

Community Agriculture Planning Workbook

Helping People Help the Land



What is Community Agriculture?

Montana is a large agricultural state in which urbanization is minimal in comparison to many other states. Overall, agriculture in Montana is seen as a rural endeavor and may not be considered profitable on small acreage in urban areas. Very few known agricultural entities utilize land within Montana city limits though most small-scale producers use innovative techniques or produce commodity crops and livestock that are typically categorized as “urban” agriculture.

Due to the rural nature of Montana, the term “urban agriculture” and how it applies to our state does not accurately capture our local agriculture communities. In addition, the term does not resonate and is often misinterpreted by our customers, our conservation partner groups, and NRCS Montana staff members. The NRCS Montana Urban Agriculture Strategic Planning Committee members propose the use of the term “community agriculture” in lieu of urban agriculture.

Montana Community Agriculture - The intent of the Community Agriculture Initiative is to provide dedicated funding to producers who are currently supplying direct to consumer (human) products in Montana. Through this initiative, NRCS is prioritizing agricultural operations and tribal or indigenous food sovereignty such as First Foods.

These producers provide healthy, local food, encourage economic development, provide employment and on-the-job training, expand community greenspaces, foster community collaboration, build climate and disaster resilient communities, and are an essential part of a robust and diversified food system.

Community agriculture includes specialty crops as defined by the USDA.

Eligible Land needs to be in current production for Community Agriculture Initiative applications. Production is defined as, “The soil has been prepared, crop planted, tended to, and harvested.”

Land Use Definitions

NRCS has developed the following land use designations to be used by planners at the field and landscape level.

Crop- Land used primarily for the production and harvest of annual or perennial field, forage, food, fiber, horticultural, orchard, vineyard, or energy crops.

Forest- Land on which the historic and or introduced vegetation is predominantly tree cover managed for production of wood products or non-timber forest products.

Range- Land on which the historic and/or introduced vegetation is predominantly grasses, grass-like plants, forbs or shrubs managed as a natural ecosystem. Range land may include natural grasslands, savannas, shrublands, tundra, alpine communities, marshes, and meadows.

Pasture- Land composed of introduced or domesticated native forage species that is used primarily to produce livestock. Pastures receive periodic renovation and cultural treatments, such as tillage, fertilization, mowing, weed control, and may be irrigated. Pastures are not in rotation with crops.

Farmstead- Land used for facilities and supporting infrastructure where farming, forestry, animal husbandry, and ranching activities are often initiated. This may include dwellings, equipment storage, plus farm input and output storage and handling facilities. Also includes land dedicated to the facilitation and production of high-intensity animal agriculture in a containment facility where daily nutritional requirements are obtained from other lands or feed sources.

Designated Protected Area- Land or water used for the preservation, protection, and observation of the existing resources, archaeological or historical interpretation, resource interpretation, or for aesthetic value. These areas are officially designated by legislation or other authorities. Examples: legislated natural or scenic areas and rural burial plots.

Water- Geographic area whose dominant characteristic is open water or permanent ice or snow. May include intermingled land, including tidal influenced coastal marsh lands.

Associated Agriculture Lands- Land associated with farms and ranches that are not purposefully managed for food, forage, or fiber and are typically associated with nearby production or conservation lands. This could include incidental areas, such as idle center pivot corners, odd areas, ditches and watercourses, riparian areas, field edges, seasonal and permanent wetlands, and other similar areas.

Community Agriculture Planning Documentation

Date: _____ Name of Applicant: _____

Individual: _____ Entity: _____

Address: _____

City: _____ State: _____

County: _____ ZIP Code: _____

Home Phone: _____ Email Address: _____

Do you have records established with the Farm Service Agency? Yes: _____ No: _____

Township, Range, Section(s): _____

Farm and Tract Number (s): _____

Acres Owned and Operated: _____

Acres Leased: _____ Acres Deeded: _____ Acres Public: _____

Community Agriculture Assessment

Describe your current operation (include how many acres are currently in production).

What crops are you currently growing?

Are there additional crops you plan to grow in the future?

Do you currently have livestock or other animals used for production? If so, what species and how many?

Yes: _____ No: _____ Species: _____

Numbers: _____

Is your ground irrigated? If so, what is your water source?

Yes: _____ No: _____ Water source/irrigation method: _____

Describe how you are currently distributing your farm products.

Describe how you are currently marketing your products.

Are you making value-added product? Value added agriculture refers to production or manufacturing processes that increase the value of primary agricultural commodities. Examples include soaps, jams, candles, etc.

Yes: _____ No: _____ Products: _____

What conservation measures have you introduced on your operation? Examples include soil health management, pollinator habitat, renewable energy production, etc.

What are your resource concerns? Examples include soil health, plant productivity, water quality, nutrient management, etc.

What partner groups have you worked with in the past or are currently working with that have helped with your operation?

What are your goals for your operation?

Short term: _____

Long term: _____

How does your operation support community agriculture?

Is your operation organic or transitioning to organic? Yes: _____ No: _____

Are you applying for a high tunnel? Yes: _____ No: _____

If yes, is the land area that the high tunnel will be installed on:

Previously cropped ground? Yes: _____ No: _____

Level ground? Yes: _____ No: _____

Describe the size and style of the high tunnel you are interested in installing.

NRCS Field Office Contact Information

Now that you have completed the Community Agriculture Planning Workbook, please bring it to your local NRCS office or call to get assistance in completing the community ag planning process. Contact information is available at nrcs.usda.gov/contact/find-a-service-center. You can also find more information about NRCS and conservation at <http://www.mt.nrcs.usda.gov/>.



Montana NRCS Administrative Areas and Service Centers

USDA is an equal opportunity provider, employer, and lender.

THIS MAP IS FOR GENERAL INFORMATION ONLY AND DOES NOT REPRESENT A GUARANTEED ACCURACY AND SHOULD BE USED AS A GUIDE. THE USER ASSUMES ALL RESPONSIBILITY FOR THE USE OF THIS MAP. THE USER ASSUMES ALL LIABILITY FOR ANY AND ALL DAMAGES OR LOSSES, INCLUDING REASONABLE ATTORNEY'S FEES, ARISING FROM THE USE OF THIS MAP. THE USER ASSUMES ALL LIABILITY FOR ANY AND ALL DAMAGES OR LOSSES, INCLUDING REASONABLE ATTORNEY'S FEES, ARISING FROM THE USE OF THIS MAP.

