

## The Urban Agriculture Project

31 May 2023

Agroecology urban farms are crucial for establishing sustainable enterprises and localized food systems by incorporating agroecological principles and practices into urban agriculture. The Urban Agriculture Project is currently working on developing three agroecological farms in Gauteng Province, specifically in Kathlehong and the City of Ekurhuleni Municipality, as well as Newlands and South Hill in the City of Johannesburg Municipality. Our primary objective is to establish five sustainable enterprises at each project site, with a particular emphasis on engaging women and youth within the community.



*Figure 1 The women at the South Hill, Johannesburg pictured here with the local ward councillor Coucillor Faiza Chaime: Left Thembi, Theresa, Zama, Nthate Pusho, Councilor Faeza Chame, Charles, Mam Bella, Mam Doris and Mandla*

Agroecology urban farms prioritize sustainable farming methods, such as organic cultivation, agroforestry, permaculture, and biodiversity conservation. These practices reduce reliance on synthetic inputs, minimize soil erosion and degradation, conserve water, and promote ecosystem health.

Urban farms bring food production closer to consumers, reducing the need for long-distance transportation and associated greenhouse gas emissions. By growing food locally, agroecology farms contribute to shorter supply chains and enhance food security by decreasing dependence on external sources.

Agroecology emphasizes the use of composting, vermiculture, and other techniques to recycle organic waste into nutrient-rich compost. By closing the loop on nutrient cycling, urban farms reduce the need for chemical fertilizers and minimize waste sent to landfills, contributing to a circular economy.

Urban farms provide opportunities for community engagement, education, and skill-building. They serve as valuable educational spaces where people can learn about sustainable farming practices, healthy eating, and environmental stewardship. This knowledge empowers individuals to make informed choices and participate in building sustainable food systems.



*Figure 2 Members of the Community from the South Hill site harvesting kale and spinach to sell to the surrounding community (Left: Tshepo, Mam Doris, Theresa and Mandla).*

Agroecology urban farms can generate local employment opportunities and contribute to the local economy. They often prioritize fair labor practices, promote social inclusivity, and provide fresh and nutritious food to underserved communities. By reinvesting resources back into the local community, they contribute to the development of sustainable and resilient local economies.

Urban farms utilizing agroecological principles can act as mini ecosystems that provide various ecosystem services. They support pollinators and beneficial insects, improve air quality, regulate microclimates, and contribute to urban biodiversity.

These farms can also enhance urban resilience by mitigating the impacts of climate change and providing green spaces. Agroecology emphasizes the conservation of traditional and heirloom seed varieties, promoting genetic diversity and preserving cultural heritage. By saving seeds, urban farms contribute to maintaining resilient and adapted plant varieties, reducing dependence on commercially produced hybrid seeds.

Overall, agroecology urban farms offer a holistic and sustainable approach to food production within urban environments. By adopting regenerative practices, engaging the community, and prioritizing local food systems, they contribute to building more resilient, environmentally friendly, and socially just enterprises.