# Exploring Urban Agriculture, Food Access, and Public Transit Through Professional Development

Jason Boggis, Dr. Alma Perez, and Dr. Robert (Bob) Williams
College of Agricultural Sciences and Natural Resources

## Introduction

Urban agriculture continues to grow as an important strategy for improving food access, promoting environmental sustainability, and strengthening community engagement. As urban agriculture grows in popularity, school-based agricultural educators must work to better understand the unique challenges and opportunities found in urban agricultural settings. Historically, agricultural education has primarily focused on rural communities. This leaves many educators with limited exposure to urban agricultural systems (Martin et al., 2024). A professional development activity was conducted for agricultural educators in the DFW area to showcase urban agricultural initiatives through experiential learning. Participants visited two urban farms, and reflected on the interconnectedness of urban agriculture, community development, education, public health, food access, public transportation, and public safety. This experience demonstrated the value of place-based professional development helping agricultural educators better understand urban food systems and the broader social and community contexts in which they operate.

## Steps/Phases

Planning for this professional development experience began well before the event. This tour was developed with the vision of utilizing Dallas Area Rapid Transit (DART) to visit urban farms. Restorative Farms and Big Tex Urban Farms were contacted to coordinate farm visits and help facilitate the tour, a travel route was developed, and a schedule was coordinated around the availability of the nonprofits and the frequency of DART trains. While weather conditions prevented DART travel, future workshops will incorporate public transit to provide educators with firsthand experience navigating a mass transit system utilized by 220,000 riders daily (DART, 2026). After the tour participants ate lunch together at a local restaurant, providing additional time for networking and professional discussion. Conversations focused on observations from the tour and ways urban agriculture can be integrated into classroom instruction and student learning experiences. Each participant completed a brief reflection sheet describing key takeaways, potential classroom applications, and recommendations for future professional development.

## Results to Date and Implications

Urban agriculture functions not only as a food production strategy but also as a tool for strengthening communities (Ilieva et al., 2022). This workshop was designed to be immersive and highlight organizations contributing to meaningful community development through urban agriculture. Participants discussed the broader role of urban agriculture in addressing food insecurity and supporting community revitalization in urban areas. Urban farms are often located in or near historically underserved neighborhoods that are food deserts. The visited farms demonstrate how localized food production and education initiatives can increase access to fresh food while also providing spaces for community engagement, education, and workforce development. Throughout this workshop participants reflected on their observations and discussed how urban agriculture and hydroponic crop production can be taught in the classroom.

## Future Plans

Future professional development programs will incorporate public transportation as originally intended. In addition to visiting urban farms, future tours may include riding the DART to a grocery store, purchasing groceries, and returning by train to help participants better understand how transportation infrastructure influences food access within urban communities. Additionally, workshops will continue to promote agricultural literacy and strengthen educators' understanding of urban agriculture and food access. This professional development was funded through a grant. After the grant period ends, workshops will require a cost-recovery registration fee.

## Costs and Resources

Expenses included transportation and participant meals. DART passes were pre-purchased. Due to weather conditions, the group traveled together in a passenger van.

| Costs included: | |
|---|---|
| DART day passes: (12 X $6) | $72 |
| Passenger van and fuel: | $100 |
| Participant lunch: (8 X $15) | $120 |
| Estimated Total Cost: | $292 |

## Acknowledgement

This initiative was partially funded through USDA NIFA NLGCA Award No. 2023-70001-40987.

## References

Martin, M. J. , Mumma, K, & Van Der Kamp, B. (2024). Implementing school-based agricultural education in an urban context Journal of Agricultural Education, 65(3), 115—128. https://doi.orc/10.5032/iac.v65i3.2601

Ilieva R., Cohen N., Israel M. , Specht K., Fox-Kämper R. , Fargue-Leliévre A., Poniiy L, Schoen V, Caputo S., Kirby., Goldstein B., Newell J., & Blythe C. The Socio-cultural Benefits of Urban Agriculture: A Review Of the Literature. Land, 11 (5). Retrieved from https://bar.nsf.gov,'blblio/10373899. https://doi.org/10.3390,land 1 1050622

Dallas Area Rapid Transit (2026). DART facts. https://www.dart.org/about/about-dart/about-dart/dart-fact