

Cleveland Seasonal High Tunnel Initiative

Cuyahoga County

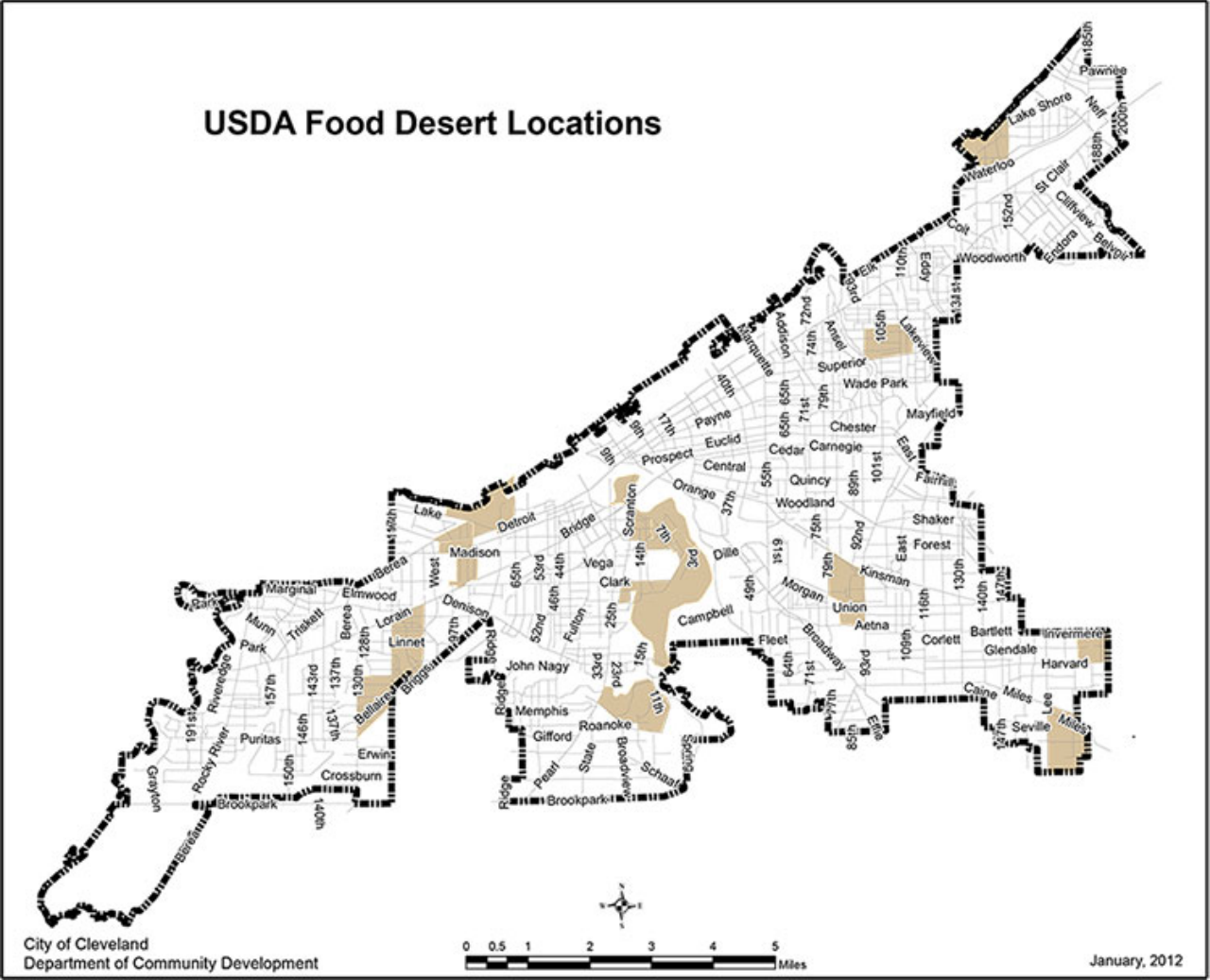
Urban Agriculture

- ▶ For the past 13 years, Cleveland's grass root urban agriculture movement has grown steadily.
- ▶ Cleveland is now recognized as having the second most active and successful urban agriculture movement in the country.

Food Deserts

- ▶ Many residents in the greater Cleveland area live in “food deserts”; areas with limited access to food near their homes. USDA created a map of food desert areas within Cleveland to show where to target assistance in providing nutritious food.
- ▶ To address the critical needs of these residents, high tunnel applications from these areas receive higher priority for funding.

Cleveland Food Desert Areas



City of Cleveland Partner's

- ▶ The Cleveland Foundation, food-centric non-profits, city and county government, the Cleveland Clinic, and Case Western University are just a few of the partners working to improve the health of Cleveland city dwellers and the environment within the city.

Urban land

- ▶ Urban is a common term used when describing a particular zoning ordinance.
- ▶ Nothing in the definition indicates the EQIP eligibility is subject to zoning restrictions. As such, while not common thought of in this context, an urban garden can meet the definition of “agricultural land” for EQIP purposes.
- ▶ However, while the applicant and the land may meet EQIP eligibility requirements, zoning may restrict a participant from installing certain practices within an urban area. NRCS would not be able to pay for a practice which violates any applicable law or regulation.

