California's Urban Shared Agricultural Zones

Last Modified on 03/22/2018 11:38 am EDT

Urban Agriculture Incentive Zones (UAIZ)

The state of California passed a bill for a program providing tax incentives to owners of vacant land in cities, in exchange for converting their land to agricultural use.

Why Did We Select This Case?

California is taking first steps in tackling urban issues through sharing solutions in food and common space, and have extended the bill despite limited initial response from landowners as it takes time for initiatives to be adopted and normalised.



Source

About the Case

The state of California passed the bill on the 28th of September 2013. San Francisco

was the first city to adopt the Urban Agriculture Incentive Zone program on the 7th of August 2014, followed by several other cities. In the State Assembly Bill No. 551, an Urban Agriculture Incentive Zone is defined as “an area within a county or a city and county that is comprised of individual properties designated as urban agriculture preserves by the county or the city and county for farming purposes.” In order for land to be eligible for the UAIZ program it must be within the limits of a city with a population of minimum 250,000, be between 1/10 of an acre and 3 acres in size, have no permanent habitable structures, and only be put to agricultural use, which includes community gardens, nurseries, education centers, crops, and animal husbandry.

This initiative especially addresses two significant challenges to farmers, availability of land and secure land tenure. The program relieves tax burdens on landowners as they apply for reduced property tax assessments when partaking in the UAIZ program.

Community development and resource sharing is supported as UAIZ land must include interaction with the public in the plan for their farm or garden, either as educational activities or as an open community garden. As a result, community regeneration and development is encouraged.

> "In a 130-day temperate growing season, a 10x10 meter pot can provide most of a household's total yearly vegetable need, including much of the household's nutritional requirements for vitamin A, C and B complex and Iron." - Halton Region Sustainable Food Security Report

Gardening and farming provides the city with vibrant green space, ecological benefits, and opportunities for recreation. The initiative creates jobs in urban farming, incubates micro-businesses, and increases accessibility of nutritious health food and food security, as well as education about fresh food production. The zones increase food resources and contribute to food security for neighbourhoods wishing to localise and reduce food waste as a result of the transportation shrinkage. Access to healthy food options provides community health benefits by lowering rates of obesity, diabetes, and heart disease.

Putting the land to use can reduce blight and illegal dumping on vacant properties. The program limits and closely regulates the use of pesticides and fertilisers on the produce and maintains landowner compliance with the contract through annual inspections by the County Agricultural Commissioner, as well as the Recreation and Parks Department.

Impacts & Outcomes

San Diego, Los Angeles, Sacramento, San Jose, Santa Clara, and Long Beach have joined the UAIZ program while Chula Vista and other counties are considering taking part. A bill extending the act beyond 2019 to 2029 has been passed unanimously (assembly bill no. 465) on the 28th of September 2017. While the government remains optimistic, the rate at which landowners join the program has been slower than expected. Currently only a few parcels are registered as Urban Agriculture Incentive Zones in California. Furthermore, the media has questioned whether this incentive program is ideal given the priorities of cities, such as San Francisco, that are experiencing housing crises and climbing rent.

Sources

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