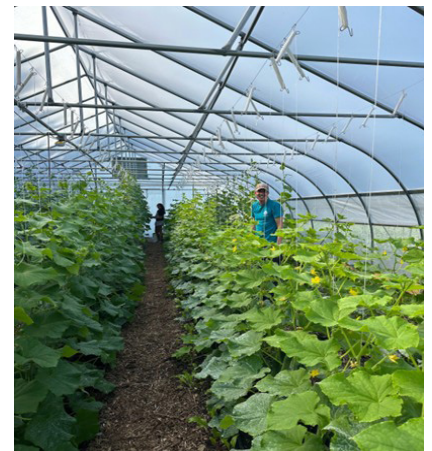




Franklin County Urban Agriculture Critical Infrastructure Grant 2025 End of Year Report

OVERVIEW

In January 2025, Franklin Soil and Water Conservation District (FSWCD) launched the second year of the Franklin County Urban Agriculture Critical Infrastructure Grant (Urban Ag Grant), which was financially assisted by the Franklin County Board of Commissioners. The purpose of this grant is to strengthen the local food supply chain, increase food crop production, processing, and distribution via sale/donation by local urban farms, accelerate the ability of local growers to scale up their operations, and ensure support for socially disadvantaged farmers (e.g. BIPOC, women, and low-income growers). This grant fills a key gap in the local food supply chain by allowing community gardens and urban farms to scale up their operations and produce more local food for sale and donation. Eligible uses of this grant funding include infrastructure that contributes to growing, processing, aggregating, and distributing local food. Examples include but are not limited to high tunnels, water service, fences, sheds, wash/pack stations, cold/dry storage, market stands, compost infrastructure, drip irrigation, harvesting equipment, vertical growing towers and other technologically intensive growing methods, apiaries, chicken coops, harvesting equipment, and tilling equipment.



Garden For All installed electrical to run fans for cucumbers.

Purpose: Provide funding for infrastructure that contributes to growing, processing, aggregating, and distributing local food.

Produce from the 2025 Urban Ag Grant Recipients



Diakons from Upper Arlington Lutheran Church Community Garden.



Butternut squash from Upper Arlington Lutheran Church Community Garden.



Tomatoes from Upper Arlington Lutheran Church Community Garden.

We realized over the first year of the grant that this program fills a large gap within the county for infrastructure funding for urban farms and community gardens. Grants that are this large, are open to for-profit businesses, and target larger scale infrastructure projects are rather hard to find. Our first year was a good indication of how much interest there was in the grant program, and the 2025 grant cycle only confirmed that level of interest. We received 42 requests for funding, totaling \$584,752.60 when there was only \$285,000.00 of funding available to awardees. Decisions on grant award were made by a Grant Advisory Committee, made up of representatives from Franklin County Economic Development and Planning, City of Columbus Public Health, OSU Extension Franklin County, and Osteopathic Heritage Foundation. Ultimately, twenty-five projects were awarded full or partial funding. Sub-grantees and award amounts are detailed on the following page. A majority of these organizations are led by BIPOC, LGBTQ+, or woman growers. Awarded projects included expanding existing garden plots, installing water lines, greenhouse upgrades and maintenance, purchasing high tunnels, and refrigeration and processing infrastructure.

2025 Urban Ag Grant Recipients

1. Bhutanese Community of Central Ohio
2. Bishop Griffin Resource Center
3. Community Development for All People
4. Community Organizing Center
5. Cooke Road Urban Farm
6. Dorothy England Legacy Farm
7. Feed Me Tomatoes
8. Gahanna Community Congregational Church
9. Gooseberry Farm
10. Growth and Growing Collective
11. Harriet Gardens
12. Highland Youth Garden
13. Hodges Creative Works (Foraged & Sown)
14. ICANDO Community Development (Southside Family Farms)
15. Killdeer Acres
16. Over the Fence Urban Farm
17. Southfield Community Veteran Outreach Garden
18. The Family Adolescent and Child Community Engagement Service
19. The Garden for All
20. The Hardy Center
21. Three Creeks Produce
22. Upper Arlington Lutheran Church
23. Veritas Community Church
24. Vineyard Christian Church
25. Vineyard Community Center



PROGRAM OBJECTIVES

Franklin Soil and Water Conservation District made technical assistance and other resources available to grant awardees throughout their projects. Urban agriculture related resources, such as grants, workshops, and meetings were emailed out to both awarded and rejected grantees. This year, we supplemented these resources with a grant we received from the National Association of Conservation Districts and provided free soil tests and free Good Agricultural Practices training to grantees (and any other local growers). A site visit

New in 2025!

