Virginia Cooperative Extension
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Virginia Urban Agriculture Mini Grant Projects

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Introduction

One of the objectives of the **Advancing Urban Agriculture and Sustainable Food Systems in Virginia Initiative** was to launch an urban agriculture mini-grant program. A total of seven organizations across Virginia received funding following the submission and approval of the mini-grant outreach plan by the USDA. Each recipient demonstrated progress and success. Contributors to this project include Virginia Cooperative Extension, the Virginia Tech Center for Food Systems and Community Transformation, Virginia State University, the Small Farm Outreach Program, Happily Natural, the Petersburg League of Urban Growers (P.L.U.G.), and partners from USDA and FSA.

2025 Mini-Grant Project Vignettes

This initiative, supported by the Urban and Innovative Agriculture Community-Based Organization Fund, aims to strengthen the capacity of existing urban agriculture efforts across Virginia. These capacity-building efforts focus on enhancing local food systems, improving access to resources, and expanding opportunities for urban growers across the Commonwealth.

The purpose of the mini grants is to invest in urban agriculture projects that are already demonstrating meaningful impact in their communities. Many of these efforts serve under-resourced areas by providing food security, creating spaces for resource sharing and knowledge, and supporting more resilient and locally driven food systems across the Commonwealth. By providing targeted financial support, the program helps sustain and expand initiatives that actively contribute to community well-being while addressing persistent challenges such as limited land access, food insecurity, and the need for climate-resilient agricultural practices. Selected projects received awards ranging from $5,000 to $15,000. This funding aligns with the USDA Farm Service Agency's broad definition of urban agriculture, which includes farming, gardening, and other food production activities in urban and peri-urban areas.

As part of the program, site visits were conducted between June and July 2025 to assess project progress and the effectiveness of the mini grants. These visits informed the development of vignettes included in this publication, which serve as tools for promotion and knowledge-sharing. The following summaries highlight each project's activities, use of funding, and contributions to the **Advancing Urban Agriculture in Virginia Initiative**. The following summaries highlight each project's activities, use of funding, and contributions to the project.

New Roots Farm Global Urban Agriculture Project (International Rescue Committee)

The New Roots Farm Global Urban Agriculture Project, led by the International Rescue Committee (IRC) in Charlottesville, supports refugees and new Americans through a well-established network of community gardens. With more than 10 years of operation and five sites across Charlottesville and Albemarle County, it is the region's largest nonprofit-led community gardening initiative. Through mini-grant funding, the IRC invested $15,000 in infrastructure improvements to enhance operational efficiency, improve quality of life for participating farmers, and strengthen household food security.

Growers from more than twenty countries cultivate culturally significant crops, with many maintaining plots for multiple years. The primary eight-acre site borders the Rivanna Trail and lies within a floodplain, requiring adaptive strategies such as trenching, raised beds, and vertical growing techniques. Plot types vary, with private plots priced at three cents per square foot and plots near centralized water systems priced at five cents per square foot. Governance is democratic, with members voting on decisions affecting the garden.

As part of the statewide initiative, New Roots contributes to expanding organizational capacity, improving land access, and connecting under-resourced growers with USDA resources. Future priorities include strengthening distribution channels, installing a solar-powered water pump, and securing more resilient land following flood impacts in 2018. Additional goals include improving access to tools and purchasing bulk seed.

Healthy Pantry (SERVE Inc.)

Healthy Pantry SERVE, led by SERVE Inc. in Stafford, is a long-established organization providing USDA Foods and nutritious produce to low-income households at no cost. Supported by a $15,000 investment from the mini-grant program, SERVE expanded its efforts to increase the production and distribution of locally grown food by integrating urban agriculture into its food assistance model. Over its 45-year history, SERVE has grown to serve more than 55,000 individuals, operating seven days a week with the support of more than 2,200 monthly volunteers.

Grounded in a "Food Is Medicine" approach, SERVE prioritizes fresh, locally sourced, and culturally relevant foods. More than half of its distributed produce is fresh, totaling over 1,090,000 pounds in 2025. Partnerships with regional farms support seasonal supply, while healthcare partnerships enable the acceptance of food prescriptions.

SERVE also operates a Mobile Pantry that delivers food to households and community sites. With a small staff supported by volunteers, the organization emphasizes accessibility, dignity, and community impact while continuing to expand its role in local food systems.

Enhancing the Sustainability of Urban Agriculture in Northwest Roanoke (One Valley, Inc.)

This project, led by One Valley, Inc., aims to strengthen community engagement, increase local food production, and improve orchard management in Northwest Roanoke. Supported by $14,900 in mini-grant funding, the initiative builds on One Valley's mission to reclaim urban land through community-driven agriculture.

The organization manages multiple growing sites, including the 8th and Gilmer Garden and the Carver Garden, both of which supply local food pantries and community members. Educational programming for youth includes initiatives such as the Villa Heights Children's Garden and a two-year Urban Agriculture Training Program.

