Swette Center for Sustainable Food Systems
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Urban Agriculture Land Conservation

Recommendations for Kansas City

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Land Acknowledgement

As we explore ways to protect and conserve land for people to grow food in cities, it is critical to acknowledge that this story begins with the Indigenous people who first stewarded this land. I am located in and writing about the place known today as Kansas City, land with a history stretching back at least 10,000 years. Many people have stewarded this land, including people of the Hopewell exchange in ancient times, more recently the Kaw, Kickapoo, Oceti Sakowin, and Osage peoples, and also the Sauk and Fox, Otoe-Missouria, Pawnee, Shawnee, and Wyandot peoples in the course of their forced displacement by colonialist means that continues to this day. Today, there are four federally recognized tribes in the Kansas City area: The Iowa Tribe of Kansas and Nebraska, The Kansas Kickapoo Tribe, The Prairie Band of Potawatomie, and the Sac and Fox Tribe of Missouri in Kansas and Nebraska. All these peoples are the past, present, and future of this land.

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Table of Contents

Introduction *1*

Literature Review *2*

History and Value of Urban Agriculture 2

Community Land Trusts 3

Summary 6

Research Methods *7*

Kansas City's Landscape of Urban Agriculture *8*

The Case for Protecting Urban Agriculture Land in Kansas City 9

The Challenges to Protecting Urban Agricultural Land in Kansas City 13

The Priorities in Protecting Urban Agricultural Land in Kansas City 16

Models of Urban Ag Land Protection *17*

Community Land Trust 17

Conservation Land Trust 21

Agrarian Commons 23

Grower Ownership 25

Recommendations for the Kansas City Area *27*

Multifaceted and Collaborative Approach 27

Work with Existing Land Trusts 28

Long-tenure Public Land Access 30

Improved Pathway to Land Bank Properties 31

Land Link Services 32

Conservation Easements 32

BIPOC Farmer Land Fund 34

Conclusion *35*

Future Research *36*

References *37*

Appendix 42

Executive Summary

Access to affordable farmland is one of the greatest challenges facing farmers today. Farmers and gardeners in urban areas face some similar barriers to rural farmers when it comes to finding and protecting land to grow food. However, urban growers face other unique and more complex challenges than their rural counterparts. This research discusses the value urban agriculture brings to cities, including access to fresh food, the positive environmental impacts, and the social and educational spaces it creates in urban settings. It makes the case for why the Kansas City metropolitan region, and cities across the United States, should invest in permanent protection of land for urban agriculture. To overcome challenges such as expensive land and other costs, conflicting values around land use in urban areas, proximity to neighbors, and restrictive zoning codes, many cities around the country have created coalitions, organizations, programs, and policies to address equitable and permanent land access for urban agriculture.

This research focuses on Community Land Trusts as a possible solution to hold and ensure affordable access to land for urban food production, both for urban farm businesses and community gardens. Throughout interviews and research, other models emerged such as conservation easements, Agrarian Commons, and specific funds and programs to support individual land ownership for Black, Indigenous, and People of Color (BIPOC) growers. Each of these strategies could play a role in Kansas City's work to protect land for urban agriculture. As programs are developed, all solutions should center community power, should be grounded in mutually beneficial relationships between growers and their neighbors, and should secure permanent use of the land for food production. The Kansas City metropolitan region is growing, and as suburban sprawl destroys prime farmland, land within the city remains vacant. With renewed investment in developing density in the city, and at a critical moment to act in the name of climate resilience and community health, it is important for the Kansas City region to invest in our local food system, which begins with protecting land to grow food for current and future generations.

Introduction

Access to affordable farmland is one of the biggest challenges facing farmers today. While programs, policies, and resources have been directed toward preserving and protecting traditional farmland from development, there has been less attention paid to protecting land for agriculture in urban spaces. Additional barriers to protecting land to grow food in urban areas include higher land prices, zoning and policies, varying levels of community acceptance, and political will.

Although urban agriculture represents a tiny footprint in the context of 900 million acres of agricultural land in the US, it plays a significant role for people living in cities. The National Young Farmers Coalition's Land Policy Report includes farmland access in urban areas as one of their guiding principles, stating, "Urban agriculture is critically important, not only for food production but for community building, civic engagement, conservation, education, employment, and providing pathways to farming" (Rippon-Butler, 2020). These spaces for people to connect with land, food, and each other in their own neighborhoods add value to a community that often goes unseen and unsupported.

This research explores how the Kansas City metropolitan area could and should protect land for urban agriculture today, tomorrow, and in perpetuity. Specifically, it analyzes how different models of community-driven land ownership such as Community Land Trusts, Agrarian Commons, and farmer land funds are working to secure long-term protection, accessibility, and affordability of land for urban agriculture. This project will address the following questions: (1) Are Community Land Trusts the best model for urban agriculture land protection in Kansas City? Do they meet the needs of urban farmers, landowners, and community stakeholders? (2) If yes, what are the best structures and practices to replicate? Who are the best partners to implement Community Land Trusts as an urban agriculture land conservation strategy? (3) If no, what alternatives exist and how do they better meet the needs of urban farmers, landowners, and other stakeholders?

Literature Review

History and Value of Urban Agriculture

Agriculture has been integrated into cities throughout history and has been documented in many cultures throughout the world. In the United States, there is a history of communal urban land for growing food as early as the 1890s, designed to “grant garden space to otherwise property-less urban individuals” (Lawson, 2004, p. 153). According to the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA), urban agriculture contributes 15 to 20 percent of the global food supply (USDA Climate Hubs, 2023). While urban agriculture cannot meet the full demand of food needs in cities, it can make a significant contribution to feeding urban communities.

According to the USDA, “Urban agriculture includes the cultivating, processing, and distributing agricultural products in urban and suburban areas. Community gardens, rooftop farms, hydroponic, aeroponic, and aquaponic facilities, and vertical production are all examples of urban agriculture” (USDA Office of Urban Agriculture and Innovative Production, 2020). While access to fresh food is the primary benefit of urban agriculture, many scholars have examined additional benefits to growing food in cities.

The Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) asserts that in addition to producing food and extra income, “urban and peri-urban agriculture have become key parts of strategies for reducing cities’ ecological footprint, recycling urban wastes, containing urban sprawl, protecting biodiversity, building resilience to climate change, stimulating regional economies, and reducing dependency on global food markets” (FAO, 2019). The social impact of urban agriculture is important as well. Nathan McClintock theorizes a rise in urban agriculture as human response to the “alienation from our natural environment caused by urbanization and capitalism” as a motivation for the more widespread adoption of urban agriculture in recent years (2010). Education is another well-known benefit of urban agriculture, both as a teaching tool in schools, as well as offering spaces for urban residents to learn about and participate in growing food (Lawson, 2004, p. 154).

Alongside the many benefits of urban agriculture, there are significant challenges and barriers associated with growing food in cities. Land insecurity is considered to be the greatest barrier to urban agriculture (Kaufman and Bailkey 2000; Lawson 2004). Over the last century, city planners and public officials have signaled mixed messages in their support for urban food production, often celebrating urban farms and community

gardens as champions of environmental action, healthy communities, and social connection, while simultaneously assuming that growing food is a temporary use until development takes place (Lawson, 2004, p. 151). This attitude continues to hinder progress of urban agriculture throughout the country. Even in cases when land is set aside for urban agriculture, “community gardens and urban farms are often at the mercy of landowners and state agencies looking to sell the land for more profitable use” (Wekerle and Classens, 2015, p. 1177). Lawson’s research notes that within cities of the global north, urban agriculture activists have typically grown on and struggled to protect public land (Lawson, 2004). Wekerle and Claasens assert, “in an era of continued public divestment and unimaginative, often regressive public land management, urban food activists are increasingly looking to the agrarian potential of privately owned land” (Wekerle and Classens, 2015, p. 1176).

Whether growing on publicly or privately held land, city planners and elected officials play a large role in determining the future of urban agriculture. Upon examining two cases of ancient cities with resilient urban food systems, researchers conclude that, “agricultural production is not ‘the antithesis of the city.’ but often an integrated urban activity that contributes to the resilience of cities” (Barthel and Isendahl, 2013, p. 224). With these benefits and struggles in mind, the need to protect land to grow food within cities, whether for urban farms, community gardens, school gardens, or other models, is greater than ever.

Community Land Trusts

This research is centered on the model of Community Land Trusts (CLTs) as a tool for protecting land to grow food in cities. The land trust model is not new. It is rooted in the Black agrarian and Civil Rights struggle in the South as a way to cultivate community ownership of housing and land for farming. In “The Community Land Trust: A guide to a new model for land tenure in America,” Robert Swann et al. puts forth the vision of a community land trust as “a social mechanism which has as its purpose the resolution of the fundamental questions of allocation, continuity, and exchange” (Swann et al., 1972, p. 1). The guide goes on to define the Community Land Trust as “a legal entity, a quasi-public body, chartered to hold land in stewardship for all mankind present and future while protecting the legitimate use-rights of its residents” (Swann et al., 1972, p. 1).

The CLT model as we know it today sits on a foundation built by theorists over the last century. In “Origins and Evolution of the Community Land Trust in the United States,” John Emmeus Davis outlines the ideas and history behind CLT. Davis writes, “So rampant, so accepted, so deeply embedded in our national culture has been this notion of the individual’s inalienable right to gather to himself all the land he can grab, enriching himself in the process, that Thorstein Veblen, our greatest homegrown political economist, suggested that speculation, not baseball, should be seen as America’s true national pastime” (Davis, 2014, p. 5). In contrast, he goes on to say that alongside the dominant colonial practice of individual property ownership, there has always existed a quieter ethic of stewardship, rooted in Native American values and the New England tradition of town commons (Davis, 2014, pp. 5-6).

“Land speculation, not baseball, should be seen as America’s true national pastime.”

