Executive Summary of Dissertation Policy Recommendations for Local and State Governments

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This dissertation analyzed “urban food enterprises”. The dissertation defines, urban food enterprises as commercialized food production activities in urban areas that sell, at least part of, their food in their local community (see 4.1). Urban food enterprises engage in at least one of the following types of food production: plant cultivation, including hydroponic and aeroponic production; animal husbandry, including honey, egg, and aquaponic production; value-added production (e.g. bread, cheese, jelly/jam, spice blends, and many other products), and alcohol production (e.g. brewing, vinting, distilling, and cidemaking). Enterprises can be formally structured (i.e. for-profit or non-profit legal entities), informally structured (i.e. lacking any legal status), and transitioning (i.e. otherwise informal but working to develop a legal structure).

Recommended Changes in Perspective

Conceptualize Urban Food Entrepreneurship as an Economic Sector

This dissertation argues that local and state government officials should conceptualize urban food entrepreneurship as a nascent, but growing economic sector that can play a role in growing urban economies. Many government officials participating in research supported this idea (see 11.1 and 13.1). Additionally, as this dissertation documents, urban food entrepreneurs can effectively find adaptive reuses for many underutilized (e.g. vacant, abandoned, brownfield, etc) urban spaces and neighborhoods. By conceptualizing each of the varied production types noted in the previous definition as a collective phenomenon, local and state governments can craft policies to encourage growth of this economic sector (see 12.3). This dissertation proposes a model to explain differences between urban food enterprises (see 12.3).

Change Perceptions of Urban Food Entrepreneurship

Before enacting policy change, elected officials and government administrators should change their perception of food production in an urban context. Many current officials’ education about American urbanity was likely, in part, rooted in the architectural/planning Modernism worldview. This worldview, which arose to prominence in the early/mid-20th century, stressed a strict separation between urban and rural spheres, in which agriculture and other types of food production were segregated to the rural sphere. Economic realities of mid-century urban industrialism underpinned this worldview. Under this mindset, urban plant or animal agriculture, and to a lesser extent other forms of urban food entrepreneurship, are a transitory use of land and buildings until, “a higher and better” use emerges.

This separation may have been logical in the mid-century urban economy that placed a high demand on urban land and buildings. However, changing post-industrial economic realities in many neighborhoods, as well as whole communities, beginning in the final quarter of the 20th century erodes the economic support for the Modernist worldview of strict urban/rural segregation. Rather, massive declines in demand for property in central and inner ring cities, combined with radical improvements in intensive food production technologies (e.g. rooftop and hydro/aqua/aeroponic farming) as well as increasing consumer demand for healthy, local, and justly produced food suggests an emerging economic reality that supports a return of some forms of urban food production. However, this production may not appear like historical examples.

Enact Policy Change with Intentionality

Only rarely do food entrepreneurs in either regions face regulatory challenges due to intentionally restrictive policies or rules. Rather, most policies or rules are unintentionally restrictive, as the policies or rules were not designed to accommodate urban food entrepreneurship. Officials should intentionally design policy reforms with urban food entrepreneurship in mind. For example, officials wishing to utilize urban farming as a transitive use should understand the role that urban farming can play as a transitive use and design a policy with those characteristics in mind. Implementing such policy changes may require a government to empower a policy intrapreneur (see 13.3.2).

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Conceptualize Feeding Programs as Economic Development Program

Despite the common public conception that federal feeding programs (e.g. SNAP, WIC, FMNP, etc) are charity to lower-income citizens, public officials should view these programs as economic development incentives that support farmers, food manufacturers, and food distributors/retailers. Feeding program dollars redeemed at traditional grocery stores and corner stores will tend to support national and international supply chains, while program dollars redeemed through local and in-state producers will have a greater impact on local and state economies. Entrepreneurs in both regions reported difficulties in understanding and accessing the ability to redeem these programs. Where possible, officials should reform policies to lower the barriers for urban food entrepreneurs to redeem feeding program (see 8.3.3, 10.5.1, and 13.3.4.7).

Recommended Changes to Policy

Evaluate Land for Use by Food Entrepreneurs

Local governments should inventory and evaluate all available land, especially publicly owned land, that could be engaged by food entrepreneurs. Officials should perform a similar analysis of buildings. A Land Evaluation and Site Assessment (LESA) process using geographic information systems (GIS) is recommended (see 13.3.4.1). One theme that emerged from interviews with both entrepreneurs and administrators was the need for enterprises to develop in locations appropriate to their intended use. For example, the same urban farm might be economically successful in one location but fail in another. Governments should encourage entrepreneurs to develop in locations with a higher likelihood of either short-term or long-term success (see 13.2.2). The City of Orange’s efforts to encourage food enterprises to be long-term anchor tenants in the community’s Valley Arts District is a positive example of this (see 13.2.1). This evaluation process could divide potential land and buildings into two groups, one group focused on using food entrepreneurship as a transitory use until a higher and better use emerges, and the other focused on using food entrepreneurship as a transformational use (see 13.1).

