STL Urban Ag Workshop*

8-Oct-2026

Meet us in St. Louis — building a climate-resilient urban food system

Executive Summary























** The Climate Analogs Academy is a USDA NIFA Extension Climate Hub Partnerships Project (20236701339348) led by Washington State University's Center for Sustaining Agriculture and Natural Resources (CSANR).*

Agriculture & Food Systems Institute

CSANR
Center for Sustaining Agriculture and Natural Resources
Washington State University

Saint Louis University

Taylor Geospatial

WashU

Executive Summary[1]

Why this workshop: Increasing the practice of Urban Agriculture in St. Louis has the potential to generate socio-economic, environmental, and public health benefits, while addressing management challenges the city faces today. Organizations invested in growing Urban Ag in St. Louis can learn from peers in other cities and regions with active Urban Ag communities, supporting development of an informed, science-based strategy for the expansion of Urban Ag in St. Louis. This workshop explored the key factors that underpin thriving Urban Agriculture programs in the US, how to translate them for St. Louis, and how impacts of a changing climate will influence strategies for St. Louis.

Key Outcomes: Guided discussions during the workshop identified priorities and generated recommendations including increased funding for Extension support of urban ag; strengthened communications mechanisms targeting communities, especially in North St. Louis; policy reforms to ease zoning restrictions on LRA parcels; data-driven prioritization of LRA parcels for expansion of urban ag; and the creation of a new organization or expansion of an existing one, responsible for expanding urban agriculture. Specific neighborhoods, notably those strongly affected by the May 2025 tornado, were highlighted as priorities for engagement and investment through urban agriculture.

What's next: The recommendations generated at the workshop will be socialized with the broader Urban Agriculture stakeholder community in St. Louis. Top priorities will be formulated into a vision and action plan and presented to the City of St Louis, neighborhood and community leaders, with the aim of identifying organizations willing to champion them.

Who Contributed: The Agriculture & Food Systems Institute, in partnership with Washington State University's Center for Sustaining Agriculture and Natural Resources convened regional and national partners representing civic, research, and industry partners. Contributors included local and national Urban Ag experts, Specialty Crop Extension specialists from across the country, including regions currently in St. Louis's climate future, and Urban Ag experts from Dallas and New York City, both of which have seen successful expansion of Urban Ag in recent years. Local contributors including Eckert's Farm in Belleville and the new Jackie Joyner-Kersee Food, Agriculture & Nutrition (FAN) Center in East St. Louis hosted farm tours. The Post Building hosted a reception where a moderated panel featured Maxine Clark (Delmar DivINe, etc.) and Elliott Kellner (President, Taylor Geospatial).

---

[1] This Executive Summary is extracted from the full workshop final report, which was assembled and primarily written by the workshop organizer, Dave Gustafson, an independent scientist who performed all workshop-related activities under a contract with the Agriculture & Food Systems Institute, based on funding received from USDA/NIFA Project # 20236701339348. Major assistance on workshop planning and execution was provided by Rachel Opitz (Taylor Geospatial).

Key Recommendations

Research:

1. Assess and report on how climate is likely to impact STL Urban Agriculture through 2050 and beyond, including northward movement of pests and diseases.
2. Evaluate the suitability of WashU's "St. Louis Dashboard" as a provider of demographic and public health data to support STL Urban Agriculture planning.
3. Facilitate the creation of a gap analysis and ecosystem map for STL Urban Ag, identifying where resources and research are needed.

Funding:

4. Advocate for the funding of multiple long-term Urban Ag positions in UM/UIUC Extension.

Policy:

5. Advocate for the development or reinstatement of a clear process and program for accessing vacant land managed by the Land Reutilization Authority (LRA) for Urban Ag in STL.
6. Address the massive reforms needed in zoning and other policies to enable successful, rapid expansion of STL Urban Ag.

Community Engagement and Coordination:

7. Use the workshop outcomes and resources to engage a group of current STL urban ag farmers and other key stakeholders to co-develop a multi-phased plan for the conversion of current LRA locations into an expanding network of neighborhood-centered urban farms.
8. Create a new entity (identify optimal host) whose purpose is to facilitate greater cross-sector partnerships on STL Urban Ag, as well as needs in funding and other resources.
    - Determine whether a new member-based organization is needed to represent the collective interests of STL Urban Ag farmers.
9. Launch a centralized website/webpage for STL Urban Ag: e.g., mapping tool presented by Taylor Geospatial, crop desirability, zoning, resources for farmers, etc. (NYC example)
10. Engage groups like City Greens and Local Harvest to understand where new surveys may be needed to learn which crops are of primary interest to STL residents.
11. Encourage farms and farmstands to launch year-round Urban Ag 'destinations' in STL, following the practices has Eckert's pioneered successfully in nearby Illinois. Collaborate with others already in place (e.g., EarthDance) and/or who are currently planning similar initiatives (e.g., Jackie Joyner-Kersee FAN Center).

12. Reconvene the STL-based participants with additional stakeholders working in this space to consolidate interest and broaden participation.

Communications and branding:

13. Develop a branding and marketing strategy to take actions such as creation of a new 'Grown in *The Lou*' sticker for foods and beverages produced from crops grown by STL Urban Ag farmers. Collaborate directly with the similar 'Known and Grown' initiative, and any others pursuing similar ideas.
14. Develop a communication strategy to advocate for the expansion of Urban Ag as a regional priority for STL, highlighting its benefits in and beyond the metro region.
15. Organize a tour for community leaders and policymakers of existing STL Urban Ag sites to showcase success stories and needs.

Presentations

The morning session of the workshop featured a series of presentations. Slide decks shared by the various presenters are available on a Google Drive folder, with links to the individual PowerPoints provided below.

- **Dave Gustafson (Agriculture & Food System Institute) – SLIDES**
- **Kirti Rajagopalan (Washington State University) - SLIDES**
- **Rachel Opitz (Taylor Geospatial) - SLIDES**
- **Melba Salazar-Guitiérrez (Georgia, UGA Center for Urban Agriculture) - SLIDES**
- **Yolanda Gonzalez (New York, Cornell U) – SLIDES**
- **Micah Anderson (Oklahoma, Langston U) - SLIDES**
- **Yaritza Torres Espinosa (Texas, City of Dallas) - SLIDES**

Acknowledgements

We acknowledge Chad Kruger, Teal Potter, and the entire team at Washington State University for approving this workshop as a component of the No Cost Extension to the Climate Analogs Academy project. Accordingly, we explicitly acknowledge the funding provided by that USDA NIFA Extension Climate Hub Partnerships Project: 20236701339348. We also thank the presenters, the hosts on the mini-tour, and all the workshop participants for their enthusiasm and bountiful outpouring of excellent ideas. Dave thanks Andrew Roberts, Jessica Mojica, Stephanie Carter and the entire team at the Agriculture & Food Systems Institute for their administrative support. He also expresses personal thanks to Rachel Optiz, Elliott Kellner, and everyone at Taylor Geospatial for their engagement and in-kind support of the workshop, as well as to Kirti Rajagopalan, for her creative scientific work that led to this novel application of the 'climate analogs' concept. And lastly, a special word of thanks to Lauren Littrell for so professionally hosting the moderated panel discussion, and to Maxine Clark, who so generously shared of her time, wisdom and insights at the panel discussion.