Due to limited cold storage, produce is distributed directly to community partners. One Valley employs practices such as permaculture design, composting, and crop rotation. Future goals include expanding volunteer capacity, improving infrastructure, and increasing land access.

Chimborazo Playground Community Garden Urban Greenhouse (Verdant Virginia)

This project, led by Verdant Virginia in Richmond, focused on constructing a solar-powered greenhouse and water-harvesting system to improve sustainability and extend the growing season. Supported by a $5,000 mini-grant, the initiative builds on the long-standing Chimborazo Playground Community Garden, established in 2009.

The garden includes over forty raised beds maintained by approximately 80–90 gardeners. Participants contribute volunteer hours, and the site supports a variety of activities, including food donation programs, pollinator habitats, and community foraging.

The addition of renewable energy infrastructure and water management systems will enhance year-round production and reduce operational costs. Future goals include expanding educational programming and improving infrastructure.

Water Access and Conservation Project at the Mosby Justice Garden (Richmond Food Justice Alliance)

This project focuses on improving water access and promoting conservation practices to support urban agriculture and strengthen community resilience in Richmond. Supported by a $13,610 mini-grant, the initiative contributes to broader efforts to address food access challenges and support community-led land stewardship.

Located in the Mosby Court neighborhood, the garden serves as a hub for food production, environmental education, and community engagement. Since its establishment in 2021, the site has grown into a center for programming and resource distribution, including a weekly farmers market.

Youth engagement is a central component of the project, with participants taking on leadership roles and engaging in adaptive agricultural practices. Looking ahead, the initiative aims to strengthen infrastructure, expand youth education, and deepen community engagement, continuing to serve as a model for community-led urban agriculture.

Building Capacity for Community Urban Gardening at Farmer Street Park in Petersburg (Building ANU Foundation Inc.)

Building ANU Foundation focuses on establishing an educational urban garden to support long-term community growing efforts. Supported by $10,961 in mini-grant funding, the project is located in Farmer Street Park, where a new garden is strengthening community connections through urban agriculture. Nicole and Craig Tucker, longtime Petersburg residents and founders of the Building ANU Foundation, identified a need to preserve community spaces and create opportunities for neighborhood engagement through gardening. Through a Community Development Block Grant, they improved the local basketball court and playground and partnered with the Director of Parks and Recreation to install eight raised beds and a water retrieval system.

The initiative's long-term goal is to develop a neighborhood food bank, though the garden has already become a safe and welcoming space for residents. Current features include raised beds, a pergola connected to a refillable water station, and newly planted fruit trees. Their effort demonstrates how urban growers can access institutional support, build partnerships, and adopt sustainable practices to strengthen local food systems.

Nicole and Craig have received assistance from Virginia State University and have engaged a wide range of community stakeholders, including police and fire departments, Parks and Recreation, City Council members, first responders, incarcerated individuals, and neighborhood residents. Beginning in early 2024, they gathered community input, and

by November, construction and planting were underway. Despite having no prior gardening experience, their work reflects a strong commitment to community improvement and aims to inspire broader participation. Beyond managing the garden, they maintain the surrounding park, organize community events, conduct grassroots fundraising, deliver food to elderly residents, and coordinate service opportunities.

Future goals include expanding agricultural production, developing youth programs for at-risk children, increasing educational offerings, and improving community health outcomes. Their work highlights how urban gardening and community engagement can contribute to neighborhood revitalization and stronger social connections.

Proposal to Revitalize 31st Baptist Church Urban Farm (NANIH Farm and Garden Inc.)

This project, led by NANIH Farm and Garden, Inc., seeks to re-engage church members and the surrounding Richmond community in supporting this historic farm through initiatives such as establishing a farm store, mobilizing volunteers, and offering free educational workshops. Supported by $15,000 in mini-grant funding, the project represents a new phase of stewardship beginning in 2024 through a partnership with Patrick Johnson, a longtime permaculturist and urban grower.

Located in Richmond's historic Church Hill neighborhood, the farm is being restored as a productive, community-centered space grounded in ecological sustainability. The church has leased the land to Johnson, who is revitalizing production areas, installing new infrastructure, and implementing sustainable growing practices. With more than three decades of experience, including Peace Corps service, graduate training in international agriculture at Cornell University, and work with Virginia State University's Small Farm Outreach Program, he has introduced practices such as intercropping, cover cropping, soil conservation, and rainwater harvesting.

With support from the mini grant, the farm contributes to efforts to expand capacity and connect urban growers with USDA resources. Planned improvements include a walk-in cooler, a second greenhouse, and a farm stand. A key goal is to engage the church's approximately 750 members, many of whom are older adults, through targeted outreach, discounts, and food access programs. By fall 2025, the project aims to add 1,000 square feet of new growing space and fully integrate farm operations into church life.

Although independently managed, the farm collaborates with community partners, including a local beekeeper who maintains on-site hives, and utilizes shared resources such as water access. A farmers' market is already in operation, with produce distributed locally. The revitalization reflects a renewed commitment to sustainability, community well-being, and urban food access.

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