



# Policy and Possibilities: Recommendations for the City of Vancouver's Urban Farm Guidelines

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Vancouver Urban Farming Society

# Acknowledgments

This report is a project of the Vancouver Urban Farming Society (VUFS).

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## Land Acknowledgment

We want to acknowledge that our work as urban farmers and advocates takes place on traditional, ancestral and stolen territory of the Coast Salish peoples, including the Territories of the xwməθ kwəyəḿ, Skwxwú7mesh, and sə ɫɪlwətaʔɫ Nations. For millennia, this land was forests, meadows, estuaries, rivers and oceans teeming with wildlife, people and plants. People indigenous to these lands, with sacred laws, ceremony and traditional knowledge lived here in reciprocity and ongoing sustenance for thousands of years.

Our goal is to bring food growing back into urban life and connect people to the ecological systems that sustain us. We recognize that the urban environment and far-reaching ecological impact of urban residents is enabled by colonial laws and policy and alongside the effects of intergenerational trauma continues to dispossess Coast Salish and other Indigenous peoples of their Territories and food sovereignty. In this City of Reconciliation, as we reconcile histories and relationships between people, plants, living creatures and lands we seek to support Indigenous sovereignty and embrace Indigenous ways of knowing and caring for the land.

## In Recognition

We are grateful to the urban farmers, policymakers and urban farming forum participants who contributed to the development of these recommendations.

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# Executive Summary

The Vancouver Urban Farming Society (VUFS) presents the following research and recommendations to improve the City of Vancouver's Urban Farm Guidelines. This research was conducted to help inform the city's current review of the Urban Farm Guidelines, adopted by Vancouver City Council in March 2016. The 2017-2019 Vancouver Urban Farming Census documents a decline in the Vancouver farming sector, following seven years of growth.

In this report VUFS identifies three key issues with the City's Urban Farm Guidelines and notes, in the city's current review of the Guidelines to date, there has been no progress on the top two key issues, with some promise of progress on the third:

1. There is a lack of supportive policy and programs that would enable the urban farm sector to firmly establish and grow.
2. The requirements for permitting and licensing create uncertainty and impose high costs that compromise the economic viability of urban farms and impede growth of the sector.
3. The Guidelines set unnecessary limitations on urban farm activities.

To address these issues, we research and report on examples of supportive policies in other jurisdictions and call for the following policy changes in the City of Vancouver:

1. Incentivize landowners to make land available to urban farmers using taxation or other policy tools.
2. Make more City-owned land available for urban farming.
3. Allow urban farming in all zones as a Permitted Use, and eliminate the Development Permit requirement for Class B and large Class A urban farms.
4. Create building bylaws appropriate for urban farm structures.
5. Clarify and simplify the business license application process.
6. Allow other urban farming products besides fruits and vegetables.
7. Allow non-disruptive urban farming activities outside 8 am - 9 pm.
8. Expand on-site sales and allow farm stands.

The current city staff review of the Guidelines creates an opportunity for the City of Vancouver (COV) to enact bold policies towards a vibrant farming sector. The mandate for supportive policies and programs is further bolstered by the Council COVID Recovery Committee who recommended, in 2020, to prioritize enabling more local food production into COVID recovery program workstreams. Now more than ever, it's time to unleash the potential of urban farming to cultivate significant social, economic, and environmental benefits for Vancouver's residents.

# Background

## Farming in Vancouver

Food provision from land now called Vancouver dates back millenia with the long and continual presence of the Coast Salish peoples of the xwməθ kwəyəəm, Skwxwú7mesh, and sə lílwətaʔ Nations. Starting 170 years ago white settlers cleared forests, meadows, hunting, trapping and food gathering areas for farming.<sup>1</sup> Chinese settlers, initially blocked from buying land, leased land for farming and grew the majority of the region's fresh produce through to the 1960's.<sup>2</sup> Former farm sites were converted to golf courses and City of Vancouver parks as the city grew up around them.<sup>3</sup> By 2001, BC was down to being just 34% food self-reliant<sup>4</sup>, meaning the majority of foods were imported, despite the Lower Fraser Valley's unmatched agricultural productivity in all of Canada. In Vancouver, farms were no longer an allowable use in Residential, Industrial or Commercial zoning in stark contrast to neighbouring municipalities such as Richmond.

In 2010, majority young white university educated farmers gained access to land through lease and informal agreements, and swelled to nine farms.<sup>5</sup> Their motivations were to engage in the food system, address climate change and barriers to employment, shorten food supply chains, empower youth and create green jobs, inclusive training opportunities and food enlivened communities. The Vancouver Urban Farming Society (VUFS) was created in 2012 to advocate for farming as an allowable use and business activity for commercial enterprises and not-for-profit organizations.<sup>6</sup> Leveraging grant funds, farmers and supporters volunteered hundreds of hours with VUFS and on the Vancouver Food Policy Council, hosted eight public urban farming forums with 120+ attendees each, hosted farm tours for city staff and met with city staff to inform on the economic and practical realities of farming in the city and discuss policy. Farms grew in number to 13 by 2016, grossing \$746,000 on 3.2 hectares.<sup>7</sup>

The latest [Vancouver Urban Farming Census 2017-2019](#) shows that the city's farming sector is no longer growing as it was from 2010-2016. We know of at least six farm businesses that either closed down or moved their operation to neighbouring municipalities after 2017. Revenues from farm sales declined by 37% between 2016 and 2019, and the production area has held steady at about 7.5 acres since 2013. In

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<sup>1</sup> [Douglas Park](#), Places that Matter, Vancouver Heritage Foundation.

<sup>2</sup> [Covered Roots: The History of Vancouver's Chinese Farmers](#), Chinese Canadian Stories Project.

<sup>3</sup> [Douglas Park](#), Places that Matter, Vancouver Heritage Foundation.

<sup>4</sup> [BC's Food Self-Reliance](#), BC Ministry of Agriculture and Lands.

<sup>5</sup> Shutzbank, Marc. 2010. '[Growing Vegetables in Metro Vancouver: An Urban Farming Census](#).' Master's Thesis, UBC, Vancouver.

<sup>6</sup> [History](#) of the Vancouver Urban Farming Society.

<sup>7</sup> [Vancouver Urban Farming Census 2014 to 2016](#), Vancouver Urban Farming Society.

2020, one more relatively high-grossing business shut down and is seeking relocation to a neighbouring city where leases are easier to secure for farming purposes. Five not-for-profit and three farm businesses remain, down from 13 in 2016.

And yet, Vancouver's farmers are essential, resilient, resourceful and committed, something made more apparent by the COVID 19 pandemic. On average, between 2016-2019 the farms that remain in Vancouver saw growth in land area under production, revenues and paid wages. Sales to restaurants took a dive in 2020 with pandemic related restaurant closures and slow-downs, however diverse farms pivoted to increased Community Supported Agriculture (CSA) and market sales and emergency food provision to match increased demand for local food and food security initiatives.

Vancouver's farms generate significant community benefits through education, green space, and community connectedness, engaging over 17,000 people in 2019 through events, volunteering, skills development and educational programs. They empower youth and city residents in the food system, help them to improve their mental and physical health, teach them skills to start their own gardens, how to be more food literate and civically engaged with community and place. Vancouver's farmers are active and collaborative in the policy making process and continue to engage with the city to create a regulatory environment that would support urban farming.

## City of Vancouver Urban Farm Guidelines

Amidst food security concerns, community activists created the Vancouver Food Policy Council in 2004. The 2007 [Vancouver Food Charter](#) articulates a vision for a food system which benefits our community and environment through the development of a coordinated municipal food strategy. In the [Greenest City 2020 Action Plan](#), the City prioritized the creation and adoption of policy to recognize farming as an allowable land use and set up a clear regulatory process to support growth of the farming sector.

