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Editorial: Urban agriculture as local food systems: benefits, challenges, and ways forward

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Editorial on the Research Topic

Urban agriculture as local food systems: benefits, challenges, and ways forward

Urban agriculture, through community gardens and urban farms, plays a crucial role in achieving sustainable development goals, including reducing urban poverty, enhancing health and wellbeing, creating sustainable cities and communities, mitigating climate change, preserving the land, and fostering partnerships among stakeholders. Urban agriculture as a local food system (LFS) has emerged as a critical area of research due to the increasing pressures of population growth, rapid urbanization, climate change, and land use changes on agricultural productivity and food security. The COVID-19 pandemic has further highlighted the vulnerabilities in global supply chains, resulting in limited food availability and underscoring the importance of resilient local food systems. LFS, which involves locally or regionally produced food sold directly to consumers, offers a promising approach to ensuring a steady food supply during crises. Policymakers, planners, and advocates are increasingly recognizing the broader benefits of LFS, including community building, diversified economies, civic engagement, and climate resilience. This Research Topic aims to document and disseminate knowledge on urban agriculture as LFS with the primary objectives of:

- i) Exploring the various forms of urban agriculture, such as community gardens, home gardens, and urban gardening, and their contributions to the local economy, sustainability, and wellbeing. The suite of articles published in the Research Topic have advanced these understandings of urban agriculture as LFS and thereby contributed to a key perspective on urban agriculture, and
- ii) Identifying the challenges and opportunities for scaling up urban agriculture to create healthier food landscapes.

This Research Topic comprises 9 articles that focus on various aspects of urban agriculture across the Global South and North and that contribute new social and ecological perspectives (Zimmerer et al., 2021). Tareke investigated the contribution of cash transfers (CTs) to urban agriculture and food security in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia. This study reported that CTs have moderately improved financial inclusion for women and slightly increased food security. It emphasized pro-poor and gender-responsive financial inclusion options for urban agriculture development in the country. A comparative study

in Chongqing City, China, explored the value of urban gardening among local and migrant gardeners, as conducted by [Xie and Xing](#). They found that local or native gardeners value a combination of small, private greenery, ornamental plants, and edible vegetables. In contrast, migrant gardeners prefer relatively large gardens for food production that generates income.

Training, perceptions, and enabling factors for broader adoption of LSF are equally important. [László and Wahlen](#) explored how young consumers in Hungary define, perceive, and experience local food. Young people consider local food in terms of health, freshness, taste, quality, and trustworthiness, which are the relational values of LSF relevant to farmers and policymakers undertaking interventions to promote local food production systems. Drawing on a study in Washington, USA, [Keefe and Lee](#) reported that training programs create a space for social learning, changing collective practices and narratives that foster the development of community gardens or community-supported urban agriculture. They suggest that state and local governments need to intentionally support policies that recognize the importance of urban agriculture in their sustainability agendas. In Hanoi, [Nhuong and Truong](#) identified several factors, including attitude on high-tech production, access to information and credit, size of farm, membership in extension organizations, education level, visits to demonstration sites, extension services, and training to farmers that influence farmers' adoption of high technology in vegetable production. City residents and policymakers in modern cities recognize that home food gardening plays a crucial role in providing food during humanitarian emergencies and lockdowns, as noted by [Xu et al.](#) Moreover, home food gardening is becoming an increasingly popular recreational activity, offering therapeutic benefits such as fostering social bonds, improving mental and psychological wellbeing, and strengthening the connection between humans and nature.

Crop combinations, the role of actors, and information and communication technologies (ICTs) are also essential attributes for the development and wider promotion of urban agriculture. As reported by [Macall et al.](#), locals consume a diverse range of crops from community gardens within Barcelona's municipal boundaries. However, they suggested practicing monoculture cropping in community gardens across the city to achieve significant self-sufficiency, which required the professionalized and coordinated role of relevant actors. The adoption of ICTs may improve the efficiency of small-scale food production systems. [Alfonsi et al.](#) examined the adoption patterns and desirable characteristics of ICTs among small-scale food producers engaged in urban agriculture in South Africa. Producers prefer food-related mobile applications to have functions such as price comparisons, sharing best practices, and health advice. They also prefer user-friendliness, low data usage, and affordability in food-related mobile applications. This study points out the importance of comprehensive approaches to the development and

promotion of food-related ICTs when targeting small-scale food producers. By studying the food value chain across seven European cities, [Leimkühler et al.](#) stated that the city-region food systems approach helps identify the roles and relationships of various actors in the value chain.

In conclusion, articles included in this Research Topic emphasized the value of urban agriculture for conserving agrobiodiversity, promoting recreation, generating income, and ensuring food security. The involvement of women, young perceptions, training, CTs, adoption of ICTs, and collaboration among many stakeholders are critical factors that policymakers should address to promote and sustain urban agriculture in cities. To foster healthier and sustainable urban societies, LFS is essential, necessitating robust policy support and collaboration among stakeholders in the value chain.

Author contributions

TN: Writing – original draft, Writing – review & editing.
SM: Writing – review & editing.

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