

Overview of Urban Agriculture- Defining Urban Ag. in Maine

Within the geographic extents, how should NRCS prioritize funding?

- Market participation
 - Where is the farm selling their produce? Prioritize farmer's market/local farmstand over commodity wholesale
 - Is the farm selling food at a farmer's market that accepts Maine Harvest Bucks?
- Local participation
 - How far is a producer traveling to distribute their produce?
- Low-Income/Low-Access
 - Is the farm operating in or serving a community that has a high rate of poverty and low rate of food access?
 - Is the farm or garden providing produce or growing space to historically underserved communities or neighborhoods?
- How is the practice addressing a natural resource concern?
 - E.g. Lead/contaminated soils? Raised beds

Other Comments:

- Importance of the waiver process: Some projects may not fall within the geographic extents, but they are clearly hyper-local and centered around a community. Towns can petition to be included in the map, and the Soil and Water Conservation Districts can approve. Tribal land is included in the urban ag pool.
- Should we focus on cropland, and restrict livestock? Counter-argument is that raising chickens/fowl in urban or peri-urban areas is practiced in other states, and Maine's growing Muslim African and Middle-Eastern population has a cultural connection to goat raising; we may not want to restrict the type of agriculture at this point
- Tony mentioned the problem of bunching applications- the application timeline doesn't always work out for all producers, based on their own organizational timelines. Are there processes NRCS can undertake to make the application period more accessible?
- Reviewing the FY 23 Urban Ag rankings and funded projects would be helpful to understand the context- seems like this is a good point of context to improve services for FY 24!

Levers for Improving Efficacy of Urban Ag Funding

Add or Edit Ranking Questions

- See above notes: Add a question about market participation; keep question about distance to market (Thanks Cheyenne!)
- Alex S. mentioned the ranking question about streambank or shoreland erosion- this question seems to prioritize more rural, traditional conservation projects
 - Potentially the question about classic or ephemeral gullies also applies- is this relevant to urban agriculture?
- Any other ranking questions we should consider adding?

Narrow the Urban Ag Practice List

- Helena S pointed out that this may be the most effective strategy for improving service to urban ag
- Committee members will review the scenarios, and decide which are most relevant for urban agriculture

Updates on Urban Ag. in Maine

MOFGA- Mariam noted that there has been a lot of interest from groups hoping to start community gardens, neighborhood cooperatives, and other forms of collective growing. She noted the need for education for landlords who are interested in or have been asked to provide growing space for renters. Leases sometimes are vague in whether they allow for garden construction, and the rights of renters. MOFGA has been challenged to provide support to all inquiries.

Cultivating Community- Janel described the high demand for community garden space in Portland, and the constraints on available space and staffing constraints to provide support to all gardeners. She said that the Portland Parks Department has been great.