The [Amendments to Zoning and Development By-law and Business License By-law regarding Urban Farming Report](#), issued shortly before the Urban Farm Guidelines went before council for adoption, cites six plans, strategies and targets towards which farming contributes: [Greenest City 2020 Action Plan](#), [Vancouver Food Strategy \(2013\)](#), Healthy City Strategy, Vancouver Economic Action Strategy, Transportation 2040 Plan and Food Waste Targets.

In March 2016, Vancouver City Council adopted [Urban Farm Guidelines](#) that integrated farming into the zoning bylaw and created two farm business license categories: 1) Class A Urban Farms operating in residential zones and on institutional grounds, and 2) Class B Urban Farms, which operate in industrial, commercial, or

historical area zones. The Guidelines apply to farming in all areas except Southlands, the City of Vancouver's only land parcels in the provincial Agricultural Land Reserve (ALR). The new policies were intended as a two-year pilot, and staff were directed to engage with farming stakeholders to evaluate effectiveness and recommend changes.

Unfortunately, in 2016, the Vancouver Urban Farming Society (VUFS) heard feedback from farmers that the cost of meeting permit requirements was a significant barrier for their businesses and not-for-profit organizations. Funded by the City of Vancouver, VUFS commissioned a report to understand the specific concerns of Class B farms which, alongside large Class A farms under the Guidelines, require a Development Permit in addition to a Business License. The 2017 report, ['Class B' Urban Farm Guidelines: Impacts & Recommendations](#), flagged numerous limitations and costs imposed by the Guidelines that diminish, if not eliminate, the economic viability of commercial farms and squander the resources of not-for-profit farms. This study draws heavily on the findings of the *'Class B' Urban Farm Guidelines* report.

The city's review process of the pilot Guidelines resumed in 2019. Social Planning staff gathered feedback from farmers on how the Guidelines have affected their operations and suggestions for improvement. The Social Planning department convened internal meetings with Finance, Licensing, Building & Development Services and Legal departments. Social Planning staff are working towards a report of their findings and recommendations to Council by mid-2021.

It is relevant that Vancouver is a City of Reconciliation and is responding to requests for improved cross-departmental collaboration that would better support xwməθ kwəyəm, Skwxwú7mesh, and sə́ílwətaʔ Nation engagement with the city. The city is [exploring the structural support](#) needed for a whole-systems approach with [One Water, Vancouver Plan](#) and cross-initiatives with Parks. Food might be another initiative that warrants a whole-systems approach.

In 2020, the [Council COVID Recovery Committee](#) reiterated the importance of enabling local food production, listing it amongst 41 top-priority recommendations to ensure a successful recovery from the pandemic. The report recommends that staff "incorporate the top-priority recommendations into the City's COVID-19 Recovery Program and other workstreams as appropriate". Lastly, the [Vancouver Plan](#) articulates 10 provisional goals for which farming has a role to play, not exclusively:

- Become a Sustainable and Carbon-Neutral City;
- Ensure we are a Prepared, Safe and Resilient City;
- Support a Diverse and Healthy Economy;
- Create Complete, Connected and Culturally Vibrant Neighbourhoods;
- Re-establish Thriving Urban Natural Systems.

## Methodology

The primary objective of this report is to put forward policy recommendations to improve the City of Vancouver's [Urban Farm Guidelines](#) as part of the current review process conducted by the city. Identification and analysis of issues with the Guidelines is informed by prior VUFS publications: the 2017 '[Class B' Urban Farm Guidelines](#) report, the [Urban Farming Census 2014-2016](#), and the [Urban Farming Census 2017-2019](#).

This report is also informed by the results of a policy workshop, *Workshopping the City of Vancouver Urban Farm Guidelines*, held at the [8<sup>th</sup> Vancouver Urban Farming Forum](#) on January 19, 2020. Farmers, policy makers, and interested members of the public came together to discuss key aspects of the Guidelines, the challenges they pose to farms and growth of the sector as well as possible policy solutions. Three staff from the City of Vancouver were in attendance representing Social Planning, Building & Development Services and Licensing. Representatives of six farms that operate in Vancouver spoke as panelists to share their perspectives. After panelists spoke, attendees broke up into four groups to further discuss four key areas regulated by the Guidelines (Building Permits, Development Permits, Business Licenses, and Tax Incentives to promote farming) and possible solutions.

This report's recommendations also rely on a policy scan and comparison to identify possible solutions and precedents from other cities in Canada and the US. The scan used web searches to look primarily at relevant zoning codes, business licensing bylaws, building codes, and municipal urban farming webpages. Precedents informed the development of policy recommendations to address specific issues with the Guidelines. We recognize that policies are context-specific and cannot simply be transplanted from one jurisdiction to another. Policy precedents are intended to spark discussion and increase the number of options available for the review process.



# Issues with the Guidelines

VUFS has identified the following issues with the City's Urban Farm Guidelines.

1. There is a lack of supportive policy or programs that would enable the urban farm sector to firmly establish and grow. The Guidelines were designed to limit the size of farms and prevent farms in Vancouver from attaining [Farm Class Status](#) under the BC Assessment Act<sup>8</sup>. Without Farm Class Status urban farmers cannot access provincial agricultural support programs including a province-wide incentive for land owners to lease land to farmers, inhibiting land access.
2. The requirements for permitting and licensing create uncertainty and impose high costs that compromise the economic viability of commercial urban farms and squander the resources of not-for-profit farms.
  - a. The Development Permit process is lengthy, uncertain, and expensive to undertake. The costs to comply are disproportionate to what farms can bear, given that food production in any context is a low margin industry. Because there is little remaining farm infrastructure in Vancouver, farms are burdened by a nascent and costly development permit process.
  - b. Building bylaws for brick-and-mortar buildings are applied to farm structures that are often used for storage or season extension and have low occupancy. The cost of making upgrades to get a Building Permit is disproportionate to the economic returns of farming.
  - c. The process for applying for a Business License is perceived by farmers as time-intensive, and unclear, especially for farms that operate on multiple sites. Onerous data requirements in the Business License application process are linked to the City's perceived need to regulate farm size, and are seen as unnecessary.
3. The Guidelines set unnecessary limitations on farm activities. Farms are only allowed to cultivate fruits or vegetables. Farms in or near residential areas are not allowed to have activities outside 8am to 9pm. On-site sales are not allowed for farms in Residential Districts unless the primary use of the parcel is Institutional. Any on-site sales are limited to produce grown on the site.

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<sup>8</sup> From [Amendments to Zoning and Development By-law and Business License By-law regarding Urban Farming Report](#): "The restrictions in farm size and sales and land lease requirements, coupled with proactive enforcement and monitoring, are intended to create effective mechanisms that minimize the financial risk to the City." A financial risk assessment has not been made available by the City to date.

# Summary Table of Recommendations

POLICY AREA AND RECOMMENDATIONS	OUTCOME	Provides support for sector to thrive	Reduces unnecessary regulations	Reduces costs of permitting and licensing
<p><b>1. Incentives for urban farm leases</b> Explore options to incentivize landowners to lease land to farmers.</p>	<p>Increase access to private land.  Facilitate partnerships between farmers and property owners.</p>	✓		
<p><b>2. City-owned land</b> Make more City-owned land available for farming.</p>	<p>Increase access to land with secure long-term tenure.</p>	✓		
<p><b>3. Development Permits</b> Allow farming in all zones as a Permitted Use.  Eliminate or create an alternative process to Development Permit for farms.</p>	<p>Reduce barriers for potential landlords to lease to farmers.  Reduce cost and barriers to apply for Development Permits  Legitimize farming as a desirable land use and activity</p>	✓	✓	✓
<p><b>4. Building Permits</b> Create building policies appropriate to farming.  Exempt hoopouses from Building Permit requirement.  Designate city staff liaison for Building Permit process.</p>	<p>Allow farmers to use low risk agricultural equipment.  Reduce cost and barriers to apply for building permits.</p>		✓	✓
<p><b>5. Business licenses</b> License farm sales rather than farm production sites.  Streamline application process.  Clarify license requirements for not-for-profit and charitable farms.</p>	<p>Reduce administrative burden and improve user experience.  Reduce cost and barriers to apply for a business license.</p>		✓	✓

