

STL Urban Ag Workshop*

30-Sep-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).

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Executive Summary¹

On July 29, 2026, the Agriculture & Food Systems Institute (in partnership with Washington State University's Center for Sustaining Agriculture and Natural Resources and several other partners) held a day-long workshop in St. Louis, Missouri, with a primary overall purpose of developing science-based guidelines for the successful expansion of Urban Ag in St. Louis. The workshop brought together local and national Urban Ag experts, as well as Specialty Crop Extension specialists from across the country – particularly those in regions now experiencing St. Louis's future climate (in accordance with the 'climate analogs' concept). The workshop also included Urban Ag experts from Dallas and New York City, both of which have seen successful expansion of Urban Ag in recent years. The workshop was preceded on July 28 by an optional half-day tour of Urban Ag locations throughout the St. Louis region, including two stops in Illinois: Eckert's Farm in Belleville and the new Jackie Joyner-Kersey Food, Agriculture & Nutrition (FAN) Center in East St. Louis. A pre-workshop reception was held that evening at the historic Post Building in downtown St. Louis. The reception was highlighted by a moderated panel discussion featuring Maxine Clark (Delmar DivINe, etc.) and Elliott Kellner (President, Taylor Geospatial). The workshop itself included a morning filled with presentations by several of the gathered experts, followed by a pair of afternoon breakout sessions during which the participants brainstormed opportunities and barriers to the expansion of Urban Ag in St. Louis in two general domains: (1) science-related topics, such as agronomics, climate, and innovative uses of GeoAI; (2) policy-related topics. This Executive Summary contains selected portions of the [full report](#), including the key recommendations and links to the morning presentations. Key workshop recommendations (see page 3) were identified in the following areas: research needs, increased funding in Extension and other support areas, strengthened communications, needs for new investments, policy reforms, and the creation of new organizations and branding to support successful expansion of STL Urban Ag. In summary, the workshop participants concluded there are major opportunities for expansion of STL Urban Ag in St. Louis that would bring a host of socioeconomic benefits. Given the current dire status of certain neighborhoods, particularly those ravaged by the May 2025 tornado, action is urgently needed to begin pursuing these opportunities. Fortunately, the St. Louis region possesses the needed expertise and resources to act upon these opportunities. All that is missing is the collective will to begin.

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

1. Conduct and publish an assessment of how climate is likely to impact STL Urban Ag through 2050 and beyond, including the northward movement of pests and diseases.
2. Facilitate the creation of a gap analysis and ecosystem map for STL Urban Ag, identifying where resources and research are needed.
3. Assess information currently available from groups like City Greens or Local Harvest to determine whether new surveys are needed to learn what crops residents would like to see grown in STL.
4. Advocate for the funding of multiple long-term Urban Ag positions in UM/UIUC Extension.
5. Explore the St. Louis data dashboard from WashU and assess how to pull demographic and public health data that would assist in STL Urban Ag planning.
6. Launch a centralized website for STL Urban Ag: e.g., mapping tool presented by Taylor Geospatial, crops desirability, zoning, resources for farmers, etc. ([NYC example](#))
7. Advocate for the development or reinstatement of a clear process/program for accessing vacant land managed by the Land Reutilization Authority (LRA) for Urban Ag in STL.
8. Consider encouraging Eckert's or other investors to launch additional year-round Urban Ag 'destinations' in STL, following the practices Eckert's has pioneered so successfully in nearby Illinois. Collaborate with others already in place (e.g., EarthDance) or currently planning similar initiatives (e.g., Jackie Joyner-Kersey FAN Center).
9. Address the massive reforms needed in zoning and other policies to enable successful, rapid expansion of STL Urban Ag.
10. 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.
11. Determine whether a new member-based organization is needed to represent the collective interests of STL Urban Ag farmers.
12. Consider creation of a new 'Grown in The Lou' sticker/brand for foods produced from crops grown by STL Urban Ag farmers. Collaborate with the similar 'Known and Grown' initiative.
13. Much stronger and more effective communication is urgently needed to explain how the expansion of Urban Ag and its many benefits should be a critical regional priority.
14. Organize a tour for community leaders and policymakers of existing STL Urban Ag sites to showcase success stories and needs.
15. Utilize climate-related and other workshop findings, as well as an updated version of the mapping tool 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.
16. Reconvene the STL-based participants with additional stakeholders working in this space – identify a suitable convener for such a meeting (potentially Danforth, TBC).

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-Gutiérrez (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](#)**

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