One of the influential voices toward a different culture of land ownership was Henry George, an American political economist and journalist, who wrote “Progress and Poverty: An Inquiry into the Cause of Industrial Depressions and of Increase of Want with Increase of Wealth: The Remedy.” George “saw poverty as resulting from the ownership of land by a small cadre of landowners who are able to capture for themselves the appreciating value of land” (Davis, 2014, p. 7). While George believed in nationalizing land, he knew this radical of a solution would not be possible, so instead proposed a single government tax on appreciating land value that would allow for the elimination of other taxes on wages and profits (Davis, 2014, p. 7). Many people followed and adapted George’s ideas, including Ebenezer Howard, who wrote “Garden Cities of Tomorrow,” that proposed building communities designed for 32,000 people on municipally owned land on the outskirts of urban areas and “combining the best features of town and country” (Davis, 2014, p. 8). Another influential writer was Ralph Borsodi, whose book “This Ugly Civilization,” critiqued land speculation and landlords and argued that land should never be individually owned. He was the first to describe leased land communities such as Garden Cities as land trusts and coined the term “trustery” to replace “property” (Davis, 2014, p. 9).

In the United States, New Communities Inc. (NCI) created the first Community Land Trust model as it is known today. NCI formed in Georgia during the Civil Rights struggle as a response to housing discrimination experienced by Black people throughout the South. In 1970, NCI purchased 5,000 acres of farmland and woodland, which at the time was the largest tract of Black-owned land in the country. NCI had plans to farm

New Communities Inc., the first Community Land Trust in the US, purchased 5,000 acres of farmland and woodland, which at the time was the largest tract of Black-owned land in the country.

for income and build housing for Black farmers and community members, but due to extreme hostility from neighboring white farmers and discriminatory lending practices, they were never able to build. They farmed for over a decade, before drought and discrimination forced them to sell 1,300 acres in the 1980s, followed by foreclosure (Davis, 2014, pp. 23-25).

Drawing on inspiration from around the world and American theorists before them, a group of leaders and activists continued to refine the CLT model through the 1970s and 80s, publishing two guidebooks to help clarify the model and spread the message. Through the 1990s and 2000s, the model continued evolving to meet the needs of the time, particularly focusing on creating affordable home ownership opportunities for low-income residents in urban areas with the philosophy of “development without displacement” at the heart of work (Davis, 2014, p. 30).

Today, models of land trusts generally fall into two broad categories: Community Land Trusts, which often focus on securing affordable housing and community development, and Conservation Land Trusts, which typically work to protect open space for conservation purposes such as protecting water quality and creating places for people to access natural areas. Some land trusts also focus specifically on protecting agricultural lands, particularly for family farms. Today, there are more than 225 CLTs active in the United States (Grounded Solutions Network, 2023). Additionally, there are 465 accredited conservation land trusts dedicated to open space land conservation (Land Trust Accreditation Commission, 2023). Urban agriculture sits in a unique intersection between these two models of land trusts because CLTs often operate in urban areas and many recognize the benefits to providing open space, community gardens, and urban agriculture opportunities for communities where they provide housing. Similarly, land trusts focused on open space recognize the relevant impact of green space in more densely populated areas for mental and physical well-being and as a tool for habitat restoration and climate resilience.

In “Beyond Housing: Urban Agriculture and Commercial Development by Community Land Trusts,” Greg Rosenberg and Jeffrey Yuen surveyed CLTs and researched sixteen case studies of CLTs working with urban agriculture across the country. Their work outlines three different roles CLTs can play in supporting urban agriculture: securing land, programmatic support, and direct production. It goes on to explain the variety of models and programs in detail, providing examples from around the country and highlighting the challenges and opportunities for CLTs to work on urban agriculture and other types of commercial projects. Rosenberg and Yuen conclude, “Based upon the success of many CLTs reviewed in this study, we do believe that more CLTs should

consider pursuing non-residential projects in order to contribute to comprehensive community development and neighborhood revitalization" (Rosenberg and Yuen, 2012).

Summary

There has been extensive research into the history, models, and applications of CLTs, which reinforces that their potential as a strong and flexible framework to achieve a community's social goals related to land. The history also shows continuous evolution of the CLT model to adapt to a shifting socio-political environment and community values and needs. While others have written about CLTs as a model for urban agriculture and many cities have implemented programs using this model, there is a need for ongoing assessment of community land ownership models as ideas about land use, socio-political context, and local food systems continue to evolve in cities.

Much of the research around urban agriculture is now nearly a decade old, and I see three significant factors that have impacted how urban agriculture and urban land use may have shifted since then. First, the COVID-19 pandemic beginning in March of 2020 had a major impact on our global food system and highlighted the vulnerability of consolidated systems and led to extreme inflation in the housing and real estate market. This led to historic federal investments in local and regional food systems through the American Rescue Plan Act and the Inflation Reduction Act. Second, the nationwide protests in support of Black lives in response to the murder of George Floyd on May 25, 2020 changed the public conversation around racial justice and equity. While there is still a long road ahead toward racial justice in this country, and progress continues to be undermined by politics rooted in White Supremacy, the Black Lives Matter movement has raised awareness about pervasive and systemic racism in the US, including in agriculture related to land and resources. Third, Midwestern cities are finally reckoning with the need to take action in response to climate change. In 2021, the Mid-America Regional Council and Climate Action KC adopted a regional Climate Action Plan, followed by the City of Kansas City, Missouri adopting a Climate Protection and Resilience Plan in 2022. Both of these plans call for investment in local and regional food systems and natural systems both for their carbon sequestration value and to increase the resilience of the region's food supply. While these events and their impact are still unfolding, together they shape an urban landscape that is ripe for the development of community-held land with an emphasis on food sovereignty and climate resilience rooted in racial justice for Black, Indigenous, and People of Color (BIPOC) growers.

Research Methods

For this research project, 22 individuals representing 20 urban farms or organizations working in land protection or conservation participated in 30 to 60-minute interviews over Zoom or phone. Interview participants include six urban farmers or supporting organizations in the Kansas City metropolitan area, four CLTs currently working in urban agriculture, three CLTs or conservation land trusts in the Kansas City area, and ten organizations that work nationwide or in other cities on issues related to urban agricultural land protection or policy. Some interviewees represented multiple categories. Outreach to interview participants began with pre-existing relationships within my network or the network of Dr. Kathleen Merrigan, Executive Director of Swette Center for Sustainable Food Systems. Interview outreach expanded through research into organizations around the country that are using CLTs to protect land for urban farms and community gardens and through referrals from interviewees.

Kansas City's Landscape of Urban Agriculture

This research focuses on the Kansas City metropolitan area, which consists of nine counties and 119 cities in the region, totaling 4,400 square miles in two states. The primary urban cities are Kansas City, Missouri (KCMO) and Kansas City, Kansas (KCK) (Mid America Regional Council, 2023). The total population for the KC metropolitan area is 2.2 million, but with the sprawling footprint, it is among the least densely populated major cities. The largest city, KCMO, spans 318 square miles or 1,617 people per square mile, and the entire fourteen county Metropolitan Statistical Area (MSA) has a density of 260 people per square mile (World Population Review, 2023). The large land area and low population density highlights that there is land available even within KCMO and KCK city limits, as well as in the peri-urban area surrounding the cities.

The population of the KC metropolitan region is 72% White, 12% Black, 9.2% Hispanic, 3.1% Asian/Pacific Islander, 3.1% Multi Racial, and 0.6% other. The cities of KCMO and KCK have higher percentages Black, Latino, Asian, Indigenous, and multi-racial citizens. In KCMO, the population is 26.5% Black, 10.7% Latino, 3% Asian or Pacific Islander, 0.4% Indigenous, and 6.3% multi racial. In KCK, the population is 21.8% Black, 31.2% Latino, 5.7% Asian or Pacific Islander, 0.8% Indigenous, and 8.7% multi-racial. There are also about 14% who identify as White alone and Hispanic or Latino (United States Census Bureau Quick Facts, 2022).

Agriculture and agribusiness have a long history in the Kansas City area. In 1910, reports indicate that Wyandotte County, home of KCK, produced significant amounts of corn, wheat, oats, fruits, vegetables, and dairy (Raj and Raja, 2016). KCMO still carries the nickname of Cowtown from its era as the second largest stockyards in the country in the late 1800s (Braude, 1992). With its central location in the heart of farm country, along with connectivity through river and railway access, Kansas City was a hub of agricultural trade. In the 1920s, parts of Kansas City and neighboring towns such as Shawnee, Kansas were known for thriving truck farms (Shawnee Town Museum, 2023). With the rich agricultural history of the heartland, including within its cities, it is natural that agriculture has continued through the urbanization of the Kansas City area.

Today, there are dozens of urban farm businesses and hundreds of community gardens, school gardens, and orchards throughout the KC metro area. The local food economy includes dozens of farmers markets, farm stands, Community Supported Agriculture shares, U-pick farms, online sales with pick up or delivery, community farms that offer food for volunteer time, farm-to-table restaurants, and a regional food hub.

The urban agriculture ecosystem also includes dozens of nonprofit organizations that support growers of all scales with resources and education, help eaters find local produce, advocate for better food policies in the region, and work towards making fresh, local food available to people with low income and/or low access to nutritious food.

The Case for Protecting Urban Agriculture Land in Kansas City

When people think about protecting farmland, they often think about large swaths of farmland at the edges of urban areas, which has been decreasing at an alarming rate due to suburban sprawl over the last 50 years. According to American Farmland Trust's Farms Under Threat 2040 Report, core counties in the Kansas City metropolitan area are projected to lose significant farmland in the next twenty years. Jackson County, Missouri is projected to lose 22,300 acres of farmland between 2016 and 2040 if development proceeds as currently projected. The same modeling predicts Wyandotte County, Kansas will lose 7,100 acres of farmland by 2040. Johnson County, Kansas, the suburban county south of Wyandotte County, is projected to lose 40,000 acres (Farms Under Threat 2040, 2022). These numbers primarily highlight the threat of sprawling development to existing farmland, but many of the same pressures exist today for vacant lots within the urban core of Kansas City.

American Farmland Trust (AFT) has led the movement of farmland protection in the US. The organization was founded in 1980 with three goals: protecting agricultural land, promoting environmentally sound farming practices, and keeping farmers on the land, and was behind coining the well-known phrase "No Farms, No Food," to raise awareness about the issue of farmland loss. Over the last 43 years, AFT has helped protect 6.8 million acres of farmland through agricultural conservation easements and advanced research, policies, and investments to achieve their goals (American Farmland Trust, 2023). In recent years, AFT has expressed interest in learning about the needs of farmland protection for farmers within cities and advancing resources, policies, and models for urban agriculture land protection.

