



# Farm-a-Lot Program

# Guidelines

## STATEMENT OF PURPOSE

The Urban Redevelopment Authority of Pittsburgh (**URA**) owns many vacant properties that, while currently distressed, can be made available for productive reuse, including farming. The Farm-a-Lot Program, in partnership with the Pittsburgh Land Bank (PLB), helps streamline the potential for farmers to access and activate this land for sustainable urban agriculture.

The URA defines urban agriculture sites as urban land gardened for personal use or for selling agricultural products, including fruits, vegetables, herbs, legumes, nuts, grains, flowers, and other products as permitted by applicable local, state, and federal laws. According to the United States Department of Agriculture, urban agriculture “has the potential to nourish the health and social fabric of communities, improve the physical landscape, and create economic opportunities for farmers and neighborhoods.” [\[1\]](#) The goal of the Farm-a-Lot Program is to unlock this potential for the City of Pittsburgh neighborhoods by:

1. Converting URA-owned vacant properties into farmer-stewarded urban agricultural sites;
2. Preparing local farmers to acquire land from the URA through the Land Bank;
3. Helping small urban agriculture businesses and residents to support the inclusive and healthy growth of neighborhoods;
4. Promoting community investment and land recycling strategies that build a more equitable Pittsburgh;
5. Re-imagining diverse space activation projects and fostering neighborhood interactions; and
6. Supporting efforts to develop urban food systems that are just and sustainable in their benefit to City of Pittsburgh communities.

## SITE ELIGIBILITY

1. Eligible Parcels
  - a. Farm-a-Lot projects must be located on a URA-owned vacant parcel within the City of Pittsburgh. Available URA-owned properties can be found [here](#).
  - b. All project parcel(s) may be reviewed for eligibility by the URA’s Property Inquiry Review Committee.
2. Zoning Regulations
  - a. The Farm-a-Lot Program is **not** available for vacant parcels listed under the following zoning codes:
    - i. Urban Neighborhood Commercial District
    - ii. Educational/Medical Institution District
    - iii. Downtown Riverfront District
3. Soil Testing

- a. Soil must be tested before application submission to determine if the parcels are eligible for urban agriculture. Soil tested at 1000 parts per million or less for lead is eligible for the Farm-a-Lot program.

Please refer to the City of Pittsburgh's Soil Policy [here](#) for information and instructions on proper soil testing.

## **ELIGIBLE ACTIVITIES & USES**

The Farm-a-Lot Program supports proposals that include the following eligible activities:

1. Edible gardens, rain gardens, community gardens, flower gardens, pollinator gardens, or bee farms. All requested uses may be subject to URA staff review.
  - a. Bee Farm Guidelines: This use permits two beehives on lots with a minimum lot size of 2,000 square feet and allows two additional beehives for every additional 2,000 square feet of lot space up to 10,000 square feet. The applicant must provide a flyway barrier of at least six feet in height. More information can be found [here](#).
2. On-farm infrastructure
  - a. High tunnels, fencing, cold storage, solar energy, efficient irrigation systems, and other physical structures are subject to review by the URA's Quality Control & Inspections unit. An occupancy permit may also be required. More information can be found [here](#).

## **APPLICATION REQUIREMENTS & APPLICANT ELIGIBILITY:**

1. Applicants will complete a customer intake form, [linked here](#), and provide:
  - a. Completed Right of Entry form, [linked here](#);
  - b. Completed Soil Test form;
2. After the intake form and soil testing is completed and approved, the applicant will complete a Farm-a-Lot application, linked [here](#); the application must include the following:
  - a. Project information;
  - b. Property information;
  - c. Contact information;
  - d. Plan or narrative for the project; and
  - e. Listings of past projects and relevant experiences.

Applicants requiring assistance to complete their Farm-a-Lot applications may email [farmalot@ura.org](mailto:farmalot@ura.org) for help.