POLICY AREA AND RECOMMENDATIONS	OUTCOME	Provides support for sector to thrive	Reduces unnecessary regulations	Reduces costs of permitting and licensing
<p><b>6. Allow other products</b> Allow other farming products besides fruits and vegetables.</p>	<p>Enable farmers to diversify their revenue streams.</p>	<p>✓</p>	<p>✓</p>	
<p><b>7. Hours of operation</b> Allow non-disruptive farming activities outside 8 am to 9 pm.</p>	<p>Enable farmers to optimize work hours, leading to improved product quality and work environment.</p> <p>Balance nuisance regulation with the needs of farmers.</p>	<p>✓</p>	<p>✓</p>	
<p><b>8. On-farm sales</b> Expand on-site sales.</p> <p>Create farm stand guidelines.</p> <p>Allow sale of any local farm products at any farm stand.</p>	<p>Reduce limitations on how Class A farms can market products.</p> <p>Enable more marketing channels.</p> <p>Increase residents' access to local products.</p>	<p>✓</p>	<p>✓</p>	

# Recommendations

The first two recommendations, to incentivize land leased to farms and make more public land available for farming, address the critical issue of access to land. Access to land and indoor growing space is the most common challenge faced by new entrants to farming due to the extremely high cost of land, an issue Vancouver farmers share with their regional counterparts. Because of the tax equity implications, implementing tax incentives, or opting into the provincial tax incentive already in place, may be a lengthy political process. By grappling with the question of how to make land available for food production on land under pressure for competing uses while spreading the municipal tax burden equitably, the City of Vancouver would join regional efforts to activate land for local food provision in this age of Reconciliation. The policy recommendations and precedents in this report are intended to inform further discussion towards policies that increase access to land for food provision.

The recommendations pertaining to development permits, building permits, and business licenses were identified at the Urban Farming Forum workshop by farmers as top priority, and is not unconnected to land and indoor growing space access.

Improving the permitting and licensing processes requires the City to:

- prioritize farming within the workstreams of each relevant department, facilitated by an engagement specialist, putting the onus on finding creative, supportive policy solutions across departments;
- recognize that established Vancouver farmers (some who have been in operation for over a decade), regional agricultural practitioners and professionals are an invaluable resource with deep knowledge that can help to bridge information gaps;
- recognize that farming is a newly returning land use and a low-margin activity with positive social impact worthy of city resources across departments;
- seek input from agricultural counterparts in neighbouring municipalities, Metro Vancouver and the Province.

Adopting policy changes to reduce barriers and costs for farm businesses and not-for-profits will make it easier for farms to access growing space and serve the community.

The last three recommendations involve adjusting the Guidelines to recognize and enable common urban farming practices and provide farmers with greater flexibility in marketing and operations improving their economic viability and long-term sustainability.

# Policy Recommendation #1

Incentivize landowners to make land available to urban farmers using taxation or other policy tools.

## Specific Recommendations

1. Explore policy options that can incentivize landowners to make land available to farmers, including:
  - a. Removal of revenue and size limits on farms to enable properties with leased farm parcels to qualify for Farm Class Status,
    - i. OR, Use of Municipal Revitalization Tax Exemptions or other permissive tax exemptions to exempt properties with farm parcels from municipal property value taxes,
    - ii. OR, Creation of a tax incentive program specific to urban farming, as per San Francisco and Washington DC.
  - b. Inclusion of farms as Community Amenity Contributions.
  - c. Advocate at the provincial level for Agricultural Land Reserve tax reform to address tax equity issues.

## Current Policy

### *UF Guidelines*

#### *1 Application and Intent*

*These guidelines have been prepared to assist the development of safe, neighbourly and productive urban farms and create a more sustainable food system for Vancouver. Urban farming will improve the resilience of Vancouver's food systems in accordance with the vision, principles and goals defined in the Vancouver Food Strategy and the Greenest City Action Plan which calls for an increase of urban farms to improve economic, social and environmental objectives... The purpose of the guidelines is to assist both urban farm applicants to apply as well as City staff to evaluate applications by: (a) Providing details on suitability of urban farms in Vancouver; and (b) Ensuring that urban farms meet City policy and regulations.*

#### *2.1 Operational Management - Class A*

*(vii) If operated on a single parcel or by a single land owner, the farm may not generate revenue exceeding \$9,999 in any calendar year, unless the primary use of the parcel is Park or Institutional;*

## 2.2 Business License

iv) If a farm is subject to a lease, the lease must be provided to the City License Inspector;

v) A license holder may not operate an Urban Farm – Class A that exceeds a combined planting area of 7,000 m<sup>2</sup>;

## Impact

The preamble of the Guidelines calls for the development of productive farms and points to the [Vancouver Food Strategy](#) and [Greenest City Action Plan](#) goal to increase the number farms in the city to 35 by 2020. The [Amendments to Zoning and Development By-law and Business License By-law regarding Urban Farming Report](#) describes how farming also contributes to priorities in the Healthy City Strategy, Vancouver Economic Action Strategy, Transportation 2040 Plan and Food Waste Targets.

At the same time, the Guidelines block Vancouver farms from being eligible for farm status under the BC Assessment Act. The Guidelines restrict aggregate farm size to below the size required, .8 hectares (1.98 acres), to attain provincial farm status with leased lands. This was explicitly done to “minimize the financial risk to the city” as per the [Amendments to Zoning and Development By-law and Business License By-law regarding Urban Farming Report](#). The report goes on to say, on page 8:

*“When a property is converted from non-farm use to farm use, and if qualified for reclassification, it would result in property tax loss to the City. As a result, Council would have to increase the tax rates for all other taxpayers to compensate for the shortfall.”*

The financial risk then, as stated above, is to other taxpayers and not the city. And the degree of risk, or the projected increase to taxes for landowners who do not make their land available to farm, is unknown. To date, a financial risk assessment, one where the potential impact on taxes is estimated, and upon which these Guidelines are based, has not been made available. An explicit assessment of the financial risk to taxpayers who do not make their land available to farm, vetted against realistic, sector-provided growth scenarios, and assessed against the potential benefits to the city, would provide a better basis for policy. City staff could engage urban farmers in a financial risk assessment to access first-hand knowledge of the sector and lay the groundwork for the development of more refined policy tools. A jointly produced financial risk assessment would more fully equip Council to decide whether they want to incentivize agricultural land use through property taxes, or not.

The impact of blocking farms from attaining farm status is that Vancouver’s farmers do not have access to the province-wide “carrot” of lowered property taxes when

approaching or negotiating with property owners to lease available sites. It also blocks farmers from accessing provincial funding programs for farms with farm status. A 2016 Metro Vancouver report, [Encouraging Agricultural Production through Farm Property Tax Reform in Metro Vancouver](#), notes that without the incentive of farm class status, urban farms will mostly be limited to public land.

Additionally, not allowing urban farmland to qualify for lowered property taxes stifles not-for-profit organizations and social enterprises from accessing a ready source of funding. Given the economics of urban farming, farmers would likely enter into agreements with property owners receiving a potential tax break, where the property owner not only makes land available to farm but also passes along some of the tax break to the farmer to make the farm economically viable.

The city's focus on preventing farms from achieving farm status is linked to overbearing data requirements in the licensing process. Farmers are required to provide leases, farm plot dimensions and coordinates and apply for separate business licenses for each site they operate so the city can ensure farms aren't eligible for farm status. These informational requirements are costly and pose issues for the kinds of agreements farmers enter into with people that offer them land.

