



# Farm-a-Lot Program

## History

The Urban Redevelopment Authority of Pittsburgh (URA (Urban Redevelopment Authority)) is working to launch the Farm-a-Lot Program by the next growing season. This lease-to-own program is intended to allow folks the opportunity to transform vacant, underutilized land back to productive uses that align with urban agricultural practices.

The program was initiated as a pilot into community interest and [demonstrated success], the URA plans to launch a permanent program in 2023.

Read media coverage on the program when it started: [Why the URA is encouraging urban agriculture with its new Farm-a-Lot program.](#)

## Current Work

The URA is developing program guidelines and a program application to create an equitable program that both promotes urban agriculture and encourages Pittsburghers to grow food locally for themselves and for their community.

To better support our applicants, we have compiled several resources that offer technical assistance in areas including but not limited to:

<u>Resources for Urban Agriculture</u>	
Workforce training/workshops & volunteers	Business development
Marketing, website development	Gardening tips and information
Urban farm grants and low-interest loans	Planning and preparation
Planting supplies	Farm maintenance and pest control
Stands and containers	Tools and technology
Solar panels and renewable energy	Land surveying and technical drawings
Design and space planning	Legal assistance
Document preparation	English translation

## Resources for Farmers/Growers

### Water for Gardens

**Pittsburgh Water and Sewage Authority (PWSA)** has a program called “**Water for Gardens**” which allows gardeners to use free city tap water for gardening up to 25,000 gallons (about the volume of a one car garage) per season.

### PACDs Grant Opportunities

Allegheny conservation district has several grants that apply to soil and water conservation, planting, and environmental maintenance plans:

- [Ag Plan Reimbursement Program](#)
- [Mini- and Sub- Grant Overviews](#)
- [Chesapeake Bay Grants](#)

### **Grow Pittsburgh**

An awesome resource for anyone who wants to start a farm. They are a great technical resource too.

### **Love Your Block**

A City of Pittsburgh mini-grant program that brings neighbors together to improve communities by combating blight, creating assets, and building resilience - block-by-block. \$5,000 Maximum grant.

### **Adopt-A-Lot Program**

The City of Pittsburgh has a program that encourages residents to turn vacant lots into gardens and more. The program established by the city council and implemented by the Department of City Planning to allow residents a process to access city-owned vacant lots for food, flowers, or rain gardens. Check out this [article](#) about the program's roll out!

### **Urban Agriculture Infrastructure Grant Program**

The Urban Agriculture Infrastructure Grant Program provides funding as a reimbursement grant to eligible applicants seeking to improve urban agriculture infrastructure in Pennsylvania.

### **Urban Agriculture and Innovative Production (UAIP) Competitive Grants Program \$50K-300K**

Opportunities from the Department of Agriculture and Natural Resources Conservation Service

### **Urban Growers Scholarship Fund (education and training): \$500 Max / Year**

This fund exists to support urban gardeners and farmers in Pittsburgh and Allegheny County and help them access professional development opportunities. Funds may be used for conferences, workshop registrations, trainings, and/or transportation costs (such as bus tickets or toll reimbursement) to these professional development opportunities. This and other opportunities at [Pittsburgh Food Policy Council](#) help support urban farmers/growers.

### **Garden Grant Program**

Garden Grant program provides a \$3,000 monetary grant to support a new or existing edible educational garden located at either a:

K-12 School

Non-profit organization (501(c)(3) in the US/Registered Charity in Canada) that serves children in the K-12 grade range

### **Pittsburgh Neighborhood Economic Development NED (Neighborhood Economic Development)**

Every year the City of Pittsburgh receives funds from the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) under the Community Development Block Program (CDBG). These funds are distributed by the City as Neighborhood Economic Development Grants (NED), used by nonprofits doing economic development activities in CDBG eligible neighborhoods.

### **How to start a small farm business in Pittsburgh?**

Your local and state laws may vary when it comes to the requirements for establishing a small farm business. But the basics are the same: you will need to register your business name, purchase a business license, get an employer identification number, and carry product liability insurance.

### [Urban Farm Business Plan Handbook](#)

The Urban Farm Business Plan Handbook (this document) provides guidance for developing a business plan for the startup and operation of an urban farm. It focuses on food and non-food related cultivated agriculture. The information provided is applicable regardless of whether the farm is to be operated as a nonprofit or for-profit business.

### [Urban farm Business Plan Worksheet](#)

These worksheets are a helpful resource for those looking to get started in urban agriculture and want to get their ideas down on paper!

### [City of Pittsburgh - Soil Policy](#)

Soil is an environmental building block that supports plant life, influences the water cycle, and provides habitat. As such, the health of soil on a vacant lot plays a critical role in health, especially if the lot will be in direct contact with community members whether through physical contact or through food consumption. Soil sampling is a tool used to identify the health of the soil on a particular lot. The results will give you baseline information on nutrient levels, pH levels, and certain contaminants on a given lot. Knowing this information is incredibly important for anyone looking to use a vacant lot for green space and to do so with health and safety in mind.

