

## **Food, agriculture and cities: challenges and priorities**

More and more of the world's population is becoming concentrated in and around large cities. Ensuring that the billions of people living in cities have their rightful access to adequate amounts of safe and nutritious food represents a global development challenge of the highest order. Promoting sustainable agricultural production in urban and peri-urban areas and developing food systems capable of meeting urban consumer demand will become increasingly important to global food security. Currently however, the important relationship between food security, agriculture and urbanization is often not sufficiently recognized.

This briefing note highlights the major issues related to food, agriculture and cities and provides a set of recommendations for action at the global, national and local level.

### **Urbanization, poverty and hunger**

In 2008, for the first time in history, the world's urban population outnumbered its rural population. In 2005, the world's population stood at 6.5 billion and it is expected to reach 9.2 billion by 2050. This population growth will take place mainly in urban areas of developing countries. By 2030, 3.9 billion people are expected to be living in the cities of the developing world. The impact of expanding urban populations will vary from country to country. Depending on national policies settings and economic structure, increased urbanization can affect hunger and poverty in both positive and negative ways.

As cities expand, so does the urban consumer demand for food. The recent food and financial crises have highlighted the problem of urban food insecurity in developing countries. Urban households saw their purchasing power decline drastically and they have a very limited capacity to produce their own food. As a result, the number of hungry people in the world climbed higher.

### **Investing in urban food security**

It is clear that in order to reach the Millennium Development Goal 1: 'eradicate extreme poverty and hunger', urgent attention will need to be given to cities. Food production, marketing, and transportation, as well as the sustainable management of natural resources in and around cities will play an important role in reaching this goal.

Feeding expanding urban populations will also help reduce the risk of social unrest and conflict. In addition, satisfying the food needs of expanding urban markets and promoting nutritious diets in urban households can function as a motor for economic and social development in rural communities.

### **Strengthening rural-urban linkages**

Specific attention needs to be given to the links that connect urban and rural communities, shape the economic relationships between them and determine how water and other natural resources are shared. At a time where new cities are being created and older cities are expanding and merging, it is urgent to bridge the increasingly unclear divide between the urban landscape and the countryside. It is imperative to think in terms of territorial planning that incorporates rural, peri-urban and urban areas and food systems.

Strengthening these links will require a rethinking of current systems of urban governance. In addition, as price of energy increases and pressure mounts to reduce carbon dioxide emissions, the

costs and the distances required to transport food between producers and urban consumers will need to be reduced and better managed.

The steps in delivering safe nutritious food from the field to the urban consumer: the production, processing and marketing, are all interlinked and should mutually strengthen each other. Promoting the benefits of a nutritious and diversified diet to urban consumers is a key element in creating markets for local producers, processors and vendors.

Protecting and preserving agricultural land and forested areas in and around cities will require progress to make in sustainable livestock production and the integrated management of land and water resources. As the demand for water increases, the treatment, productive recycling and safe reuse of waste and wastewater will be crucial for peri-urban and urban agriculture and food security. In addition, the price of phosphorous and other fertilizers is expected to rise, so it will make economic sense to recycle these inputs as much as possible.

### **Cities, emergencies and food security**

The impacts of climate change may severely affect urban areas as they often lack environmental buffers against climate-related disasters, particularly flooding. The development of sustainable peri-urban and urban agricultural production can help mitigate the risks of climate-related disasters in cities. In addition, to be successful, emergency interventions designed to address the needs of internally displaced people seeking refuge in urban and peri-urban areas need to integrate food, nutrition and agriculture components right from their initial planning stages.

### **Building expertise through partnerships**

More than 40 cities around the world have benefited from FAO activities related to peri-urban and urban food security and agriculture. Through these projects, which are tailored to meet specific local development priorities, the Organization has gained a high level of expertise in promoting urban food production that is socially inclusive and generates employment in vulnerable communities and in improving the management of land, water and forest resources in peri-urban and urban settings. The commitment of local authorities and integrated approaches involving a broad range of stakeholders has been necessary to guarantee the sustainability of these initiatives. For this reason, FAO works closely with a variety of international organizations, non-governmental organizations and national and local authorities.

### **Food, agriculture and cities: challenges and the way forward**

There is an urgent need to ensure that cities are included on the agenda of food and agriculture policy makers, planners and institutions. Likewise, it is equally urgent to integrate food security and agriculture into the agenda of city planners and local urban authorities.

### **Recommendations at the global level**

To ensure food security in cities during this period of rapid urbanization, the following actions should be undertaken at the global level:

- taking stock of urban food security and agriculture policies, legal frameworks and programmes that cities and countries around the world have developed, or are developing, with a view to their systematisation and wider dissemination;
- developing decision-making and planning tools (guidelines, criteria and indicators) for policy makers dealing with urban development in relation to agriculture, livestock, aquaculture, land use planning and forestry, as well as urban food system planning and development; and
- setting up multi-stakeholder platforms for dialogue, action planning and policy formulation on good governance on food, agriculture and cities, including a high-level advisory panel to

FAO that would bring together international organisations, national and regional representatives and related sectoral expertise.

### **Recommendations at the local and national level**

At local and national level it is imperative to support the development of policies and programmes that address the issue related to food, agriculture and cities. Support to local and national governments should contribute to enhancing the productive capacity of urban and peri-urban areas for sustainable food production, with particular attention to indigenous foods. This enhanced food production would require that important natural areas and agricultural lands be preserved and included in city development and land use plans. To ensure the sustainability of this food production, it will be crucial to safeguard the environmental health of these areas by strengthening the integrated management of natural resources, including trees, land and water throughout the entire urban and peri-urban landscape.

Improving sustainable agricultural production in urban and peri-urban areas can be accomplished by using planning mechanisms that ensure:

- land use in important natural and agricultural areas is not only determined by market forces; and
- urban and peri-urban agricultural development contributes to supporting other environmental and social functions, such as mitigating and adapting to climate change, reducing urban heat islands and preventing floods.

Along with improving natural resource management, support at the local and national level should strengthen urban-focused food systems, including production, processing and marketing. This involves:

- fostering urban producer and consumer organizations and direct marketing schemes;
- raising consumer awareness about the nutritional value of locally produced and processed foods;
- supporting technical innovations that can ensure safer production, processing and marketing within both the formal and informal food sectors.

Innovative project financing and the creative use of information and communication technologies can help bring about these changes.

At the local and national level, support is also required to ensure that issues related to food, agriculture and cities are addressed in national research institutions or programmes. This support should focus on:

- promoting action and policy oriented research;
- integrating monitoring and systematisation activities in all programmes dealing with urban food security and agriculture; and
- integrating subjects pertaining to urban food production and food security into university curricula.

For more information: FAO Food for the Cities multidisciplinary initiative: <http://www.fao.org/fcit>