Farmland protection success is typically measured by the thousands of acres. However, Cris Coffin, National Agricultural Land Network Director and Senior Policy Advisor with AFT, said, “When I think about those ¼ acre lots that are in really densely populated areas, they are about community and about education, about understanding and knowledge of ‘this is where food comes from.’ And about encouraging people to be able to get their hands dirty” (C. Coffin, personal communication, July 6, 2023). Julia Freedgood, a Senior Fellow and Senior Policy Advisor with AFT, noted, “When I think of urban agriculture, I don’t think of it in terms of the quantity of farmland. I think of it more as ‘what does it give to the community, what does that land contribute to the community?’” (J. Freedgood, personal communication, July 6, 2023). Both Coffin and Freedgood also believe that when you start adding up the small urban agriculture lots into ten or twenty acres of growing space within a city, they can make a significant impact in the local food system.

“When I think about those ¼ acre lots that are in really densely populated areas, they are about community and about education, about understanding and knowledge of ‘this is where food comes from.’ And about encouraging people to be able to get their hands dirty.”

Recognizing the value of urban agriculture, the 2018 Farm Bill directed the USDA to create the Office of Urban Agriculture and Innovative Production (OUAIP), which officially launched in 2020. The existence of OUAIP has increased attention and investment from USDA agencies and field staff with the Natural Resource Conservation Service and the Farm Service Agency. These agencies are beginning to recognize the challenges and opportunities with urban agriculture, highlighting the need for urban growers to ensure secure land tenure to make use of new federal resources. There are still high barriers to accessing federal resources, especially for Black farmers and BIPOC-led organizations, that need to be addressed to ensure equity for historically underserved farmers. As increased resources, policies, and practices come into play, it is critical that the grassroots organizations and growers that have stewarded this movement be the first to benefit, particularly BIPOC farmers and communities.

In each of my interviews with Kansas City area farmers, they were asked to rank the importance of protecting land for urban agriculture on a scale of one to ten. Every farmer answered at least ten, and three asked if they could rank it beyond ten, demonstrating the critical importance of land protection in the minds of growers. Each farmer I spoke with has secure access to land to grow on through private ownership, family ownership, organizational ownership, or a long-term lease of public land. At the same time, most individual farmers with private or family ownership do not have a plan to ensure their land remains in agricultural use. While they hope someone will carry on

the legacy of food production, each farmer had a different vision for and unique constraints around what that could look like.

While it feels like there is positive momentum for urban agriculture from the perspective of growers, organizations, and the federal government, several interviewees noted complicated relationships with local city and county governments. On one hand, most examples of successful land protection for urban agriculture are closely aligned with and supported by their municipal governments in accessing and securing land for long-term use or, in some cases, ownership. Local governments are often the largest landowners in a city through a variety of departments and systems including parks, floodplains, and land banks. Many Midwestern and Rust Belt cities have not recovered to their population peaks in the 1950s, 60s, or 70s, leaving significant amounts of now vacant land within urban areas. As cities turn greater attention toward planning and development for climate resilience, urban agriculture offers an opportunity to achieve these goals and make valuable use of vacant land within cities.

The City of Kansas City's Climate Protection and Resilience Plan includes "Growing and sharing local and nutritious food" as one of its six priority areas. The strategies include (1) Increasing production of local food and (2) Improving healthy and sustainable food access. These strategies are broken down further to include short-term and near-term actions toward achieving success in this field, including "Transform(ing) underutilized urban areas into food production areas" (City of Kansas City, Missouri, 2022, pp. 73-75). Similarly, the Kansas City Regional Action Plan includes food systems as one of the priority areas. Two of the strategies include (1) Scal(ing) up local food production to respond to increasing demand for local food and (2) Increas(ing) the number of neighborhood urban farms, gardens, and orchards. The plan states:

> Urban farms, gardens and community orchards sequester carbon and reduce food transportation costs. Urban gardens are gathering places and help build community identity and pride. They contribute to food security and public and ecological health. Larger gardens and orchards can also contribute to job creation and economic opportunities for a community. Promoting urban agriculture opportunities with grant funding and removing barriers to urban agriculture helps to pave the way for more urban farms, gardens and orchards. In areas with existing community gardens, educational assistance about how to maintain gardens and increase their productivity can help sustain the garden's broad set of community benefits for years to come (Climate Action KC & Mid-America Regional Council, 2021, p. 121)

The regional climate action plan recognizes and names the wide ranging and deep community benefits of urban agriculture, which should provide a framework for regional action on protecting land. Ginny Moore, Kansas State Director of The Conservation Fund, reinforced this idea. In an interview, she stated, "There is a lot of momentum in the climate space in Kansas City right now, and so the extent to which we can link urban farming with climate solutions is great" (G. Moore, personal communication, July 6, 2023).

Additionally, in April of 2023, Kansas City, Missouri completed an update to the city's comprehensive plan, known as the KC Spirit Playbook. While urban agriculture or food is not named specifically in this plan, two of the goals intersect and align with the goals of protecting land for growing food including, "(1) Healthy Environment: Promote a healthy city through environmental sustainability and resiliency and (2) Parks and Open Spaces: Protect and expand our system of parks, boulevards, and open spaces" (KC Spirit Playbook, 2023). Again, this shows that elected officials in our region are turning attention to the value of open space and its connection to community wellbeing and resilience.

The Kansas City metro area is also fortunate that both KCMO and KCK have land banks to help make properties accessible for purchase or lease. At this time, the Land Bank of Kansas City, Missouri owns more than 2,700 parcels of vacant land, and the Wyandotte County Land Bank owns more than 4,000 vacant lots (Land Bank of Kansas City, Missouri, 2023; Unified Government of Wyandotte County and Kansas City, Kansas, 2023). Given an abundance of vacant land, it would be beneficial for some of it to be available for urban farms, community gardens, or personal gardens. In the early years of the land banks, farms and gardens were frequent uses of lots. Over time, the priorities of both land banks have shifted towards using land bank lots to build infill housing, moving away from farms, gardens, or other community use. The Wyandotte County Land Bank is in the process of changing its policies, and recently completed a public engagement process to learn more about the community's needs and desires. The process engaged with 318 citizens over the course of five different events and through surveys, during which 74 percent of participants agreed that land bank lots should be used for gardens and farms (Unified Government of Wyandotte County and Kansas City, Kansas, 2023). With momentum underway in Wyandotte County, and new leadership at the Land Bank of Kansas City, Missouri, there is an important window of opportunity to strengthen policies and relationships between these entities and urban agriculture.

Dina Newman, Director of the University of Missouri Kansas City's Center for Neighborhoods and Founder and CEO of Kansas City Black Urban Growers, shared her

thoughts on the value of protecting land for urban agriculture. “Having access to land is important for generational ownership. I think we are going to see more supply chain disruptions like we had with COVID-19 and knowing that we have land to grow on is so important for our health and wellbeing, especially as food prices continue to rise” (D. Newman, personal communication, June 30, 2023). No matter the method of protecting land for urban agriculture and regardless of the type of food production, there is value to having land available to grow food for the health and resilience of Kansas City residents.

The Challenges to Protecting Urban Agricultural Land in Kansas City

As we explore solutions to protect land for agriculture in urban areas, it is important to understand the unique barriers and challenges that differ from traditional agricultural land protection. Throughout twenty interviews with people from diverse backgrounds and geographic regions, four themes of challenges to land protection emerged: (1) financial burdens, (2) conflicting land use values, (3) proximity to neighbors, and (4) city policies.

The high financial cost of protecting land in urban areas was noted as the top challenge in ten of the twenty interviews. While the price of land in urban areas relative to rural areas tends to be higher, which most people mentioned, the people I interviewed also talked about the high costs of conservation easements, high tax rates and high assessments of property values in urban areas, high water rates, and the expense of liability insurance. Accessing and protecting land for urban agriculture, will require significant investments of resources, partnerships, programs, and policies that incentivize urban agriculture through subsidized costs of land, property taxes, or agricultural water rates. Cities around the country have adopted a variety of strategies to lower the costs for urban farms and community gardens, recognizing that their value to the community and city goes beyond the economic impact of the food grown.

The second challenge noted in eight of twenty interviews is how urban agriculture is often viewed to conflict with cities’ values around land use. This comes up in terms of agriculture not being considered the “highest and best use” for land within an urban area. A tool commonly used in real estate development and city planning, “The highest and best use of property is essentially the reasonably probable use that results in the highest value” (The Appraisal of Real Estate, 15th edition, 2020). The highest and best use is determined by analysis of a property’s geographic and relative location, physical characteristics, and legally allowed uses, as well as the economic demand for different uses of the property. Analysis of these components yields estimates of the financial

impacts and benefits for each possible use and determines the preferred use for that site, which in most cases is some form of residential or commercial development (The Appraisal of Real Estate, 15th edition, 2020).

The focus on the potential economic return of land use often leaves little room to consider other benefits that land might offer to a community, such as improved social connection, healthier residents, cooler temperatures, cleaner air, reduced flooding, or ecosystems for pollinators. As a result of the prevalence of the highest and best use framework in city planning, urban agriculture is often viewed as a temporary use until something more profitable comes along. It is common to see cities create programs or policies designed to support community gardens or urban farms on city-owned land with short-term leases. Short-term leases disincentivize growers to invest in their farm or garden, often resulting in poor soil health, inadequate infrastructure, and less community engagement. Pantaleon Florez III, a farmer at Maseualkualli Farm in Lawrence, Kansas, shared an alternative framing he uses, "People say 'development,' but I say 'permanent removal' from agricultural use. When people say development it has that positive spin, but we need to recognize that we are also destroying at the same time" (P. Florez, personal communication, July 7, 2023).

"People say 'development,' but I say 'permanent removal' from agricultural use. When people say development it has that positive spin, but we need to recognize that we are also destroying at the same time."

