

**Developing Urban Agricultural Educators for the 21st  
Century**

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**Innovative Idea**

## **Developing Urban Agricultural Educators for the 21st Century**

### **Need for the Innovation**

Nationwide, there are more openings for agricultural educators than there are qualified candidates to fill the vacancies (Ingram et al, 2018). Urban agricultural education is growing in importance as the urban population continues to grow. Research priority number 3 of the National Agricultural research agenda (Robert et al, 2016) focuses on developing a professional workforce for the challenges of the 21st century. This includes both urban farmers and those educators responsible for preparing them. Urban agricultural educators face unique instructional (Roberts et al, 2017) and technical challenges (Oberholtzer et al, 2016) associated with their professional role. The objectives of this project were (1) identify professional challenges, needs, and interests of urban agricultural educators in a major metropolitan service area of the southern United States, (2) collaborate with key stakeholders and potential partners for experiential learning in urban settings, and (3) propose a large comprehensive initiative for external funding.

### **How it Works**

Current agricultural educators in the target area were sent a questionnaire to identify specific challenges within the scope of their job as well as determine their interest in various forms of professional development and collaboration with Texas A&M University-Commerce and its community college partners. Agricultural educators were also asked to recommend names of a campus and career-technical education administrators to participate in future focus group discussions about facilitating opportunities for early field experiences and student teaching for preservice agricultural educators. Using the data collected through the questionnaire, focus groups, and meetings with industry stakeholders' priorities and projects for collaboration will be identified and external funding sought for support. The analysis of needs and plans will also be used to develop one or more Large Comprehensive Initiatives.

### **Results to Date**

A questionnaire was developed, piloted with a panel of experts, and distributed to a large sample of current agricultural educators in the targeted urban setting. An initial meeting with one community college partner has occurred and a meeting with another community college partner is scheduled for the near future. We anticipate the scheduling of focus groups with educational administrators within a few weeks of data collection, an analysis of results from the questionnaire recently distributed. Additionally, we are compiling a list of urban agricultural stakeholders from industry, governmental agencies, and non-profits for a face-to-face meeting early in 2022.

### **Future Plans**

This project should lead to stronger relationships between Texas A&M University-Commerce, urban agricultural educators, administrators and urban agriculture industry stakeholders. We hope to establish new sites for urban agriculture internships, early

field experiences for preservice agricultural educators, and student teaching and as well provide professional development opportunities relevant to urban agricultural educators. Ideally, a network of urban agricultural stakeholders will emerge that will help sustain agricultural education in this setting for the foreseeable future.

**Resources Needed**

This project is supported with an award from USDA-NIFA Non-Land Grant Colleges of Agriculture Capacity Building Grant over a two-year period beginning in September 2021.

Resources funded under this project include:

Partial summer pay for PD	\$ 6,000
Graduate assistant for two semesters	12,800
Travel (for meetings and reporting at conferences)	<u>3,200</u>
Total less indirect costs	\$22,000

In addition to these direct expenses, office and computer access for the graduate assistant was needed along with access to university-provided accounts for Qualtrics and Zoom.

## References

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