Increasing Local Food Production in Toledo and Lucas County

Introduction
Seeking to strengthen the local economy by scaling up local food production, the Center for Innovative Food Technology (CIFT) engaged in a process of surveying viable farmland for production and convening stakeholders to discuss barriers and opportunities in Toledo and surrounding Lucas County. CIFT received a project grant from the Center for Farmland Policy Innovation at Ohio State University. The Center’s mission is to enable communities to achieve farmland protection policy and food and agricultural economic development priorities by partnering on innovative projects and providing needed programming.

CIFT’s ultimate goal was to encourage more food production on viable city and county land. These efforts resulted in tools and resources to support local production in the area, including:

1. A published inventory and catalogue of all existing farmland in Toledo and Lucas County;
2. A PowerPoint presentation for easily communicating land data to stakeholders;
3. A published survey of policies regarding use of urban farms in other parts of the country that may apply to Toledo; and,

Farmland Inventory
CIFT used Geographic Information Systems (GIS) software to map all identifiable tillable land and greenhouses in Toledo and Lucas County. The data to populate the map was drawn from the U.S. Census, USDA soil datasets, and the Lucas County Auditor. The data from the Auditor allowed CIFT to quickly identify active agricultural land based on its assessment under Current Agricultural Use Value (CAUV). CAUV programs create an incentive to farm by taxing land used for commercial agriculture based on its agricultural use, as opposed to its “highest and best use,” which may represent a higher tax rate.

The data show that Lucas County contains 66,741 acres of tillable land, with 1,222 of those acres being located within Toledo urban boundaries. CIFT emphasized the need to increase production use of urban agricultural land through a PowerPoint presentation that highlighted some of the prime tillable land in Toledo.
Best Practices & Planning
Based on the mapping of tillable land, CIFT identified the importance of bolstering urban agriculture as a component of sustainably strengthening the local food system. As such, best practices were identified from other cities that had successfully enhanced their urban agriculture landscape through policies and programs. Cities such as Boston, Milwaukee, Chicago, Portland, and Seattle in addition to urban epicenters in Ohio, were examined for their successful programs, resources utilized, unique characteristics of the area, valuable collaborations, and more.

Ultimately, a final planning document was developed that outlined the best practices from other localities in addition to capturing the potential for agricultural development in Toledo and Lucas County.

Next Steps
The use of Lucas County Auditor data allowed CIFT to identify the owners of all land parcels within Toledo city limits. As a next step, CIFT proposed convening those landowners to determine their level of interest and assistance needed in transitioning their land to active urban food production sites. One proposed strategy for supporting this transition was expansion of the Toledo GROWS program, which offers organizational resources and technical assistance to support the development of sustainable garden projects. CIFT noted that this program could expand to include mentoring opportunities for urban farmers. Other suggested strategies included an urban farmland preservation program specific to the area, establishment of a cooperative system for increased economic impact, and urban farm training centers strategically established for maximum engagement in communities.

Find Out More
To learn more about how the Center for Innovative Food Technology applied its Community-Based Agricultural Economic Development planning grant from the Center for Farmland Policy Innovation to increase local food production in Toledo and Lucas County, contact:

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Funding
The “Increasing Local Food Production in Toledo and Lucas County” project was made possible with a grant from the USDA NIFA, award #2010-38923-20817.