Even in cities where urban agriculture is celebrated and supported by elected officials publicly, many people I interviewed highlighted the contradictory messaging from municipal governments, who frequently declare support for urban agriculture while simultaneously undermining the efforts of growers by issuing code violations, withholding access to publicly owned land, or displacing existing community gardens or urban farms when there is potential for "development." To protect land, people, particularly urban planners, elected officials, and city staff, must understand the value of agriculture as a land use worthy of investing in and fighting to preserve.

The third challenge raised in five interviews is the proximity of neighbors to an urban farm or garden, in contrast to rural farming where the nearest neighbors may be miles away. While creating gathering places for neighbors to grow food or connect with each other is often the goal of urban agriculture, it does not necessarily mean that everyone who lives nearby wants to participate or supports the effort. In the United States, there is a strong history and culture of valuing manicured lawns. An article in The Scientific American article titled "The American Obsession with Lawns" put forth, "Lawns connect neighbors and neighborhoods; they're viewed as an indicator of socio-economic

character, which translates into property and resale values. Lawns are indicative of success; they are a physical manifestation of the American Dream of home ownership" (D'Costa, 2017). To this day, many homeowners' associations and city ordinances ban gardens, particularly visible growing in a front or side yard. Given this culture, it is not surprising that some neighbors will go to great lengths to disrupt the growing of food in their neighborhoods. To protect farmland, urban growers must take extra care to build relationships with their neighbors, and work to maintain a growing space that is embraced by the community. On the flipside, urban communities should cultivate a culture of accepting diverse landscapes, including urban farms and gardens.

This brings us to the final common challenge raised across five different interviews, which relates to how city policies regulate urban agriculture. In 2010, the City of Kansas City, Missouri passed an ordinance to formally allow urban agriculture in many forms, including front yard gardens. While urban agriculture has always taken place in cities, ordinances can offer security to growers in the face of scrutiny or complaints. Even with a supportive ordinance, complaint-based enforcement tends to override security provided in the City's code. There are efforts underway to strengthen the KCMO code and create an urban agriculture ordinance in Wyandotte County.

In 2020, the Greater Kansas City Food Policy Coalition established the Urban Farm Zoning and Planning Task Force to "identify best practices and develop policy recommendations to ensure urban farmers are able to operate successfully" (Greater KC Food Policy Coalition, 2021, p. 2). The report identified seven primary challenges that act as barriers to urban agriculture in the Kansas City region: "(1) Unreliable access to vacant lots; (2) Development of prime farmland; (3) Access to affordable, clean water; (4) Restrictive land use regulations; (5) Limited accessory structures; (6) Prohibited sales and markets; (7) Complicated policies and processes" (Greater KC Food Policy Coalition, 2021, p. 8).

Many of these barriers to urban agriculture align with the specific barriers identified for land access, and several of them can be addressed through policy change to continue making city ordinances more friendly and flexible for urban agriculture. In order to protect land for growing food, it is important that the agricultural practices used in an urban setting are allowed under city code. Of course, the rules and regulations vary from city to city, even within the Kansas City metropolitan area, which makes it difficult to begin addressing policy barriers in support of urban agriculture.

Throughout interviews, several other challenges were raised by interviewees, including the need for expensive and time-consuming soil remediation to grow in urban areas, gentrification leading to displacement and turnover among garden leaders and

participants, and the complex laws governing land that vary by state and city. Despite the overwhelming challenges, urban farmers and community gardeners have persisted for generations. It is important and urgent to ensure that future generations will continue to have access to land to grow food.

The Priorities in Protecting Urban Agricultural Land in Kansas City

Throughout my interviews, three themes emerged as characteristics that are critical to successfully protecting land for urban agriculture in urban areas. First, regardless of the strategies or models used, protecting land for urban agriculture must center community power. People who are geographically closest to potential urban farmland and who have lived in the surrounding neighborhood longest should have a voice in decision making about an urban agriculture project. Regardless of who owns the land and how a project comes to be, the desires and needs of the surrounding community should be considered before purchasing or developing a property.

Second, urban farmers and gardeners should strive to develop mutually beneficial relationships with their neighbors. Whether the grower is an urban farmer running a business, a community gardener working with neighbors, or a home gardener growing for themselves, they have a responsibility to be a respectful neighbor and citizen. Not everyone will agree about how a space should look or operate, but an urban growing space should be clearly maintained in a way that cares for the people around it. While the depth of community engagement will depend on the type of garden or farm, the personalities of the growers, and the characteristics of the surrounding community, growers should always be open to hearing concerns from neighbors and working toward mutually beneficial solutions.

Third, it is essential that policies or programs to protect land for urban agriculture consider growing food to be a long-term use of that land. Additionally, growers who have access to land held for agricultural use should not be limited on the length of time they can use the site. Investing in soil fertility, weed management, infrastructure, and community relationships, require secure tenure without external pressures to leave the site.

Models of Urban Ag Land Protection

Given the complexities of urban land ownership, access, community relationships, wealth, politics, and traumatic histories and evolving stories of forced displacement, there is no one size fits all approach to protecting land to grow food in urban settings. Throughout this project, I have focused on community land trusts as strategy for protecting land for urban agriculture, and along the way learned about other models and approaches, which are summarized in the next section.

Community Land Trust

What it is

Community land trusts (CLTs) are typically nonprofit organizations governed by community members with the purpose of owning land and developing projects for the benefit of people in a community. Most often, CLTs are focused on creating homes to maintain permanently affordable homeownership opportunities for lower income families. However, the same CLT ownership model can also be used for agricultural land, commercial spaces, cooperative housing, or community green spaces (Grounded Solutions Network, 2023). The CLT model as it is known in the US today is rooted in the civil rights movement, led by and for Black farmers to create secure access to land and housing.

How it Works

The most common form of CLT involves an individual purchasing a house, while the land underneath it remains owned by the CLT. The homeowner then leases the land from the CLT in a long-term lease. The homeowners gain access to a more affordable pathway to homeownership, but also agree that when they are ready to sell the house, it will be at a reduced price to keep it affordable for the next homeowner (Grounded Solutions Network, 2023). There are, of course, tradeoffs with this model. It is recognized that the homeowner will not be able to build the full equity they might otherwise on an open market, however research shows that a CLT homeowner builds more assets than they would otherwise if they were renting.

In “Beyond Housing: Urban Agriculture and Commercial Development by Community Land Trusts” by Greg Rosenberg and Jeffrey Yuen, the authors identify three primary roles that a CLT could play in support of urban agriculture. First, CLTs can secure a stable and affordable supply of land to house urban agriculture projects. Several tenure

arrangements could be used by CLTs, including fee simple ownership, ground leases, deed restrictions, or easements. Second, CLTs can provide programmatic support, including program management, technical assistance, and other agricultural services. Third, CLTs can directly engage in agricultural production themselves. At times, CLTs take on more than one of these roles, such as securing land through fee simple ownership, managing farming operations, and hiring staff to till the soil (Rosenberg and Yuen, 2012, p. 12).

Throughout my interviews with CLTs that currently work in urban agriculture, I spoke with CLTs that represented each of these roles outlined by Rosenberg and Yuen. These CLTs either owned land or held long-term ground leases to secure land for urban growers, then leased the land to organizations, community members, or individuals to grow food. One also actively managed urban farms or community gardens. But for the most part, the CLTs preferred to focus on their expertise in real estate and leave growing food to other community partners or urban farmers. Most recognize a need for technical assistance, access to resources, and occasional interim support in maintaining a site.

Factors for Success

The CLTs interviewed for this project that are currently working in urban agriculture stressed the importance of only taking on land projects that the community has requested. Once a CLT is a landowner in a neighborhood, it is important to prioritize strong community engagement and mutually beneficial relationships between a CLT, the grower(s), and the neighborhood where the urban agriculture project is located.
A CLT also must have the ability and capacity to step in to manage a site if there is a transition of growers. Most CLTs have guidelines and systems to minimize the risk of a CLT-owned site not having a farmer or gardener to use it, but also noted they need to be prepared to mow a lot for a season until a new grower is found.
Four interviewees also spoke to the importance of having a diverse combination of experience within the CLT or among partners, including real estate and legal expertise, agricultural knowledge, and community development skills.

Challenges

In their analysis of CLTs engaging in urban agriculture land protection, Rosenberg and Yuen identified four challenges or risks, including: “(1) low potential for financial gains; (2) potential gaps in the organization's core competencies; (3) unpredictable funding and production; and (4) organizational inertia” (Rosenberg and Yuen, 2012, p. 17). Each

of these challenges should be considered when deciding if and who is the right entity to create or expand a CLT focused on protecting land for urban agriculture.

Community Land Trust Case Studies

Three organizations I interviewed are active CLTs who currently hold land for urban agriculture purposes. Their work is summarized below.

Athens Land Trust

Athens Land Trust (ALT) was founded in Athens, Georgia in 1994 with a focus on affordable housing. Their work has grown in response to the community-identified needs to support a thriving community in many ways. “Our mission is to improve the quality of life for all by preserving, protecting, and strengthening the fabric of community through education and the stewardship of land for purposes of affordable housing, conservation, agriculture, and economic development” (Athens Land Trust, 2023). ALT has protected over 20,000 acres through conservation easements across the state, helped 49 families become first time homeowners, operates two urban farms and supports a network of 12 community gardens, hosts a farmers’ market, and supports neighbors with a variety of needs.

In an interview with Heather Benham, Executive Director of Athens Land Trust, she acknowledged that housing, conservation, and agriculture don’t come together in one CLT very often. “There are a lot of conversations at the national level about trying to get them to work more together, but it can be challenging when people are coming to land with very different mindsets” (H. Benham, personal communication, June 9, 2023). Traditionally, conservation land trusts work to keep people off the land to protect it, while community land trusts have focused more on how to make land accessible to people to use for different purposes. “From the beginning, there has been a little different idea here focusing on how we use land to benefit the needs of the community, which includes a mix of uses” (H. Benham, personal communication, June 9, 2023). Over the next three years, ALT is working to build out their model project, which will include twelve acres of mixed affordable housing, farmland, and accessible wooded areas.

