



# **Kalamazoo County Urban Agriculture Community Needs Assessment Survey - Summary of Results**

The Kalamazoo Conservation District, a UAC planning grantee, conducted an Urban Agriculture Community Needs Assessment Survey, employing digital surveys, focus groups, and engagement with farmers' markets and meetings. Through this process, we connected with local small-scale farmers, beginning farmers, and underrepresented households to focus on the agricultural needs of our urban areas. The goal was to determine the farmers' primary technical and business needs, explore partnership opportunities, and gather feedback on urban agriculture farm infrastructure needs, including leasing space and equipment rental.

The survey was designed in collaboration with agricultural education leaders at the Kalamazoo Valley Community College's Food Innovation Center and The W.E. Upjohn Institute for Employment Research. The survey was open between January and May 2023, with continued outreach to our list of farmers, agencies, and other partnering groups during this time to encourage participation. A Spanish version of the survey was prepared to prioritize outreach to relevant organizations. Feedback was also sought from local organizations regarding their understanding of gaps in urban agricultural programming and infrastructure.

There were 65 completed surveys submitted and of those 54 were farmers and 11 were partnering agency personnel. Additional demographic information such as race (25% non-white), gender (72% female), and income level were collected for eligibility participation in USDA farm bill programs and other potential grants. All the survey data and results are available on the Kalamazoo Conservation District website.

During the community needs assessment process, it was apparent that numerous resources exist in Kalamazoo County that support urban and small-scale farmers, including technical and business-related topics. KCD plans to catalog these resources and publish them on our website as a convenient reference for urban and small-scale farmers.

Composting systems and scaling up production emerged as top priorities for both farmers and agency personnel. Common interests among farmers included urban food forests, soil health, cover crops, conservation tillage, and fruit trees. Agency personnel prioritized environmental contamination, climate change adaptation/mitigation strategies, water conservation and irrigation.

The survey highlighted environmental contamination as a significant training need according to agency personnel, although it ranked lower for farmers. Only a small number of farmers reported having their soil evaluated, despite growing food for themselves and others. Agricultural food safety training was not a high priority for farmers, but it could be combined with other more desired training programs as a way of providing this priority information.

Business-related needs overlapped considerably between farmers and agency personnel, including city and township ordinances related to urban agriculture, USDA farm bill programs, business management and enterprise planning, and adapting existing buildings for agricultural use. City and township ordinances related to urban agriculture were a top concern for both groups, with several farmers reporting that they were unfamiliar with local ordinances. Among urban farmers, half reported experiencing ordinance issues related to their farms. Although leasing space was believed to be a farmer priority for agency personnel, only a few farmers expressed the same interest when presented with several other technical training opportunities. However, in a separate question with fewer competing choices, 57% of farmers said they were interested in renting space with greenhouse space, ground to grow small crops, and indoor grow building space in the top three. Grant writing was also deemed an important need for farmers.

The survey indicated that 83% of agency personnel felt a need for an urban agriculture mentoring program in Kalamazoo County, while approximately 64% of existing farmers were open to mentoring someone. Mentoring opportunities and resources will be included on the KCD's urban ag resources.

Based on the needs assessment process and survey results, the Kalamazoo Conservation District and its community partners are well-positioned to address the identified needs of the urban agriculture community. The feedback will be used to provide outreach to those who will benefit from conservation programs, technical assistance, and farm bill programs. The feedback will also be used to plan, design, and implement future conservation-related workshops, informational sessions, and practice demonstrations that will best meet the needs of our urban community. Existing staff, such as the Produce Safety and MAEAP Technicians and the strong NRCS partnerships can help address the highest-priority technical needs.