

## Summary of Urban Farming Dissertation in Bristol- Key Points/ Lessons

### Project Outline

This study sought to draw lessons from Bristol's best practice in urban farming alongside drawing out wider policy and planning lessons. It was a 'comparative design' project based on case studies of the four main city farms- St Werburgh's, Lawrence Weston, Windmill Hill and Feed Bristol- as each farm is located in very different parts of Bristol with contrasting planning issues (Bryman, 2012, p. 53). Bristol's wider sustainability planning context was explored and wider policy lessons were drawn through interviews with key policy makers and sustainability experts to assess how far Bristol's success in urban farming can be replicated in other cities.

### Key Findings

- Urban farming, outside of allotments, is a relatively rare land use in British cities though interest is growing in it with the popularity of local food movements (Webb *et al*, 2014; Morgan, 2012).
- However, Bristol is a British leader and pioneer in urban farms with over 40 food growing projects in the city and four main city farms (Carey, 2011, p. 6, 2013).
- Although the farms are very diverse and operate different models according to their community's needs, the key general findings are that,
  1. Firstly, the farms contribute to environmental sustainability through growing food in an organic, biodiversity enriching way. Also, they supply particular segments of the market rather than providing a direct, constant and voluminous supply.
  2. Secondly, the farms benefit both the physical and mental wellbeing of their users/ visitors through providing greenery and a contact with nature in cities.
  3. Finally, they are socially inclusive environments and give a sense of belonging and purpose to those traditionally excluded from society like people with learning difficulties or unemployed.
- Given the climate of fiscal austerity, urban farms are continuing to diversify, commercialise and adopt extra revenue generating activities in order to remain financially viable.
- Given their environmental and social benefits, urban farms should be protected and promoted through the planning system, especially local plans. It also involves councils playing a supportive, facilitative role and wider institutional support, especially from sustainability partnerships. Indeed, while council support for a more local food culture and urban farming is key, in the absence of public money, councils can now only play a largely facilitative role. However, having an umbrella, partnership organisation like Bristol Green Capital is vital for bringing together different sustainability players and fostering/ supporting urban farms.
- Also, to solve Britain's severe housing crisis but still protect urban farmland/ greenspace, a more regional, spatial planning is needed so that Green Belt land with low environmental value and excellent public transport links is developed for housing instead of urban greenspace.
- Overall, there is still a need in local areas for fully public accessible parks/ woodlands as urban farms are not a panacea as inevitably having restricted access in their opening times (Specht *et al*, 2014). Nonetheless, their unique benefits, including providing volunteers extensive opportunities and giving the public, especially children and young people, direct and close contact with animals, means that they should be afforded particularly strong protection in the

planning system and promoted and championed as much as possible by local authorities, institutions and partnerships.

## References

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