

**“We Grow Food and Community”:
How Urban Farmers Contend With Land Access and Urban
Agriculture Policy In Los Angeles**

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Executive Summary

Urban agriculture, as a means to provide food, greenspace, and community is growing in Los Angeles, and urban farmers around the county have created pockets of edible landscape within the city. Especially in communities with high rates of food insecurity and little greenspace, urban farming can yield high benefits. But for all the potential good of urban agriculture, and increasing community interest, LA City and County lack a comprehensive or standardized policy for urban agriculture. Of the 88 cities in the county, there are not any identical municipal codes pertaining to agriculture. Existing incentive programs are under-utilized, and the high cost of land in LA makes it difficult to begin farming.

This study interviews nine urban farmers in the Los Angeles area about their experiences in urban agriculture and the policies that they have to contend with, including land access, producer certifications, and more. Using the testimony and opinions of urban farmers, this study identifies the main barriers to establishing and operating an urban farm. Access to land and other economic barriers figure most heavily in the identified barriers, pointing to the fact that urban farming, most acutely needed by poor communities, is not accessible to all. Further, the identification of regulatory barriers indicates that the existing urban agriculture policy is not well adapted to small scale urban operations. Ultimately, this study recommends amendments to land access programs, in addition to larger policy implementation such as the standardization of agricultural codes across cities, and the inclusion of agricultural zoning in urban spaces.

Acknowledgements

First and foremost, I acknowledge that this study is fundamentally of land and land access, and that the land in question belongs to the Tongva people. They are the original stewards of this land, and have lived and fed themselves on this land for centuries, and no study of food and land justice in Los Angeles would be complete without that knowledge.

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Professors Shamasunder, Cha, and Rodnyansky: Thank you for being supportive and helpful, and for pushing me to complete a project I'm proud of. And to Sharon Cech and Rosa Romero, thank you for every opportunity, piece of guidance, and pearl of wisdom which you have given me in the last few years.

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Introduction

Growing food in urban spaces is an increasingly popular concept and practice across the country, and Los Angeles is no exception (Horst et al 2017). It has been identified as a potential solution to issues of food access, and a way to create greenspace and healthier communities in urban areas which experience a deficit of access to healthy food and outdoor spaces (Golden 2013). But while urban agriculture as a concept has grown steadily in popularity over the last few decades, Los Angeles policy is not yet up to a standard that would make urban agriculture a viable source of healthy food, despite the potential for unused land in LA (Watson 2018). Existing urban farms struggle to contend with opaque policies, enforced by a myriad of different government agencies (Jackson et al 2013).

Farms which have been able to access land and establish a production model still contend with policies and certifications which are in place to regulate the distribution of produce (Franco 2018). In an interview conducted over the summer of 2020 with urban farm operator Elliot Kuhn, such issues came to light. His farm, Cottonwood Urban Farm, is on about an acre of land in Panorama City, and he has experimented with different models of distribution of produce. From his description of the process to be allowed to sell produce, it was clear that regulating agencies and their procedures were incompatible with the farm's operation, and at odds with the nature of growing food on a small, urban scale. Rather, these regulations seemed to have been adapted from large scale rural agriculture, and didn't make much sense at farms like Elliot's. This sparked my interest in urban agriculture policy, and how it may be maladapted to small scale urban growing operations, inhibiting their success. Further, these maladapted policies may have further repercussions for poor communities for whom urban agriculture is a potential food source. As a fairly novel issue in public policy in Los Angeles, the existing regulations for urban

agriculture seemed incompatible with modern food access and urban greening projects, and I wondered what a policy landscape which was perfectly tuned to the needs of urban farmers and their communities would look like. This study interrogates the question of an ideal urban agriculture policy in Los Angeles. After considering the potential benefits and challenges to urban agriculture, and establishing the existing policy landscape in LA, this study turns to the experience of urban farmers in the LA metro area. It asks their opinions on the successes and failures of the current regulations, including land access programs, administrative structures, and produce distribution regulation. Ultimately, this paper draws conclusions about what may be working well and which pieces are missing, and proposes policy that looks to a future where food grown locally, in an urban setting, may feed Los Angeles.

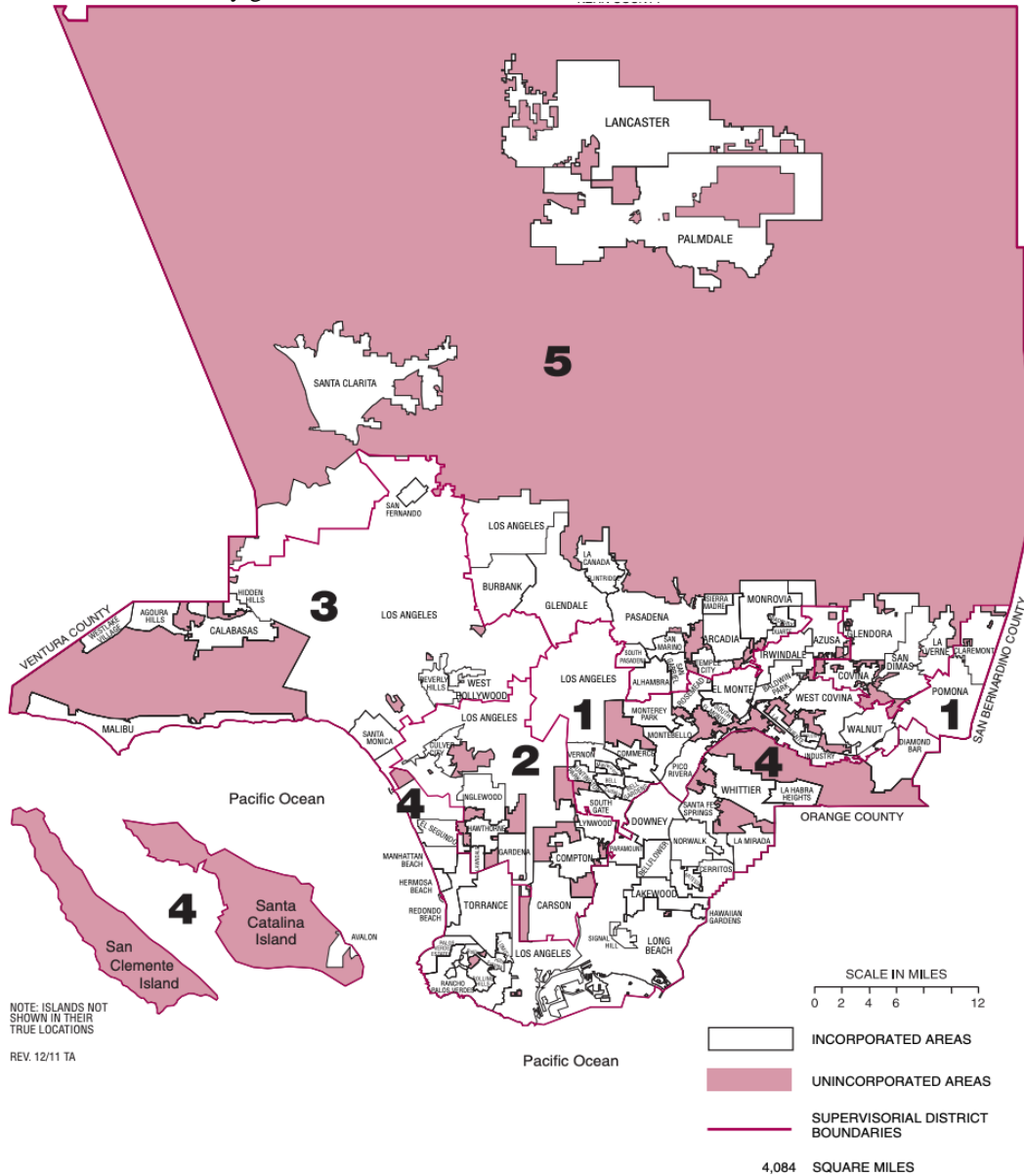
An urban farm is defined in this paper as a tract of land in an urban area, in this case urban areas of LA County, which is used to grow food that is intended to be sold or distributed to community members (Golden 2013). The policy sphere pertaining to urban agriculture in LA County is dense, and difficult to penetrate. With so many different municipalities, each with their own policies pertaining to agricultural practice, a farmer seeking to begin growing and eventually distributing produce faces bureaucratic barriers. Two key elements of building an urban agriculture project are access to land and establishing a distribution model to sell or give away their produce, and these necessary stages each come with their own policy barriers (Jackson et al 2013). This study specifically probes how farmers come to obtain tillable land, and the variety of steps and certifications required for an urban farm before they can meet their goals, including growing food and hosting community programming. The most prominent policies investigated include the Urban Agriculture Incentive Zone program, a land access tool,

Residential Agriculture Zoning, and the various certifications which farmers must have to sell their produce.

