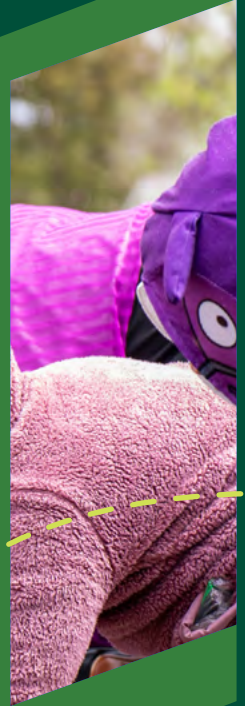


Michigan State University

# URBAN AGRICULTURE SUMMIT

2025 Report



# Acknowledgments

First and foremost, we thank Dr. Larry and Nadine Walker for their generous funding of the Urban Agriculture Summit along with the Network for Inclusive Farm Business Engagement (NIFBE), which supported session leader and facilitator stipends. These investments sowed seeds that will further the efforts and statewide collaboration for urban agriculture in Michigan.

We also thank the coordinating committee: Remi Harrington, Devon Wilson, Terri Barker, Jahi Johnson-Chappell, Eric LaFary, Jeff Martin, Alison Shores, Jennifer Silveri, and shakara tyler saba. Keesa V. Johnson also served on the committee, facilitated a session, and pulled this report together!

Thank you to those listed above, and those who led sessions and made the effort to attend and make the Summit a success.

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This report is a summary and evaluation of the 2025 Michigan State University Urban Agriculture Summit (UAS) that was held February 27, 2025 in East Lansing, Michigan.

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# Report Summary

The Michigan State University Urban Agriculture Summit (UAS) proved to be a pivotal event, **strengthening the bond** between individuals, their food, culture, and environment, **with participants from diverse regions** and farmers across the state.

# 242

attendees were present, highlighting a robust interest and engagement.



What  
does  
Urban Ag  
mean to  
you?



The UAS brought people from Michigan's urban centers together to build, collaborate and share resources while **demonstrating community care, community power, and collective agency.**

## Geographic Representation

The UAS was attended by representatives from **five states**, showcasing a diverse geographical interest.

Notably, there was participation from California, Ohio, Kansas, and Illinois, each contributing one attendee.



## Participants by County



# Community Engagement

The UAS attracted urban farming professionals from various fields, with the top three professions represented being **farmers, government officials, and educators.**



These groups played a crucial role in the discussions and networking opportunities that characterized the summit, contributing to a rich exchange of knowledge and ideas.



## Participatory Facilitation

During the MSU Urban Agriculture Summit, participatory facilitation techniques were used to enhance collaboration and innovation. Key methods included:

- **Affinity Diagram:** Participants wrote responses to guiding questions on post-it notes, which were sorted into categories to prioritize urban agriculture topics.
- **Bridge Building:** A three-part activity where participants envisioned an ideal future, assessed the current reality, and identified actionable steps using visual expressions.
- **Rotating Flip Charts:** Groups rotated among charts with different questions, fostering dynamic discussions and allowing ideas to build upon one another.

These methods encouraged active learning and fostered a valuable exchange of ideas and experiences among participants during the sessions. If you want to learn more about conducting participatory workshops, be sure to explore [the Seeds for Change - “Facilitating Participatory Workshops” resource available here.](#)



# Key Takeaways

The UAS served as an invaluable opportunity for participants to gain insights, network, and foster community connections. Below is a summary of the key takeaways and suggestions for improvement based on attendee feedback.



## Keynote Highlights

Kathryn Underwood's keynote address emphasized the evolution of food sovereignty through systems analysis and underscored the essential role of urban agriculture. She stressed the need to integrate community resources—such as licensed kitchens and transportation—with small-scale and BIPOC farmers to bolster these movements against disruptions.

**Key policy considerations she addressed included:**



Protection of  
land ownership



Zoning laws



Environmental  
concerns



Genuine  
community  
engagement

Additionally, educating local departments on urban agriculture laws and advocating for flexible policymaking were highlighted as vital components.

## Post-Summit Insights

Participants left with a sense of shared values across the state and gratitude, forging statewide connections and partnerships. The summit emphasized resilience and sustainability, while offering resources and vetted strategies from farmers.

