

# Cultivating Change: Urban Farming in Commercial Real Estate



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# Foreword



When we think of commercial real estate and sustainability, our scope constantly broadens. We've all long embraced the need to drive energy and water efficiency, divert as much as possible from landfills, and shift to a net zero future. Critical as those imperatives are, none can be touched and felt by our tenants, our guests and ourselves. Sustainability in commercial real estate is critical, but it is generally intangible.

Enter urban farming. By growing vegetables, herbs, and other crops in, on, and around our commercial and institutional properties, we can meaningfully drive sustainability forward while also providing actual produce that our tenants can touch, feel - and even taste.

Urban farming generates a virtuous cycle. Not only does it provide a positive contribution to the environment, it also reduces the urban heat island effect while providing a fantastic tenant engagement opportunity. The more veggies we grow, the lower our carbon footprint and the less heat our roofs absorb. And that's not even counting the fresh, organic carrots, leeks, rosemary and more we can provide at a tenant barbecue – or to a local food bank.

At the end of the day, commercial real estate and urban farming are ultimately about how we best manage our land. Combining the two together connects our industry in a meaningful way with the land on which it sits.

**Benjamin L. Shinewald**  
President and Chief Executive Officer  
BOMA Canada

# Preface

“Gardening is a passion for me, and I’m incredibly lucky to have perennial beds and vegetable gardens. But what about those who don’t have such a luxury? What happens when you can’t afford fresh vegetables?”

At GWL Realty Advisors, we are wholeheartedly dedicated to sustainability efforts that improve life not only for our tenants, but for our community as well.

*When the opportunity came to install urban gardens on our rooftops, it made sense in so many ways. We provide pollination and food opportunities for our resident rooftop bees, we provide greenery to help lower the heat dome in the city, and most importantly, the food that is produced is donated to local food banks.*

Being able to purchase and consume fresh, local produce is not an option for many people in our city and that’s not right. Growing produce on our rooftops helps alleviate this problem while bringing awareness about this issue to our tenants, employees, and visitors to our buildings. Having the gardens (and the bees) on our rooftops has been an incredible educational opportunity. Many were unaware a program like this was even possible, so we’ve found there is a great deal of interest in how the program is run, how the gardens are maintained, and where the food goes.”

**Elizabeth Schreurs**

Vice President, Property Management  
GTA / Corporate Properties

# Summary

## Why the need for ecological urban farming?

### **60 % of human population is expected to live in cities by 2050.**

Urbanization movement is putting an unprecedented stress on cities' procurement chains. There is an urgency to review our food supply system to face the increasing demand.

### **The world has lost a third of its arable land due to erosion or pollution in the past 40 years<sup>1</sup>**

Exploiting underutilized urban areas and developing new sustainable agricultural techniques are key to ensure food security and safety.

### **Canada's climate is warming twice as fast as global average<sup>2</sup>**

Climate warming has the potential to significantly disrupt our supply chains, societies' health and natural habitats. Our cities need to adapt and develop their resiliency to face adversity.

## Urban Farming...

### **...supports urban biodiversity,**

By developing rich ecosystems and providing habitat for urban biodiversity to thrive in.

### **...feeds local communities,**

With fresh, nutritious, sustainable and locally grown products, a growing trend for consumers.

### **...reduces dependency on fossil fuels**

By cutting the distance travelled by food, the GHG emissions related to transportation, the need for machinery and petroleum-based fertilizers through ecological farming practices.

## You are not alone in this

Companies like MicroHabitat offer a turnkey service to ensure the complete management of the urban farm, its success and peace of mind for project owners!

## Cities : the Perfect Place to Grow Food

More nature for urban dwellers

Less pest prevalence preventing food production efficiency

Easy access to water, energy and flat surfaces

Prevalence of unused spaces

Very limited pesticide contamination around cities

The heat-island effect makes growing easier

Higher prevalence of CO2 in the atmosphere promoting plant growth

Reduced wind in cities compared to large agriculture fields

Increased labor force compared to rural zones

The younger generation's that want to work in the field of agriculture live in cities

## Benefits of Urban Farming

Added value to property

Help prevents the heat island by the creation of green spaces

Increases wellness and performance in the workplace

Reduces greenhouse gas emissions and purifies the air

Promotes and preserves urban biodiversity

Creates resilient food systems for local communities

Raises awareness to healthy eating habits

Inspires for a better way of life, at the corporate and individual level

# Urban Farming, (Re)connecting City Residents to Nature

Before we explore the many benefits of urban agriculture, it is important to draw a picture of the context surrounding the birth and growing popularity of this practice in our societies. What is the need behind urban farming? What role does it play in food resilience? What will it look like in the future?