Urban Agriculture Movement



- 215 Community gardens, 36 for-profit farms
- 30 Farmer's markets
- Well established partnerships include foundations, non-profits, governments, private businesses, and universities

Urban Soil Management

- ▶ Urban soils are used for many purposes, some of them relevant to agriculture. These intensely managed and disturbed soils have not been investigated until recently and represent most urban zones on soil survey maps.
- ▶ As a result of their origin and uses, urban soils may contain pollutants, thus the location and characteristics of the soil must be established clearly to ensure safe land uses.
- ▶ All potential applicants are advised to work with their local Ohio State University Extension Service office to have their soil analyzed.
- ▶ Lead is the most common element checked on these sites.
- ▶ Compost from local livestock farmers have been used to mediate soil characteristics.

NRCS Technical and Financial Assistance on Urban Land

- ▶ Conservation Technical Assistance and Urban Area

NRCS has traditionally provided limited technical assistance through the Conservation Technical Assistance (CTA) Program to urban residents. A growing concern in urban farming areas has spark a new commitment to outreach to city dwellers through the Cleveland High Tunnel Project.

Laying the Foundation

- ▶ In 2010, the City of Cleveland acted to encourage urban agriculture by modifying the zoning code to permit agricultural production in single family residential districts.
- ▶ The modified the zoning code allows farm stand sales, signage, limited animal agriculture(chickens, bees), and agricultural structures.
- ▶ They reducing city water rates for urban agriculture (\$72 for the growing season).
- ▶ The city of Cleveland has demolished thousands of vacant homes in the past years thus leaving many vacant lots suitable to farming.

What is a Seasonal High Tunnel

Definition

- ▶ A seasonal high is a polyethylene covered structure with or without electricity, heating, or mechanical ventilation systems. High tunnels modify the climate to create more favorable growing conditions for vegetables and other specialty crops grown in the natural soil beneath it.

Purpose

- Tunnel systems are designed to extend the cropping season and benefit natural resources by improving plant quality, soil quality, and water quality through methods such as reduced nutrient and pesticide transport.

Cleveland High Tunnel Initiative



Alfonso Norwood, Urban Conservationist

Why High Tunnels

- ▶ The Cleveland High Tunnel Initiative grew from discussion between the NRCS and community leaders about the need for USDA assistance to help Cleveland residents grow fresh food in an environmentally friendly manner for all but the coldest months.

Cleveland Seasonal High Tunnel Initiative Origin

- ▶ In 2012, NRCS State Conservationist (STC) Terry Cosby allocated a portion of Ohio's Environmental Quality Incentive Program (EQIP) funds to pilot a high tunnel project in the Greater Cleveland area.
- ▶ STC Cosby also hired a full time urban conservationist to lay the groundwork for the project.
- ▶ NRCS leadership at the national level amended an agreement with the Federation of Southern Cooperatives to assist with project development and local outreach.



Objectives

- ▶ Increase urban participation in NRCS programs (EQIP).
- ▶ Increase local food production via community gardens and urban farms.
- ▶ Create business/CO-OP opportunities for constructing hoop houses.
- ▶ Build onto and promote existing Cleveland model (local food system).

Environmental Quality Incentive Program(EQIP) and Urban Farming

The following basic EQIP rules only require that, to participate, the applicant must:

- ▶ Be in compliance with highly erodible land and wetland provisions established in the 1985 Farm Bill;
- ▶ Have an interest in the agricultural operation;
- ▶ Have control of the land for the term of the proposed contract period;
- ▶ Submit an EQIP plan of operations;
- ▶ Supply information, as required by NRCS, to determine eligibility;
- ▶ Include eligible land;
- ▶ Have a resource concern which may be addressed through the implementation of an EQIP contract.

Initial targeted population

- ▶ 50 urban participant in Cleveland area
 - 22 eligible participant-ready for hoop houses
 - 28 ineligible due to eligibility issues

Project Component

- ▶ Eligibility
- ▶ Planning/Contracting
- ▶ Hoop House construction
- ▶ Education & Training
 1. NRCS programs
 2. Hoop House construction and maintenance
 3. Cooperative
- CO-OP Development if feasible

Stake Holders

- ▶ NRCS is the planning/contracting agency of the project.
- ▶ Farm Service Agency (FSA) is the lead agency for eligibility.
- ▶ Cuyahoga Soil and Water Conservation District(SWCD) is partnering with NRCS to promote high tunnels, urban farming, and communicating the value of the project with the City of Cleveland.
- ▶ Ohio State University Extension Service (OSUE) is partnering to provide educational workshops.
- ▶ Federation Of Southern Cooperatives is partnering to conduct outreach and follow-up meetings with participants. They also help participants with obtaining leases.
- ▶ City of Cleveland will provide leases and permits that mirror the different wards.
- ▶ Fair Food Network was contracted to construct high tunnels and hold educational workshops.