- free soil tests
- free Good Agricultural Practices training

was completed or has been scheduled with each awarded grantee to confirm successful implementation of infrastructure. Through implementation and close-out of these projects, awarded grantees were encouraged to share and have discussions with FSWCD staff regarding their current capacity and any additional needs beyond this grant and other available resources within the county. Some of these additional needs do exist, some will be met through upcoming work by FSWCD, and some of them can be viewed as opportunities for other local organizations looking to get involved in the local food space. These responses were recorded and will guide the future of both the Franklin County Urban Agriculture Critical Infrastructure Grant and any technical assistance or resources that FSWCD provides to local growers.



**Status of site visits as of December 19, 2025.
^Some locations were visited multiple times.*

A guiding principle of our technical assistance for this grant has been equitable assistance and support to different grantees. Additional consideration was given to socially disadvantaged growers and smaller organizations during the application evaluation process. Organizational capacity and the experience of our project contact was considered before and during any assistance. Some grantees only needed a phone call or two to ask questions during the project and some grantees needed more in-depth site visits and input on the feasibility of their projects. Some grantees requested checks delivered during site visits, some needed paperwork printed off due to lack of access to a printer, and FSWCD tried to meet the needs of grantees as we were able. FSWCD staff plan to solicit feedback from the City-County Local Food Board, County staff, and the Grant advisory committee on program objectives and outcomes, including equity in our support offered to grantees.

- Objective #1:** Increase local food production by scaling up growing operations.
- Objective #2:** Provide technical assistance and resources to grant recipients.
- Objective #3:** Ensure equitable support for all projects.

CHALLENGES AND GRANTEE FEEDBACK

One of the largest challenges with this grant was that most of the time allocated to implementing projects fell within the growing season, when farmers are busiest. This led to most projects being completed at the very beginning of the season or the very end. Of no fault of their own, many of the grantees' budgets changed drastically once they were awarded due to increases in quotes from contractors or increases in material prices. In these situations, FSWCD remained flexible with grantees to ensure that their projects were implemented successfully even if they varied slightly from the original submission. Our goal with this grant was to offer flexibility to grantees and make sure we were letting them tell us what resources and infrastructure they need. FSWCD remains committed to catering our resources and assistance to the needs of the community and listening to goals and needs before offering assistance, rather than prescribing what we think they need.

- Challenges:**
- implementation of projects during growing season
 - changes in budget
 - permitting
 - meeting the grant deadline

Some additional challenges this year included significantly more difficulty with permitting. This was a reflection of grantees dreaming bigger with projects, so naturally more permitting followed. While this did lead to two projects being unable to be completed by the 2025 deadline, we worked with grantees and contractors to have contracts in place, schedules confirmed, and payments made by the grant deadline so that grantees could continue to move forward.

FINAL REFLECTIONS

While this grant program helped local organizations scale up their production and improve their efficiency, it also highlighted the importance of the Franklin County Board of Commissioner’s commitment to supporting the local food system, and highlighted FSWCD’s proven track record of providing boots-on-the-ground technical assistance and facilitating successful implementation of conservation projects. However, this grant cycle made it more obvious than ever that sometimes success can’t be measured in pounds of produce or reduction in labor hours (although we never get tired of mentioning Highland Youth Gardens 284% increase in production this year). While there were quantifiable increases in production, this year’s grant cycle also provided support in more abstract ways. Janeen Sands with Cooke Road Urban Farm cited feeling very well supported by FSWCD and NRCS staff – and we felt like we learned alongside with Janeen as well. Jodi Kushins of Over the Fence Urban Farm stated she felt a sense of renewal and a feeling of confidence being award the grant and successfully completing her project. This grant program was a “game-changer” and “highly impactful” and led to more locally grown food making its way into the local food system, while also supporting and challenging grantees so that they are the best farmers and community builders they can be!

Photos of Infrastructure Funded by the 2025 Urban Ag Grant



Bhutanese Community of Central Ohio garden expansion and fencing.



Bishop Griffin Resource Center greenhouse.



Community Development for All People raised beds.



Upper Arlington Lutheran Church front beds and irrigation.



The Hardy Center raised beds.



Vineyard Christian Church water spigot.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

This program was made possible with financial support from the Franklin County Board of Commissioners. Additional program support was provided by Franklin County Economic Development and Planning, City of Columbus Public Health, OSU Extension Franklin County, Osteopathic Heritage Foundation, Franklin Park Conservatory, City-County Local Food Board, and the Natural Resources Conservation Service. This grant program was administered by Annabel Spranger, Urban Conservation Specialist, and would not be possible without the strong team and support system we have at FSWCD.