## What is Urban Farming?

Urban agriculture is defined as all forms of agricultural production occurring within or in proximity of cities. It generally includes the production of fruits, herbs, vegetables, flowers, eggs and honey through different installations in built-up environments.

Though urban agriculture used to mostly take place in people's backyards, urban farms rapidly grew in scale and variety in recent years. From community gardens to commercial farms, this new sector of agriculture has welcomed a lot of new players including rooftop hives and corporate farms. It has also led to the development and popularization of agricultural techniques that are more adapted to urban environments such as hydroponic greenhouses, aquaponics, indoor vertical farms, and new high-tech equipment.

## A Business Growing Strong

The rise of urban agriculture is closely linked to urban migration, the gradual shift of populations from rural to urban areas in the last decades.

**According to the United Nations, currently more than half of the human population lives in urban regions, a proportion expected to reach 68% by 2050<sup>3</sup>.**

This induces substantial pressure on cities, and uncovers a pressing need to turn towards new sustainable ways to produce and consume food. Moreover, the world's urban populations are growing at increasing rates. The growing number of mouths to feed puts great pressure on the availability of resources, as the amount of arable lands keeps decreasing due to unsustainable agricultural practices... All the more reason to start exploiting unused urban spaces for food production !

The growth of urban farming in developed countries was also pushed by the recent return of localism, the support of local businesses in both production and consumption. Although market globalization strongly promotes the development of international food chains, the events of the Covid-19 pandemic has led governments all over the world to reconsider their supply chain strategy and invest even more in their local economies. A growing environmental concern from the population is also at the root of this momentum. In addition to reviving the nourishing function of cities, urban agriculture contributes to greening urban spaces and reducing the carbon footprint of our food.

Urban farming has already taken root in several big metropolises such as Montreal, where it is estimated that around 42% of the population practices urban farming at home<sup>4</sup>.



## Cultivating a Better World

In 2015, the United Nations adopted the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, a blueprint showing the path towards universal peace and prosperity for both people and the planet. As part of this statement, 17 Sustainable Development Goals were developed to promote the progress of urgent issues such as poverty, hunger, climate change and inequalities. They serve as a guidance for countries, municipalities and enterprises all over the world to orient their activities towards the achievement of these specific goals<sup>5</sup>.

Urban agriculture is in line with these initiatives by acting as an engine of progress regarding several goals.





## Goal 2: Zero Hunger

*End hunger, achieve food security, improve nutrition and promote sustainable agriculture.*

Urban farming promotes food security by contributing to the development of local and resilient food supply chains. Transforming unused urban spaces into nutritious food production zones allows an improved accessibility to healthy food by local communities, and thus contributes to better nutrition habits.



## Goal 3: Good Health and Well-Being

*Ensure healthy lives and promote well-being for all at all ages*

Bringing pieces of nature to urban environments improves the quality of life of its inhabitants. Regardless of their type, plants contribute to better ambient air quality and, in certain contexts, can promote peace of mind to the individuals around. Urban agriculture connects urban citizens to nature and thus encourages healthier living habits, as much for the mind as for the body.



## Goal 11: Sustainable Cities and Communities

*Make cities and human settlements inclusive, safe, resilient and sustainable.*

Urban farming fosters community relationships and better accessibility to green spaces. These programs are reinforcing a sense of community within neighborhoods or workplaces, uniting individuals from all cultures and of any age around a shared interest. It also favors greater social inclusion by providing local employment opportunities.



## Goal 12: Responsible Consumption and Production

*Ensure sustainable consumption and production patterns.*

Urban farming produces food closer to the place of their consumption and thus reduces the carbon footprint of food. Through practices such as community gardens, in which people are fully realizing the time and efforts lying behind each grown vegetable, communities become more aware of the energy put into growing food and thus, the importance of limiting food waste.