Background

According to a comprehensive study conducted by Cultivate LA in 2017, there were more than 1,000 agricultural sites in Los Angeles County at the time. Around 200 of these are identified as farms, though within this designation there is a wide variety of size, capacity, and purpose (UCANR 2017). Of the 88 cities in Los Angeles county (see Map 1), 61 have no mention of farms in their zoning policy, though none prohibit them. Between all 88 cities and more unincorporated areas, very few cities share the same agricultural policies (Jackson et al 2013). Twenty-one of these cities allow farms, and none prohibit them. The remaining cities don't mention them in their zoning code (Jackson et al 2013). Fifty-one cities permit the growing and distributing of fruits and vegetables, none prohibit it, and the agricultural activity is regulated by 44 zoning codes and 12 municipal codes (Jackson et al 2013). So while there is a huge variety in agricultural policy across the county, one clear theme is that many municipalities fail to mention urban farms and agricultural practices, suggesting that it is not an activity which many cities have considered, or that they chose not to include it. Among the various zoning codes in LA County, the countywide policy, which applies to county land like Census Designated Places (CDPs), is the most agriculture-inclusive. It allows the largest number of agricultural activities, and has designated agricultural zones (Jackson et al, 2013).

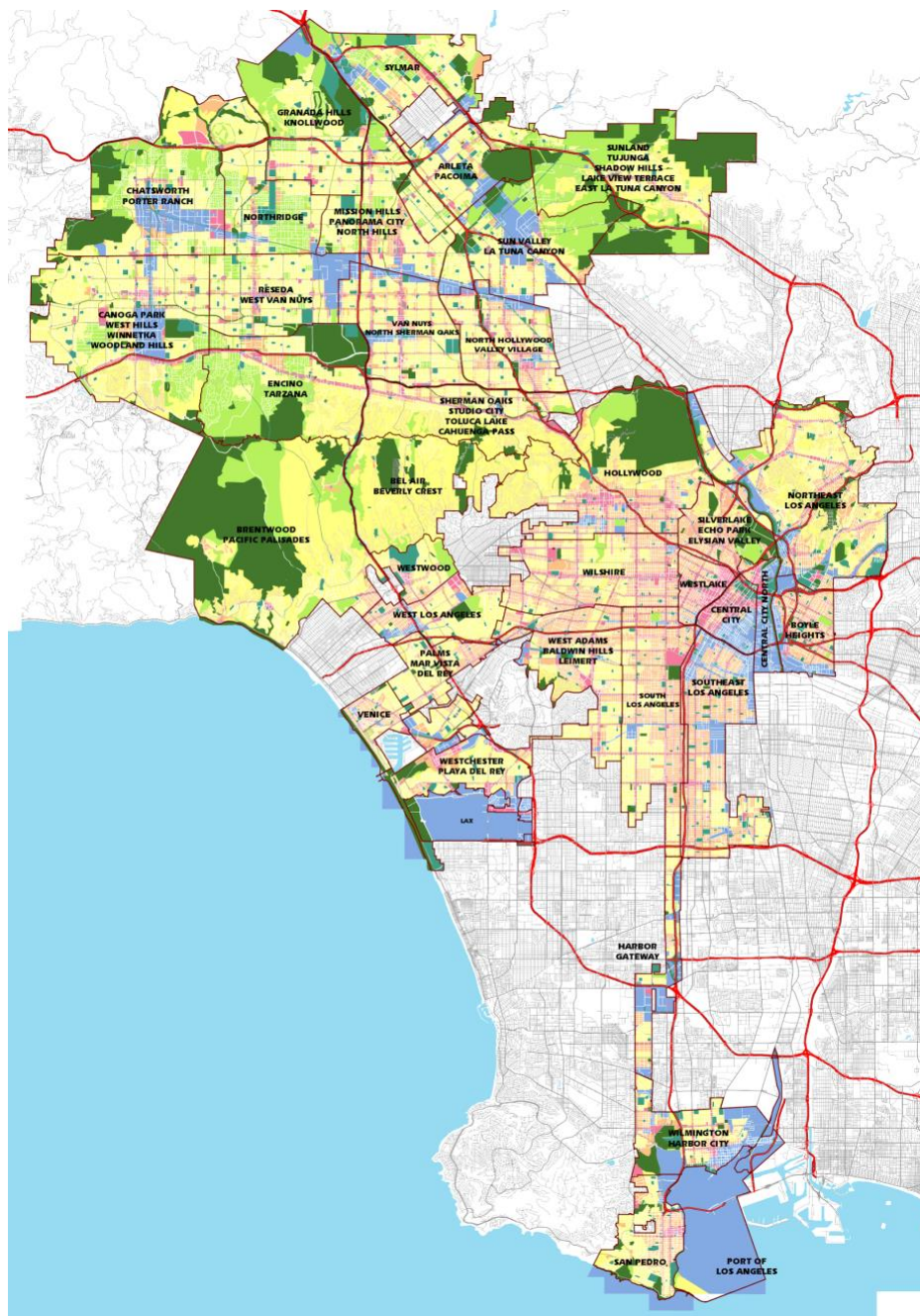
Map 1: LA County and its Municipalities. CDPs can be seen in red.
 Source: LACounty.gov



In some areas in Los Angeles County, Residential Agriculture zoning explicitly allows for agricultural practices on residential land. Land zoned for residential agriculture (RA) permits single family residences as well as the cultivation of crops (LA County Department of Regional Planning). Residential estates (RE), which are single family residences on larger plots of land are also permitted to grow crops (Gendler 2020). RA land in the city of Los Angeles is concentrated in the San Fernando Valley, in areas like Tarzana, Tujunga, and Northridge. South of

Downtown, there is very little RA zoned land (AbundantHousingLA). See Map 2 below, which indicates Residential Agriculture in light green. In other municipalities though, there are exceptions. In Compton, the neighborhood of Richland Farms contains about 400 homes zoned for residential agriculture, where the residents keep livestock and grow food (Surls 2009).

Map 2: Residential Zoning in the City of LA. Light green indicates Residential Agriculture.
Source: Abundant Housing LA (2016).



When residential land is not an option for a farm project, organizers may look in other directions. The Urban Agriculture Incentive Zone (UAIZ) program is a land access program for urban farming which grants tax breaks to owners of vacant lots if the lot is used for urban agriculture. The Urban Agriculture Incentive Zone Act, or AB 551, was passed by the California State Assembly in 2013 and was renewed in 2017 (CA Revenue and Taxation Code 2013) (CA Government Code 2017). LA County adopted it in 2016, and LA City followed shortly thereafter in 2017 (LA County Ordinance 2016) (Franco et al 2018). The lots must be between 0.1 acres and 3 acres, and contain no habitable structures. Further, the agreement with the city lasts a term of five years, at which time the landowner can either renew the agreement or terminate the agricultural usage on their property (CA Revenue and Taxation Code 2013). The UAIZ program is generally underutilized for a variety of reasons, and thousands of lots in Los Angeles city and county which could qualify for the program are yet to be cultivated.

In order to sell any farmed produce, including animal products, directly to the consumer at farmers markets, urban growers must become certified producers and obtain the permit from the LA County Agricultural Commissioners. Inspectors from the LACAC must come to the farm and witness the produce that is to be sold being grown (Franco et al 2018). Many urban farms are not selling at physical markets, however, and instead opt for a CSA model where they sell directly to consumers. There are further certifications from the California Department of Food and Agriculture required in order to become a registered CSA, and the type of certification depends on the style and structure of the production farm (Franco et al 2018).

Various models for land ownership and produce distribution, plus varying municipal regulations cause urban agriculture practitioners in Los Angeles to create different models for their urban farms that are best suited to their land access and to the community that their farm is

intended to serve. Through a review of the literature, and of a qualitative investigation of urban farmer's experiences establishing their farm model, this study examines whether and how current policy regulating urban agriculture is suited to different models of land access and farm operations, and which goals of urban agriculture are supported.