### [City of Pittsburgh Vacant Lot Use Soil Policy](#)

The City of Pittsburgh requires a test for lead levels on all public parcels before use by residents for community green space. We recommend a test for nutrients but require a test for lead and other heavy metals as well.

### [Pittsburgh Vacant Lot Toolkit](#)

To implement the mandates of the Open Space Plan, the Department of City Planning created an Advisory Committee of City departments, authorities, and nonprofit partners to create the Vacant Lot Toolkit. This Committee contracted a team of consultants who assisted in developing Vacant Lot Toolkit policy recommendations.

### [GRANTS.GOV](#)

Useful website to apply for different grant opportunities

### [URA Financial Assistance & Resources](#)

The URA provides a portfolio of programs that include financing for businesses, developers, homeowners, and future homeowners. You may contact Marcus Robinson ([mrobinson@ura.org](mailto:mrobinson@ura.org)) for available grants related to urban agriculture.

### [Duquesne Light Resources](#)

[Duquesne Light Company Incentives on Refrigeration](#)

[Duquesne Light Company New Construction Incentives Available](#)

### [Black Urban Gardeners and Farmers of Pittsburgh Co-op](#)

The Black Urban Gardeners and Farmers' Cooperative of Pittsburgh (BUGS FCP) "revives and continues the tradition of black farmers begun after Emancipation in the 1860s. It imparts the gardening and agricultural skills many people in the community have to others to keep that tradition alive." ([Source](#)). Check out their work in [Sankofa!](#)

### [Hilltop Urban Farm](#)

Located on 107 acres of land – with 23 acres dedicated to farming – it is a multi-pronged initiative that produces locally-grown crops, provides agriculture-based education, generates

entrepreneurial opportunities, and strengthens communities. Hilltop Urban Farm is set to transform the land it currently occupies. Given its size, scope, and reach, it has the potential to become one of the largest urban farms in the United States and serve as a resource for urban farming initiatives.

### [Farmer Incubation Program](#)

The Farmer Incubation Program (FIP) at Hilltop Urban Farm is a 3-year workforce development program for new small-scale organic urban farm enterprises.

### [The CitiParks new City Farm Program](#)

This Program will work to connect the city's food producing gardens and farms more actively to city resources. Currently the City Farms initiative is working to meet with key stakeholders involved in local garden/farm efforts to inform the development of our strategy to support this important work.

### [Three Rivers Agricultural Land Initiative \(TRALI\)](#)

Grow Pittsburgh has partnered with [Allegheny Land Trust](#) to protect and preserve selected urban agricultural lands in perpetuity. The Three Rivers Agricultural Land Initiative (TRALI) is based on a [Community Land Trust](#) model.

### [ADA-Compliant Raised Beds](#)

This website offers ADA-compliant elevated raised beds to allow for accessible and inclusive gardening opportunities. Shallow planting beds are intended for herbs and low-growing greens while deeper planting beds are ideal for root vegetables and larger plants like tomatoes. Designed for a wheelchair to fit comfortably underneath while also allowing increased mobility and comfort.

### [Terrace Gardening](#)

This website offers terrace gardening and erosion control products; hillside planters stabilize the landscape using repurposed materials. With Pittsburgh's rolling hillsides and uneven landscapes, this gardening technique proves ideal in a topographically diverse city.

### [Missouri Botanical Garden: Plant Finder](#)

Cannot decide which seeds and/or plant varieties are best for your urban growing space? This website allows you to research over 7,500 plants which are growing or have been grown in specific display gardens. Search by scientific name, common name and/or selected plant characteristics.

### [Farmers on the Rise award competition](#)

Farm Credit is hosting the third annual Farmers on the Rise award competition this fall! Established in 2021, the Farmers on the Rise program was created to honor outstanding beginning farmers (three to ten years of experience) within the diverse agricultural community who excel in their field.

### [Netafim](#)

Netafim is a leading drip irrigation technology company. Their systems are designed to increase yield while decreasing the use of natural resources.

### [Gardeners Supply Company](#)

Gardeners can supply nearly any necessary garden item, including Accessible gardening beds, watering tools, and elements. In addition to the sales, the site also provides advice and articles to improve garden yield and function.

### **USDA Expands Funding Opportunities**

The U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) is expanding the Food Safety Certification for Specialty Crops (FSCSC) program to now include medium-sized businesses in addition to small businesses. Eligible specialty crop growers can apply for assistance for expenses related to obtaining or renewing a food safety certification. The program has also been expanded to include assistance for 2024 and 2025 expenses.

Producers can apply for assistance on their calendar year 2024 expenses beginning July 1, 2024, through Jan. 31, 2025. For program year 2025, the application period will be Jan. 1, 2025, through Jan. 31, 2026. Answers to frequently asked questions can be found at [farmers.gov/food-safety/faq](https://farmers.gov/food-safety/faq).

Please contact us at [fpac.bc.press@usda.gov](mailto:fpac.bc.press@usda.gov) with any additional questions.

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### **Peer reviewed articles and publications:**

- [Cultivating citizenship, equity, and social inclusion? Putting civic agriculture into practice through urban farming](#) by Melissa N. Poulsen
- [Social capital and older people in farming communities](#) by Deirdre Heenan