



## What to Look For in an Urban Farm Site

More and more first generation farmers are seeking cropland amid concrete. Here are some of the site selection criteria you can use to stake out your city-based farm.

- Size - a site's total footprint should accommodate walkways and structures such as a commercial cooler, post-harvesting processing station, storage shed, other workspace and parking, in addition to growing space. For  $\frac{1}{2}$  acre of growing space, a  $\frac{3}{4}$  to 1 acre size lot is optimal.
- Topography/physical conditions - relatively flat terrain is optimal. The site should have good drainage and not be susceptible to flooding. Farming can be done on a slope or even possibly on a hillside but issues of soil and water runoff become considerations under those conditions.
- Soil condition - basic soil tests need to determine that the soil is within the range of state agricultural soil averages, or that it can be improved to achieve this range through the use of organic inputs. In the case of brownfields, the SPIN growing techniques and business model can be adapted to container and raised bed growing.
- Sunshine - the site should ideally be in full sun, but partial shade locations can be made to work, as long as shading is not excessive for much of the day.
- Utility access - the site should have existing water and electric hookups; if not, city policies allowing for these site improvements at a relatively low cost should be encouraged.
- Relationship to community and nearby residences - support of neighbors, community associations, and elected officials is critical. In addition, if the farm site is adjoined by residences, a buffer between the farm and those residences may be essential to avoid conflicts over noise and other farming activities that could be perceived as disruptive.
- Buffer from non-residential uses - in some situations a buffer may be necessary to protect the organic nature of the field in cases where chemicals are applied or emitted by neighboring uses. Large buffering requirements may greatly expand the size of site needed. Guidelines provided by a state's organic association can be used in these circumstances.
- Relationship to adjacent non-residential uses - certain adjacent activity can also negatively impact farming. Ideally adjacent uses would have minimal nighttime lighting and low traffic volume. If outside interferences do exist, additional open space or other buffer may be necessary.

- Vehicle access – adequate access must be available for a van, mini truck, or similar sized vehicle
- Perceived security - given that farmers work mainly outdoors and their products are outdoors the neighborhood should offer a reasonable sense of safety for both the farmer and the farm.
- Site access - nearby public transit access is desirable.
- Land acquisition - City policies need to be encouraged to provide for “urban farmsteading” type programs which would provide assistance in land acquisition to farmers and allow them to build equity.
- Site control and term of site availability – Farming is a highly adaptive and dynamic activity and can therefore be considered as an interim use in certain situations; some sites, however, can be designated permanent agriculture sites to compensate the farmers who operate there for their investment of time and funds in the land.

*SPIN is helping a growing corps of first generation farmers to establish their farmsteads in the middle of urban jungles and on the suburban fringe. Their collective actions are re-defining farming for the 21<sup>st</sup> century – sub-acre, close to markets, environmentally friendly, low-capital intensive, entrepreneurially-driven. To see how you can use SPIN to take food production into your own hands, visit the SPIN-Farming website at [www.spinfarming.com](http://www.spinfarming.com).*

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