

10 facts about Urban Agriculture in **CAPE TOWN**

About The City

Located at the south western tip of the African continent, Cape Town is a city of around 4.2 million inhabitants, surrounded by farming regions which produce a wide range of wine, fruit, meat, dairy, and vegetable products. Around 45% of South Africa's agricultural exports move through the Western Cape region, which boasts a large, profitable agricultural sector, with ownership concentrated in few hands, and ownership patterns little changed since the end of legal Apartheid. Similar dynamics persist in the urban geography of the city of Cape Town, whose poorer residents, overwhelmingly People of Colour, mostly live in the sandy, densely populated, low-lying Cape Flats to the south and east of the city centre. Their physical marginalisation is mirrored by their economic marginalisation, which has knock on effects in many areas of life, including in their access to food.

Cape Town's most important urban food source is under threat

The Phillipi Horticultural Area, around 20km south of the city centre, enjoys cooler temperatures and drought resilience thanks to its location on an aquifer. Despite contributing fresh vegetables and herbs to the city's food basket throughout the year, this area is under constant risk of disappearing due to urban sprawl.

There are more than 6,000 small scale and micro farmers on the Cape Flats

More than a hundred farmers grow food in groups on the Cape Flats just outside of Cape Town, mostly with insecure tenure on school or municipal land. The majority are women of pension age.



Gugulethu Urban Farming Initiative delivers fresh produce to the door steps of local Early Childhood Development Centres. Photo: Vuyani Qamata

The environment is unfavourable for growing vegetables

Sandy soils, burning sun, and strong winds worsened by frequent periods of drought and water shortages make it difficult to produce vegetables on the Cape Flats. Violence, vandalism, and a lack of access to necessary infrastructure further undermine production.

Much of the organically grown produce is not sold to local residents

NGOs, social start-ups, and funders have tended to encourage producers to target wealthy customers. Although this provides income for some, most urban farmers lack access to markets in their own communities.

Urban Agriculture is promoted by political authorities

The municipal government and the provincial Department of Agriculture promote urban agriculture as a solution to food insecurity and poverty through policy, and supply subsidised inputs such as seeds, manure or labour, along with dozens of NGOs which provide training, technical support, inputs, and access to markets.

Urban agriculture does not make a significant contribution to food security or livelihoods

Urban farmers are among the most food insecure in the Cape Flats, and revenues are low. Production is too low to supply local neighbourhoods with fresh food, and most urban dwellers are not able to afford fresh farm produce. A lack of marketing structures results in some fresh produce being thrown away.

South African food systems are highly corporatized

From seed to plate, small producers face high barriers to entry into the formal food market, including competition from artificially cheap produce. Meanwhile urban farming barely plays a role on the informal market as a lack of transport and coordination, and insufficient volumes of production, hamper access to markets.

Food insecurity is often considered a rural problem, but in the Western Cape more urban than rural households are food insecure.

The multifunctional benefits of urban agriculture can only be unlocked with political will

A broader understanding of the socio-economic and political structure of the food system needs to be developed. Urban agriculture can provide dietary diversity, nutritional education, community cohesion, and the greening of school land.

Cape Town's geography is still shaped by Apartheid, with consequences for food systems

Apartheid-era spatial planning produced a highly segregated city. The negative consequences of this include reduced food access for People of Colour, as well as diminished viability for urban agriculture initiatives.

COVID-19 underlines the urgent need for a holistic urban food system

Cape Town needs a food system that incorporates urban agriculture into community-led systems, and fosters solidarity of the kind already seen when urban farmers join forces with others to create community-led projects such as community kitchens and neighbourhood-level dialogues on the future of food.