

November 1, 2018

# Urban Growers' Collaborative Project

UC San Diego  
SCHOOL OF MEDICINE

Center for  
Community Health



UC San Diego  
SCHOOL OF MEDICINE

Center for  
Community Health

UCSDCOMMUNITYHEALTH.ORG



# Project Goals

**Understand barriers & opportunities for collaboration among small urban farmers to improve viability and entry into new local markets**

- 1.) Support viability of small urban farms**
- 2.) Increase fresh food access for communities in need**







# Project Phases

## One

- Review research on urban ag viability
- Assess product supply of growers' group
- Identify opportunities for TA
- Understand interest/potential for collaboration

## Two

- Assess local demand
- Determine recommendations for collaborative action/project/product
- Provide TA to access local markets

## Three

- Study the feasibility of the determined collaborative action from Phase 2





# Phase Two Objectives

- Assess demand by understanding barriers/opportunities, interest and mission alignment of local buyers and consumers
- Recommendations for collaboration
- Provide technical assistance



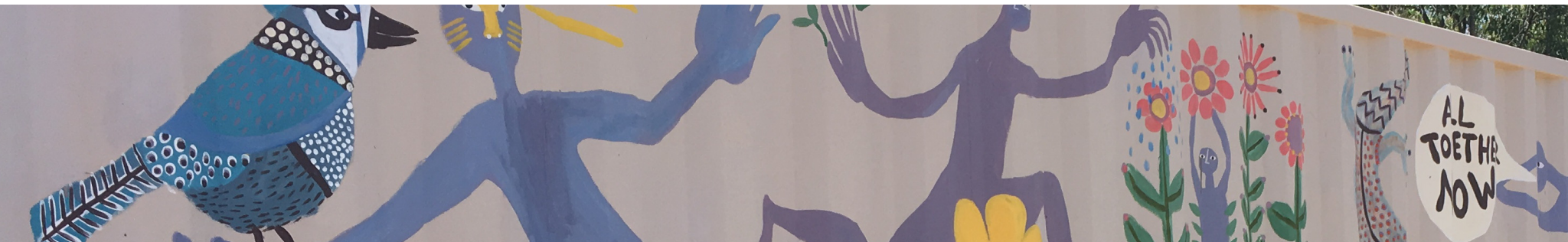
# Research Questions

## Buyers:

- Who are the buyers of local produce?
- What are they buying?
- What barriers/opps do they have to increase purchases of local produce?
- Are they interesting in supporting local urban farms?

## Consumers:

- Who are the consumers of local produce?
- Where do they purchase local produce?
- What have their experiences been, if any, with CSAs?
- Are they interested in supporting local urban farms?





# Methodology:

## Buyer Interviews

- 17 individuals from the following categories: independent grocers (11), restaurants (2), caterers (1), small-scale distributors (2), and small-scale processor (1).
- Selected for interview based on commitment or interest in: serving low-income communities, buying/selling locally grown produce.



# Buyers: Findings



# Interested in Local?

- **11 of 17** see local farms as important to their business's success or mission
- **9 of 17** define "local" as grown in San Diego County.
- **11 of 17** currently source local foods
- **3 of 5** who are not sourcing local are interested in doing so



# Perceptions about Local Urban Farm Sourcing

## Advantages

- Lower delivery costs
- Increased shelf life
- Fresher products
- Better tasting products
- Access to unique/exotic varieties
- Creative partnerships
- Connection to grower
- Sense of community
- Supporting local economy

## Disadvantages

- Cost
- Inconsistency
- Increased logistics
- Limited availability/diversity
- Poor communications
- Lack of food safety plans
- Lack of professionalism

# Opportunities to Support Urban Farms

**9 out of 17** feel they currently support local urban farms. **16 of 17** expressed interest in doing more.

**What could/would they do?**

Purchase products (10) see *pg. 4*

Promote/partner on dinners/events (7)

Provide biz advice/mentorship (2)

**Additional suggestions/ideas:**

Focus on high-end restaurants, develop a buyers' co-op, create a farmer directory for buyers.





