

Understanding Our Practices from Seed to Scrap Project Backgrounder | February 2013

Vancouver Urban Farming Society

Project Overview & Team

In Fall 2012 the Vancouver Urban Farming Society (VUFS) hired a coordinator team of Shelby Tay and Zsuzsi Fodor to research what a code of best practices for urban farming in Vancouver could look like to provide a way for urban farmers to proactively and continually address the challenges and concerns around growing practices, community engagement, business practices, health and safety, among others. The research team is also working on:

1. VUFS Communication: Website, Newsletter & Social Media
2. Community Engagement & Education: 2012 Urban Farming Forum, 2013 Workshops & Tours
3. Organizational Development: VUFS Strategic Planning & Visioning

How We Are Approaching the Research

Working Directly With Urban Farmers

Our research approach is grounded in community based research by directly working with Vancouver's urban farming community of practice. This honours that the answers we are looking for are not 'out there' but exist within the lived experiences of Vancouver's urban farmers.

Building Capacity

We are taking a capacity building approach. Rather than focusing *solely* on creating a final end product, we will be using resources throughout the research period to coordinate workshops, skill shares, and networking forums for the local urban farming community as a way of building capacity.

Is There Really A Best?

The idea that there are *best* practices for urban farming in Vancouver is perhaps a misnomer. Because the city is being farmed in such a diversity of ways—there is no one size fits all—and how new the majority of farms are, there might not be *best* practices, but instead, emerging or promising ones.

What We Hope to Accomplish

1. Increase the capacity of urban farms in Vancouver to co-learn and share their management practices and capture this knowledge in a dynamic, engaging, and accessible way;
2. Influence City of Vancouver urban farming policy with a strong urban farmer voice; and,
3. Serve as a precedent for other jurisdictions and urban farming communities of practice.

The Big Questions We Are Asking

The REALLY Big One

What is the current landscape of emerging and promising practices for urban farming in Vancouver?

The Medium Ones

What practices are working well? What practices are not working well? What practices are still experimental?

What practices will best serve urban farmers into the future? What barriers exist to realizing these?

How does the urban farming community in Vancouver feel towards a code of practices (e.g. are they in favour/opposed/unsure, what would they want to see in it/not see in it, how could it serve them, how do they want to be involved in the process)?

How Are We Going to Do It?

| Tool | Description | When to Expect It |
|--------------------------|---|--|
| Forums | We will host two forums. The first is the annual Urban Farming Forum to collect baseline data on urban farming practices in Vancouver. The other will be a forum to share the research findings so far and consult with the urban farming community of practice before finalizing content inspired by the “Sustainability on the Table” menu process used with the Neighbourhood Food Networks. | First Forum: November 2012 Second Forum: May or June 2013 |
| Literature Review | Lots of reading of research, reports, and all sorts of other existing media. | Ongoing |
| Interviews | One-on-one or group interviews with practicing urban farmers and additional stakeholders to gather more in depth practices information building on the baseline from the November forum. | Interviews: March & April 2013 |
| Farm Tours | We will partner with tour hosts and other organizations (i.e. Young Agrarians and Neighbourhood Food Networks) to put on a series of 6 urban farm tours. | Tours: April-September 2013 |
| Workshops | We will support the coordination and resourcing of workshops for urban farmers on topics of their choosing. | Workshops: TBA |

What Areas of Practice Are We Interested In?

Through our work so far the following came up as priority areas of practice the urban farming community wants to see more research into, in no particular order:

1. Preparation, Planning & Start of Season
2. Land and What You Build On It
3. In the Field
4. Farm Crew
5. Storage, Transportation & Distribution
6. Marketing & Sales
7. Community Engagement
8. Organizational Structure, Governance & Legal Status
9. Business Planning & Finances
10. Health and Safety
11. Inter-Farm Collaboration
12. Insurance, Liability & Legal Matters

How to Reach Us

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