NeighborSpace

NeighborSpace is a nonprofit urban land trust in Chicago, Illinois that preserves and sustains land for gardens on behalf of community groups. Their primary role is securing land, but they also provide elements of programmatic support. “We support community gardens – through property ownership, insurance, water, stewardship, education, tool

lending, project planning, fundraising support, troubleshooting, and more — so that community groups can focus on gardening and on their community-building vision, generating food, beauty, play, health, and safety for their neighborhoods" (NeighborSpace, 2023). While NeighborSpace is an independent organization, it was established out of a planning effort in the 1990s in which the City of Chicago, the Chicago Park District, and the Forest Preserves of Cook County came together and established a 20-year intergovernmental agreement to establish and fund the organization. Their goal was to give structure and legitimize the community use of open space in underserved neighborhoods. It remains a semi-governmental organization, with seven members of the board of directors appointed by various city departments and officials (B. Helphand, personal communication, June 30, 2023).

NeighborSpace currently has 125 gardens in their network, and of the land they own, most of the land has been purchased for $1 from the City of Chicago. "If we didn't have the close relationship with the City, we would have 6 or 7 sites. Chicago owns tens of thousands of lots, we do purchase land from the County Land Bank, and occasionally from private owners" (B. Helphand, personal communication, June 30, 2023). In the beginning, their work centered on protecting land for existing community gardens on city owned land, which NeighborSpace came in to legitimize and protect. Now their work tends to be more working with communities who want to create a garden on a vacant lot, and NeighborSpace works to secure the land.

Seed St. Louis

Seed St. Louis is a nonprofit organization in St. Louis, Missouri that supports over 250 community gardens, school gardens, and urban orchards throughout the region. In 2007, the organization created a land trust to protect gardens or agriculture projects from future development. The land trust is a 501(c)2 land holding entity, under the parent 501(c)3 organization, which exists exclusively to secure land for others to grow on. Today, there are 16 urban agriculture projects that participate in the land trust, all of which were existing gardens with strong community engagement prior to entering the land trust. In order for a new garden to join, they must have completed Seed St. Louis' development process, must have been successfully operating for at least five years, and most agree to the lease terms and organizational bylaws of the land trust (Seed St. Louis, 2023).

In an interview with Sara Ashe, Chief Operating Officer of Seed St. Louis, she highlighted some of the challenges with the structure of two separate entities, including expenses, insurance, liability, and restrictions of different entity types. Ashe noted that Seed St. Louis is in the process of revisiting their land trust structure through their strategic planning process (S. Ashe, personal communication, July 5, 2023). The

evolution of models used to protect land and the need for flexibility is a common thread among most interviewees.

Conservation Land Trust

What it is

In contrast to the community land trust movement, the history of conservation land trusts is rooted in protecting privately owned land for the benefits it offers as habitat for wildlife, recreation for people, providing ecosystem services such as improving water or air quality, and as working agricultural lands. "The land trust movement began with the understanding that—although using the tools of the private market—the intention of setting aside the resources was to create a public benefit" (Johnson, 2014). While many conservation land trusts focus on natural ecosystems, others play an important role in protecting working lands, such as family farms, from development pressure.

It is generally accepted that the first conservation land trust was The Trustees of Reservations, formed in 1891 in Massachusetts "for the purposes of acquiring, holding, maintaining and opening to the public...beautiful and historic places...within the Commonwealth" (Johnson, 2014, p. 3). The largest and most well-known conservation land trusts include The Nature Conservancy and The Audubon Society. It is worth noting that these conservation efforts were led by wealthy, white individuals, and many of the tools used today are primarily used by and provide benefit to wealthy landowners (Johnson, 2014, p. 6). As conservation land trusts continue to evolve, increasing emphasis should continue to be placed on equity as who benefits financially, environmentally, and socially from these tools.

How it Works

Conservation land trusts typically use two tools to protect land:

- Fee simple: The land trust buys or receives donations of land to own with the commitment to protecting open space and potentially offering public access to the land.
- Conservation easements: A private landowner sells or donates a conservation easement to a conservation land trust. The landowner maintains ownership of the land, but the use of the land is permanently restricted through the easement held by a land trust.

To protect agricultural land, conservation easements tend to be used in peri-urban or rural settings to ensure that land stays in agricultural use in perpetuity. Conservation

easements have not been used widely to protect agricultural land in urban settings, but there is growing interest in how this tool could be applied in an urban setting.

Factors for Success

Throughout interviews, I heard two common themes that contribute to the success of conservation land trusts, particularly in urban settings. First, land protection is expensive, so there needs to be a source of funding to purchase land or conservation easements, and for ongoing support of the easements. Donated land or donated easements make land protection viable, but real estate transaction costs and other ongoing costs such as property taxes, insurance, and annual inspections to ensure baseline conditions must be taken into consideration.

Additionally, several conservation land trusts noted the value of being part of alliances and coalitions working on land conservation. The Missouri Land Trust Coalition and the Land Trust Alliance were mentioned as critical resources for peer-to-peer learning and collaboration.

Challenges

Historically, the focus of conservation land trusts has been more on land and natural environments rather than on people's relationship with the land. While that is changing, the legacy of excluding people from the stewardship of and access to land presents a challenge. Agriculture is viewed as harmful by some conservationists, while others embrace agriculture as a form of protecting open space and an important land use.

Another challenge is how expensive it is to put an easement on land, and in urban areas, the devaluation of the land with a conservation easement is likely more dramatic than in rural areas. Furthermore, urban agriculture does not meet the criteria for programs like the USDA's Agricultural Conservation Easement Program (ACEP), which is discussed further in the recommendations below.

Example Conservation Land Trusts

Two organizations interviewed are conservation land trusts in the Kansas City metropolitan area, Platte Land Trust and Heartland Conservation Alliance, both of which are members of the Land Trust Alliance and exist to protect public access to natural spaces. Platte Land Trust is accredited to hold conservation easements and lists agricultural land as a conservation priority. Each organization is profiled in more detail

under the recommendations section about working with existing land trusts in the Kansas City area.

Agrarian Commons

What it is

The Agrarian Trust is a nonprofit organization that first launched as a project to convene a group of stakeholders to work together on developing innovative models of agricultural land ownership. From this collective work, Agrarian Commons was created as a "necessary and innovative land-ownership model that addresses the current realities of how land is owned, how tenure and equity are conveyed, and how land stewardship is carried out. This model challenges corporate and large-scale agriculture land-ownership models and offers a new, sustainable approach for the small farmer" (Agrarian Trust, 2020). While the first seeds were planted in 2013, the Agrarian Commons model came to fruition through the work of committees in 2019 and 2020, and the first cohort of twelve Agrarian Commons launched in 2020. An Agrarian Commons holds land in communities for the purpose of:

- Ecological, restorative agriculture and community building
- Land access and land justice for next generation farmers
- Long-term lease tenure and equity interest for farmers and ranchers
- Stewardship and ecosystem investment
- Viability of farms, ranches, and local agrarian economies (Agrarian Trust, 2020).

How it Works

Each Agrarian Commons is a nonprofit entity incorporated as a 501(c)(2) to hold land in their local community, under the 501(c)(3) of Agrarian Trust. A 501(c)(2) is a tax-exempt entity that is organized exclusively for the purpose of holding titles to property. The Agrarian Commons develops a local board, which includes representatives of the national Agrarian Trust organization, as well as local farmers, partners, and stakeholders, to make decisions centered on the community needs. While the model shares some elements of conservation land trusts and community land trusts, it is the only model that is centered exclusively on agricultural land access (Agrarian Trust, 2020). For a detailed comparison of the structural differences between conservation land trusts, community land trusts, and agrarian commons, view the chart created by Agrarian Trust in the appendix A (Agrarian Trust, 2021).

Factors for Success

The Agrarian Commons model is still in the early phase of development, so it is difficult to assess the effectiveness of this model. Of the initial group of twelve commons, two are in urban areas, so there is a precedent for both rural and urban models of Agrarian Commons. To apply to become an Agrarian Commons under Agrarian Trust, a group must have a group of at least five people who are willing to lead the effort, including people with skills such as legal services, fundraising, communications, real estate transfer, agriculture, and farm support. In addition, the project must have a viable founding land project, with the goal of integrating more land into the commons over time. Ideally, each Agrarian Commons would hold eight to twelve pieces of farmland, although to date, the majority only have one.

Challenges

In an interview with Johanna Rosen, Commons Alliance Facilitator at Agrarian Trust, she shared that establishing the 501(c)(2) entities has proven to be a more complex process than anticipated. They are beginning to explore other options, such as a 501(c)(25) in which the title holding entity can have multiple (up to 35) parent entities (J. Rosen, personal communication, June 30, 2023). At the date of writing, Agrarian Trust is working to consolidate the learning from the first twelve projects. While they are still accepting applications, the website states that they have limited capacity to take on new projects as the model continues to evolve (Agrarian Trust, 2023).

Examples of Agrarian Commons

Two of the twelve Agrarian Commons currently include urban agriculture projects. Their work is summarized from online profiles as an example of how this model is being enacted.

Central Virginia Agrarian Commons

Central Virginia Agrarian Commons, exists to “support BIPOC control of land for building resilient regional food systems.” This Agrarian Commons will hold both rural and urban land, with the goal that “urban lands will complement rural land in the commons, enabling rural producers to have a ready-made market for their produce while enabling urban farmers to benefit from the ability to grow right where they live and further food sovereignty within larger, racially diverse communities” (Agrarian Trust, 2023) The Central Virginia Agrarian Commons recently completed a fundraising campaign to purchase a 5.12-acre urban farm on the edge of Richmond, Virginia. The Petersburg Oasis CommUNITY Farm, a project led by farmers Duron Chavis and

Tyrone Cherry III, will focus on food access and education for students at nearby schools, engage university students in agriculture, become an incubator farm for beginning farmers, and provide on-site sales of fresh produce to neighbors (Agrarian Trust, 2023).

Southwest Virginia Agrarian Commons

Like the Central Virginia Agrarian Commons, the Southwest Virginia Agrarian Commons seeks to protect both rural and urban farmland. The Commons is currently fundraising to purchase and permanently protect an existing 3.5-acre urban farm in Roanoke, Virginia. If successful, the farm would be acquired by the commons and a 99-year lease would be granted to Cameron Terry of Garden Variety Harvests, a Black farmer who has been producing food for the Roanoke community on borrowed and leased urban yards since 2017. Secure land tenure would allow Terry to expand production of vegetables, fruits, and flowers to feed the community using regenerative farming practices (Agrarian Trust, 2023).

