



AB-551: A POWERFUL NEW TOOL FOR URBAN AGRICULTURE

Q1: WHAT IS AB-551?

AB-551 is a state bill that empowers California's cities and counties to pass ordinances to create "Urban Agriculture Incentive Zones." After a city and county creates an UAIZ, owners of vacant land can receive a significant reduction in their property taxes if they allow the land to be used for commercial or non-commercial agricultural use for a period of no less than 5 years. After an agreement is made between the tax authority, land owner, and urban farmer (s) the assessed value of the property is modified to \$12,000 per acre. Therefore, a half acre lot would pay taxes as if the property were valued at \$6,000 meaning potentially significant savings for the land owner. This law provides new opportunities for growing healthy food and other agricultural products in cities and provides many tangible benefits.

Q2: WHY DOES AB-551 MATTER?

AB-551 provides an accessible pathway for farmers to access land while providing incentives for land owners to participate. The potential benefits of growing food on underutilized land has many benefits:

- 1) Production of healthy, locally sourced food in areas with poor access to quality fruit and vegetables;
- 2) Education about fresh, healthy food and the effort it takes to produce it;
- 3) Development and modeling of new, energy saving and environmentally sustainable technologies;
- 4) Building of strong communities;
- 5) New vibrant green spaces and opportunities for recreation;
- 6) Source of economic development including increased job training opportunities, reduction of neighborhood level-blight, and revenue from food sales.

Q3: ARE THERE REQUIREMENTS ATTACHED TO AB-551?

Yes, the state law mandates that the benefits only apply to specific properties that meet specific requirements. Counties and cities can add provisions when enacting the local ordinances. For now, the state law says:

- 1) Only parcels that are between 0.10 and 3 acres are eligible for AB-551 benefits;
- 2) Only physical structures that support agricultural use are permitted on property subject to the AB-551 contract;
- 3) The entire property must be used for urban agriculture; properties cannot be subdivided;
- 4) Contract must be entered for a minimum of five years and maximum of ten;
- 5) Contract must comply with all local zoning and land-use laws and must allow agricultural use;
- 6) Contracts cannot conflict with Williamson Act contracts (an agriculture preservation bill) within 3 years of the end of the contract.
- 7) A city or county will assess a cancellation fee and they will be required to pay back all taxes if a landowner cancels AB-551 contract.

Q4: CAN I TAKE ADVANTAGE OF AB-551 IN LOS ANGELES COUNTY?

Efforts are underway to establish Urban Agriculture Incentive Zones in many of the LA County's 88 cities and unincorporated areas, including the City of Los Angeles. In order for this new pathway to be accessible the Board of Supervisors and City Councils need to hear from you. Get involved by talking to your elected officials and attending a LA Food Policy Council Urban Ag Working Group Meeting.



CONTACT LOSAB551@GMAIL.COM FOR MORE INFORMATION



BENEFITS OF URBAN AGRICULTURE

The potential to expand urban agriculture throughout Los Angeles is enormous. Below we identify some of the benefits greening the city could yield as urban agriculture moves forward in Los Angeles:

ECONOMIC BENEFITS OF URBAN AGRICULTURE

- ◆ Community food projects funded by the United States Department of Agriculture provided an estimated 2,300 jobs and incubated over 3,600 micro-businesses. Los Angeles has an opportunity to capture federal dollars and other healthy food financing dollars as it moves agriculture activities in the City.
- ◆ Small well-tended plots of land can yield surprising amounts of produce. In a 130-day temperate growing season, a 10x10 meter plot can provide most of a household's total yearly vegetable need, including much of the household's nutritional requirements for vitamin A, C and B complex and Iron.
- ◆ Urban area food production can operate at a for profit farm scale, producing high quality fresh foods (including protein-rich production) on relatively small amounts of space that include aquaculture, hydroponics, and greenhouses.
- ◆ Researchers from Newark have shown that 1,900 gardens in community lots of 30 acres produced approximately \$915,000 of food value in one year and almost \$4 million over 4 years.
- ◆ Urban farming is a competitive economic activity and the industry of choice for millions of urban entrepreneurs. In places like Shanghai 60% of the cities vegetables are produced by urban farming. Places like Havana cultivate economic activity through the 26,000 popular gardens that produce 25,000 tons of food each year.



REDUCING FOOD WASTE AND GROWING LOCAL:

- ◆ Americans throw away 96 billion pounds of food waste annually at a cost of over \$1 billion in disposal. Existing city infrastructure has the potential to support the expansion of gardening as a strategy to increase food resources and contribute to food security for neighborhoods that wish to grow locally and eliminate the food waste that results from transportation shrinkage.
- ◆ Gardening creates opportunity to save food dollars for households with limited incomes. Studies report that every \$1 invested in a community garden plot yields approximately \$6 worth of vegetables. The average gardening plot can produce \$160 dollars' worth of produce.
- ◆ Residents in low-income communities, more often than not, must rely on convenience stores and neighborhood markets that disproportionately sell greater amounts of fatty, sugary, and processed foods (or "junk food"). This lack of access to healthy food makes it difficult for families to eat well, fueling higher rates of obesity, diabetes, and heart disease. Allowing residents to grow their own food creates opportunity to address the food access issues for communities where food resources are limited.