Combined with numerous other restrictions in the Guidelines, including a Development Permit requirement for Class B and Class A farms above 325 m<sup>2</sup>, farmers have multiple barriers and limited options if they want to scale up their operation. The [Vancouver Urban Farming Census 2014-2016](#) reported an increase in the number of farms from 10 to 13, a continuation in the growth of farms since 2010. Following the adoption of the Urban Farming Guidelines the number of farms fell to 9, and in 2020 to 8.

*“After six months of negotiating with the landowner for a potential new urban farm site, we lost the site when they got ahold of the Guidelines.”*

*- Farmer at Urban Farming Forum 2020*

*“Maybe if farm status was allowed then isn't that a good outcome if there is a proliferation of farms across the city?”*

*- Participant at Urban Farming Forum 2020*

### **The case for supporting farmers' land access**

Agriculture provides many benefits to society besides food. Agriculture provides a suite of ecosystem services, health benefits through availability of fresh vegetables

and outdoor activity, access to green space, aesthetic beauty by cultivating beautiful landscapes and local economic activity. In 1995, recognizing the inherent value of agriculture and the need to support farming as an important land use amidst speculative land costs for residential development, British Columbia adopted the Classification of Land as a Farm Regulation. Owners of land classified as a farm have their land assessed at a lower rate which results in lower property taxes, incentivizing property owners to make their land available for agriculture. Farm class also enables farms to access cost-share funding programs such as the Beneficial Management Practices Program and the On-Farm Food Safety Program.

Like rural and peri-urban farms, but situated where a higher density of people live, urban farms produce social, economic, and environmental benefits for the community, as noted in the City of Vancouver's 2016 Urban Farm Guidelines Application and Intent quoted above. Farms in Vancouver interact with residents in formal and informal ways, helping city dwellers develop a closer relationship with soil, plants and their food, acting as a gateway to improved food system literacy.

In 2019, Vancouver's farms engaged over 17,000 city residents through educational programs and events. A majority of farms who participated in the [Urban Farm Census](#) reported providing learning and employment opportunities for residents, and for youth in particular. Farms offer a range of skill development opportunities to city residents including internships, formal courses, workshops, and school programs. They teach skills such as sustainable food production, composting, carpentry, marketing, communications, nutrition, cooking, food preservation and waste reduction.

All farms surveyed in the Census use organic principles and growing practices. They use practices that promote soil health and biodiversity, such as compost, organic soil amendments, mulch, cover crops, polycultures, crop rotation, no-till or minimal till, and cultural pest management. Farms contribute to the local economy through local procurement of supplies and equipment, job creation and supplying local restaurants, markets and food processors.

*"I learned so much about plant families, the seasonality of food grown in Vancouver, culls and food waste, how to drive a big truck and work with tools and machinery, how to write professional emails, interpersonal communication with coworkers and managers, how to cook large amounts of food based on what was in season, and a lot about myself! And it didn't even feel like learning - in a good way!"*

*- Urban farming youth intern*



Farmers grapple with the same issues of unaffordability and high housing costs faced by Vancouver residents. The Urban Farming Census shows that, in 2019, the majority of employment in the sector is part-time, with farm managers earning \$21 to \$24 per hour. Their work provides benefits to city residents, while they are blocked by the Guidelines from accessing the same tax incentive and funding programs as other BC farmers.

If the City will not allow urban farms to participate in the provincial Farm Class incentive program, it needs to explore replacement policy tools that will support farmers, recognize their contributions to the community, and help achieve the goal of increasing farmers' access to land. Arguably, it would be beneficial for Vancouver to opt into existing policy solutions and infrastructure and engage in ongoing dialogue with regional counterparts around provincial agricultural land policy and local food provision.

The ['Class B' Urban Farm Guidelines](#) report in 2017 called for a collaborative engagement process to explore the development of tax incentives or other policy tools to encourage urban farming. Some policy options are already in use in BC:

- Farm Class Status, and advocating for provincial property tax reform to improve equity issues around who carries the municipal tax burden when incentivizing agriculture.<sup>9,10</sup>
- Municipal Revitalization Tax Exemptions or other permissive tax exemptions could be used to exempt properties with farms from municipal property value taxes for up to 10 years to encourage longer-term tenure.
- Farms could be treated as Community Amenity Contributions that developers can provide in exchange for higher density. The inclusion of a 1-acre farm in the Pearson Dogwood rezoning is a step in this direction.
- Make more city grants available for farms, including businesses.

Some US cities have set up tax incentive programs specifically geared to encourage farming. These programs are in place in Washington DC, San Francisco, San Diego, San Jose, and Long Beach. They operate similar to permissive tax exemptions, specifically incentivizing landowners to lease property to farmers for a minimum term. These policy examples are interesting because they are specifically tailored to urban contexts and have conditions that must be met, such as:

- Farms must have an element of public engagement or education.
- Contracts are subject to review by the city.
- Caps on the total amount of property tax revenue abated.

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<sup>9</sup> <http://www.metrovancouver.org/services/regional-planning/PlanningPublications/AgricultureProductionTaxReformMV-2016.pdf>

<sup>10</sup>

<https://www.theglobeandmail.com/news/investigations/speculators-investing-in-bc-farmland-may-lose-tax-breaks/article32953981/>

- Landowners who break their contract before the minimum term have to repay a fine or the amount of property tax abated plus interest.

## Policy Precedents

### *San Francisco, California*

California's [Urban Agriculture Incentive Zones](#) legislation enables San Francisco to enter into voluntary contracts with landowners to use tax incentives to promote the use of vacant, unimproved, or blighted lands for small-scale agricultural use.

Owners of vacant property in the City can apply for a property tax reduction in exchange for committing their land to agricultural use for at least five years. In order to limit lost tax revenue, a special review is required if lost tax revenue is greater than \$25,000/year or greater than \$125,000 for the entire contract term, or if total area in the contract is greater than 5 acres, or if all lost tax revenue for all contracts exceeds \$250,000/year. The agriculture site must be open to the public through education programs, produce sales, or general open hours. If a property owner cancels their contract, they must pay back the tax revenue incentive amount plus interest. The state legislation was introduced in 2014 and as of 2017, four parcels in three Californian cities had entered into [UAIZ contracts](#).

### *Washington DC*

DC has recently funded the creation of a dedicated [Office of Urban Agriculture](#) that will manage two key programs, a land lease program and a tax abatement program. The tax abatement program provides an abatement of property tax to private landowners that lease their property (including rooftops) for agriculture. Land must be at least 2,500 contiguous square feet of unimproved land with no plans for development for the proposed tax abatement period. The abatement is up to 90% on the portion of the property that is being farmed. There is a cap of \$20,000 on the tax abatement per property per year.

## Policy Recommendation #2

### Make more City-owned land available for urban farming.

#### Specific Recommendations

1. Make more City-owned properties available to farm by lease.
2. Make City-owned land available for permanent farming using a community farm model with an explicit social mandate.

#### Current Policy

Not reflected in Guidelines. We are aware of one farm, Sole Food Street Farms operating since 2009, that operates on City land. The Vancouver Food Strategy and Vancouver Food Strategy Action Plan directs staff to identify and secure farming sites, and to increase the number of urban farms from 17 to 35:

*The Vancouver Food Strategy (2013)*

*Action 1.16: Increase the number of urban farms in Vancouver from 17 to 35 by the year 2020, ranging from backyard farms to mid-scale operations.*

*Lead Departments: Development Services - Planning - Social Infrastructure - Social Policy*

*Vancouver Food Strategy Action Plan 2017-2020*

*Section 4.1 Action: Support urban farming activities, including on city land and through developments*

*Immediate next steps: Continue working with Planning, Housing, Park Board, and Real Estate to identify and secure sites*

#### Impact

By design, tax incentive programs make undeveloped lots available on a short term basis to farmers until the landowner decides to develop the property. Typical lease terms for tax incentive programs are 3 to 5 years. According to the most recent Urban Farming Census, Vancouver farm lease terms range from 1 to 5 years, while three farms reported having unspecified terms based on ongoing relationships.