## Goal 15: Life on Land

*Protect, restore and promote sustainable use of terrestrial ecosystems, sustainably manage forests, combat desertification, halt and reverse land degradation, and stop biodiversity loss.*

In metropolitan areas, biodiversity is very limited by the intense presence of built-up areas. In addition, urban green spaces usually pursue decorative purposes through low-diversity vegetation such as lawns<sup>6</sup>. Urban agriculture contributes to biodiversity and ecosystem services with an enhanced diversity of plant species, providing enriched habitats for other organisms.



# Eight Benefits of Urban Farming

The practice of urban agriculture does not limit itself to feeding the urban population, but rather provides important benefits at the environmental, economic and social levels.

## Here are eight positive impacts of urban farming on our society:

### 1. Added Value to Properties

Urban farming in a corporate or residential setting offers tenants of all ages and backgrounds the opportunity to grow their own food in a common space. This encourages social interaction and sharing, while cultivating a sense of community within the building.

Furthermore, considering the shift towards environmentally sound and sustainable practices, installing an urban vegetable garden on one's property becomes a valuable initiative in the eyes of the tenants. They will feel engaged by this type of project, which reflects the property manager's desire to take part in the environmental cause, being in sync with their own values.

Dedicating an area of your real estate property to an urban agriculture project is an effective way to increase its real value in the long term. Food self-sufficiency is a trend that is far from being a fad and will continue to grow in the years to come.

### 2. Prevention of Heat Island Effect

Cities tend to have an average temperature of 5 to 10 degrees Celsius above that of surrounding regions. This phenomenon is called "heat island" and is caused by the high concentration

of built-up areas in cities such as rooftops and parking lots, which absorb and re-emit the sun's heat. In contrast with urban environments, greener surfaces such as forests and gardens produce freshness while improving air quality. Planting vegetables on rooftops is an efficient way to address heat islands, absorb carbon dioxide and have greener cities<sup>7</sup>.

### 3. Employee's Wellness, Performance and Engagement in the Workplace

From walks in parks to gardening in their backyards, contact with nature is a source of relaxation and peace of mind for many. Recent studies have shown that those benefits can be particularly useful in the workplace and other environments usually associated with high levels of stress and brain focus. Implementing a garden does not only provide healthy snacks to employees, but also contributes to their wellness by promoting a sense of community and belonging. Allowing employees to interact in the garden can serve as a way to relieve stress and mental fatigue, help recharge the brain and become more productive. In short, vegetable gardens are an easy way to promote a positive workplace environment, strengthen the organization's culture and enhance employees' performance and well-being.



#### 4. Reduction of Greenhouses Gases

Urban agriculture promotes a much more local production of the food we eat, which contributes greatly to the reduction of greenhouse gases. A large part of the fruits and vegetables we consume have to travel long distances before arriving on our plates which create great amounts of pollution. By growing vegetables directly in cities, the distance between producers and consumers is reduced and thus diminishes the greenhouse gas emitted through the transportation of food. Moreover, much like trees, vegetable plants act as air filters and sequester carbon, which contributes to the improvement of ambient air in cities.

#### 5. Promotion and Preservation of Urban Biodiversity

The proliferation of urban agriculture zones aids in the the preservation of biodiversity in cities. As a place to eat and live, these initiatives contribute to the diversification of living organisms in the urban environment. The establishment of several varieties of fruits, vegetables, fine herbs and edible flowers in the vegetable garden encourages the support of these insects and organisms essential to life. Cultivating in the city is a real and beneficial action that supports both the fauna and flora of urban centers, while contributing to the development of rich and diversified ecosystems.

#### 6. Creation of Resilient Food Systems

According to Moisson Montreal, one of the biggest food banks in the Montreal region, the demand for food keeps increasing across all food banks<sup>8</sup>. This trend reveals the problem of food insecurity in urban environments and furthers the necessity for improved food supply systems. Urban farming contributes to cities' food resiliency by supporting shorter supply chains, and limiting their exposure to risk. Moreover, certain urban farming companies such as MicroHabitat foster relationships between corporate entities and their community around these issues. By encouraging businesses to donate their crops to local food banks, these initiatives give businesses the opportunity to become involved citizens devoted to having a positive impact on their communities.

#### 7. Awareness of Healthy Eating Habits

Urban agriculture initiatives connect people with nature and with their food. Vegetable gardens become learning interfaces that raise community awareness on the importance of adopting healthy eating habits. With many communities living in environments at risk of food insecurity, urban farming initiatives help to counter this phenomenon by providing access to fresh, healthy, locally grown food. Moreover, being included in the process of growing their own food reconnects individuals to the nutritious aspects of fresh fruits and vegetables, as opposed to processed food.

