

Cornell Cooperative Extension



Helping to Grow Buffalo's Urban Agriculture Community

Cornell Cooperative Extension of Erie County, and regional teams like the CCE Cornell Vegetable Program and the CCE Harvest New York Team, have long-supported urban agriculture in Buffalo. Below is a look at some of the ways CCE has helped to empower this community through research, education, and technical assistance.



Guiding Safe Growing Practices: To formalize their commitment to growing safe food, urban growers in Buffalo partnered with the Food Policy Council of Buffalo & Erie County to create the Greater Buffalo Urban Growers Pledge: a series of best management practices with regards to soil safety, environmental protection, and other safe farming practices under the guidance of healthy soil experts from Cornell Cooperative Extension. Urban growers officially released (and signed) the pledge on February 28, 2020.

Supporting Food Sovereignty: The CCE Master Gardener Program partnered with Grassroots Gardens of WNY, and Master Gardener Volunteer Gail Wells to see her "Freedom Garden" Project to fruition. A total of 50 'freedom gardens' were built for gardeners in the following Buffalo zip codes: 14215, 14213, 14211, 14209, 14208, 14207, and 14204. Each Freedom Gardener received a mask, gloves and sanitizer, a watering can and trowel, organic seeds, a folder with information and resources on growing, contact information for guidance and assistance, and a garden journal so they can record their experiences on the gardening journey. All gardeners were connected with trained Freedom Garden Guides (Erie County Master Gardeners and site crew volunteers) to offer them assistance on their gardens.





Helping Aspiring Urban Farmers Put Down Roots: CCE-Erie hosted two virtual workshops on finding land to farm in the City of Buffalo. Caitlin Tucker, from the CCE Vegetable Program, presented *Selecting Property for Farming: Choose Wisely* on May 16, 2020. She discussed factors to consider when evaluating urban land for farming. Amhad Nieves, from the Buffalo Information Sharing Collaborative, presented *Buffalo City Auction: Advice for Buyers* on May 23, 2020. He discussed the ins and outs of buying property at the auction. **Twenty people participated in these two workshops!**

Connecting Urban FarmHers: In 2019, the Cornell Vegetable Program and CCE-Erie teamed up to create the monthly workshop series WAVES (Women in Agriculture: Voices, Experience, Skills). **The on-farm discussion group in May of 2019 was focused on urban farming.** Local grower Mayda Pozantides (Groundwork Market Garden) spoke with future growers about production in urban soils and how to adapt farming techniques for urban environments.



Boosting Production: Urban growers face similar challenges as their rural counterparts with insects, disease, weeds, nutritional issues, and soil health. The CCE Cornell Vegetable Program has long-provided technical assistance to growers in Buffalo related to soil health, season extension, vegetable production and pest management. One way we help growers stay on top of insects and disease is through a biweekly scouting program during the growing season. The Cornell Vegetable Program has **scouted urban farms in Buffalo for the last two years and has made over 100 farm visits.**

Providing Essential Supplies for Essential Farms

As the COVID-19 global pandemic began impacting the WNY region, farmers were among those deemed to be “essential workers”. The NYS Department of Agriculture and Markets looked to Cornell Cooperative Extension, with our extensive connections to local farms, to establish systems to distribute sanitizer and cloth face coverings to farms across the state. The Erie County farm supply of sanitizer and face coverings is housed at the Western New York Welcome Center on Grand Island. **A total of 11 urban farms, community gardening organizations, and farmers markets received more than 180 face coverings and 63 gallons of sanitizer**



Educating Growers on Safe Soil Practices:

The Cornell Vegetable Program, CCE-Erie, and Harvest NY collaborated to host a soil health workshop for urban growers in Buffalo in August of 2019. Hannah Shayler (Cornell Waste Management Program) and Sam Anderson (CCE Harvest NY) spoke about heavy metals contamination, soil testing, best practices, and nutrient management in urban soils. The workshop was wrapped up with a public tour of Groundwork Market Garden. **20+ people attended the workshop and tour.**

Sharing the Bounty: While looking for ways to give back to the community during Covid-19, 4-H volunteers recommended a county food drive. The Erie County 4-H Program hosted a contactless food drive on 7/17/20, that raised over 300 pounds of food to benefit FeedMore WNY. **In an effort to support urban farms and fight food insecurity, the 4-H Program collected \$1,000 in donations. All donations will be used to purchase produce from urban farms that are part of the Greater Buffalo Urban Growers. The produce will then go to farm customers in need in the city of Buffalo.**





Training our Newest Neighbors on Agriculture in Buffalo: Buffalo is home to more than 25,000 foreign-born residents. One urban farm in Buffalo specifically works to provide agricultural opportunities for our newest neighbors. The Brewster St. Farm (Journey's End Refugee Service) provides an educational urban farming program that trains adult refugees on adaptive farming and marketing skills. **CCE-Erie and the Cornell Vegetable Program have been an integral part of this program over the last 7 years** by partnering with JERS to provide educational workshops on vegetable production, pest management, soil health, and more.

Partnering on Urban Agriculture Research: CCE collaborates with Buffalo's urban farmers on research to advance urban agriculture production. In 2018, the Cornell Vegetable Program and CCE-Erie partnered on a grant centered on managing plant diseases in urban settings. Currently, CVP Technician Caitlin Tucker is serving as an advisor on **Groundwork Market Garden's multi-year Northeast SARE Farmer grant entitled "Economic Feasibility of Caterpillar Tunnels on Urban and Small-Scale Farms"**.



Expanding our knowledge of urban soil contaminants: Research conducted by Extension Associate Hannah Shayler (Cornell Waste Management Institute) **in partnership with CCE educators like Sharon Bachman (CCE-Erie), examined levels of heavy metal soil contaminants like lead, cadmium, and barium, and the corresponding levels in plant tissue.** This research helps to continually expand our knowledge of growing in urban environments, guides our best management practices, and ensures that our urban farmers are growing food as safely as possible. *"Concentrations of lead, cadmium, and barium in urban garden-grown vegetables: The impact of soil variables."*