Grower Ownership

Finally, the most straightforward option to protect land from development pressures is to support growers in owning land themselves. While this does not ensure that land stays in food production through transitions of growers, it does give them secure tenure that is often lacking on leased or borrowed land. In a city like Kansas City, where there is still land available and relatively affordable compared to other parts of the country, land protection strategies should include providing technical and financial support to purchase land independently. Organizations like the Detroit Black Farmer Land Fund and others are prioritizing individual ownership for Black farmers as a means of wealth building for Black families. In the Detroit Black Farmer Land Fund's 2022 Annual Report, they write, "From 15% of [Black] farmers in the 1910s to a mere 1% now; from our gentrifying neighborhoods and in the face of speculative development, we are smashing the narrative that the 'best use' of vacant land is based on financial worth alone (Detroit Black Farmer Land Fund, 2022). By helping Black growers own land, they can feed themselves, their families, and their communities, and generate income from the farm and build equity through land ownership.

Factors for Success

For grower ownership to be realistic in an urban setting, there needs to be a source of land within a city that is accessible to urban growers. Accessibility includes the purchase price, the purchase process, and whether urban agriculture is an allowed and

supported use. Many cities have established land banks to return vacant and abandoned properties into productive use, which is one pathway that many urban growers have used to purchase or lease land over the years. While nearly everyone who mentioned land banks in interviews noted challenges with their policies and politics, they still prove to be a primary means of land access for food production.

Other key components to purchasing land include financial support paired with technical support. Tepfirah Rushdan, co-founder of the Detroit Black Farmer Land Fund and Co-Director of Keep Growing Detroit, stated, “The land purchase process, no matter how much they try, it's just difficult. It’s one of the reasons why we need the Black Farmer Land Fund, because I think the technical assistance may be worth more value than the actual check that’s written” (T. Rushdan, personal communication, July 7, 2023). In addition to providing support to growers, Keep Growing Detroit has been involved in a cross-departmental group working to revise the City of Detroit’s process for purchasing land and permitting urban agriculture through a new Land Based Projects program. While it remains complex to navigate, Rushdan noted that having a grower at the table of this city committee to advocate for the needs of urban farmers and gardeners has been important to creating a better process for growers to purchase land and receive the appropriate permits (T. Rushdan, personal communication, July 7, 2023).

Challenges and Opportunities

Many of the challenges of private ownership are obvious - it is expensive to purchase the land, to pay taxes, and to build infrastructure. The systems of purchasing land, accessing capital, and navigating city zoning and ordinances can be complex. For those who can make the investment and navigate the necessary systems, private land ownership offers independence in decision-making and opportunities to generate wealth for the farmer and future generations. Within the scope of private land ownership, there are opportunities to support land linking programs in times of transition to make it more likely that the land stays in agricultural production.

Recommendations for the Kansas City Area

Multifaceted and Collaborative Approach

One theme that came through in most conversations with land trusts is that flexibility and patience are critical to the success of protecting land for urban food production. Each piece of land, each neighborhood, and each farmer is unique and requires an individualized approach to engaging and structuring a scenario that works best for the people involved. In order to help people understand what options are available and choose what works best for themselves and their communities, the first step towards land protection in urban areas should involve forming a coalition of advocates including neighborhood residents in areas with high concentrations of vacant land, urban farmers and gardeners using variety of land tenure models, organizations working in urban agriculture, real estate professionals, land trust experts, funders, and city or county staff to develop a variety of solutions to meet the diverse needs of growers, neighborhoods, and municipalities throughout the metro.

This coalition should be led collaboratively by organizations working in this space, with a focus on identifying resources and partners within the community to establish a suite of tools for land protection in Kansas City. The second role of this coalition is to educate the growing community and landholders on the available models and tools. Throughout interviews, several coalition-based models stood out as critical to launching or maintaining land protection initiatives. Local First Arizona's Farmland Preservation Program Manager, Danielle Corral, managed the Coalition for Farmland Preservation, a group that works on a "comprehensive approach to farmland preservation through conservation easements, policies, planning, public awareness campaigns, incentives, and creative partnerships" (Local First Arizona, 2022). Another organization, Twin Cities Community Agricultural Land Trust (TCALT) is a community-driven network made up of board members, collaborating organizations, and volunteers that work together towards long term, affordable access to community governed land for growing food. The organization's primary role has been sharing information and resources, while other collaborators focus more on direct farmland protection through conservation easements (Twin Cities Community Agricultural Land Trust, 2013). Both of these examples highlight the need for funding to organize collective work on urban farmland protection.

In an interview, Corral said, “When I got to this job, we were trying to figure out the ‘how’ of farmland preservation. I quickly realized we need to answer the ‘why’ of it for most people. Why is it important to save farmland? Answering that ‘why’ has become a huge part of my work” (D. Corral, personal communication, June 15, 2023). As Kansas City begins this work of protecting urban land for green space, it will be critical to build a coalition of people and organizations who create and believe in a common “why” across multiple perspectives including food access, food sovereignty, community health, agricultural education, economic development, neighborhood connectedness, climate resilience, and ecological stewardship.

“When I got to this job, we were trying to figure out the ‘how’ of farmland preservation. I quickly realized we need to answer the ‘why’ of it for most people. Why is it important to save farmland? Answering that ‘why’ has become a huge part of my work.”

Work with Existing Land Trusts

Kansas City’s approach to creating or partnering with a land trust should be rooted in community-driven ownership or decision-making power. Land should generate wealth for the community rather than extract wealth. Even though land trusts don’t generate personal wealth in the same way that private land ownership traditionally has, community ownership creates a pathway toward food sovereignty, health, resilience, and wellbeing. At this time in Kansas City’s organizational landscape and the challenges outlined by Roseberg and Yuen, it makes the most sense to partner with existing land trust organizations, rather than develop a new entity. Three of four potential land trust partners that serve the Kansas City metropolitan area expressed an interest in exploring the potential of holding land or conservation easements in partnership with another entity to ensure that land is available for food production in Kansas City for future generations. Below are brief summaries of each organization, which outline the geographic scope and programmatic interests of each land trust. Partnerships should be pursued with any of these organizations to meet the diverse needs of urban farmers, gardeners, and communities throughout the Kansas City metropolitan area.

Heartland Conservation Alliance

Heartland Conservation Alliance (HCA) is a conservation land trust serving the Kansas City region, with a particular focus along the Blue River, a major body of water that flows through the metropolitan area. HCA’s work focuses on improving water quality for the community and future generations, developing opportunities for communities to engage with nature, and protecting land to preserve our natural and cultural heritage. HCA is an

accredited land trust and agrees that agricultural use aligns with their vision and work. HCA owns 40 acres of primarily woodland along the Blue River, which is protected by a conservation easement (Heartland Conservation Alliance, 2023). With their geographic focus on the Blue River, they would likely primarily be a partner for protecting land through fee simple ownership or conservation easements for urban agriculture within a geographic area.

Kansas City Community Land Trust

The Kansas City Community Land Trust (KCCLT) recently expanded and rebranded from their roots as the Marlborough Community Land Trust. The organization is currently focused exclusively on providing access to affordable housing, making homeownership affordable for generations of Kansas City residents to come (Kansas City Community Land Trust, 2023). With a commitment to thriving communities, KCCLT expressed interest in exploring how urban agriculture might fit within their work (R. McQuillen, personal communication, July 15, 2023). Many of the characteristics and values of a housing-focused CLT also align with the values of urban agriculture, particularly for community-rooted growing projects such as community gardens. It would be valuable to explore a model that partnered KCCLT's expertise in real estate and land ownership with other organizations' experience in growing food and connecting farmers and gardeners to land to grow on.

Kansas Land Trust

The Kansas Land Trust protects and preserves lands of ecological, agricultural, scenic, historic, or recreational significance in Kansas. We work with landowners, communities, and other conservation organizations to protect our natural heritage. To date, KLT has preserved more than 40,000 acres, across 80 properties in Kansas, with more than 1,300 of those acres being open to the public (Kansas Land Trust, 2023). KLT was not interviewed for this report so their interest in urban farmland should be addressed in future research.

Platte Land Trust

The Platte Land Trust is an all-volunteer organization with a mission of protecting land, natural resources, and open space in the four-corners area of Missouri, Kansas, Nebraska, and Iowa for the benefit of today's communities and future generations (Platte Land Trust, n.d.). Their focus is primarily within a three-hour drive of the Kansas City area and the majority of their land protection work is holding conservation easements for private landowners. Platte Land Trust recognizes agricultural land as part

of their conservation mission and is interested in exploring conservation easements as a tool for protecting land for urban agriculture in the Kansas City area (C. Dodds, personal communication, June 8, 2023).

Long-tenure Public Land Access

One of the most common ways that growers access land in cities, particularly in more densely populated and geographically condensed cities than Kansas City, is through long-term tenure on publicly owned land. This often includes leases of land from city or county parks, schools, or other underutilized city-owned land. This model tends to be more accessible to urban agriculture projects led by and for a community, such as a community garden, a neighborhood orchard, or a cooperatively run urban farm. Private urban farm businesses tend to have less access to public land, which is traditionally held for community use rather than private businesses. However, Kansas City holds an abundance of city and county-owned land, so it would be worth pursuing long-term leases of underutilized public land for both urban farms and community gardens.

In some cases, such as Common Ground Incubator Farm in Lawrence, Kansas or Juniper Gardens Training Farm in Kansas City, Kansas, underutilized public land has been designated and developed for use by individual farmers while they participated in training and business development. Typically, an incubator model may have long-term tenure, but only allows for short-term use by a private farm business, with the idea that the grower will move to a more desirable or permanent location when they complete training or feel equipped to expand. Common Ground initially offered three-year leases with an opportunity to renew up to three times. Pantaleon Florez, owner of Maseualkualli Farm, became aware that he was basing his farm management practices on his temporary tenure at Common Ground. “If I have nine years and know I’m out, I’m not going to plant things like fruit trees and make that investment. I am a no-till, no-fossil fuel farmer, so I was already invested in healthy soil, but I also know that it takes three to five years for no-till to really start showing big time benefits,” Florez shared. After four years of organizing and advocating, he successfully convinced the County to remove the time limits on the leases at the incubator farm (P. Florez, personal communication, July 7, 2023).

