by releasing state-owned land of between 0.1 ha to 1 ha for temporary use. By the end of the 1980s, private farms produced 48% of the milk and the eggs, 53% of the potatoes and about 50% of the vegetables of the consumption of Bulgaria.

2) Urban household agriculture: (i) Farming in backyards and private gardens adjacent to family houses. (ii) Farming and livestock breeding in gardens of second homes or summerhouses located in designated recreational zones (houses owned by Sofia families and located within a 100 km peri-urban area. (iii) From 1970 to 1985 state-owned land was issued for temporary use (recreation, subsistence farming).

# Technical support services

## Sofia, Bulgaria

Bulgaria has a National Extension Service to improve farmers' entrepreneurial and management skills and raise environmental awareness. Created in 1995, any farmer can approach the service and request support, advise or plant or soil sample analysis etc.

There are four national centers, nine regional and thirty local centers. Farmers can get free access to the modern facilities of the Agricultural Academy, e.g. for laboratory analyses of crops, soil and water.

*Sale in the street – fresh vegetables.*



*Even some yards are small...*



*Yards in the villages of Great Sofia.*



*...every opportunity is used for agricultural production*

## Lessons Learned with Relevance to Other Cities

- Home production has significantly raised food security. It helps poorer people in Sofia meet their nutrition needs and avoids the sharp seasonal fluctuations in the market prices. It is also a key income supplement. About 40% of the households nation-wide receive an income from home production.
- The role of the state can be very important in planning and e.g. ensuring quality control of agricultural products, e.g. through controls of markets (e.g. mobile laboratories for spot checks on nitrate levels).
- State regulations have been passed to put vast areas of illegal summer houses and gardens within a legal framework that makes land productive. Moreover, the process of providing private farmers with state-owned land in the 1980s can stimulate UA initiatives around cities.