## 8. Inspiring a Better Way of Life

Integrating urban farming in someone's everyday life has the potential to guide individuals towards a better quality of life. City lifestyle is very fast paced, urban agriculture can be a great way to slow down that busy rhythm. Indeed, as a hands-on activity that requires concentration and attentiveness, gardening allows you to be solely dedicated to the present moment. This mindfulness exercise can greatly help reduce stress, improve one's mood<sup>9</sup>, and provide a sense of accomplishment and reward through growing food. At a larger scale, an urban farm is a visible initiative with the potential to inspire businesses to further invest in the sustainable development of their cities and communities.

As you can see, an urban farming project can address objectives at all three levels of sustainable development: economic, but also environmental and social.

Such an initiative has a strong potential to attract a large variety of stakeholders:

- Businesses
- Schools
- Health institutions
- NGOs
- Residential properties' owners
- Municipalities
- Shopping centers

**And many more!**



# Five Innovative Projects

Several organizations have seen the benefits of such an initiative on their site. Here are six urban farm projects, installed by MicroHabitat, which fostered team building, offered an opportunity to connect with nature, and improved the communities they belong to.

## Dix30 - Oxford Properties

Based in the Greater Montreal Area, the retail center Dix30 managed by Oxford Properties distinguishes itself not only by its diversity of stores, but also because of its engagement in sustainability. The property is BOMA BEST certified and shows engagement in its community by donating its harvest to local food banks.

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*"This first urban agriculture experience in Quartier DIX30 has allowed us to completely dedicate a space where nature is highlighted. This vegetable garden offers all of our visitors and employees the chance to have a tangible experience and connect with nature by seeing the continued growth of the farm. This initiative allows us to contribute to sustainable development while having a beautiful garden to visit every day! We are more than proud to say that the vegetable garden is now an integral part of the Quartier and brings life and color to it"*

**Melyssa Houle, CMD**  
Senior Property Manager

## Canada Life Building - GWL Realty Advisors

The historical building situated in downtown Toronto is one of the many sites hosting an urban farm in the Ontario metropolis. Managed by GWL Realty Advisors, the BOMA BEST Gold building is one of the 13 roofs owned by the firm. They all contribute to feeding communities, as all the harvests are donated to local food banks. GWLRA's mission demonstrates its willingness to integrate sustainability in their activities and get invested in helping local communities around issues like food insecurity.

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*"Partnering with MicroHabitat has proven to be seamless for us. The gardeners and the team at MicroHabitat have been professional and efficient, our gardens look great, and more importantly, they produce tons of fresh, local food so we can give back to those in need. Tenants have responded to these programs in ways we did not expect."*

*"We are immensely proud of our partnership with MicroHabitat and look forward to expanding our locations and enjoying many sustainable years ahead."*

**Elizabeth Schreurs**  
Vice President, Property Management  
GTA / Corporate Properties



## Centre Eaton of Montreal - Ivanhoé Cambridge

In a desire to put in place tangible measures to reduce its ecological footprint and improve its sustainability performance, Ivanhoé Cambridge has partnered with MicroHabitat to revitalize the roofs of the Centre Eaton with flourishing vegetable gardens. In addition to contributing to the greening of Montreal's downtown, the urban farm help support young people in need by adhering to the Urban Solidarity Farms initiative and dedicating all its harvests to the local food bank Dans la Rue.

*"This project offers the opportunity to be innovative in the commercial real estate industry, to look beyond the traditional uses of buildings and maximize their potential to help meet the needs of the community."*

**Nacera Zahed,**  
Property Manager of Centre  
Eaton, Place Montréal Trust and Le 1500.

## Park Vista Apartments - CAPREIT

As one of the largest residential real estate owner enterprises in Canada, CAPREIT has a mission to provide healthy living spaces to urban communities. Their partnership with MicroHabitat for the development of four urban farms situated on the ground of residences in Montreal and Toronto shows their dedication to create green and mobilizing spaces for their tenants. The residents can benefit from fresh herbs, greens and vegetables all summer long!