Literature Review

Existing literature on urban agriculture defines the term, and lays out the benefits, challenges, and existing policy related to the topic. Community benefits of urban agriculture are identified, and issues of racial inequity within existing urban agriculture projects are raised and cautioned against. Studies from urban planning perspectives outline ways in which policy and community intentions often fail to consider relevant issues like food access in urban areas. Finally, policy analysis and planning studies make recommendations for future and existing policy to better address these inequities, some specifically in the LA context. However, the framing of these challenges and the resulting recommendations focus on structural problems without suggesting that some difficulties encountered by urban farmers are the result of policy which is not well suited to small urban operations. While studies pertaining to planning and community health thoroughly investigate the goals and risks of urban farming, the voice of the urban farmers themselves are notably absent.

Within planning and policy studies about urban agriculture, categories of urban agriculture sites include school gardens, community gardens, and production oriented urban farms (UCANR 2013). The focus of this paper is production oriented farms, or farms whose production of fruits and vegetables is central to their mission. For these farms, production of food to sell or otherwise distribute to the community is a main goal, and therefore it is crucial to

consider how land access and producer certification policy helps or impedes this mission. Within Los Angeles County, community gardens are the most prevalent form of urban agriculture, but a 2013 study by the UCANR says that for-profit urban farming is growing (UCANR 2013). Nonprofit organizations or community groups sometimes make this information easier to understand, and add to the literature of urban agriculture by providing easy to understand information about the relevant policy for growing food (UCANR 2013).

Benefits and Goals of Urban Agriculture

The most commonly recognized benefits and goals of urban agriculture include community building, improvement to food access problems, and access to and repurposing of urban land to greenspace (Golden 2013). The clearest and most emphasized benefit to these programs is community development. Multiple studies and articles pointed to the bonding of a community over a common urban agriculture project as a main benefit of implementation of urban agriculture (Golden 2013) (Jackson et al 2013). The opportunity to come together and share knowledge over food production has potential to act as an agent of change in a community.

Additionally, these projects can help with food access or security. Though urban agriculture is not capable of fully providing all of the needs of the urban population, substantial growing operations can supplement people's diets and provide a meeting point for other food justice related efforts (Golden 2013). In Los Angeles, if all urban vacant lots were used to grow food, they could produce 35% of the current vegetable consumption of the City of LA, and 21% of the recommended vegetable consumption. If all AB 551 (UAIZ) eligible lots were in use, they could produce 16% of current consumption and 9.3% of recommended consumption of vegetables for the city of LA (Watson 2018). This was calculated using land area alone, and does not account for the significant cost of labor and other resources required for this project. But it

does demonstrate that the amount of available land in Los Angeles is staggering. It also notes that on a large scale, urban agriculture is still only a partial solution to food access challenges.

Finally, the repurposing of urban land to agricultural spaces is a significant benefit of these programs and organizations, which create greenspace, and offer community members places to grow their own food and interact with natural systems. Additionally, within urban production farms specifically, one other benefit is leadership development and job creation, and many urban agriculture projects in Los Angeles are primarily focused on community programming as their central mission (Watson 2018). The variety of benefits and goals for urban agriculture projects suggests that urban farms will vary in model in order to best achieve their stated mission.

Challenges and Risks of Urban Agriculture

While urban agriculture is recognized to have all of these potential benefits, most of the literature also cautions about the negative impacts that are likely to come about if urban agriculture projects are not implemented conscientiously and equitably. Specifically, the literature points to the issue of who the project is initiated by and who is represented in its leadership. There has been an influx in some cities in the US of young white urban agriculture practitioners, mostly as a result of gentrification in those US cities (Horst et al 2017). If long term residents are not the initiators of urban agriculture, urban agriculture projects may take on a paternalistic tone in the mission to “bring good food to others” (Horst et al 2017).

The connection between urban gardens and gentrification is important to consider. Urban agriculture and the related aesthetics have generally been accessible and appealing to wealthier populations (Horst et al 2017) (Golden 2013). Community gardens and urban farms don’t tend to be located in the neighborhoods which have the most immediate need for accessible, healthy

food. And when urban gardens are placed in lower-income neighborhoods with low food access, they often represent gentrification to come rather than a solution to food insecurity or other community issues (Horst et al 2017).

One study referred to various urban farming projects in New York City, and found that those with largely white leadership and a wealthier customer and community base were able to fundraise more effectively and achieve greater success by wielding more political power. Similar projects which were run by people of color and which served low income groups had a harder time getting funding and growing their projects (Horst et al 2017). Issues of racial inequity in land access and ability to distribute produce is crucial to consider in examining the incongruous nature of policy and the reality of urban farming. The fact that urban farms run by communities of color face more hardship in getting off the ground points to a hole in land and resource access programs or inequality in their implementation.

One major challenge to the successful implementation of urban agriculture projects is the access to land, which is also more accessible to white groups as a result of historical redlining and the generational wealth enjoyed by white communities (Barraclough 2009). A number of comprehensive literature reviews and policy briefs cited access to land as the biggest barrier to setting up urban growing sites. The high price of urban land, particularly in Los Angeles, prices out the profitability of urban agriculture, making farming on privately owned land a rarity (Haven and Roman-Alcala 2016). Permanent access to private land would make a project much easier to develop, but this is a luxury, and is more accessible to organizations with white leadership and a wealthier community base. The history of Los Angeles land use points clearly to the reason why. Segregation forced black and brown communities to settle in the industrial center of the city, while white suburbs in the San Fernando Valley were advertised as little farms

where families could enjoy rural life in proximity to the city (Barraclough 2009). The historical legacy of the white supremacist vision of Los Angeles is clear in the much higher rates of poverty in nonwhite neighborhoods, and lower rates of land ownership (Barraclough 2009). This legacy directly impacts the prospect of community agriculture projects. Those who do not own their own land or have the means to purchase it have to either farm on public land or on land which is only available to them for a limited time (Horst et al 2017).

In addition to white communities being at an economic advantage when it comes to land ownership and access, they are also culturally advantaged. An article about racial and political geographies of land ownership in Los Angeles argues that the history of white land ownership makes law and society more receptive to land rights arguments by white communities than by nonwhite communities (Barraclough 2009) A project which requires access to land in a white community is merely a reproduction of the system of white land ownership, which is culturally familiar to those in power. But a similar project in a nonwhite community demands the rights which they have been systematically denied, and is therefore at a great disadvantage. A case study which compares two 2006 land access campaigns in Los Angeles points to the economic disparity between white and nonwhite communities. The South Central Farm, whose farmers were mostly Latino, was located in an area of high poverty, while the Shadow Hills neighborhood in the San Fernando Valley, who were campaigning to keep their horses, was white and wealthy. The Shadow Hill homeowners were successful, while the South Central Farm was evicted from the land (Barraclough 2009).

There are a number of historical examples of productive farms being shut down as a result of losing land tenure across the country. These demonstrate the vulnerability of farms in often low-income areas where ownership of the land is not in the hands of the farmers. The

South Central Farm in Los Angeles is perhaps the most prevalent and poignant example of this, and of how the overseeing policy does not reflect the needs or best interest of the communities that urban agriculture serves. The urban farm in South LA was growing productively, and 350 households from the area were participating in growing and getting food from the fourteen acre farm (Horst, et al 2017). It was forced to close its doors in 2006 when the owner, Ralph Horowitz, turned them off the land and bulldozed the farm (Barraclough 2009). The lot has remained vacant ever since. This was able to happen because there were significantly more profits to be made from development, which is true for other urban lots which could otherwise become urban agriculture sites. Additionally, the land that the South Central Farm sat on was not explicitly designated for urban agriculture, as no such non-residential designation exists. If it had been protected either by zoning or by community ownership, then the South Central Farm may have continued to operate and feed the community.

As discussed and shown via the example of the South Central Urban Farm, urban agriculture has the potential to feed urban residents, as well as build job skills and nurture community relationships. However, if executed by the wrong people and for the wrong reasons, it can be a sign of destruction of a neighborhood rather than of growth. Projects by and for communities of color can go a long way to build community power and health, but unequal access to land, wealth, and power puts the communities which need these projects most urgently at a severe disadvantage to establishing them.

Assessment of Existing Policy

The current state of agricultural policy in Los Angeles County varies widely across the area. As discussed earlier, every one of the 88 different municipalities in LA County has a different set of policies and regulations pertaining to urban agriculture. The County regulations

allow the most forms of agricultural activity, giving CDP's the most leeway. Additionally, no cities specifically outlaw urban farms, but not very many address them explicitly either (Jackson et al 2013).