Farmers shared how short term land tenure impacts their business or organization. The continuation of the farm depends on their relationship with their landlord. Losing the site means significant costs and time towards finding a new site and rebuilding from scratch, instead of serving the community. Short-term tenure creates uncertainty and stress over the possibility of losing the land. It limits farmers'

capacity to invest in improvements and make long-term plans. Short-term tenure also affects farm production and strategies. They have less incentive to use sustainable practices that pay off in the long-term (e.g. perennial crops, permaculture techniques for soil building). Landlords also have a say over practices, for example asking farmers to focus on aesthetics. Farmers may have limited access to infrastructure like storage, washrooms, irrigation and compost bins.

*“As our relationship is very good with the company who allows us to use their land, we are able to continue with our current farming practices. However, if at any point they decide not to continue with us we would have to look for other willing partners with land in the neighbourhood... our Urban Farming is sustained by the property company allowing us to use this land.”*

*- Farmer, Urban Farm Census 2019*

On the flip side, long-term tenure is the ideal situation for farmers. It means that rather than paying moving costs, farmers can invest in equipment and infrastructure that need a longer timeframe to pay off. They can invest in perennial crops that are less disruptive to ecosystems while helping diversify their products. Farmers can build their knowledge and experience of the site (e.g. microclimate, drainage issues) over time, which helps them optimize production. Longer term land tenure also creates community benefits by helping farmers grow social capital in the neighbourhood.

Secure long-term land tenure can be supported by making publicly-owned sites available to farm. This policy goal does not have to compete with land for affordable housing development. The City could identify publicly owned parcels that are marginal for housing or other future development, such as lawns and rooftops of public buildings, schools, hospitals, government offices, libraries, or community centres. Community-oriented neighbourhood farms could be considered for future park developments, using models similar to Black Creek Community Farm in Toronto, Alemany Farm in San Francisco, and Loutet Farm in North Vancouver, that have mandates to increase food access and create educational opportunities for residents.

The city could also lease a city-owned indoor warehouse site to an established indoor grower to learn first-hand how indoor growers use space, and the overbearance of change-of-use development permits.

Additional city supports could include providing free or low-cost compost and leaf mulch deliveries to farms, sharing infrastructure such as the City’s horticultural nursery spaces, covering soil testing costs, and paying fees for urban farming consultation and expertise.

## Policy Precedents

### *North Vancouver, BC*

[Loutet Farm](#), a partnership between the City of North Vancouver, UBC and the North Shore Neighbourhood House, broke ground in 2011. In 2009, Council directed city staff to help find a viable location and work through zoning and by-law issues as they arose. Operating on public park land the farm features a residential neighborhood farmstand, offers learning opportunities for adults and children and green jobs.

### *Toronto, Ontario*

[Black Creek Community Farm](#) grows certified organic vegetables on 3.2 hectares owned by the Toronto and Region Conservation Authority in a densely populated neighbourhood in Toronto. The land is leased by a not-for-profit organization, the Everdale Environmental Learning Centre. BCCF is an example of a successful partnership between not-for-profit organizations, a city, and a regional agency that led to the creation of a community centred farm with long-term tenure and vision.

### *San Francisco, CA*

[Alemany Farm](#) is a 3.5 acre organic farm that operates on land owned by the San Francisco Recreation and Park Department. The farm is operated and maintained by a volunteer group called Friends of Alemany Farm. The produce is given away for free to the community. The farm offers educational events, workshops, and internships.

### *Washington DC*

DC recently funded the creation of a dedicated [Office of Urban Agriculture](#). Under their land lease program, the City identifies vacant plots of City-owned land and leases them at no cost to agriculture companies or nonprofits for a minimum term of 5 years.

### *Atlanta, GA*

The [City of Atlanta](#) allows for vacant city-owned property to be adopted by gardeners or farmers and used for agriculture for 5 years with the option to renew. Available land for growing food for sale is specifically being piloted on the state energy utility's right-of-ways. Interested farmers must submit an application to prove that they have the experience and qualifications to operate a farm.

### *Zurich, Switzerland*

There are 810 hectares of agricultural land within Zurich city limits, and the City of Zurich owns about two-thirds of it. [Grün Stadt Zürich](#) ("Green City of Zurich") is the municipal department responsible for the city's parks, sports facilities, urban forests, cemeteries, public swimming pools and playgrounds. The City owns 10 farms. Nine of them are leased to family farm operators, and city employees manage the tenth farm.

## Policy Recommendation #3

Allow urban farming in all zones as a Permitted Use, and eliminate the Development Permit requirement.

### Specific Recommendations

1. Amend the Zoning Bylaw to allow farms as Outright Approval Use in all districts, including in all existing and future Comprehensive Development district bylaws, eliminating the need for a Development Permit.
2. If a review process is deemed necessary for larger farms, provide an alternative to the Development Permit process. This could look like a streamlined review process for farms similar to the City of Boston's [Comprehensive Farm Review \(CFR\)](#). Any process that imposes site restrictions on farms should recognize that farms operate on thin margins and seek to support rather than impede their economic viability. Any such process should:
  - a. Be facilitated by a City employee, or establish an Agricultural Office, familiar with farming and able to help farmers navigate City processes
  - b. Not require engaging a design professional for drawings or services
  - c. Have little or no application fee
  - d. Have clear and reasonable criteria so that farmers can make business decisions and plans appropriately without fear of unexpected delays and costs

### Current Policy

*Zoning Bylaw:*

Districts	Farm type	Use type
Residential	Class A Urban Farm	Conditional Approval Use. Exempt from development permit if planting area of parcel < 325 m <sup>2</sup> and the farm complies with Zoning and Development By-law. Development Permit required otherwise.
Commercial, Industrial, and Historic	Class B Urban Farm	Conditional Approval Use. Development Permit required.
Comprehensive Development	None	Not a permitted use in most CD-1 zones.

## Impact

The challenges posed by the Development Permit requirement to Class B and Class A parcels over 325 m<sup>2</sup> are documented at length in the 2017 [‘Class B’ Urban Farm Guidelines report](#). The main challenges are the cost of retrofitting agricultural infrastructure to meet brick-and-mortar building code (\$30,000 for one Vancouver farm), engaging design and engineering professionals, the length and lack of clarity in the process, and the risk of jeopardizing relationships with current or potential landlords. The time and money costs are disproportionate to what farms can bear. In 2019, the average revenue per farm from food sales in Vancouver was \$32,413.

*“I understand the need for good electrical and site plans... but going through the same process as someone building condos is a barrier because we can’t recoup those costs.”*

*“It’s also an equity issue. We are attracting grant revenue – but so much of that money is going to professionals, instead of the social mission of the organization.”*

*- Farmers at Urban Farming Forum 2020*

Farmers who have not gone through the Development Permit process expressed uncertainty about what is involved and the costs and requirements that would be triggered once they start. Farms who have tried to go through the Development Permit process reported that City staff were unfamiliar with farming and with the Urban Farm Guidelines.

*“I’m seeking clarity on what would apply to our urban farm location. We have 3 farm sites on the same property. Would we pay 3 fees? And what are all the costs that come afterwards?”*

*“In the regulations, it says Google Maps are sufficient [for site plans]. Except that planners have never accepted Google Maps drawings. They expect architectural drawings. They don’t know how to go through the process without the architectural drawings they expect.”*

*- Farmers at Urban Farming Forum 2020*

Urban farms are currently not mentioned as either Outright Approval Use or Conditional Approval Use for Comprehensive Development (CD-1) districts, with the exception of the CD-1 bylaw for Pearson Dogwood in Marpole, where a farm has been operating since 2009. This means farms are excluded from CD-1 bylaws created via rezonings prior to 2016, and future developments, unless contemplated between the City and property owner as part of the rezoning process, instead of being presented as a feasible and valuable option.

## Policy Precedents

### *Richmond, BC*

Agriculture is a secondary use in all zones, meaning it is permitted outright and does not require a development permit, nor do outdoor farms require a business license.

