

# ***Celebrating the Inaugural “Urban Growers Program” Cohort at Kentucky State University’s Annual Small Farmers Conference***

**May 2025 - October 2025 | Louisville, KY**

## **RELEVANCE**

Urban, small-scale production is an emerging and fast-growing segment of the local food economy. However, it isn’t always about generating income; producers are often motivated to strengthen their food security through fresh food production; conserve natural resources to mitigate climate impacts; or by contributing to the vitality of their community.

In May 2025, Kentucky State University (KYSU) Cooperative Extension launched the **Urban Growers Program (UGP)** in Louisville, Kentucky’s West End – a cluster of neighborhoods that has historically experienced limited access to fresh produce, economic disparities, and environmental stressors that continue to impact residents’ health outcomes and quality of life. The UGP demonstrates how local, community-driven action drives transformative change, while providing a critical response to the social, environmental, and physical challenges encountered in urban areas.

*The “Urban Growers Program” is funded through the U.S. Department of Agriculture’s Natural Resources Conservation Service (USDA NRCS) “Equity in Conservation Outreach” Cooperative Agreement of which Maheteme Gebremedhin, PhD (Associate Professor of Soil Science) serves as the project director. The UGP is administered by KYSU Cooperative Extension’s Community Resource Development team.*

## **RESPONSE**

In its inaugural cohort, 30 urban growers were equipped with the knowledge, skills, and resources to kickstart their operations. The UGP curriculum included four core workshops occurring once per month for four hours from May to August 2025, on the topics of soil health, urban agriculture, pest and disease management, and organic practices. Each workshop consisted of a classroom session and an outdoor, hands-on activity. Outside of the core workshops, participants were required to attend at least eight hours’ worth of related elective workshops, classes, and presentations of their choice to supplement their particular interests and needs.

- Soil Health (May): This workshop was led by Dr. Maheteme Gebremedhin (Associate Professor of Soil Science), Dr. Alhagie Cham (Urban Horticultural Production Researcher), and other Research Assistants, in collaboration with 4 members of the Parkland Community Garden. Topics included key soil health principles such as understanding soil composition and properties, identifying and correcting poor or compacted soil, applying organic matter and amendments, and managing texture and drainage to make informed decisions for sustainable vegetable production. Participants spent 1 hour in the classroom followed by a field demonstration to practice properly collecting soil samples and basic composting principles.
- Urban Agriculture (June): This workshop was led by Research Assistants from KYSU's Urban Agriculture program, under the leadership of Dr. Theoneste Nzaramyimana (Assistant Professor). Topics included native crops, raised bed and traditional ground gardening, hydroponics, urban green space utilization, and more. Participants received a demonstration of hydroponics systems and microgreens production, followed by a visit to BearFruit & Grow, a Louisville urban farm, to hear about her experiences and opportunities as an urban grower.
- Pest and Disease Management (July): Led by Dr. Alhagie Cham, this workshop emphasized the importance of Integrated Pest Management (IPM), accurately identifying pests and diseases, non-chemical management, and implementing an IPM plan. This workshop began at Alberta O. Jones Park to hear about its history and future plans for developing it into a community space, championed by the Urban Conservation Corps. Participants implemented their knowledge by identifying signs of diseases or collecting pests that were present in the park's pollinator garden. Following this visit, the cohort returned to the classroom with their samples from the field to practice pest identification.
- Organic Practices (August): KYSU's Research and Extension Associates for Organic Agriculture, Linelle Rivera Rodriguez and Oluwaseun Mofikoya, provided insight into the organic certification process, record keeping, certified-organic products, and the importance of the National Organic Program (NOP) and Organic Materials Review Institute (OMRI). This final core workshop was hosted at The Food Literacy Project's farm, led by Celeste Orozco. Researchers provided a tool demonstration, primarily for organic weed control, followed by an opportunity for each grower to practice using the equipment. In the classroom, participants had an open discussion on organic agricultural practices and feasibility for small-scale urban farms.

## RESULTS

To measure the effectiveness of each workshop, participants completed a pre- and post-assessment that measured their knowledge and confidence across key topics.