# Methodology:

## Consumer Survey

- **Participant Sample (n = 196):** Must live or work in San Diego County. Connected because they are local food/ag enthusiast, urban/sustainable ag supporter, education/health supporter. Sent link via partners.
- **16 questions** to assess **shopping habits** related to local produce and **interest in CSA**.

# Consumers: Findings







# Shopping Habits Related to Local Produce

**96% purchase local produce**

18% Multiple times/wk

29% 1x/wk

29% 1x/mo

21% Few times/yr

4% Never

## Where?

71% Farmers' markets

64% Grocery stores

15% CSA

15% Farm stands

# Top Motivators to Purchasing Local

1. I want to support local growers/farmers.
2. Food is fresher because it has traveled shorter distances.
3. I want to support the local economy.





# Top Barriers to Purchasing Local

1. Limited to how often I can get to locations that sell locally grown produce.
2. The price of locally grown produce.
3. I can't find the diversity of produce to meet my needs.



# Interest & Experience with CSAs

84% **not** currently CSA members (n=161)

16% are CSA members now (n=31)

Of the 37% (n=59) that have been members at some point,  
**the top reasons they terminated membership are:**

- 1. Price per box too high**
- 2. Product mix didn't meet needs**
- 3. Lack of time for cooking/processing**
- 4. Lack of choice about products in share**
- 5. Too little diversity of products in share**



# Interest in Urban Farm CSA Program

83% (n=156) said they would consider joining

17% would not because of: lack of flexibility, cost, inconvenience

## Important CSA Attributes (ranked):

1. Diversity of produce items
2. Choice of frequency of share
3. Choice of specific items in share
4. Home or office delivery
5. Excellent customer service
6. Flexibility payment options (e.g. Mode to pay/how often)
7. Recipes & produce storage tips

# What's Next?

## Collaborative Project Decision





# Recommendations

*See pages 3-5 in Summary & Project Recs doc*

## Discussion:

- Resource hub
- Urban grower multi-farm CSA
- Urban farm broker





# Insights from Blosser Urban Garden





# About the Farm

- 4 acre certified organic urban garden in Santa Maria, CA
- 2 farm locations
- Harvesting 10-12 crops
- 2 full-time employees
- Sales outlets: CSA, on-site farm stand, wholesale, restaurant/café sales



# About the Farmer

## *Jerry Mahoney*

- Farming family of over 75 years
- Jerry has been farming for over 40 years
- Owned and operated 300 acre conventional, 200 acre organic, and now 4 acres organic urban farm



## Struggles/Areas for Improvement:

- CSA member retention
- Financial tracking
- Customer service and engagement
- Marketing
- Prioritizing efforts
- Serving surrounding community



## Strengths/Opportunities:

- Expert at farming and organic practices
- Only certified organic urban farm in the area
- Great connections with other farmers







# Technical Assistance Provided

## Social Media & Customer Service

- Hired a social media & customer service operator
- 6-8 hrs a week
- Answers emails, posts and engages on social media, promotes specials, creates promotional material

## Sales & Outreach

- Outreach for potential new markets
- Establish and maintain partnerships with new markets
- Create and send weekly fresh list
- Receive orders & create and track invoices

## Community Engagement

- Planning garden events
- Connecting with community orgs
- Better serve the surrounding community by accepting EBT
- Developing customer surveys



# Successes

- Farmer spends more time farming
- New CSA sign ups and better retention (16 sign-ups in 1 mo)
- Increased traffic at the farm stand
- New restaurant/cafe orders (\$4000/mo in sales)
- Increased number of customers from the neighborhood
- More community recognition (schools, Chamber of Commerce, non-profits, HR departments)



# What's Next?

- Select pilot project(s)
- Identify funding for business plan and/or developing the pilot
- Comprehensive business plan \*see pg. 5 Summary and Project Recs.





# Collaborators



# Funders

*The Urban Growers' Collaborative Project is funded by:*



**Alliance Healthcare Foundation**  
Advancing health and wellness for those in need.™





# QUESTIONS?

**Elle Mari, Director**

Urban Food Environments  
Center for Community Health  
University of California, San Diego  
emari@ucsd.edu  
619-681-0655

**Kate Mahoney, Project Coordinator**

Urban Food Environments  
Center for Community Health  
University of California, San Diego  
c2mahoney@ucsd.edu  
619-681-0675