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ROXBURY

# New legislation may bring more farming to Boston

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By Haley Hamilton, Globe Correspondent

Thanks to new legislation known as Article 89, Bostonians looking for locally grown food soon may not have to look much further than the vacant lot next door.

And when it comes to understanding the full potential of a successful urban farm, they may want to look towards the Dudley Greenhouse in Roxbury.

Article 89 is the product of a series of community meetings and deliberations held by the Mayor's Urban Agriculture Working Group, a committee of 22 farmers, farming advocates, experts from different sectors of the food industry, and neighborhood representatives who came together to discuss the best way to approach Boston's dearth of farming legislation.

Before this, "there just wasn't anything regulating and supporting urban farming," said Danielle Andrews, a member of the working group and the community food coordinator and manager of the Dudley Greenhouse.

The new provisions created by Article 89 establish zoning regulations for farming within Boston and define in detail what will be considered a legal farming operation. The legislation says ground-level "small" (less than 10,000 square feet) and "medium" (10,000 square feet per one acre) farms are allowed on residential, commercial, industrial and institutional land.

"Large" farms of more than one acre may be allowed, with special licensing, on residential, commercial and institutional properties, and are allowed without a license on industrial property.

Article 89 also lays out provisions for roof-top farms; maximum height restrictions on farm structures, such as sheds and shade pavilions; how far back from property lines farm structures must be set; and rules on whether a farm requires a Comprehensive Farm Review, an evaluation of proposed farm structures, site plans, compost expectations and maintenance requirements.

Drafting the policy was a long and complicated process, "but we ended up in a much better place than where we started," Andrews said.

Farming advocates say the policy is good news for farmers and for Boston as a whole, as it opens doors for the development of more community-based projects, such as Roxbury's Dudley Greenhouse.

The Dudley Greenhouse is a fully operational, 10,000 square-foot greenhouse on Brook Avenue in Roxbury, owned by the Dudley Street Neighborhood Initiative and run by The Food Project. It is one of Boston's original urban agriculture projects.

In 2004, the Dudley Street Neighborhood Initiative acquired the abandoned Brook Avenue Garage from Dudley Neighbors, Inc., with plans to transform the lot into a greenhouse to facilitate local food production and build a hub for community education. Then, in 2010, the Dudley Street Neighborhood Initiative partnered with The Food Project -- and the community farm that is the Dudley Greenhouse

was born.

“It was an absolutely natural fit,” said Travis Watson, senior organizer and communications manager at the Dudley Street Neighborhood Initiative. The neighborhood had both the demand and the need, said Watson.

The Dudley Greenhouse is divided into two spheres: food for sale to local restaurants and markets in the back half, and community growing projects in the front half of the space.

In the community garden section, Andrews oversees three elementary school partnerships that supplement science and afterschool programs. There are also local projects of Dudley neighborhood residents and the Sudanese immigrant refugee group Nubia’s Seed & Yield project, a youth-oriented educational program that aims to teach the values of strong community through growing, sharing and providing food.

“I wear two hats here,” said Andrews, “my community education hat and my farming entrepreneurial hat.”

The focus at the greenhouse is, of course, food. But in this corner of Roxbury “food” and “community” are tightly linked:

“Ever thought about food? Want to build a community around food? Come inside,” reads a hand-chalked sign in front of the first row of raised beds.

The sign espouses the mission of The Food Project’s “Grow Well, Eat Well, Be Well” initiative, a series of community-based workshops and classes designed to bring residents together to learn the values of healthy eating and healthy farming.

It’s the educational aspect of the Dudley Greenhouse that Andrews and others say is key to building a sense of community.

“We have the chance to give young people the opportunity to grow with this amazing culture,” said Watson.

Winnie Pickett, a member of The Food Project’s greenhouse committee and a longtime grower, says the greenhouse “has become like home to me.” Originally from Guyana, she has lived in Boston since 1984 and was drawn to the greenhouse by the opportunity to grow her own food. Now, she is committed to the greenhouse’s emphasis on community education.

“We have kids (volunteers and students) and groups of adults coming here to learn and to share,” said Pickett. “What I do at the greenhouse doesn’t end here,” she said of the greenhouse’s broader community impact.

The Dudley site is one of a handful of large community farms already established in Boston. ReVision Urban Farm was established in 1990 as a small garden plot used to grow food for the shelter for the ReVision Family Home, a shelter for homeless mothers and children. The ReVision Urban Farm has grown into one a half-acre farm located across from the Family Home, and supplies food for the shelter, as well as to the larger community through a nearby farm stand in Dorchester.

City Green Growers began in 2008 and has since installed over 400 raised beds and worked with homeowners, restaurants, schools and businesses throughout Boston and Eastern Massachusetts.

The final step in the adoption of Article 89 is a public hearing before the Boston Zoning Commission, set for Dec. 11.

*This article was reported and written under the supervision of Northeastern University journalism instructor Lisa Chedekel, as part of collaboration between The Boston Globe and Northeastern.*

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