*"The installation of the urban garden has transformed our green space to provide our residents with healthy, accessible and sustainable agriculture. The urban garden has given the opportunity for our residents to connect with nature, meet new people, and experience where our food comes from. This initiative has been successful in providing our residents with the resources, knowledge and tools for improved wellness through gardening."*

**Barbara Pinto,**  
Senior ESG Analyst

## Eastern Portfolio - Manulife Investment Management

With its six urban farms distributed in the Montreal area, Manulife Investment Management is giving an opportunity to its property managers to take meaningful actions and sensitize their members to healthy life habits. Using urban agriculture as a learning platform, Manulife Investment Management brings the movement to another level through mobilization activities, workshops, and the distribution of urban farming kits to its members so they can start growing at home. With only a handful of urban vegetable farms, their initiative is able to reach, inspire and benefit a large diversity of people, resulting in a considerable impact.

*"Partnering with Microhabitat was a natural fit as we work towards creating urban spaces that support biodiversity and the needs of our community. The specialized garden tours and hands-on workshops for our tenants have also promoted the importance of supporting our local communities and food sources."*

**Stephen Nicoletti**  
Managing Director, Eastern Canada



# Fundamentals of Ecological Farming and its Impacts

Starting an urban farming project is a way to connect city dwellers with nature through the growth of food, an activity long left in the rural scene.

To maximize the positive impacts of your urban farm on the environment, it is important to familiarize yourself with the principles of ecological farming, for a better understanding of the good practices to promote through your project.

## Conventional Agriculture versus Ecological Farming

In recent decades, the agricultural industry has not been spared from the pressure to always produce more and faster, to meet the demand of an ever-growing population. This is how intensive agricultural practices such as monoculture came to be, which accounts for the majority of the world's food production at the expense of our soil quality and environment.

Having to feed a growing population is one thing, but endangering the very thing that allows us to feed ourselves is quite another. In fact, according to United Nations data, the world loses 24 tons of arable land every year.

The reason for this loss is mainly due to bad agri-food practices and the progression of climate change which accelerates desertification. The use of fertilizers and the overuse of land threatens and pollutes ecosystems while impoverishing the soil. It has therefore become urgent to rethink our assumptions and to establish new agricultural practices that are environmentally friendly and resilient to climate change.





## Here are the main ways ecological agriculture differs from traditional practices :

	Ecological Agriculture	Conventional Agriculture
Location of activities	Rural, Urban	Rural
Objective	Sustainability	High Yields and Profit
Yields	High	High
Water Retention	High-Moderate	Low
Energy Efficiency	High	Low
Biodiversity	High	Very Low-Monoculture
Soil Quality	Rich	Poor
Use of chemical-based pesticides	Forbidden	Intense usage
Maintenance	Relatively complex	Easy

As you will have realized, ecological agriculture is based on principles that are much more respectful of the environment, being inspired by nature rather than trying to control it.

Through genetic modification and the abundant use of pesticides, conventional agriculture produces uniform crops, but also consumes much more energy. In contrast, ecological agriculture fosters

diversity and encourages ecological interactions that lead to synergies between the land, the plants and the surrounding biodiversity. It is even possible to limit the use of pesticides through the co-planting of certain species, which will enhance production and protect the crops from pests.

# Urban Farm Installation

Want to start your own urban farm? To **ensure** the success of such a project and produce fresh greens and vegetables for a long time, it is important to make sure your project is carefully planned and managed. Here are the main steps you should follow to ease the implementation of the urban farm in your building and make it as effortless as possible.

## 1. Define Your “Why”

What motivation pushes you to start this project? Is it to get invested in your local community, to provide fresh food for your tenants or get involved in environmental initiatives at your level? Having a clear idea of the benefits you are hoping to achieve from this project will help you communicate it better to your stakeholders.

Moreover, it plays a crucial role in the operations, as arrangements regarding the destination of the crops will depend on it. Will the crops be offered to local food banks? Employees? The building cafeteria? These are questions that need to be defined as they will provide guidance for the whole project.



## 2. Get Surrounded

The success of an urban farm depends on its installation and regular maintenance. No one wants to promise crops that will never see the light of day. Therefore, it is important to be well accompanied in order to ensure that the garden will blossom to its full potential all season long. Here is the approach we recommend to follow to assure the success of your project:

### Opt for a Complete Service

An urban farm does not manage itself. In fact, you will need to be surrounded by people available to provide weekly maintenance, collect the crops, showcase the initiative in the building, assure customer service... It can easily become overwhelming! An experienced team can also help provide external promotion, customized branding and even share its knowledge through interactive workshops. As you can see, opting for a turnkey service can definitely make a difference and provide a better return on investment.