A study conducted for the UC Cooperative Extension, Los Angeles, entitled Cultivate LA, attempted a spatial analysis and mapping project of urban agriculture sites across the county. The methods section of this study reported a significant lack of data, especially when it came to production oriented urban farms. There was no one single database, and those incomplete databases they found were out of date or unreliable (Jackson et al 2013). Their final spatial analysis found no correlation between the density of urban agriculture sites and race in a particular neighborhood, nor income (Jackson et al 2013). Additionally, most of the areas which contained the highest number of urban agriculture sites were Census Designated Places, or unincorporated areas which follow county policies. As mentioned above, the county has the most wide-reaching set of agricultural policies, which explains the high concentration of urban agriculture in places like Florence-Graham and Altadena. This is all to say that to make a statement about urban agriculture in LA County, one would have to be speaking very generally. We see that urban agriculture sites tend to have concentrated in the County-governed areas with the most agriculture-friendly policies, also, showing that allowing more agricultural activities, such as livestock possession, beekeeping, and crop cultivation, may directly lead to more agricultural sites. However, the aforementioned lack of data about agricultural sites in the urban areas makes this assessment difficult to undertake.

One of the most important pieces of legislation in the Los Angeles urban agriculture realm is the Urban Agriculture Incentive Zone Act. It is intended to address the issue outlined in previous sections: the struggle to access land for urban farmers. However, much of the literature

puts forth that AB 551 has an extremely limited scope of impact and may be benefiting the wrong people entirely. One of the biggest critiques of AB 551 is that five years is not a sufficient amount of time to dedicate to building an urban farm, especially when there is nothing preventing the owner of the land from developing or otherwise repurposing the land after that period of five years. But on top of not being a suitable amount of time, it's also difficult to qualify for. AB 551 has strict requirements for the lots, and there have been instances of otherwise eligible land with eager farmers not qualifying for AB 551 as the result of a building connected to the property (Horst et al 2017).

Further, critics have argued that the biggest beneficiary of the UIAZ policy is the owners of the land who receive tax breaks on land that they have let lie vacant, and which they could immediately turn around and develop on after five years (Horst et al 2017). For these reasons, UIAZ is not very commonly implemented. There are only a few sites in the LA region that utilize the Urban Agriculture Incentive Zone policy. They include Roots for Peace, Caso del Mexicano, the Elysian Valley Community Garden, Cottonwood Urban Farm, and Go2Zero. Considering the amount of vacant lots available in LA County, and their potential agricultural yield, this program might be considered to be failing to actually incentivize urban agriculture.

Recommendations From Existing Urban Agriculture Literature

Based on these critiques, literature on the policy and planning of urban agriculture makes recommendations for urban agriculture policy. One prominent and basic first-step recommendation is that cities should begin to include more sites for urban agriculture in their **municipal planning**. By zoning areas for urban agriculture, or just by making it an explicitly permissible use of certain land, urban farm sites might be better protected and encouraged, and they would have a clearer position in city policy (Horst et al 2017) (Jackson et al 2013). In

adding these zones to city planning, however, it is important to designate urban agriculture land responsibly: prioritizing underserved communities and their leadership are important to making sure that urban agriculture is benefitting the right people. The UAIZ program can also be adjusted to benefit the right people, and should hold landlords accountable for their abandoned land rather than granting tax breaks for doing no work on it (Haven and Roman-Alcala 2016).

Further, and specific to Los Angeles, the study that mapped urban agriculture across the county pointed to the **need to standardize agricultural code within the region**. They recommend that cities adopt universal definitions and take a stance on agricultural policy rather than omitting it, and that the codes be synchronized (Jackson et al 2013). Further, they call for a **more comprehensive tracking system for urban agriculture endeavors** in the region, after encountering difficulty consolidating their information. And finally, multiple sources suggest a further study should be done that would **evaluate the urban growing potential of Los Angeles**. Any development of urban agriculture policy in LA as a result of this study, or any in the future, should prioritize social justice and food access more intentionally, rather than just placing gardens and expecting that they solve food access issues.

Considerations of current policy and threats to equitable implementation are important for the future of urban agriculture policy in LA. Existing policy analyses acknowledge the problem of accessing land and the failure of a California policy intended to address that issue. Additionally, studies in geography and land use have demonstrated that access to land and food justice oriented missions are often at odds: it is the wealthier and whiter urban agriculture organizations which have had an easier time navigating existing policy and accessing land. Organizations which are utilizing urban agriculture as a means towards food justice are struggling more as a result of an existing policy landscape which is built for those with personal

wealth. The way the current urban agriculture system looks, urban agriculture is more of a novelty for rich neighborhoods than it is a tool for improving food security and building community.

Existing literature on urban agriculture addresses inequities in policy implementation, but fails to suggest that future policy takes the concerns of farmers into consideration. This study aims to gain further insight into the process by which urban farms in Los Angeles have come to access land, what they have had to contend with in order to make that land productive, and which key pieces of their missions are most threatened by existing policy. Fundamentally, this study inquires about the incongruity between the existing policy and the realities of the everyday challenges of urban farming, suggesting that land access programs like the UIAZ and producer certification processes have neglected to consider the nature of urban farming and its goals.

Methods

This study gathered qualitative data and anecdotal information about urban farmers in Los Angeles and their experiences with land access and produce distribution. The study aimed to determine how existing policies related to these issues align or do not align with urban farming as a practice. Therefore, the main methodology for this study was personal interviews with urban farmers, or people who have leadership or founding roles in urban farms in Los Angeles County. This qualitative approach will address the gap in the literature, in which farmer's input has not been duly considered in crafting the details and structure of policy such as the UAIZ program and the further permitting procedures. Conducting interviews in order to answer the research question accomplished three main goals of this project. First, the interviews informed about the process by which the urban farms were created and are maintained, in order to understand the

challenges of developing the farm and its functions. Second, it was important to determine how each farmer interviewed perceives the policies and processes associated with securing tillable land and becoming certified to distribute food, and that is best accomplished through a verbal interview. Finally, it is important to rely most heavily on interviews because this study is interested in observing the differences between the farmer's opinions and experience with land access and produce distribution. By asking the same questions to urban farmers who run different types of operations which aim to serve different communities, this study identifies certain features of urban farms which are better suited for long term land access and produce distribution, revealing whose interests these policies have omitted.

An urban farm is defined in this study as a tract of land in an urban area which grows produce with the intention of selling it or otherwise providing it to the community. Subject selection for this study was carried out by internet research into urban farms in LA, and word of mouth through other interviewees. The potential sample size of farms in urban areas of LA County which produce food to sell or otherwise distribute is not very large. As such, this study did not need to weigh certain farm sites over others, but rather sought to get in touch with every site that could be found to suit the definition of urban farm given in this paper. A component of that definition is self-identification as urban farm. Ultimately, this method of subject selection yielded a very diverse range of farm structures from across the city, despite the small sample size.

Farm operators were contacted and asked if they would be willing to be interviewed. Interviews were conducted primarily over Zoom, and were recorded. A few others were done over the phone, and a few more were done in person while following social distancing guidelines. In order to organize information, urban farms and their locations were entered into a

data sheet, which included the name of the farm, its location, and information about its land ownership status. After completing interviews, which ultimately included nine urban farms, their responses to the interview questions were coded into different categories of policy barriers which they identified. If a farmer emphasized something as a main barrier to establishing the farm or running it successfully, then it became a data point. Additionally, potential solutions that they identified in their interviews were also considered data points, and the ones which reoccurred across the most interviews demonstrated which issues are of most importance to urban farmers. Interview questions are attached as Appendix A.

Farmer's perceptions of land access and producer certification processes will illuminate where farmers' experience and expertise has been overlooked in policy drafting. Farm mission in conjunction with farmer's policy perceptions will reveal which farm structure and locations struggle the most to meet their missions, and where land access and distribution is a challenge. Overall, the combination of qualitative interviews of farmers and information about farm structure and mission will be synthesized to make conclusions about the gaps and flaws in existing land access and urban agriculture regulation, as identified by urban farmers.

