



September 10, 2020

The Food in Neighborhoods (FIN) Community Coalition supports community efforts to build a just, healthy, and sustainable food system in Louisville. FIN originated in 2008 under Louisville Metro's grant from the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation.

Earlier this year, we received a small grant from the Community Foundation of Louisville and decided to use that money to help people acquire land to improve food security. We dedicated these funds to support projects such as community gardens, market gardens, or high tunnels for year-round growing.

Our website, ([www.foodinneighborhoods.org](http://www.foodinneighborhoods.org)) is full of resources to help neighbors research property, launch urban agriculture businesses, grow food, find collaborators, and distribute food in their communities. A large part of this was helping citizens access the Office of Community Development and Land Bank's applications for community/market gardens (please review guide at [www.foodinneighborhoods.org/grow/land](http://www.foodinneighborhoods.org/grow/land) ).

We have discovered, unfortunately, that the Land Bank has changed its rules over time regarding acquisition of vacant lots for agriculture. We are writing to ask you to restore the previous policy, so that agriculture can once again be an approved use for purchasing vacant lots.

We are requesting a change in Land Bank policy to enable residents to **buy land for urban agriculture**. FIN has made a commitment to using the Community Foundation of Louisville grant we already received, and to raising more money as needed to meet community interest. We will accompany our neighbors through the process and offer technical assistance one-on-one and through our [Urban Agriculture Resource Library](#). FIN is committed to assisting in transitioning vacant land in food insecure neighborhoods into spaces of community wealth and food production. All that is required of the Land Bank is to reinstate the previous policy.

We would also like to propose an adjustment to your Cut It Keep it policy for vacant lot acquisition. This policy appears to be intended to assist neighbors in acquiring land nearby

them. In effect, it discriminates against majority Black residents who live in neighborhoods where Land Bank lots are concentrated.

- Blocks where there is a high concentration of vacant land often have NO dwellings and therefore no property owner living adjacent; effectively these lots do not qualify for Cut It Keep It under current rules
- Neighborhoods like Portland and Russell have a high rate of rental property and absentee landlords and MHC has documented steep declines in Black ownership in West Louisville from 2000-2017(22,000 Equities Report, 2019). Chances are high that where there is a neighbor, that the neighbor is a renter, and therefore ineligible to take advantage of Cut It Keep It. We understand well how many more Black households rent because of Louisville's history of redlining--these households are being further excluded from land ownership, effectively redlined out of vacant lot acquisition under current rules.

Applying [Louisville Metro's Racial Equity Tool](#) may shed additional light on the discriminatory effects of Land Bank policy.

We suggest a short-term remedy until a more thorough examination can be undertaken: Allow any neighbor, including renters, within the zip code or within the neighborhood, of a vacant lot to Cut It & Keep It, regardless of whether they live and own property immediately adjacent to the lot.

The investments required for urban agriculture don't make sense for a grower unless they own the property--irrigation water, raised bed garden boxes, soil improvements, fencing, fruit trees, and other perennial crops, can add up to thousands of dollars and require years of work invested. The benefits of gardening, likewise, are realized over many years. Many native plants require 5 years to establish successfully; fruit or nut trees take 4-10 years to mature. Urban Agriculture represents an investment in the future, and this is why urban growers need to own their land. When urban farmers own the land, they can invest in it and commit to creating lasting changes to their neighborhoods through food production.

Lots of Food ([louisvillelotsoffood.com](http://louisvillelotsoffood.com)) represents one example of what can be achieved when these investments are made. In 2013, Amanda Fuller purchased 5 lots from the Land Bank. Since then, her urban farm business, Lots of Food, has established an oasis on Portland Avenue--berries and passionfruits along the sidewalk and fence lines are snacks for passersby, produce is sold in the neighborhood almost exclusively e.g., at The Table restaurant and at Opportunity Corner farmers market in Russell; the site is home to the only almond trees and hazelnut trees in Jefferson County, and they are producing well. Seasonal educational programs offer neighbors and families activities like wild berry jam-making. Two beehives produce local honey; Monarchs and other migrating butterflies and pollinators find native plants and habitat here to feed & breed. . Perennials like fruit & nut trees, passionfruits and blackberries hold and build soil, infiltrating stormwater and mitigating the urban heat island effects. Dozens of tour groups and classes have visited her project to learn about it as a model.

We're familiar with the findings and priorities cited in several Louisville Metro reports, pointing to the benefits that can be realized when neighbors are able to purchase land for urban agriculture:

- Expand the local food system by 20% (Sustain Louisville)
- Increase access to healthy foods by 20% (Sustain Louisville)
- Support an equitable distribution of local and healthy foods (Sustain Louisville)
- Assess opportunities for community and market gardens on vacant and abandoned properties (Sustain Louisville)
- Provide... equity reports for land use and community development planning to evaluate Louisville Metro programs and policies.(Plan 2040)
- Support innovative efforts to provide access to fresh food, such as: urban agriculture, community gardens and farmers' markets. Encourage communities to use vacant lots for gardens to enhance access to fresh foods (Plan 2040)
- Encourage the use of vacant lots as small parks and community gardens (Plan 2040)
- Citizens' quality and quantity of life is enhanced through equitable access to parks and open space, recreation, healthcare and healthy food with no systematic and changeable differences in health between socially, economically, demographically or geographically defined populations.(Plan 2040)
- Review Land Development Code to ensure flexibility for use of urban agriculture to promote access to fresh food especially in areas known as food deserts as identified by the Louisville Metro Health Equity Report. (Plan 2040)
- Center for Health Equity points to vacant properties among root causes impacting public health and safety: When cities invest in quality green space, engaging in safe recreation becomes the easy choice for residents and reduces the likelihood that crime will occur. (2017 Health Equity Report)
- Increase funding to maintain green space (2017 Health Equity Report)
- Community gardens can improve Health outcomes in Arthritis, Cancer, Diabetes, Heart disease, Infant mortality, Oral health, Stroke (2017 Health Equity Report)
- Develop and adopt an Environmental justice policy for the city (Resilient Louisville)

Food in Neighborhoods is poised and committed to doing what we can to advance these goals, in recognizing a strong connection between land access and food security. We look forward to working with you to promote these outcomes in Louisville.

Sincerely,  
Food in Neighborhoods Community Coalition

Cc: Community Foundation of Louisville  
Office of Sustainability & Advanced Planning  
Center for Health Equity  
Root Cause Research  
Metropolitan Housing Coalition

Louisville Urban League

Jeana Dunlap, Louisville Coordinated Community Investment Project

Councilman Brandon Coan