- Soil Health: Participants reported a 74.5% improvement in knowledge and confidence, relative to their starting point.
- Urban Agriculture: Participants demonstrated a 40.7% increase in knowledge and confidence, with the most significant gains in understanding row covers and season extension, water irrigation systems, and hydroponics.
- Pest and Disease Management: Following the workshop, participants reported a 103.2% increase in knowledge and confidence.
- Organic Practices: Overall, there was a 130.6% knowledge and confidence increase among participants with significant growth regarding record keeping practices and identifying Certified Organic seeds.

[Access the full program report, including participant testimonials, here.](#)

## PUBLIC VALUE STATEMENT

At the conclusion of the Urban Growers Program, graduating members received a toolkit consisting of small hand tools (e.g., spades, shears, weeders, pruners, etc.), soil, buckets, a wheelbarrow, broad fork, and other urban grower apparatuses to promote the adoption of regenerative farming practices. At the end of the program, each cohort member was recognized at Kentucky State University's Annual Small Farmers Conference Awards Banquet (November 2025). By providing direct technical assistance and interactive demonstrations, the Urban Growers Program successfully demonstrates that even a single workshop can significantly boost technical readiness for sustainable production among emerging urban growers.

## LINKS AND IMAGES

### Images

#### Soil Health Workshop



**Alternate Text:** UGP participants learning from a KYSU researcher.



**Alternate Text:** UGP participant assisting a KYSU researcher during a classroom demo.



**Alternate Text:** UGP participants practice taking a soil sample.



**Alternate Text:** UGP participants practice taking a soil sample.

### Urban Agriculture Workshop



**Alternate Text:** KYSU researchers presenting on urban agriculture.



**Alternate Text:** UGP cohort visits LeTicia Marshall's urban farm, BearFruit & Grow.



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Pest and Disease Management:



**Alternate Text:** Dr. Alhagie Cham explains the pollinator garden exercise.



**Alternate Text:** UGP participants exploring a pollinator garden for pests or signs of disease.



**Alternate Text:** UGP participant viewing a pest sample.



**Alternate Text:** UGP participant displaying their pest samples.



**Alternate Text:** Dr. Cham assists participants with plant disease identification.

Organic Practices:



Community Resource Development  
NIDB Land-Grant Impact Statements  
**LOCAL FOOD SYSTEMS**



**Alternate Text:** UGP cohort photographed with KYSU researchers.



**Alternate Text:** UGP cohort photographed practicing weeding plots.



**Alternate Text:** Celeste Orozco providing an overview of the The Food Literacy Project farm.

UGP Program Toolkits



**Alternate Text:** Urban growers with their wheelbarrow of tools after completing their program requirements.

NIDB Information	
<b>Tags:</b>	<b>Primary:</b> Urban Agriculture
	<b>Secondary:</b> Food Systems; Organic Agriculture; Pest Management; Soil Health; Urban Agriculture
<b>Primary Funding Source:</b>	1890 Extension
<b>Urban Impacts:</b>	Yes – Jefferson County/Louisville, KY
<b>Submission Year:</b>	2025
<b>Point of Contact:</b>	Gill Finley, Jr. Program Leader for Community Resource Development <a href="mailto:Gill.Finley@kysu.edu">Gill.Finley@kysu.edu</a> (502) 597-6389
<b>Statement Synopsis:</b> <i>A short blurb that summarizes your impact. It will be the preview text for your impact statement when users are filtering the database.</i>	In May 2025, Kentucky State University (KYSU) Cooperative Extension launched the Urban Growers Program (UGP) in Louisville, Kentucky’s West End – a cluster of neighborhoods that has historically experienced limited access to fresh produce, economic disparities, and environmental stressors that continue to impact residents’ health outcomes and quality of life. The UGP demonstrates how local, community-driven action drives transformative change, while providing a critical response to the social, environmental, and physical challenges encountered in urban areas.
<b>Integrated Statement:</b> <i>If your impact statement is integrated with another unit and/or institution.</i>	N/A