The following table includes every farm site that was contacted and interviewed for this study. In addition, the table indicates different types of revenue sources at each farm. *Production to sell* refers to selling the produce grown on site, while *resale* means selling produce grown elsewhere, sometimes in addition to their own. *Leasing to others* refers to leasing space on the farm to another organization, such as LA Compost. And *community programs* refers broadly to things like summer camps and gardening classes offered in the space. This table shows the variety in structure between each farm. A more in-depth description of each farm can be found in Appendix B: Description of Participating Farm Sites.

Table 1: Interview Subjects and Revenue Sources

Farm	City	Land Status	Non-Profit?	Production to Sell	Resale	Leasing to Others	Community Programs
Cottonwood Urban Farm	Panorama City	Owned, UAIZ, RA*	No	X	X	X	X
Alma Backyard Farms	Compton and San Pedro	Leased	Yes	X			X
The Growing Experience	Long Beach	Owned by Housing Authority	Yes	X			X
South Central	CDP	Working towards ownership	Yes				X
Urban Homestead	Pasadena	Owned	No	X	X	X	
Grow Good	Bell (CDP)	Leased	Yes	X		X	X
Moonwater Farm	Compton	Owned, RA	No	X			X
Avenue 33	Los Angeles	Owned	No	X			
Go2Zero	Long Beach	UAIZ - Leased	Yes	X			X

*Residential Agriculture

Data and Findings

The following section includes data from the conducted interviews. Data was analyzed via an inductive approach, in that codes were generated through the interviews by identifying common threads. Those codes were then grouped into categories based on the similar issues and explored in greater detail. Presented below, these interviews offer insight into some of the main barriers that urban farmers face in Los Angeles when setting up their urban agriculture projects, and while maintaining them. The categories of barriers identified have been divided into the

main categories of problems of *land access, regulatory structures maladapted to small-scale urban agriculture, and the high cost of start-up infrastructure.*

Further, these problems have been coded into descriptive categories including: economic, procedural, and regulatory barriers. These categories differentiate between the problems that come about due to lack of funding or resources, confusing implementation of existing policy, or a failure of policy altogether. In this section, data is presented first via quotes and discussion, and then in table format. Further, the data is analyzed using these categories of economic, procedural, and regulatory in order to identify the root problems faced by urban farmers in Los Angeles.

Barriers to Urban Farming

1. Insufficient Land Access and Barriers Related to Land Use and Access-

The most commonly cited barriers by urban farmers were issues of land access. Of those surveyed, all respondents said that land access is one of the main issues facing would-be urban farmers in Los Angeles. Three of these respondents themselves cited a significant struggle in *finding land* to farm on, and seven specifically stated that the *cost of land* in Los Angeles is the main reason that farmers struggle to obtain land. Four respondents indicated that *leasing land is an inadequate or precarious* position for an urban farmer. Four respondents also identified issues with the Urban Agriculture Incentive Zone Program, citing its time frame of 5 years as an inadequate amount of time to establish a farm.

GrowGood is an urban farm which leases land from the Salvation Army, and in exchange they grow food for the shelter and offer job training. The founder stated:

They provide us the land grant for free and they pay for our utilities. In exchange, we provide food and programming. So we don't pay rent, and if we did, it would completely change our model and how we go about it. It's huge.

One other farm, Alma Backyard Farms, operates on leased land, and they spoke on the challenges of securing long term leases in place of ownership. Even farmers who own their land acknowledge *land ownership as key*. In response to being asked what the biggest barrier is, a founder and operator at Urban Homestead said:

The price of land. You can't really expand. Because farming [does not offer] a very high return on investment, so the profit margin is not there. The cost of land is the biggest barrier for urban farms. There's no way to expand if they did see a piece of land [they want], and you don't want to rent it because it could be taken, and you'd have spent all this time and effort to make a beautiful farm and then the owner would sell it.

So while Urban Homestead has owned their land since the 1980s, they are still limited by the high cost of land in the Los Angeles area. Further commenting on the precariousness of leasing land, Holly Carpenter of The Growing Experience stated:

That constant threat of not being able to use the land anymore is really challenging and I think that's true for all farmers. There's people who are farming on leased land and you know, it takes five years to just even get established and it's really heartbreaking to put a lot of work into a space and then have it may be ripped out from under your feet in a couple years time, or for you not to have access to that anymore. So I think that access to the land is a huge piece, and making it affordable for farmers and available to them in the first place.

Since this interview was conducted, The Growing Experience has been faced with an increasing threat of being shut down, speaking to the instability of operating a farm which is owned or otherwise managed by external or higher-up parties.

Elliot Kuhn, the owner and operator of Cottonwood Urban Farm, further expanded on the fact that leasing is inadequate, specifically in the context of the Urban Agriculture Incentive Zone Program, which only offers a five year stint on a piece of land.

I'm at *ten* years here. This was a vacant lot ten years ago. Only now do I feel like this place is pretty dialed in. So five [years] is no time to take a vacant lot and actually turn a profit.

Kuhn is a recipient of the UAIZ program, and unique in that he is the owner and the farmer. He acknowledges that this model is ideal, and uncommonly efficient, since he is not concerned

about farming land that could be revoked, and he receives the tax breaks as the owner of the property.

A representative from the South Central farm, currently in the process of obtaining land through a community land trust, succinctly stated that, “Ownership is key. The city listens to landowners.” Further impressing upon the need for land specifically in communities of color, they expanded:

When it comes to communities of color [regulatory agencies do not have an adequate understanding of farming in urban areas] because you see a lot of more urban farms in more affluent communities. And so there's a whole area of people who have been excluded from the conversation and the seat and the discussions. So I think it's important to have voices of people of color who live in neighborhoods who are underserved and I think that we need more representation. There's always been interest in urban agriculture in communities of color. It's something that's culturally embedded in us, I mean we have generations of farmers in our families backgrounds. [Our project] will hopefully take it to land ownership and then develop a project that will benefit the community.

Importantly, it is emphasized that not only is land ownership important to the longevity of the farm, but also to the influence of urban agriculture projects and the communities which uplift them.

Every other farmer interviewed also acknowledged that land access is not only key to successful development, but also the first and biggest obstacle a project has to overcome.

2. Regulatory Structures Maladapted to Small-Scale Urban Farming-

Eight out of nine farms surveyed indicated that the *existing regulations for urban farming in the Los Angeles area is not well suited to small-scale urban farming*. Three farms cited a difficult or *confusing experience navigating certifications* and permitting, such as insurance, permits to operate a farm, and selling certifications. Two *struggled to establish the selling model* that they would have liked to, a farmstand in both cases. Two farms referred to *feeling alone in the certification process*. Three farms experienced *difficulties in obtaining and effectively implementing EBT* at their points of sale.

Judi Gregory at Go2Zero had negative experiences with the city of Long Beach in the process of obtaining the relevant permitting. Gregory said that the experience caused her to “feel like the bad guy,” and that there was a fundamental misunderstanding of their project by the government as a result of inadequate regulation pertaining to urban farms.

Once [we] started getting into permitting and planning [the city was] very unfamiliar with urban farm[s]. They kept wanting to call us a community garden. And they didn't really have a lot of regulations in their ordinances that addressed urban farming or farms.

The Growing Experience in Long Beach is located in the Carmelitos Public Housing Development, and overseen by the housing authority. In this context there were also regulatory misunderstandings. Former manager Holly Carpenter says that,

Communication was also a challenge, because you have people who work in an office who have never set foot on a farm before making decisions for people who grow vegetables every day and there's just inherent misunderstandings.

Elliot Kuhn Cottonwood Urban Farm, who previously sold produce at farmer's markets, pointed to a hole in the Certified Producers Certification. Modelled after larger agricultural projects, an inspector comes to see the farm and must see everything that the farmer intends to sell while it is being grown. For a small urban farm which is constantly rotating out crops, this is an inadequate system which doesn't align with the nature of the farm.

Avenue 33 farms is the only farm on this list which is in the city of Los Angeles. The operator of Avenue 33 had previously farmed in the Portland area, and so was able to directly compare that urban agriculture policy landscape to that of Los Angeles. On this comparison he says that, “things in Los Angeles are a lot more confusing.” However, he also stated that since they were so small, obtaining operating certifications were not much of a barrier. So while the many farms reported initial confusion or frustration with regulatory structures, obtaining the correct permitting was only a major obstacle for a few farms. Holly Carpenter also stated that

permitting and fees were fairly straightforward, and that more of their problems stemmed from their overseers not understanding staff needs.