### *Victoria, BC*

[Zoning Regulation Bylaw](#): “Small-scale commercial urban food production is permitted in all zones, provided it is not noxious or offensive to neighbours or the general public by reason of emitting odour, noise or artificial lighting.” A Development Permit may be required if the farm site is part of any other building, structure, or landscape feature that requires a development permit, such as a new multi-unit or new commercial building. Urban farmers need to contact the Permits department about their specific situation.

### *New York City, NY*

Urban agriculture is permitted in most zones by the [NYC Zoning Resolution](#). Agricultural uses (with no noise/sales restrictions) are permitted in Manufacturing zones. Agricultural uses with no offensive odors/noises and no sales of produce grown off-site are permitted in all residential and most commercial zones (except for amusement parks).

### *Boston, MA*

Boston has a very specific and granular [zoning policy](#) for farms depending on the type of farm (ground-level, roof level, hydroponic, aquaponic), size, and district. Boston has a Comprehensive Farm Review process that some farms must go through with the purpose of ensuring that farms and structures are designed in a way that promotes good relations with neighbours and well-integrated into building design when part of a new development. The CFR process is free and does not require professionally drawn plans. The Boston Redevelopment Authority assigns a designer to work with the farmer on the CFR plan and application. See Appendix for detailed zoning tables and CFR requirements. The CFR process signals a desire to balance the need for city input and review of design elements while reducing the cost barrier for farmers.



## Policy Recommendation #4

### Create building bylaws appropriate for urban farm structures.

#### Specific Recommendations

1. Exempt plastic-covered hoop houses and high tunnels from the Vancouver Building Bylaw.
2. Professionally engage farmers and City staff to create clear building policies appropriate to farm infrastructure.
3. Designate a City employee to facilitate the Building Permit process for farms and help farmers navigate City processes.

#### Current Policy

##### *UF Guidelines*

##### *2.4 Greenhouses and Other Structures*

*i) Greenhouses and sheds less than 10 m<sup>2</sup> are permitted and do not require a building permit, as outlined in the Vancouver Building By-law; and*

*ii) Greenhouses or other structures that are part of an Urban Farm Class B are required to meet standards in Vancouver Building By-law.*

#### Impact

The challenges posed by the application of the Vancouver Building Bylaw to farm structures greater than 10 m<sup>2</sup> are documented in more detail in the 2017 [‘Class B’ Urban Farm Guidelines report](#). The cost of upgrades to make farm structures meet building code bylaws designed for permanent residential and commercial buildings has been a major barrier to applying for city permits. The ‘Class B’ report presented specific cases of these challenges:

- Costly upgrades for shipping containers, including anchors, a new roof design, and a sprinkler system
- Fire exits for hoop houses that are covered with 6-mil plastic that can be easily broken through by a person
- Many hours were spent applying for permits and meeting with City staff
- Farms benefitted from having a champion within the City to move the process along

The costs of making upgrades and hiring design professionals compromise the economic viability of farming. They increase the start-up costs for new farmers, eat into already narrow margins, and take away resources that farms could otherwise invest into growing their business or not-for-profit organization, hiring more staff, or

expanding the reach of social/ educational programs. Farmers should not need to rely on having a champion within the City in order to navigate the system successfully. Any farm should be able to complete the application process without leveraging political relationships.

Part of the issue is that building bylaws for brick-and-mortar buildings are not always appropriate for farm structures that are often used for storage or season extension and have low occupancy. For example, requiring a building permit for hoop houses and high tunnels adds prohibitive costs that eliminate the benefits of using the structures in the first place. Hoop houses and high tunnels allow farmers to extend the growing season and create the right microclimate for high value crops such as tomatoes in the summer and greens in the colder seasons. Investing in these structures can allow farmers to expand their markets and intensify production. The plastic covering can be easily rolled up for ventilation in the summer and removed in the winter if not in use. High tunnels for small-scale food production generally do not have permanent utility hook-ups or concrete foundations. In many cases, the plastic covering is removed in the off-season to limit the risk of tearing in winter storms and allow rain to wash away salts in the soil. Other cities have exempted hoop houses and high tunnels from building codes (see Policy Precedents section).

The 'Class B' report highlighted that farmers value the safety of their operations and the need to meet code for electrical, plumbing, and fire exits. They expressed a willingness to engage with the City to develop building code policies that address safety and liability issues while accommodating the needs of farms. Clear building policies should be developed for other farm infrastructure besides hoop houses, including rooftop farms, indoor farms, repurposed shipping containers, and other farm structures greater than 10 m<sup>2</sup>. This can be achieved through a facilitated working group or other collaborative engagement process between farmers and Building and Development Services, drawing on the experiences of farms that have gone through the permitting process as well as policies from other jurisdictions.

## Policy Precedents

### *Exemptions for hoop houses and high tunnels*

A number of US states and cities have building code exemptions for hoop houses and high tunnels. See Appendix for full policy text.

- [Baltimore's Building Code](#) does not require building permits for hoop houses covered in shade cloth or plastic film.
- [Massachusetts exempts greenhouses](#) covered exclusively with plastic film from requiring a building permit, as long as the structure is not used for large assemblies of people.

- New York State treats “temporary greenhouses” as specialized agricultural equipment rather than buildings, and exempts them from the [State Building Code](#).
- New Jersey exempts hoop houses from the [Uniform Construction Code](#) if they a) have no permanent foundation, b) are not used for storage of chemical/flammable materials, c) are no wider than 31 feet, d) have an unobstructed path of <150 feet from any point to a door or accessible wall area, and e) use a covering no thicker than 6 mils and can be easily broken through if needed.

*Building bylaws specific to farms*

- [Baltimore’s Building Code](#) limits the height (20 feet), floor area, and distance from property line (36 inches) of greenhouses in residential areas.
- New Jersey’s Dept of Agriculture and Dept of Community Affairs created a detailed [fact sheet](#) and FAQ explaining the conditions under which temporary greenhouses are exempt from building code.
- Town of Halton Hills, Ontario: The Building Services Department created a [guide](#) about the permitting requirements for farm buildings. It includes a summary of design requirements and some common building elements that require engineer design and review. It also lays out the steps for applying for a permit, how fees are calculated, and types of documents that need to be submitted. Since Halton Hills has a large farm sector, the guide might be more detailed than is required by farms in Vancouver.

## Policy Recommendation #5

### Clarify and simplify the business license application process.

#### Specific Recommendations

1. Option 1: License farm produce sales rather than farm sites.
2. Option 2: Streamline the business license application process and improve user experience.
  - a. Reduce the informational requirements of the business license application by removing the requirement for site plans
    - i. OR, Provide an example of site plan - the level of detail required
  - b. Remove the requirement for a copy of the lease or agreement
    - i. OR, Provide a format or template for leases
  - c. Clarify how the City assesses urban farm business license applications and the rationale and assessment criteria for each piece of information collected
  - d. Ensure that the first point of contact at the City (Social Policy staff or Enquiry Centre staff) are equipped to support farmers through the application process
  - e. Assign an account manager responsible for driving each business licence and permit application in a timely manner, acting as a liaison between all relevant city departments and taking responsibility for overcoming roadblocks as they appear
3. Clarify whether the business license requirement applies to not-for-profit farms that use farming activities to meet their core mandates (e.g. social impact, education), in addition to requiring a Community Association License.