Develop and/or Engage Innovative Land Acquisition Programs to Support Food Entrepreneurs

The City of Dayton’s Lot Links program and Montgomery County’s (Ohio) Land Bank (see 8.1.2 and 8.1.3 respectively) are examples of land access programs that food entrepreneurs can utilize to access land/building for production with sustainable land tenure. The City of Newark’s Adopt-a-Lot program, with its one-year lease structure, is an example of a poorly implemented land access program (see 8.1.1). State and local governments should develop and/or engage programs that allows food entrepreneurs to purchase or otherwise acquire parcels with clean titles and no delinquent taxes. Although not directly examined in this dissertation, public and private land preservation programs may also be an effective way for entrepreneurs to access land. Such programs could align their efforts to coordinate with a land evaluation scheme as noted above.

Improve Public Leases to Food Entrepreneurs

Entrepreneurs reported that short-term leases (e.g. less than three-to-five years) are a significant challenge to their economic viability. Longer leases encourage infrastructure investment by the entrepreneurs, which in turn improves their economic viability. Some leases restricted urban farmers from erecting high tunnel hoop houses. The farmers reported they need high tunnel hoop houses to achieve year-round production, which they indicated as economically important. Governments leasing public land to food entrepreneurs should only grant leases on sites with conditions that encourage entrepreneurs to succeed. Officials should not grant leases where conditions restrict the use of important infrastructure to farmers (e.g. high tunnel hoop houses or the installation of water taps). If incorporated with a land evaluation scheme as noted above, officials could create a multi-tiered lease structure to support the findings of a LESA (see 13.3.4.2).

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**Improve State-Level Regulations**

Four significant state-level regulatory issues emerged as major barriers to urban food entrepreneurship. Reforms to Ohio’s brewery laws likely encouraged the dramatic increase in small-scale breweries in the Dayton region in recent years (see 7.3.4.1). State governments should permit or license small-scale breweries without requiring direct food service (see 7.3.4.1). Interviews in New Jersey indicated both a high demand for legalization of home/cottage-scale value-added production, as well as a high likelihood of illegal, underground production. Interviews with entrepreneurs in Ohio suggest cottage-scale production is a viable path for small business creation. State governments should permit home/cottage-scale value-added production (see 13.3.3). State and local governments should balance public safety concerns over urban beekeeping with economic and spatial viability of beekeepers (see 7.3.2.2.2). Urban farmers in both states reported difficulties in allowing customers to redeem feeding program subsidies (see 10.5.1). Many farmers believe their inability to easily benefit from the programs negatively affects their economic viability. The “5-acre rule” in New Jersey is a significant example of this (see 10.5.1). When possible, state and local governments should streamline the application and redemption process for feeding programs (see 13.3.4.7).

**Update/Reform Zoning and Property Codes**

Local governments should update zoning and property codes to account for contemporary innovations in urban food production including surface-level and rooftop farming, hydro/aqua/aeroponic production, beekeeping, and chicken keeping. These reforms should incorporate an understanding of what locations are appropriate for what types of urban food production and which locations support economic viability of urban food enterprises (see 13.2.2). This is especially true of high tunnel hoop houses on urban farms (see 7.3.1.3.3). Officials should incorporate the land evaluation scheme noted above in this process.

**Encourage Development of Regional Distribution Chains**

Nearly every entrepreneur reported the ability to increase their food production, but most said significant challenges to distribution and sales prevented production increases (see 10.6). This was especially true of urban farmers. Many urban farmers believe that regional aggregation is necessary for their individual economic viability, as well as urban food production at the regional level (see 11.3). Additionally, this dissertation discovered several multi-enterprise partnerships, where an enterprise’s production utilized either produce from local farms or waste generated by another enterprise (see 9.4.2 and 12.2). Local and state governments should incentivize the development of regional distribution chains, with connections to regional rural agriculture (see 13.2.3 and 13.4.1), as well as encourage multi-enterprise partnerships (see 13.4.2).

**Develop Supporting Infrastructure**

Accessing necessary infrastructure is important to all entrepreneurs (see 8.2). Water was the most important resource for urban farmers and alcohol producers (see 10.3.1). Governments should develop infrastructure in areas to encourage the economic viability of likely enterprises (see 13.3.4.3). Infrastructures investments could coordinate with the land evaluation scheme as noted above.

**Design Regulatory Factsheets to Educate Fledging Entrepreneurs**

Entrepreneurs across the production types reported difficulties in understanding the network of regulations and regulatory agencies affecting them (see 11.3.2). Many also expressed frustration at inconsistencies between individual regulators from the same government or between regulators at different levels of government (see 10.4). In several cases regulatory factsheets were outdated, incomplete, or failed to address food production in an urban context. Governments should create or update relevant factsheets to address contemporary changes to urban food production presented in this dissertation. An individual factsheet should include all the necessary information for an entrepreneur engaged in a specific production type to operate their enterprise, including likely sales methods. Separate agencies and departments should collaborate to create factsheets holistically and include citations to statute and administrative codes. Governments should maintain a centralized webpage that stores all factsheets relevant to food production.