3. High Cost of Start-Up Infrastructure-

Five out of nine respondents refer to the *cost of infrastructure* as another main barrier to establishing a farm in Los Angeles. Specifically, this refers to getting irrigation set up, building beds, paying for soil clean up, and other structural needs on the site. For vacant lots, which the UAIZ program explicitly requires, running irrigation can be a major expense. The operator of Alma Backyard Farms elaborates that on their San Pedro site there were no existing utilities and that, “In order for us to get... water and power we basically had to initiate all of that ourselves, and that was like thousands of dollars to get all that set up.”

The director of the Go2Zero farm site in Long Beach talked about struggling to meet the demands of the city in terms of cost. The city had stated that their fence needed to be decorative, which was not explicitly in the city code, and was out of the project’s financial reach.

I mean a \$60,000 fence would have killed our project and we probably would not be moving forward right now if we hadn't got that cleared up. But it's those kinds of things that are super discouraging.... I found that the biggest costs were you know permits and fees and things like that, but the fence was a big one, for us, that really scared us and, again, we thought that that might be the end of the project.

After months of back and forth with the City, Go2Zero was finally able to settle on a chain link fence, which they should have been allowed all along.

Proposed Solutions by Interviewees

In their interviews, many of the farmers identified some potential solutions to the barriers outlined above. These solutions to suggestions came up conversationally, and in answer to a question asking what they would change about how urban farming is regulated. These

suggestions range from small subsidies to zoning overhauls, and reflect both practical amendments and visions for the future.

The most commonly cited ones were *breaks on utilities to farmers, distribution of unused city land, education on the benefits of urban agriculture, and a restructuring of zoning to include urban agriculture and other community greenspaces*. Additionally, many farmers referred to support that they received from community organizations as invaluable in getting their farms off the ground.

Seven out of nine had help and *support from community organizations*. This aid varied from help understanding the relevant policy to support in the form of donations of money and infrastructure. In addition, five farms had affiliations with Master Gardeners who had completed the Master Gardener training program at UCLA. In discussion of helpful community organizations, Holly Carpenter at The Growing Experience said that Long Beach Fresh helped them connect to the community as well as get set up with permitting:

Long Beach Fresh is huge. They provided not only ears on the ground, but also kind of our mouths on the street to kind of help us spread the word. [They] really kind of made a huge difference in how we were able to navigate a lot of the political things as far as permitting goes.

Four out of nine farms identified *breaks on utilities* as something that would be helpful for new farmers. Other ideas, like a *new zoning category for urban farming*, and the *city offering unused land for urban farming*, go much further in their suggestions. Other ideas didn't necessarily call for changing the laws and policy, but just making them clearer. Alma Backyard Farms talked about a policy workshop put on by the UC Agriculture and Natural Resources department which helped them understand the regulatory landscape. And when it came to land access, the South Central Farm has partnered with the Los Angeles Community Land Trust in order to access land.

We built a partnership with the name of her land trust and they're the ones that kind of have been helping us navigate the acquisition process, because I think it's very challenging because they are experienced buying land for parks and urban farms, so we reached out to them and they're helping us with that process.

Further, South Central identifies the implementation of land trusts as a means to secure land to urban farming in the long term:

I think that the concept of the community land trust is really important to secure and preserve land for our communities and that way our [communities] hold a deed and then it won't be sold for development.

The owner and operator at Moonwater Farms also refers to a future land trust as a method to establish their farm in perpetuity, so it can be owned and controlled by the community.

Data tables

Answers to interview questions have been coded into the following tables. As mentioned above, this data was formulated inductively, meaning that answers were coded into categories after the completion of all interviews. Table 2 indicates the policy barriers and the farms which identified them in interviews. Table 3 refers to the potential policy solutions which were proposed or mentioned by the farmers during their interviews.

Table 2: Identified Barriers to Establishing Urban Agriculture Sites

Farm	Struggled to obtain land	Identify land access	Land Cost	Confusing permitting processes	Difficulty selling	Cost of Infrastructure	Struggle to sell to profit
Cottonwood Urban Farm		X		X	X		X
Alma Backyard Farms	X	X	X			X	NA
The Growing Experience		X	X			X	
South Central	X	X	X				NA
Urban Homestead		X	X				X
Grow Good		X	X			X	NA
Moonwater Farm		X	X				NA
Avenue 33	X	X	X	X		X	X
Go2Zero		X		X	X	X	NA
Total	3	9	7	3	2	5	3

Farms	Regulation poorly suited to small urban ag	Difficulty obtaining/using EBT	Had help from community org	Felt alone in the permitting process	Leasing is inadequate /precarious	Master Gardener affiliations	Critique UAIZ timeframe of 5 years
Cottonwood Urban Farm	X	X	X		X		X
Alma Backyard Farms	X		X	X	X	X	X
The Growing Experience	X	X	X		X	X	
South Central	X		X		X		X
Urban Homestead	X						
Grow Good			X			X	
Moonwater Farm	X		X			X	
Avenue 33	X	X					X
Go2Zero	X		X	X		X	
Total	8	3	7	2	4	5	4

Table 3: Subject's Proposed Solutions

Barriers Addressed	Land Access			Poor Regulatory Structures			High Cost of Operation
	City giving land	Land Trust	Introduce UA Zoning	Offer farming workshops	New city ordinances for urban ag	Education about urban ag benefits	Breaks on Utilities
Cottonwood Urban Farm			X				X
Alma Backyard Farms	X					X	X
The Growing Experience							
South Central	X	X	X				
Urban Homestead							
GrowGood		X					X
Moonwater Farm	X	X	X			X	
Avenue 33				X			X
Go2Zero					X	X	
Total	3	3	3	1	1	3	4

Data Analysis

Each of the barriers to growing an urban farm that have been outlined above can be grouped into three categories: economic, procedural, and regulatory. An analysis of which of these categories features the most prominently demonstrates the main issues faced by urban farmers in Los Angeles. Additionally, the potential solutions identified in face of those barriers goes to show the most urgent issues in the eyes of urban farmers.

The majority of the barriers identified in this study can be categorized as economic barriers, wherein would-be farmers struggle to realize their mission as a result of financial

barriers. All issues of land access can be considered economic barriers, especially given the clear advantages of owning land versus leasing it. The fact that land access and specifically the cost of land was most readily pointed to indicates that it is the opinion of LA's urban farmers that land access is not only the most important part of building a farm, but that it is also the most difficult to accomplish and is therefore the most pressing issue. It is important in this analysis to note the *difference between land ownership and access to leased land*. Those farmers who did own their land acknowledged that that was a key component to the success of their model, and those who did not yet own land stated that land ownership was one of their main goals for the future. The fact that *three out of the seven proposed solutions relate to land ownership* demonstrates that this is a high priority for urban farmers in Los Angeles. However, the proposed solutions, such as the city distributing unused land and a restructuring of zoning laws, are wide-reaching and would call for a significant overhaul of zoning codes and the valuation of land.

Other economic barriers include cost of infrastructure and struggling to sell at a profitable scale. It is notable that only one farm in this dataset, Avenue 33, is a full time production model that does not augment its income by reselling produce grown elsewhere or community programming. And the operators of Avenue 33 both had other jobs, and it only recently became a full time endeavor for Eric Tomassini, demonstrating that a model focused exclusively on the sale of produce is almost impossible on an urban scale. A fourth proposed solution, offering breaks on utilities to farmers, is geared towards addressing these economic barriers that face the farms once they have accessed land, and might make a profitable urban farm more feasible.

Beyond financial difficulties in urban farming, operators are also faced *with procedural barriers*, in which the current policy may work in theory, but its execution is confusing or frustrating. This can be seen in Go2Zero's struggle to obtain the correct permitting, or in the

farms which expressed that they felt on their own in the permitting processes. While this was difficult for some farms, however, others plainly stated that once you had obtained land and infrastructure (in other words cleared the economic hurdles), that permitting wasn't that difficult to obtain. The general feeling about regulatory agencies varied widely, as some farmers reported great difficulty and others brushed it off as inconsequential in comparison to other barriers. A possible explanation for this is the wide variety of municipalities and degrees of community support for each project. The farm at the Carmelitos Public Housing Development reported little difficulty with permitting, while a nonprofit organization in the same city struggled. The administrative might of the Housing Authority may explain this discrepancy. However, small grassroots organizations should not have to experience such a disadvantage. Both farms, located in Long Beach, cited the help of the organization Long Beach Fresh, which operates as a Food Policy Council, as crucial in helping them understand the regulation and connect to the community. These testimonies point to the benefit of third party community organizations dedicated to uplifting urban agriculture projects.