3. A qualified Farm-a-Lot applicant:
  - a. Has no outstanding City, School, and County real estate taxes or can present evidence of enrollment in applicable repayment plan(s).
  - b. Owns no property with unremediated citations or State and Local property codes and ordinances violations.
  - c. Was not subject to a judgment in a tax foreclosure proceeding in the past five years.
  - d. Has no delinquent water accounts with the City of Pittsburgh's Water and Sewer Authority or other local water utilities.
4. Evidence of property insurance acceptable to the URA and Land Bank is required.
5. Evidence of a financing plan for project costs is required.

6. Applicants must be in the process of obtaining or have completed all appropriate permits and authorizations from the City of Pittsburgh's Department of Permits, Licenses, and Inspections, if applicable.

## **PROGRAM PROGRESSION & TIMELINE**

Utilizing a URA-owned parcel for urban agriculture through the Farm-a-Lot Program begins with completing the Farm-a-Lot Inquiry form. The applicant will then acquire a Right of Entry form for on-site soil testing. Upon confirmation of site eligibility, soil testing, and an approved application, the Farm-a-Lot applicant can enter into a license agreement to begin their urban agriculture project on the site.

### **1. Year 1: License Agreement**

The License Agreement will include an initial three-year term, parcel information, pricing, and licensee responsibilities, including maintenance and land vacation procedure.

- Applicants will receive a drafted agreement for review and signature.
- Proof of Certificate of Insurance must be presented before agreement execution.
- A 30-day written notice may be provided to the URA to terminate the license agreement.

After the applicant's year one site inspection, they may have the opportunity to start the For-Sale Eligibility Review process and enter into the Land Bank's disposition process to purchase the property.

### **2. Year 2: Review of For-Sale Eligibility**

If the Farm-a-Lot applicant's property is deemed eligible for sale by the URA's Property Inquiry Review Committee, they may enter the Land Bank's disposition process.

- If applicable, a project manager (PM) from the URA will be assigned to the project.
- Applicants must complete and submit an Application to Purchase to the Pittsburgh Land Bank.
- Site drawings and evidence of financing, among other disposition documents required as part of the PLB Application, will be prepared. Once the Application and all supporting materials are finalized and approved by the URA PM and PLB Staff, PLB Staff will present the proposal to sell the property to the Farm-a-lot applicant to the PLB Board.
- After the PLB Board votes to approve the Sale, a 20-day objection period must pass. If 15 or more residents submit a petition objecting to the sale during that time, PLB staff will hold a predisposition public hearing to gather additional feedback from the community and present this information to the PLB Board for a second vote of approval.
- If no objection is filed, PLB may enter into a Purchase and Sales agreement with the buyer as early as 30 days from the board approval date. Buyers will have six months from the date of entering the Purchase and Sales agreement to complete the sale.
  - Please note that the PLB will require a deed-in-escrow, reverter deed, or enforcement mortgage to ensure the completion of any proposed improvements requiring zoning approval or building permits.

## **WAIVER OF PROVISIONS**

The URA Board of Directors may waive certain provisions of these guidelines based on a determination of the private and public benefits of the project.

## **NOTIFICATION**

The URA reserves the right to:

1. Reject any application.
2. Notify the appropriate community-based organization(s) of applications received from businesses in their neighborhoods.
3. Publicly announce all awards.

## **NON-DISCRIMINATION CERTIFICATION**

The Urban Redevelopment Authority of Pittsburgh abides by all applicable laws and regulations regarding non-discrimination and refrains from discriminating based on age, race, color, religious creed, ancestry, national origin, sex, sexual orientation, gender identity, gender expression, political or union affiliation, and disability. No person shall be excluded from participation in, be denied the benefits of, or otherwise be subjected to discrimination solely based on any of the above factors under the loan and grant programs operated by the Urban Redevelopment Authority of Pittsburgh.

Updated December 7th, 2023

[\[1\]](#) "Urban Agriculture," Urban Agriculture | USDA Climate Hubs (U.S. Department of Agriculture), accessed March 1, 2023, <https://www.climatehubs.usda.gov/urban-agriculture>.