It is important to keep in mind that private land ownership is not always the end goal for aspiring farmers, nor will it ever be feasible for many growers. As new policies and programs are developed to support beginning farmers in accessing land, secure, long-term tenure must be an option on public or collectively held land.

Improved Pathway to Land Bank Properties

The Land Bank of Kansas City, Missouri and the Wyandotte County Land Bank have both created opportunities for growers to purchase some of the thousands of vacant lots throughout the bi-state metropolitan area. The land banks on both sides of the state line have been the source of vacant lots that are now home to many urban farms and community gardens, and at one time this was a welcomed use of the abundant vacant land within KCMO and KCK. As development pressure has increased and speculative land purchasing from outside the community has become common, land banks have faced scrutiny around who has been able to buy their properties, for what purpose, and at what price. In 2021, several local news outlets investigated the Land Bank of Kansas City, Missouri and reported on a wide array of issues including secretive sales of dozens of lots to politically connected families, rejecting legitimate proposals from adjacent homeowners or neighborhood associations for gardens or gathering spaces, and ongoing complaints about the lack of accountability to neighborhood associations and residents (Hendricks, 2021). In a few interviews, similar challenges arose with land banks across different cities, including anecdotes of purchase proposals from Black growers being rejected in favor of white urban farmers (T. Rushdan, personal communication, July 7, 2023).

Some cities are taking action toward more equitable and transparent processes for purchasing land bank lots. As noted earlier, the Wyandotte County Land Bank went through a public engagement process to update its policies and procedures and 74% of participants agreed that land bank lots should be used for gardens and farms (Unified Government of Wyandotte County and Kansas City, Kansas, 2023). In 2019, the City of Detroit, Michigan undertook a planning effort to improve the process of purchasing and permitting Land Based Projects. On their Land Based Projects website, the City writes, “The City recognizes the role neighborhood stewards have played in preserving community through their investment into these projects over time. The City commits to enacting transparent standards that will allow these projects to thrive, and creating processes that are clear, fair, and understandable” (City of Detroit, 2023).

Even in cases where efforts are being made to make land bank lots and other public land more accessible to urban growers, several interviewees noted ongoing challenges and need for accountability and partnership with land banks and city programs for urban agriculture land access. As city staff, land bank commissioners, and elected officials continuously turn over, ongoing relationship building, and advocacy will be required to sustain progress within a city in support of favorable land bank processes and relevant permits.

Land Link Services

Land Link services create opportunities for farmers who are seeking land to connect with landowners or holders who would like someone to grow on their land or purchase it for agricultural use. Land Link services were not a focus of this research project, but discussions about the process of grower transitions on urban land came up in many interviews. It is also important for growers who determine that private ownership is their priority to know where to look for potential land. It is also a valuable resource for growers who desire to keep their urban farms or gardens in food production as they transition out of agriculture. The existing land link services near the Kansas City region currently serve traditional farmland in rural areas, such as AgKansitions, a program of the Kansas State University Office of Farm and Ranch Transitions, or LandLINK operated by FCS Financial. Neither of these programs would reach or meet the needs of farmers or gardeners seeking land in an urban area.

Land link services in an urban area should consider the same values of prioritizing community needs and decision-making power, even when dealing with private land ownership or tenure. Additionally, information and use of a land link platform should be freely available to both landowners and land seekers to incentivize use of a platform to facilitate land connections. In addition to a platform to connect landholders and land seekers, resources such as lease agreement templates, real estate guidance, liability insurance options, and conflict resolution support should be included in a comprehensive land link program.

Conservation Easements

Conservation easements are a tool used to permanently secure the land as open space in perpetuity. Typically, a private landowner donates or sells the conservation easement, which is a voluntary deed restriction on the use of the land, to a land trust. The land trust, an organization with a mission of preserving open space for the public benefits that conservation provides, holds the easement and is responsible for ensuring that the property continues to comply with the conditions of the easement. While the property may be bought and sold or passed down to future generations, the easement remains in place. A conservation easement will, in most cases, lower the market value of a property because it cannot be developed. In some cases, the donation of a conservation easement can qualify as a tax-deductible charitable donation, which may be an incentive to the landowner. Some programs and policies exist to purchase conservation easements from landowners or cover a portion of the costs, but most commonly, a landowner will cover the costs to place an easement on a property as a form of ensuring the legacy of their land aligns with their values of land stewardship for generations to come.

American Farmland Trust is known for the tagline, “No Farms. No Food.” and they have recently added “No Future” to this list. The rapid loss of farmland to development and consolidation is concerning for the future of food in the US. From 2001-2016, 11 million acres of farmland were lost to development (Freedgood et al., 2020). Conservation easements on agricultural land or working land have become a critical tool to protect family farms and ranches. The USDA Natural Resource Conservation Service (NRCS) runs the Agricultural Conservation Easement Program – Agricultural Land Easements (ACEP-ALE) to support the use of conservation easements that allow for agricultural production and prohibit development of commercial or residential buildings on the land. Through ACEP-ALE, the NRCS partners with eligible entities including nonprofit land trusts to buy agricultural conservation easements on working agricultural lands. The NRCS identifies criteria and priorities to determine program eligibility and priorities to help rank applications. Historically, agricultural land in urban areas would be excluded from eligibility or rank low on the criteria for ACEP-ALE.

Without access to this federal funding, it will be necessary to find resources elsewhere to make conservation easements in urban areas feasible. The Central Arizona Land Trust, Coalition for Farmland Preservation, and the City of Phoenix recently teamed up to invest $1,000,000 in a Farmland Preservation Program. The first project funded the purchase of a conservation easement on Maya’s Farm, a 3.3-acre urban farm where farmer Maya Dailey has grown full-time on leased land since 2006. This will ensure the land remains in agricultural use in perpetuity, giving Maya’s Farm secure tenure on land with high development pressure (Coalition for Farmland Preservation, 2022). This case made use of funding from the American Rescue Plan Act to invest in a resilient local food system in Phoenix. It could serve as a model for other cities to collaborate with urban farmers and land trusts to ensure existing urban farmland will remain in agricultural use.

There has been some interest in creating an urban agriculture conservation easement program within the USDA. In 2021, members of the congress introduced H.R.5173 - Urban Agriculture and Community Food Security Act to propose the idea of a new Urban Agriculture Conservation Easement Program. This bill did not pass and has yet to be reintroduced in the 118th Congress, so is unlikely to be incorporated into the 2023 Farm Bill. However, the USDA and NRCS have demonstrated increased interest in urban agriculture since the 2018 Farm Bill created an Office of Urban Agriculture and Innovative Production, so there may be other pathways to improve access to ACEP-ALE for urban farmers. Over the last two years, the USDA has launched 17 urban service centers, with more on the way. In July of 2023, Kansas City was announced as one of ten new cities to have a Farm Service Agency Urban County Committee (USDA

Farm Service Agency, 2023). Through these new offices, existing NRCS practices and programs are being adapted to meet the needs of urban growers, so it is possible that ACEP-ALE will be adapted to include criteria to prioritize urban farmland even without the creation of a new urban-specific program.

BIPOC Farmer Land Fund

Over the last century, Black farmers have lost 90% of the farmland they owned in 1910, adding up to sixteen million acres and approximately $326 billion dollars in generational wealth lost for Black farm families (Francis et al., 2023). The history of discriminatory policies and practices is well-documented and includes that the Emancipation Proclamation freed slaves but did not allow them to own land, lack of documentation for land purchase or transfer, racist implementation of the GI Bill and USDA lending, heirs property laws, redlining, and gentrification (Duke Sanford World Food Policy Center, 2020).

In addition to the loss of Black farmland landowners, it is also important to acknowledge that Indigenous peoples had their land stolen from them by the US government as the country was established and colonized. Similarly, many People of Color from around the globe are resettled in the US due to forces of colonialism and violence displacing them from their own homes. Many of the people who grow our food and make the US and global food system function are from Mexico, Central America, and South America. Each of these racial groups continues to face unique barriers to farmland ownership in the US, and many organizations and farmers around the country are working to repair this harmful legacy of white supremacy in land ownership. A few examples include organizations such as New Roots for Refugees, Detroit Black Farmer Land Fund, the Black Farmer Land Fund, and the LANDBACK movement.

Given this history, many BIPOC urban farmers seek to own their own land, and any efforts to make farmland ownership possible should prioritize BIPOC farmers. At the same time, there is also a legacy of cooperative land ownership in BIPOC communities, which should be recognized and honored in urban farmland protection work. All collaborative work to ensure access to urban land to grow food should center the needs and interests of BIPOC farmers and community members.

Conclusion

There is not a one-size-fits-all approach to a community-driven, farmer-focused approach to protecting land for growing food in cities. Community Land Trusts offer a valuable tool to hold land for the benefit of neighborhoods and allow people to have a voice in how the land is used. Where urban farms or community gardens currently exist with community support, a CLT would be the right tool to ensure that land remains available to the community to grow food in perpetuity. In cases where land is owned privately by an urban farmer, a conservation easement could help carry on the farmer's legacy by permanently restricting that land to agricultural use for the next generation. Public land, such as underutilized park land, should consider offering transparent and clear pathways for community members or groups to access to the space to grow food. As individuals and organizations transition out of growing food, there should be a way for the next wave of urban growers to gain access to that land. The ever-evolving landscape of cities, funding, organizations, growers, and neighbors will require a CLT and any other supporting services or programs to be adaptable in structure and collaborative in nature. This work will require grounding in the needs of the community, and an unwavering commitment to the value of protecting land for the simple act of growing food to feed ourselves and our communities.