### Look for an Environmentally-Invested Partner

The main goal of hosting an urban farm is to generate a positive impact on society and the environment. It is therefore essential to choose a partner sensitive to environmental issues and whose activities take into account their potential impact on ecosystems. Thus, go for urban farmers following sustainable and ecological principles!

### Partner Up with an Experienced Team

Expertise makes all the difference when embarking on this kind of project. Make sure your partner is a professional in the field, with proven standardized methods, a transparent process and a straightforward approach, as to avoid any bad surprises.

### Go Local!

Working with a local partner is a great way to stimulate the local economy and create employment opportunities in your region. It is a key element to look for when choosing a partner!



## 3. Location Evaluation and Risk Assessment

To facilitate the process and ensure a thriving vegetable garden, an expert in urban farming should be there to assist you and provide advice regarding the best possible location. The evaluation will take into account several elements such as the orientation of the area, sunlight exposure, wind, security, water access and material unloading access.

## 4. Prepare the Site

If you choose to partner up with an experienced team, most of your job is done for the installation of the urban farm. When the season starts, it will be important to make sure your site is ready for the project by checking these elements:

- **Functional Water Access:** Make sure in advance that the water system is functional to avoid bad surprises during installation.
- **Eased Logistics:** Putting in place a vegetable garden will require many trips from the operational team. You want to make sure their path is cleared by informing your security staff, making sure parking space is available, giving the right keys to access the site, etc.

## 5. Share the Project with Your Community

Because an urban farm is a public-facing, visible initiative, take the time to properly communicate it with your tenants, employees, students and partners. These individuals will be the ones enjoying the benefits of the urban farm, and it is important to have them understand the motivations behind it. Your team will be pleased by this project and take pride in it. Your partners can be of great help to you by providing educational workshops, posters, newsletters, announcements on social media and much more!

## 6. Let Your Initiative Grow!

Hosting an urban farm on your property goes beyond growing greens and vegetables. The vegetable garden can also become a learning platform, where tenants or colleagues can reflect, come together and develop a sense of community around a meaningful project. There is nothing that brings people together more than food! From celebrating the abundance of harvests in September to organizing group cooking activities, there are plenty of opportunities to spend fun times around the urban farm project.

Moreover, workshops about ecological agriculture can educate individuals and push the movement even further by bringing those good practices at home. The impact of your sustainability initiative will thus see itself multiplied by the individual actions of your members. In brief, the project can become part of the social culture of its surrounding environment!



# Managing Risk on a Rooftop Farm !

## Safety and Liability

Considering the elevation at which the project is taking place, very close attention must be paid to safety. A good partner should provide guidance for the most secure way to locate the vegetable garden on your roof. Being experts in the domain, an informed partner will also be aware of environmental factors to consider when defining the growing space, the safety norms dictated by the law, and provide the best ways to comply with them. Your partner will be the best placed to maintain a secure environment.

## Urban Wildlife

This question can be pretty worrying for rooftop farms, seeing how voracious seagulls can be when eating a simple sandwich in a park. Now, the thing to keep in mind is that birds in general are not big vegetable eaters. A good urban farming partner will be able to come up with options to protect your crops from birds and animals while still preserving biodiversity through an ecological approach.

**Remember that a good partner will support you throughout the whole process !**

Hosting a rooftop farm can come with some concerns...  
**But rest assured !**

## Insurance

Even though your partner will make sure to limit and constrain any possible risk, uncertainties never cease to exist. However rest assured : a good partner will make sure to have its activities covered by insurance to assure no repercussions on the landlord itself.



# The Lifecycle of Hosting an Urban Farm

Contrary to popular belief, an urban farming project does not only take form in summer, but needs careful planning and maintenance all year long.

This is where a good urban farming partner is of great help. By offering a turnkey service, your partner can assure you peace of mind from January to December, and guarantee a prosperous succession from year to year.

## 1. Planning - Winter to Spring

In agriculture, planning begins very early in the year as there are a lot of things to prepare. Some elements have to be planned as early as wintertime, to give the plants time to develop before the beginning of the growing season in spring.

However, be certain that your partner will take care of all the details and make sure everything is in order to start the season off right. With their collaboration, you will plan out details such as the size of the project, its location, site analysis, security evaluation and accesses.