Finally, and perhaps most impermeable, are *regulatory barriers* which outright restrict or otherwise do not clearly allow for certain activities that would be helpful to urban farmers in Los Angeles. Examples of these barriers include the struggle by some farms to obtain EBT machines since they are not classified as a vendor, or the extreme variance in the agricultural codes across LA County which leads to variation in ease of establishing operation depending on the municipal code. Certainly, critiques of the Urban Agriculture Incentive Zone program fall under regulatory barriers. The five year timespan granted by the program renders it almost useless by some farmer's accounts. This is an example of a policy which was intended to support, or at least to allow urban agriculture, which fundamentally misunderstands the nature of farming and the time

and work that goes into it. The fact that eight out of nine farm operators surveyed said that regulatory agencies were poorly suited to urban agriculture demonstrates a significant failing to effectively regulate and implement urban agriculture. Further, this misalignment with urban agriculture indicates that the urban agriculture policy that exists was drawn from the realities of larger, rural agriculture projects with little in common with small scale urban farms.

Two potential solutions raised by farmers - the addition of urban agriculture zoning, and the introduction of new urban agriculture ordinances in city policy - demonstrate that farmers in Los Angeles believe that the governing bodies need to go farther to include urban agriculture in its policies. It is not restrictive policies, but rather the poor adaptation or complete lack of urban agriculture regulation which seems to be the most source of regulatory barriers.

It is important to note that as a result of this unstandardized body of urban agriculture regulation, every farm included in this study has a different structure. This is a result of their adaptation to the regulations of the municipality that they sit in, and as a way to serve out their varying missions. Each of these farms looks different, makes money in different ways, and were founded for different reasons, but they almost entirely agree that the regulation of urban agriculture is poorly adapted to its purpose. Further, these farms carry out different purposes, be it growing food or growing community, but they all have common needs, such as land, water, and clear distribution regulation, that effective urban agriculture policy could be better suited to address across the county.

The fact that economic barriers are the most commonly cited and perhaps the most difficult to overcome points plainly to issues of racial and economic equity. One of the main goals and benefits of urban agriculture projects is food access, which is most pressing in low-income communities of color in areas such as South Los Angeles and Long Beach. The fact that

capital, in land and other economic terms, is a main barrier to establishing a farm which may seek to address food access demonstrates that *the failings of these policies disproportionately impact those poor communities of color*. The unofficial slogan of the South Central Farm emphasizes this point: Land Access is Food Justice. When pointing to gaps in accessibility to urban farming in LA, it needs to be understood that those gaps are all the wider for communities living in poverty, who lack the financial resources to purchase land due to the legacies of racist policies of redlining and disinvestment, and to whom permitting procedures may be far more hostile as a result of language barriers. In a future restructuring of urban agriculture policy, issues of equal access to food, greenspace, and community spaces need to be centered. The following section details policy recommendations intended to address each of these barriers to urban farming, including those suggested by the interviewees.

Policy Recommendations

In order to address the barriers to urban farming as outlined above, the following policy amendments should be made. It is important to note that the limited amount of policy relating to urban agriculture also limits the scope of small-scale policy intervention. Rather, the majority of policy recommendations below require that the city and county take far more of an interest in urban agriculture if it is going to be appropriately regulated. In the case of smaller economic barriers, smaller policies may make urban agriculture projects more feasible. But regulatory barriers, and larger economic barriers like land access will not be solved by incentive programs. If the community benefits of urban agriculture projects are to be seen in LA city and county, the governing agencies need to build a comprehensive urban agriculture framework from the ground

up. The following recommendations consist of amendments to the few existing urban agriculture policies in the area, followed by potential routes of larger-scale policy change.

To begin with, amendments to the terms of the Urban Agriculture Incentive Zone policy may be a small but impactful change. Many of the farmers interviewed indicated that the allotted five years is not enough time to really set up a farm, get it to production, and have an impact with it. As a result, would-be farmers are deterred from using the program to access land that they might soon lose. *The duration of land tenure for UAIZ farmers should be expanded* on the state level. A term of ten years would provide more land security to the farmers, and allow urban agriculture projects to have more impact.

In addition to a longer term of lease, the Urban Agriculture Incentive Zone policy could *do more to incentivize land owners* to pursue participation in the program. Some farmers suggested that the landowners not just receive tax breaks for allowing urban agriculture on unused land, but that they also be fined for allowing a lot to lay vacant. This approach, which provides benefits to landowners committing to urban agriculture and burdens to those who won't, may make vacant land owners more likely to commit their land to a use which would bear community value. Currently, UAIZ is not commonly implemented, and it is because either landlords don't want to commit their land, or farmers don't want to commit their labor. There needs to be added incentive on either side of the policy in order for it to be more commonly utilized. These changes would take the form of an amendment to AB 551 at the state level, which would then have to be adopted by participating municipalities, including LA City and LA County. Finally, a database of eligible UAIZ sites may expand the use of the program. A project to map and list all of the eligible sites in Long Beach was recently undertaken at Long Beach Fresh, and directly led to a farm included in this study, Go2Zero, obtaining their land. A similar

project in LA City or county-wide would give would-be farmers a place to start looking for land, and alert landowners to the opportunity.

Beyond just amendments to one policy, there are larger policy actions that could be taken to increase the accessibility of urban agriculture in Los Angeles. Fundamentally speaking, Los Angeles policy makers need to take an interest in urban agriculture, and start including it in their plans for the city if the community benefits of urban agriculture projects are to be seen.

According to the comprehensive urban agriculture study Cultivate LA (2013), every municipality in LA County has a different agricultural code, and allows a different combination of agricultural activities. Currently, most agricultural sites are concentrated in CDPs and follow the county agricultural guidelines, which allow the most activities. This study suggests that a *standardization of agricultural regulations* and permissions would make urban agriculture more streamlined, and the benefits of urban agriculture to be more equally distributed across all municipalities rather than concentrating them in the cities and CDPs where agricultural regulation is the most lenient.

An amendment to the zoning codes to include agricultural spaces in urban areas is perhaps the ideal way to address the barrier of access to land, which was prevalent in existing policy studies as well as the responses from participating urban farmers. Two farms included in this study were on land zoned for residential agriculture, and one is zoned as an estate, which allows agricultural activities. These designations streamline certification processes, and allow for more agricultural activities. *Expanding the designation of residential agriculture in the zoning codes of LA County, and adding non-residential urban agriculture zoning* would be a huge step towards expanding urban agriculture and its benefits to the people of LA. Setting aside spaces for urban agriculture in the zoning code would address the problem of land access, this study's most

oft-cited barrier to urban agriculture projects, by allocating urban land which must be used for agriculture. Additionally, the amendment to the zoning code would allow for an *intentional placement of urban agriculture projects in order to address community needs* according to what urban agriculture can offer. Placing urban agriculture zoning in areas which struggle with food access and poor access to greenspace would be an effective community-driven way to address those problems. The South Central Farm was accomplishing those goals, in addition to building community power, until they lost their land in 2006. If they or other farms had permanent land tenure, then the benefits of urban agriculture would have been in the control of the residents who know what is best for the community.

Another potential avenue for increased access to urban agriculture in LA looks at the volume of vacant land in the area to identify potential spaces for growing. As mentioned in the review of the literature, the vacant lots in Los Angeles are capable of producing about a third of LA's current vegetable consumption. Much of this land is owned by the city (Watson 2018). If the city really wants to address food access and inequality of greenspace, granting this land to urban agriculture projects would go far to invest in communities' health. Rather than land lying vacant, awaiting the potential construction of unaffordable housing, *city-owned vacant land should be donated to community agriculture projects to feed and nourish communities*. Specifically, this land should go to communities with the highest rates of food insecurity, and the least access to greenspace in their neighborhoods. Vacant land donation projects would need to further contend with issues pertaining to getting the land ready for farming, including soil restoration and building infrastructure. Breaks on utilities, as recommended by a number of interviewees, in addition to assistance with soil restoration, would be a necessary addition to this

program, in order to ensure that the productivity of the land was maximized and safely grown upon.