## Current Policy

### *UF Guidelines*

#### *2.2. Business License*

*Every site operated as either an Urban Farm Class A or Class B requires a separate business license as regulated in the License By-law.*

#### *3 Outline of Process for Application*

*(a) Applicants for an Urban Farm Class A that is less than 325 m<sup>2</sup> apply to Social Policy and Projects. Staff will review the application in partnership with the Business License Department, to issue a business license.*

*(b) Applicants for an Urban Farm Class A that is more than 325 m<sup>2</sup> or an Urban Farm Class B apply to the Enquiry Centre. Staff will assist the application and Development Permit process with the necessary departments.*

### *Vancouver Charter*

#### *Part VI — Licences*

*276. A person who maintains more than one place at which he carries on a business, trade, profession, or other occupation shall be deemed to be carrying on his business, trade, profession, or other occupation at each of such places and to be subject to being licensed with respect to each place.*

### Business License application process

For a Class A farm under 325 m<sup>2</sup> to apply for a business license, they must:

- Complete one Urban Farm Checklist per farm business (see Appendix for copy).
- For each site operated by the farm, submit a Business License application, site plan with sketch, and copy of lease agreement.
- Every site plan should indicate locations of the planting area (including dimensions), storage shed and other accessory buildings, organics management, surrounding property lines, and main building streets/sidewalks. Sketch may be done using Google Maps.

For a Class B or Class A farm over 325 m<sup>2</sup> to apply for a business license, they must:

- Complete one UF Checklist per farm business.
- For each site operated by the farm, submit a Development Permit application, copy of lease agreement, site plan (including sketch of site), and farm management plan.
- Every site plan should include a legal description (lot #, block #, plan #, district lot #), street names, dimensions of site (including north arrow), and building plans. They should indicate locations of any permanent or accessory/storage buildings, planting area, size and location of off-street

parking and loading spaces, washrooms and garbage, organics management, source of water intake and point of discharge.

- Farm management plan should outline hours of operation, number of staff and patrons, materials and growing medium, description of building and storage uses, description of any onsite selling and distribution of products on- and off-site, description of security and safety of the site, description of mitigation of any impact to neighbours, indication of the degree of soil contamination, and provide proof of soil testing (if applicable), description of the management of organic waste generated onsite, and description of mitigation strategies for run-off and leachate from precipitation and irrigation water.
- For each site operated by the farm, submit a Business License application only once the Development Permit is approved.

## Impact

At the Urban Farming Forum 2020, farmers expressed a perception that the business license and development permit application process is tedious, time-intensive, and unclear. The City collects information from the site plan, but farmers do not know the level of detail required, why the information is being collected, and how each application will be assessed. The application asks for a copy of lease agreements but does not provide a template or format. One farmer asked for a checklist of what was required to obtain a development permit for an indoor growing space but none was provided. The issue for farmers is not the fee per application, but the time and opportunity cost of gathering information and completing the process, and then renewing the business licence every year.

The time and costs are exacerbated by the requirement of having a separate business license for each farm site. Most farms in Vancouver have more than one site, and the average number of plots per farm organization is 4.5. The process is especially tedious for farms that operate on a yard sharing residential model — these are farms that lease plots from homeowners. One yard sharing farm in Vancouver operated on 15 farm plots in 2019.

At the Urban Farming Forum 2020, it was pointed out that the Vancouver Charter requires a license for every place of business. However, what makes farming a business - and different from gardening - is the actual marketing and sale of products. A farm that grows food on multiple plots but sells them through one marketing channel (e.g. CSA harvest box) should be licensed for the CSA sales, instead of being licensed for each individual plot as a business premises. The City should explore whether the Vancouver Charter requirement can be interpreted this way. Most municipalities in BC do not require a business license to grow food, rather the sale of food requires a business license.

Vancouver could look to the City of Victoria’s licensing policy for small-scale commercial urban food production, where farmers are required to get a license to sell their products. They can sell products both on-site and off-site, but separate business licences are required. The City of Vancouver could look to existing examples where a company conducts business on multiple sites but requires only one business licence: eg. in-home services, construction. The City of Vancouver could look to the City of Richmond and other municipalities in the region who do not require farmers, or community gardeners to have a business license to grow food and sell it.

## Policy Precedents

### *Richmond, BC*

Richmond, and most BC municipalities, do not require farms to have a business licence to grow food.<sup>11</sup> In Richmond, business licenses are not required for production or the sale of food grown in gardens, community garden plots or farms.

### *Victoria, BC*

Farmers must obtain a [business license](#) to sell their products. They can sell products on-site or off-site. On-site means the products are sold in the same place where they were grown. They can be sold at a food stand or at an on-site sales outlet where allowed by zoning. Farmers can apply for an annual on-site sales license (\$100) or a three-month license (\$25). Off-site sales means the products are sold at a different location from where they were grown. This includes farmers markets, retailers, restaurants, CSA subscriptions, and other private sales. Farmers can apply for an annual off-site sales business license for \$100. The City recommends, but does not require, a lease or formal land use rental agreement for farmers who grow on someone else’s property.

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<sup>11</sup>

[https://www2.gov.bc.ca/assets/gov/farming-natural-resources-and-industry/agriculture-and-seafood/farm-management/farm-business-management/new\\_farm\\_start-up\\_guide\\_2017.pdf](https://www2.gov.bc.ca/assets/gov/farming-natural-resources-and-industry/agriculture-and-seafood/farm-management/farm-business-management/new_farm_start-up_guide_2017.pdf)

## Policy Recommendation #6

### Allow other urban farming products besides fruits and vegetables.

#### Specific Recommendations

1. Option 1: Update the Guidelines to allow more types of products beyond fruits and vegetables, similar to the City of Victoria's policy.
2. Option 2: Update the Guidelines to allow farming products in general without specifying or limiting the type of products allowed, similar to New York City's policy.

#### Current Policy

##### *UF Guidelines*

##### *2.1 Operational Management*

*v) Urban farms are to cultivate only fruits or vegetables.*

##### *2.5 Food Safety*

*i) Only fruits and vegetables are to be grown on urban farms. Public health concerns are reduced by ensuring that food grown and sold by urban farms is limited to fruits and vegetables, which are lower risk foods*

#### Impact

Farms in Vancouver have the opportunity to diversify their products outside of fruits and vegetables. A few farms already grow and sell cut flowers and bouquets, which are not edible and do not pose risks to consumers, but are not allowed in the current Guidelines. There are other horticultural products that farmers could incorporate into their operations, such as nuts, seeds, grains, herbs, hops, plant starts (e.g. seedlings and cuttings), natural plant fibres (e.g. loofah, flax, materials for weaving baskets), fungi (e.g. truffles and shiitake mushrooms have been produced at UBC farm as part of Agroforestry studies), and compost. There are also animal products that are compatible with small scale urban farming, such as honey and other bee products, eggs from backyard hens, fish (e.g. aquaponics), and insects (e.g. black soldier fly larvae as animal feed or frass for soil amendments). The current policy precludes farmers from considering these other products in diversifying their businesses.

#### Policy Precedents

##### *Victoria, BC*

The [Zoning Bylaw](#) allows a long list of products that can be grown, cleaned, and packaged as part of small-scale urban food production: fruits, vegetables, flowers,



fibre, seeds, nuts, seedlings, herbs, eggs, honey, mushrooms, plant cuttings. They also allow compost and other soil amendments to be produced for retail in Industrial and Service Zones. Products regulated by the Controlled Drug and Substances Act (Canada) are prohibited.

*Boston, MA*

The [Zoning Code](#) defines Urban Agriculture as “the use of a Lot for the cultivation of food and/or horticultural crops, Composting, Aquaponics, Aquaculture and/or Hydroponics. Such use may include the Accessory Keeping of Animals or Bees where Allowed by Underlying Zoning.”

*New York City, NY*

The [Zoning Resolution](#) includes greenhouses, nurseries, and truck gardens in Agricultural Uses, but does not define all activities or products that are considered Agricultural. The City’s [Urban Agriculture website](#) says that agricultural uses “include personal gardening, community gardening, commercial farming, indoor farming such as hydroponics and aquaponics, rooftop greenhouses, and more.”

## Policy Recommendation #7

### Allow non-disruptive urban farming activities outside 8 am - 9 pm.

#### Specific Recommendations

1. Update the Guidelines 2.2.i. and 2.2.ii. to limit only noisy activities (noisy use of tools, food stand sales, public activities) between 8am and 9pm. Non-noisy farming activities should be allowed outside those hours.