## 2. Farm Installation - Spring

The real beginning of the urban farming year starts in spring. Your urban partner will start installing the vegetable garden, transplant seedlings and deploy the necessary systems to ensure that the conditions are perfect for a good growing season.



## 3. Weekly Maintenance and Quality Control - Spring, Summer, Fall

Once the garden is well rooted, a professional team will provide weekly check-ups on the farm, do its maintenance and harvest the vegetables and greens. A weekly presence will prevent potential problems and ensure optimal quality output!

## 4. Harvest - Summer

The spring harvest will begin as early as June, allowing for the distribution of harvests to your tenants and stakeholders!

A good partner will make sure to sustain continuous production and weekly distributions all season long. Want to donate your harvest? Urban farming companies such as MicroHabitat offer programs to help distribute your fresh products back to the community.

## 5. Closing and Hibernation - Fall

Once the season is over, it is important to properly close the garden, to avoid any damage during winter. Your expert partner will take care of preparing the urban farm for hibernation by assuring the preservation of the production zone's quality throughout wintertime.

# MicroHabitat: Cultivating Change, One Rooftop at a Time



Did you know that some of Montreal and Toronto rooftops are boasting food gardens? Though they might be hidden above our heads, these gardens greening our cities and nourishing local communities are the work of MicroHabitat.

## Connecting People with Nature Through Urban Farming

This Canadian company has now been growing in the field of urban agriculture for a few years and offers a turnkey service for the installation and maintenance of urban farms for local businesses and organizations. From schools, hospitals, and nonprofit organizations, to large corporations, MicroHabitat transforms unused space into nourishing gardens and offers workshops to educate people and raise awareness around the topic of urban agriculture. Their mission? Cultivate change, one garden at a time.

By bringing food production closer to the people, MicroHabitat prompts reflection on modern agricultural practices and our current consumption patterns. Each rooftop farm is established in line with the principles of ecological agriculture, and encourages the development of a sustainable, local and resilient food system. Their network of urban production zones introduces a new way to feed our populations while strengthening our natural ecosystems and limiting our reliance on fossil fuels.

# Making Urban Farming Accessible to All

Even though they are greening roofs, MicroHabitat's urban farms are not quite the typical "green roof".

Through the use of lightweight geotextile pots, the installation of a rooftop farm does not induce stress on the building's structure and thus makes it accessible to a diversity of spaces. Their technology allows for a depth of soil of 12 to 18 inches, optimal for vegetable growth, without affecting the roof's bearing capacity.

In short, the simple implementation of a MicroHabitat farming project makes it possible for any property owners to start their initiative, without constraints and at a lower cost!

## A Social Business Active in its Community

MicroHabitat's urban farms go beyond the simple vegetable garden. In 2018, the company launched its Urban Solidarity Farms program, encouraging corporate clients to make a commitment to communities by donating the harvests of their urban farms to the community. Through this program, several food banks have received weekly donations of fresh, healthy food from participating MicroHabitat urban farms. This concrete action aims at helping communities living in food deserts to access nutritious greens and vegetables. Since 2018, over 107,300 servings of vegetables have been offered to food banks.

MicroHabitat is sensitive to the reality of food insecurity, which is why they are also supporting the Breakfast Club of Canada, which offers breakfast to children in need. Each MicroHabitat pot sold offers one meal through the program and contributes to fostering healthy eating habits for our youth. A total of 5,400 meals have been funded through this initiative.

## A Growing Movement

As time goes on, MicroHabitat has not only seen its team growing with passionate and dedicated individuals, but has witnessed its rooftop gardens conquer the hearts of many different stakeholders across society.

Here are some of the partners who embarked in the MicroHabitat adventure :

 **Manulife** Investment Management

 **OXFORD**

 **GWL REALTY ADVISORS**

 **BNP PARIBAS**



# Last Words

From developing team cohesion to nourishing local communities, starting an urban farm project can be an incredible experience. The benefits do not stop at the organization's level, but are shared with the greater society and the environment.

With the proper help of an experienced team, the project is easy to execute and sustain. It remains affordable for any organization : all it really takes is the willingness to be part of changing our societies.

Urban farming connects individuals back to nature and plays a role in the larger issue of food security and cities' resilience. As building owners and managers, we could not be better placed to help propel the movement towards.

Contact us or MicroHabitat for more information.



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