If Los Angeles wants to see more urban agriculture projects, the city and county need to take an interest in it, and take significant measures to build urban agriculture into the fiber of the city. Community-built farms which are fighting the city every step of the way can only be so successful. If urban agriculture projects are to fully realize their potential to aid communities, policy changes need to go farther than a few incentive programs. Rather, Los Angeles needs to build policy infrastructure to support and encourage urban agriculture.

Conclusion

Urban agriculture projects yield benefits like increased food access, access to greenspace, community-building, and healthier communities. Not only do these sites address community needs, but they have the potential to be community run, build community power, and uplift and empower people through the act of food production. Current urban farming projects are limited in Los Angeles as a result of lack of a real policy framework and poor access to land and resources. With a more robust plan with explicit equity goals, Angelenos may be able to enjoy the benefits of urban agriculture in the near future. By creating more intentional spaces for edible gardens and farms in LA through increased agricultural zoning and land access programs, urban agriculture in LA can be elevated from a neighborhood amenity to a real food source and space for community growth.

As emphasized throughout this study, the communities in need of urban agriculture are the communities with the most barriers stacked against them. Historically racist policies which have relegated poor nonwhite communities to neighborhoods without access to healthy food and

greenspace are still operating to keep those vital resources out of reach. While all farmers included in this study identified barriers to land access and to the economic resources needed, areas with high rates of poverty and occupied by nonwhite and immigrant communities feel these barriers the most acutely. For this reason, future urban agriculture policy projects must be explicitly oriented towards food justice.

This study is a broad overview of the barriers experienced by urban farmers. It lacks quantitative analysis of certain questions, such as the relationship between where urban farms are located and where rates of food insecurity are highest. Quantitative research or a mixed methods study would be well suited to evaluate these questions and more, such as how the scale of urban farms relate to their profitability or community impact. Furthermore, a lack of data on existing urban farms in LA limits the scope of this study, which inevitably could not have included every voice in the urban farming sphere. Future studies should endeavor to close this data gap, and conduct more detailed, data-driven research about how location, structure, size, and community demographics influence the success and scale of urban farms. These data-driven investigations would provide much-needed context for the drafting of future urban agriculture policy and its food justice goals.

As this study has concluded, there is very little consideration of urban agriculture in city and government regulations, and therefore few programs and policies to support it. The benefit of this policy gap is that we can now start from scratch and build a framework which will prioritize food access, urban greening, and community empowerment. It is crucial that this policy development be led by community leaders in urban agriculture, and those communities which need it most.

A successful and equitable urban agriculture policy development could lend itself to a future where urban farms are incorporated into the landscape of the city. We would see healthier and happier communities with access to home-grown food and therapeutic greenspace. Community empowerment via land ownership and skill development could combat the wealth gap between racial groups in Los Angeles. Soil poisoned by industry would be revived and productive, and people could rely on a food system closer to home and better for the environment. The City of Los Angeles has the land and the resources, and its population has the expertise to make urban agriculture a viable source of food, income, and community.

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Appendix A: Interview Questions

1. Can you talk about how this farm got started? What was the inspiration and its goals, and who was the individual/group that created it?
2. Once you had made decisions about what the farm would look like, what steps did you/the organization have to take?
 - a. What were the biggest challenges in getting the farm off the ground?
3. How did you/the organization obtain this land and get it ready for farming?
 - a. What is the ownership/management structure like?
4. Can you describe the farms physical space and its uses for me? Area, what is being grown, etc.
5. In its current form, what would you say is the farms main purpose?
 - a. And what barriers do you feel stand between the farm and fully realizing that purpose?
6. Do you have any certifications that allow you to distribute produce? And what does that entail?
7. Can you identify any main challenges that the farm is facing right now? (Like the last 3 years, not COVID era)
8. If you could change anything about how urban farming is regulated/overseen, what would it be?
9. What did you learn about urban farming that you didn't expect to learn?
10. Do you feel that the agencies and governments responsible for urban agriculture policy have an understanding of the challenges of urban farming?
11. What are the policies or agencies which you find helpful?
12. Which do you consider to be in your way?
13. If applicable, are there any community groups or organizations which helped you understand all of the relevant policy? If not, would that have been helpful?

Appendix B: Farm Descriptions

Cottonwood Urban Farm: Located in Panorama City, CA, Cottonwood Urban Farm consists of an edible garden, native plant garden, duck area, orchard, and compost windrows, all in just over an acre. The farm has taken on many forms, including a CSA, full production farm, and community education space. At the time of this study, Cottonwood owner and operator Elliot Kuhn runs a weekly produce bag program, called Market Zero, and rents space to LA Compost for their San Fernando Valley Community Compost Hub. Half of Cottonwood Urban Farm qualifies for the Urban Agriculture Incentive Zone program.

Cottonwood Urban Farm aims to reconnect its community with the process of agriculture, and serve as a place to grow food and community. For more information about the founding and growth of the farm, visit the [Cottonwood website](#).

Alma Backyard Farms: Founded in 2013, Alma Backyard Farms has two locations, in Compton and San Pedro. Both locations are on leased land, neither of which utilize the Urban Agriculture Incentive Zone, though the San Pedro lot would qualify. The farm spaces are designed with community in mind, combining food production with beauty to make the spaces as advantageous to the community as possible. Their main programs include a jobs training program for formerly incarcerated people, youth education programs, and a community farm stand. Learn more at the [Alma website](#).

The Growing Experience: The Growing Experience is unique among this group in that it is located within a public housing development, and the farm is staffed and operated by employees of the Los Angeles County Development Authority. Located in the Carmelitos Public Housing Development in Long Beach, the farm space occupies a total of 7 acres, 4 of which is production oriented farm, and the rest of which is community garden space allotted to the residents of the housing development. The farm is funded by grants, and runs a weekly produce stand and offers community programming and job training. The Growing Experience is currently facing the threat of being shut down, but have faced similar threats before.

South Central Farm: The South Central Farm is one of the most well known instances of community agriculture in Los Angeles, and the country. Beginning in 1992, the South Central Farm occupied 14 acres and served hundreds of families in South Central Los Angeles. In 2006, after fourteen years of feeding the community, the farm was forcefully evicted from the land after it was sold to a new owner. Though the new owner stated that they intended to develop the land, it has continued to lay vacant for fifteen years.

Currently, the South Central Farm is in the process of securing land via a Community Land Trust. Their organization centers around empowering communities of color in South Central through food and organizing. You can learn more about the history and current projects of the South Central Farm at [their website](#).

Urban Homestead: Located on a Pasadena residential lot of just $\frac{1}{5}$ of an acre and gardening on $\frac{1}{10}$, the Urban Homestead is an amazing example of maximizing production in an urban setting. Owned by the Dervaes family, the Urban Homestead has grown over the years to become what it is today, yielding around 7,000 pounds of food per year, which they sell through their CSA in collaboration with Alma Backyard Farms. Learn more about the [Urban Homestead](#).

Grow Good: Grow Good was born out of the Salvation Army homeless shelter located in Bell. Located on 1.5 acres of Salvation Army land, the farm produces food for the kitchen at the shelter, provides job training programs, and otherwise provides a welcoming natural space for the residents of the shelter and the community. The garden is also a space for health and wellness training in the garden space, and cooking classes to round out their mission of using the garden to transform. Learn more about Grow Good and their programming at [their website](#).

Moonwater Farms: Moonwater Farms in Compton is located within one square mile of residential agriculture zoning. The lot is $\frac{1}{3}$ of an acre, and holds a garden space, compost site, goats and chickens, native plant garden, and event spaces, in addition to the home of the owner and operators. Over the years the farm has grown to be more oriented towards community programming, and running camps and classes for local children. It is a space intended to grow collaboration and community wealth, using land and food as a meeting point. Learn more about Moonwater's programming and future goals at moonwaterfarm.net

Avenue 33: Avenue 33 is a production oriented farm in Lincoln Heights growing vegetables and flowers, founded in 2018. The plot of land is located on a $\frac{1}{2}$ acre hillside, and the farm project called for using the contours of the hill to create a safe and productive farm site. The only farm on this list which is production oriented, Avenue 33 sells to local restaurants and through a farmstand at the property. Learn more at [their website](#).

Go2Zero: The youngest farm on this list, Go2Zero is a non-profit organization dedicated to environmental solutions. They secured the land for their urban farm in May of 2018 via the Urban Agriculture Incentive Zone program, and have been working on building up the infrastructure for their food access project. Located in an area with few grocery stores, the Go2Zero farm aims to distribute healthy food to the community in Long Beach.