#### Current Policy

##### *UF Guidelines*

##### *2.2 Business License*

*i) For Class A, no activities may take place outside the hours of 8am to 9pm;*

*ii) For Class B, if located within 30 m of a residence, no activities may take place outside the hours of 8am to 9pm;*

#### Impact

Farmers often need to start work before 8 am in order to get products to their customers on time. This is especially critical in the summer months when temperatures rise quickly and products need to be removed from the heat in order to preserve their quality and freshness. Farmers must be able to start early and take advantage of cool morning and evening temperatures and long hours of daylight. Harvesting, weeding, and planting can be quiet activities that do not involve the use of noisy machinery.

#### Policy Precedents

##### *Victoria, BC*

For urban farms outside of commercial and industrial zones, the [City of Victoria](#) limits the loading of farm products into a delivery truck, operating a food stand, and noisy use of tools to daytime hours, defined as 8am-7pm Monday to Saturday and 10am-8pm on Sundays and holidays.

##### *Seattle, WA*

For farms in residential zones, the [City of Seattle](#) limits retail sales and all other public use to 7am-7pm every day.

## Policy Recommendation #8

### Expand on-site sales and allow farm stands.

#### Specific Recommendations

1. Allow on-site sales of farm products wherever farms are allowed or on any lot where a farm is established.
2. Create guidelines for farm stands to facilitate on-site sales on Class A farm sites in Residential zones, as per City of Victoria. Guidelines should allow a farm with multiple growing sites to sell their produce at any of their own farm stands.
3. Explore ways to allow local farm products to be sold at any Vancouver urban farm stand.

#### Current Policy

*UF Guidelines 2016*

##### *2.1 Operational Management*

###### *Class A*

*(vi) On-site sales are not permitted, unless the primary use of the parcel is Institutional (e.g. school, church) and sales are limited to what is cultivated on the site;*

###### *Class B*

*(iii) Onsite sales are limited to what is cultivated on the site;*

*Vancouver Food Strategy 2013*

##### *Urban Farming Action #1.11*

*Explore possibilities for urban farmers to sell produce directly from an urban farm (farm gate sales) with appropriate limitations and mitigation strategies.*

*Timeline: Short-term Priority*

*Lead Departments: Development Services - Planning - Licensing*

#### Impact

Allowing on-site sales in Residential districts provides Class A farms, and specifically those that use the yard-sharing model, with more flexibility in marketing their products. In the event of a bumper crop, farmers could sell excess produce to neighbours in the immediate vicinity of the farm. Allowing on-site sales also gives city residents access to buy hyper local produce grown right in their neighbourhood.

The Guidelines currently do not allow the sale of products grown off-site. Updated Guidelines should accommodate farms with multiple sites who wish to sell products

grown on one site at another site with better traffic or visibility. It would also be beneficial for farms to be able to sell regionally grown produce at their farm stands to act as distribution hubs for regional farm products. Regional farms access an established neighbourhood-scale market, and the urban farm can diversify their offerings to customers.

## Policy Precedents

### *Boston, MA*

[Farm stands](#) are allowed where farms are allowed uses, and are conditional in all other districts where retail is not allowed by the underlying zoning. Farm stands are limited to 200 square feet (18.5 m<sup>2</sup>) and must not encroach on sidewalks, driveways, or other rights of way.

### *Victoria, BC*

[On-site sale](#) of urban farm products is allowed on lots where farming occurs as long as it happens through a food stand in the front yard, or as part of retail trade or food and beverage service where those uses are already allowed by zoning. The City restricts the size, design, and placement of food stands. Each lot can only have a single food stand in the front yard, measuring no more than 1.85 m<sup>2</sup> in footprint, 3.35 m in height, and set back at least 0.6 m away from the lot line. Food stands do not require building permits. They must be removed if not in use for longer than a week.

### *New York City, NY*

On-site sales are allowed for urban farms. In residential districts, on-site sales are only allowed for produce grown on site. In commercial and manufacturing districts, urban farms can also sell produce grown in other locations.

# Conclusion

Vancouver farms face significant challenges to their operations in terms of access to land and indoor growing space, narrow margins, insecure land tenure, and the high cost of living. In addition to these challenges, they are constricted by city regulations that create uncertainty, impose high costs, and set unnecessary limitations on urban farm activities. There continues to be a lack of supportive policy and programs to help Vancouver's farm sector thrive.

VUFS calls for the adoption of policies that improve access to land and indoor growing space, eliminate unnecessary regulations and reduce the cost of compliance for overbearing permitting and licensing processes. With a mandate from six city strategies, plans and targets to increase farming, the city is positioned to bolster its support. City investment in urban farming is required if we are to accrue the benefits that urban farms can deliver.

The City's current review of the Urban Farm Guidelines and the COVID 19 Recovery Program, creates an opportunity to enact bold policies to help urban farming succeed. Now is the time to reinvigorate food provisioning from these lands to create social, economic, and environmental benefits and to connect Vancouverites to the agro-ecological systems that sustain us all.

# Appendix

## VUFS Reports

[‘Class B’ Urban Farm Guidelines: Impacts and Recommendations](#)

[Vancouver Urban Farming Census 2014-2016](#)

[Vancouver Urban Farming Census 2017-2019](#)

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## Vancouver Policy Documents

[Report - Bylaw Amendment Re Urban Farming: 2016 Feb 23](#)

[Urban Farm Guidelines](#)

[Urban Farm Checklist](#) - Required for business license and Development Permit application

[Greenest City 2020 Action Plan Part Two: 2015-2020](#)

[Vancouver Food Strategy 2013](#)

[Vancouver Food Strategy Progress Report and Action Plan Update 2017](#)

## Metro Vancouver Policy Documents

[Encouraging Agricultural Production through Farm Property Tax Reform in Metro](#)

[Vancouver](#)

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## Policies/Programs from Other Jurisdictions

*Canada*

Victoria, BC

[Zoning Bylaws](#)

[Schedule L - Small Scale Urban Food Production](#) - Part of Zoning Bylaw

[Small Scale Commercial Urban Food Production Handbook](#) - Plain language handbook

Toronto, ON

[Black Creek Community Farm](#)

[History of BCCF via Ryerson University](#)

Halton Hills, ON

[Farm Buildings Application Guide](#)

*US Cities*

Atlanta, GA

[Atlanta Grows-A-Lot: Urban Farms](#) - Program website

Baltimore, MD

[Building and Fire Codes](#) - Refer to s. 105.2.10 for hoophouse exemption and 427.3 for restrictions for greenhouses in residential areas

Boston, MA

[Article 89](#) - Urban agriculture zoning regulation

[Article 89 Made Easy](#) - Plain language handbook

New York City, NY

[Zoning Resolution](#)

[NYC Urban Agriculture FAQ](#)

San Francisco, CA

[Urban Agriculture Incentive Zones Application Packet](#)

[Ordinance implementing UAIZ Program](#)

[Assembly Bill 551 Urban Agriculture Incentive Zones Act](#) - California state legislation enabling UAIZ in counties/cities

[Alemany Farm](#)

Seattle, WA

[Seattle Permits - Urban Agriculture](#)

Washington DC

[Urban Farming and Food Security Amendment Act of 2016](#)

[Office of Urban Agriculture](#)

Massachusetts

[State Board of Building Regulations and Standards](#) - Refer to s. 105.2 for exemption for plastic-covered greenhouse

New Jersey

[Fact Sheet for Temporary Greenhouses Under the New Jersey Uniform Construction Code](#)

New York State

[Executive Law Article 18 \(Fire Prevention and Building Code Act\) Section 372](#)

[Definitions](#) - Refer to s. 17 for definition of Temporary Greenhouse

*Other*

Zurich, Switzerland

[Agriculture in Zurich](#)