Grateful. Foundational. Love. Complicated. Central. Life. Symbiotic. Evolving. Hopeful. Steward. Adoration. Family. Symbiotic. Dirty. Complicated. Intimate. Appreciative. Enduring. Complicated. Reciprocal. Connected. Life. These are the words interviewees chose when asked to describe their relationship with land in just one word. The word "complicated" appeared three times out of 22 interviews, which, given our country's complex and ugly history and values around land ownership, makes perfect sense. For most people directly involved in stewarding or protecting land, the words reveal a deep level of care and reciprocity, which guides and fuels their work in this challenging pursuit. Now is the time for Kansas City to act to create pathways for land access, particularly for BIPOC communities and individuals, to have the power to permanently steward land in their neighborhoods and determine the future of their food systems.

Future Research

The high financial cost of protecting farmland in urban areas is the greatest challenge to success in this field. Throughout this research, several funding mechanisms were identified to support protecting urban farmland. Further research is needed to explore how different funding tools work and how they might be adapted to the unique socio-political landscape of Kansas City.

Additionally, future research should investigate the perspectives of neighbors of urban farms and community gardens who are not involved growing food to gain a deeper understanding of community views on urban agriculture. As urban farmers, gardeners, and sustainability advocates push for investments and policies to protect land, it will be helpful to have a broader understanding of community views on the subject.

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Appendix

The following charts and graphics are shared with permission from Agrarian Trust. It is important to note that these documents reflect a plan for the Agrarian Trust and Agrarian Commons structure, governance, and ownership that dates in 2020. As of September 2023, this structure was under review and revision, so the information may be outdated. The chart also uses broad generalizations about the different land protection models that are not universally applicable. It still presents an helpful overview of some key distinctions of the different models.

COMPARING STRUCTURES

	CONSERVATION LAND TRUSTS	COMMUNITY LAND TRUSTS	AGRARIAN TRUST (AT) AGRARIAN COMMONS (AC)
MISSION	Protection of land for habitat, water quality, open space, natural/cultural/ historic resources.	Protection of land as a resource for social and community benefits e.g. affordable housing.	Protection of whole farms and natural ecosystems for land access, equity, and affordability for farmers, health of soils, water, biodiverse systems, and agrarian enterprises interconnected to community.
LEGAL STRUCTURE & TOOLS	501(c)3 nonprofit. Holds perpetual conservation easement on privately owned land. May also own land in fee and manage for conservation values.	501(c)(3) nonprofit, owns land in fee. Often conveys use and equity to individuals via ground leases.	501(c)(3) Agrarian Trust supports and oversees multiple local 501(c)(2) and 501(c)(25) Agrarian Commons affiliate land holding entities. Agrarian Commons conveys use, equity, and secure tenure through leasehold interest to farmers.
	Conservation easements keep land in private ownership; bought/sold/ consolidated/fragmented/and speculated on. If land trust closes, easements must be conveyed to nonprofit with similar mission.	Bylaws usually prohibit land from ever being sold. If community land trust closes, land must be conveyed to nonprofit with similar mission.	Bylaws prohibit land from ever being sold. If local AC closes, AT must steward while new AC formed. If AT closes ACs are assigned to named 501(c)(3).
	Conservation easements generally prohibitory - of subdivision, development, extraction, etc.	Community values protected via long-term ground lease conveyed to individual(s). A third-party conservation land trust may hold easement as well.	Food system, ecological and equity values protected via leasehold interest conveyed to farmers and/or community-based organization. Third-party conservation land trust may hold conservation easement as well.
GOVERNANCE	Vary from small and flexible to large and quasi-public. Governed by board of directors that may include farmer representation.	Governed by board of directors with community, resident, and ally representation.	AT governed by representative national board of directors. AC governed by majority local board including farmer/lessee, community stakeholder, and AT representation.
OWNERSHIP, ACCESS & EQUITY	Conservation land trust holds specific rights through conservation easement with land and improvements held privately, may hold land in fee.	Land owned by the community land trust. Improvements either shared, rented, or owned outright by lessee.	Land owned by the local AC and improvements either shared, rented, or owned outright by lessee. AT supports each AC, with collective benefits across ACs.
	All other property rights remain owned in private markets, rarely guaranteeing farming or conveyance to farmers. Conservation land trusts rarely involved when protected land is leased or sold.	Tenure conveyed to qualifying individual at the discretion of the community land trust, in accordance with its mission and public benefits.	Tenure conveyed to working farmers/ranchers, via process managed by AC and supported by AT to promote equity and land justice.
	Easements rarely give concrete advantages to small/beginning/ disadvantaged farmers. Lands owned in-fee often leased to established farmers, at market rates, for modest terms.	Long-term, secure, equity-building tenure conveyed via affordable lease.	Long-term, secure, equity-building tenure conveyed via affordable lease to farmers/ranchers/stewards. Commons designed to decomodify and regenerate land and support agriculture.
PRODUCTION & STEWARDSHIP	Protects land and natural resources via prohibitory language and enforcement rights of conservation easement, very rarely to protect or support farms and agriculture on the land.	Protects land, housing, infrastructure, and community assets to support access, affordability, and equity.	Protects and supports land, farms, and agriculture for diversified and sustainable food production, business viability, and shared ecological stewardship.
	Protects farmland, very rarely requires active farming, conservation practices, or addressing the ecological degradation of soils, water, and ecosystems caused by agriculture.	Protect and support social/economic goals through ownership, lease, and governance structure.	Community centered, farmer/rancher/steward lead, nationally supported representative structure creates shared commitment to agricultural viability, agrarian community wealth, and soil, water, and overall ecosystem health.

Please note: Each type of entity shown is of great value to the earth and society. These generalizations are for purposes of comparison; and may not be true in every instance.

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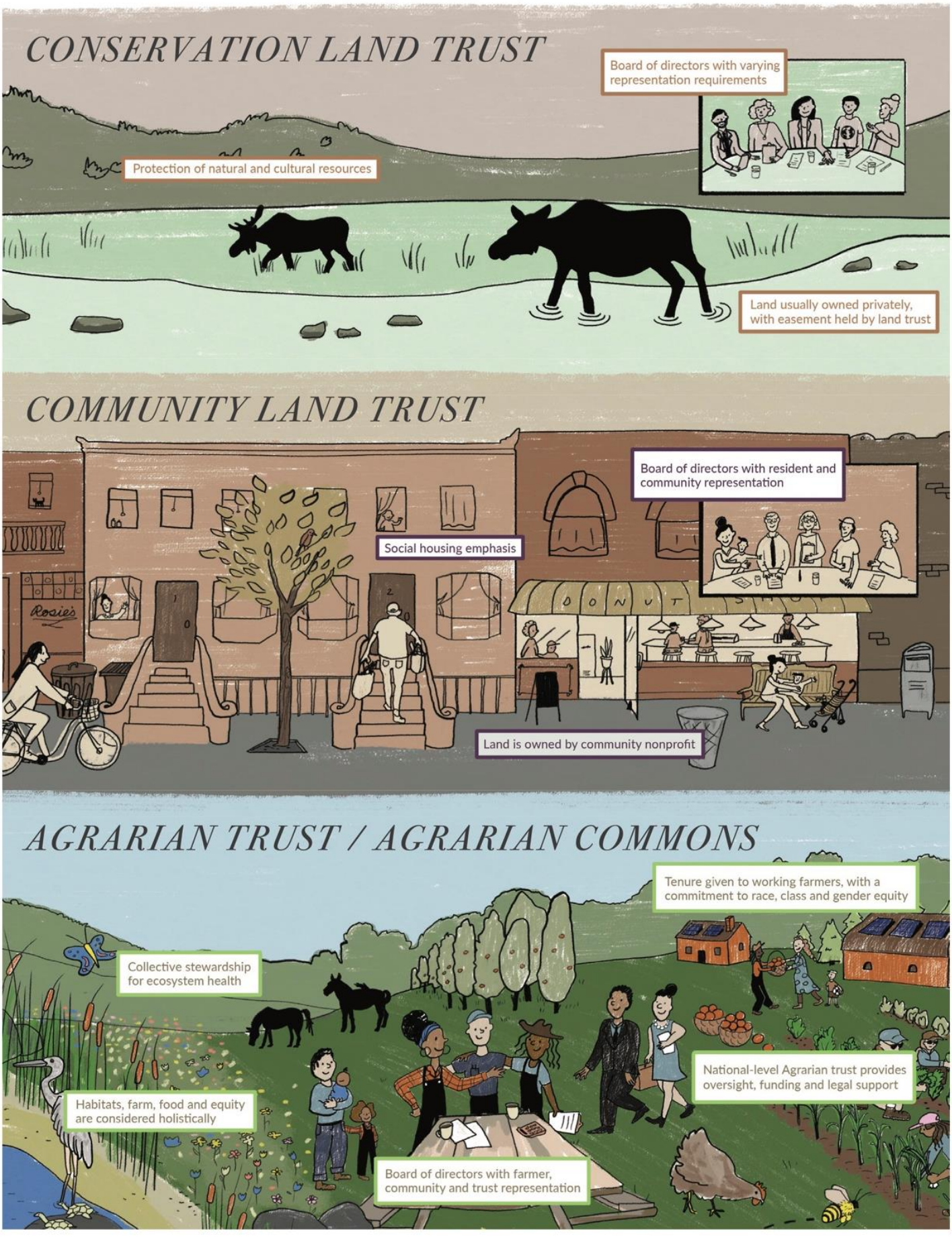
AGRARIAN TRUST



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Ami Freeberg is the Assistant Director of Strategy and Partnership for Cultivate Kansas City, a nonprofit working to grow food, farms, and community in support of a healthy, sustainable local food system for all. Ami first completed an internship at the organization in 2008, then returned in 2010 where she spent the first seven years of her career engaging the community with urban agriculture in Kansas City. After five years working in other Kansas City-area nonprofit organizations at the intersection of urban agriculture, community development, and environmental action, she returned to Cultivate Kansas in 2021. In her spare time, Ami founded and organizes Longfellow Farm, a volunteer-run neighborhood farm in the heart of Kansas City, Missouri, that has been growing strong since 2015. She delights in watching her young son munching on fresh vegetables and digging in the dirt at the neighborhood farm. She holds a bachelor's degree in Sociology from Grinnell College and this project completes her master's degree in Sustainable Food Systems through Arizona State University.

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Swette Center for Sustainable Food Systems is a unit of ASU School of Sustainability