### Key areas of learning:

- Developing connections that foster a stronger sense of community and deeper relationships
- Funding opportunities and business models
- Urban agriculture job training
- Ideas related to land stewardship and creative healing



## Areas for Improvement

### Attendees suggested several enhancements for future events:

- More variety in presentation topics and shorter length of sessions
- Community-based locations
- Space and time for networking and hands-on training
- Possible multi-day conference to optimize topics and sessions
- Regionally focused sessions on soil remediation, policy and planning



# Session Summaries

## **THE SEVEN ACCESSES OF MICROENTERPRISE**

**Remi Harrington, Eric LaFary and Naim Edwards**

Microsystems Design for a Regenerative Food Future. In this session, we will explore unlearning the myth that bigger is better. Through Microsystems design, we explore hyper-local, community-led models that are scalable and sustainable. The Zoo City model exemplifies this—locating real pathways for participation in the food ecosystem through seven accesses of micro-enterprise. It's a living system of circular economies, food sovereignty, and inclusive design, offering a blueprint for a truly representative food future with global relevance.

## **DBFLF LEGAL AND BUSINESS SERVICES PROGRAM**

**Gabby Knox and Bekah Galang**

Detroit Black Farmer Land Fund's Legal and Business Support Service provides farmers with the essential tools and guidance needed to navigate the complexities of the agricultural industry. In addition to financial assistance, this program connects farmers with business professionals who will provide expert assistance in areas such as: business structuring, permits and compliance, contracts, and financial planning. By equipping farmers with tailored legal and business resources, DBFLF empowers them to build sustainable and thriving agricultural enterprises. In this session, we will discuss DBFLF's Program and Key Business Services that farmers need to support their farm businesses on and off the field.

## **OPTIMIZING TRANSPLANT PRODUCTION**

**Romondo Woods and Alison Shores**

Learn how to calculate the number of plants needed for a particular growing space and how to generate healthy transplants.

## **LEARNING IN COMMUNITY, LEARNING ON THE LAND**

**Katie Brandt and Julius Buzzard**

Hear about innovative models for teaching Michigan's new urban farmers and supporting them on their path to farm success. We will split into small groups to brainstorm how to support these urban ag entrepreneurs through classes, workshops, peer-to-peer learning communities, mentorship, farmwork opportunities, navigators and more. Walk through project goals, activities, partners and funding streams that could support this work.

## **CLIMATE RESILIENCE / REGENERATIVE AG**

**Keesa V. Johnson**

Explore approaches to land management driven by improving soil health. We'll cover a blend of sustainable farming methods tailored to each farmer's needs that help them persist in an unpredictable climate.



## **CREATIVE HEALING**

**Yexenia Vanegas**

Imagine a sustainable world through creative activities leaning into play/rest. Participate as much or as little as you'd like in activities like the collage corner, creating a clay object/character to add to the miniature eco-village or enjoy a meditative coloring brain break.

## **COMMON MISTAKES IN URBAN FARMING**

**Devon Wilson and Bekah Galang**

Learning from common mistakes can save time, money, and effort. Dive into the biggest pitfalls in soil management, crop planning, and business strategy, offering practical solutions for success. With real-world insights from running an urban farm, this class provides the tools to grow efficiently and sustainably.

## **INSTITUTIONAL SUPPORT FOR URBAN AG**

**Naim Edwards**

Defining equitable engagement — gauge how current relationships and resources can be improved to support urban farmers.

## **FUNDING, WATER MANAGEMENT, AND WORKING WITH VETERANS**

**Travis Peters and Terri Barker**

Learn about funding opportunities like Natural Resource Conservation Service grants, ways to store water and irrigate, as well as working with veterans.

## **LAND SOVEREIGNTY**

**shakara tyler saba, Patrice Brown, and Alison Shores**

Land tenure and access remain one of the most significant challenges for urban growers. We will explore community-controlled land tenure models for individuals, collectives and cooperatives.

## **POLICY SIDE**

**Winona Bynum and Keesa V. Johnson**

A discussion of local ordinances, state law, and other policies affecting urban agriculture, and how to advocate for policy. We covered ways to get involved with food councils, engage elected officials, and organize for systems change.

## **STEWARDSHIP, LEARNING & MIRRORING ABIOTIC ECOSYSTEMS**

**jøn kent, Piper Carter, and Kelly McClelland**

Learn how Sanctuary Farms (SF) stewards water, air, soil, agriculture, and nature access (WASANA) and how these efforts have shaped ecological resilience and community transformation. By mirroring the interconnectedness of these abiotic factors, SF has developed frameworks for community organizing, policy advocacy, and education that reflect nature's collaborative structures. Through these Initiatives, SF demonstrates how ecological stewardship can inspire and sustain social change.

