Urban and Peri-Urban Agriculture: Role for Food Security and Employment Opportunities

Food security is ensured “when all people at all times have both physical and economic access to sufficient food to meet their dietary needs for a productive and healthy life” (FAO 1996).

Urban and peri-urban agriculture (UPA) is defined as food production from cropping and animal husbandry in and around the urban area. With more than 50% of the world population presently living in urban areas, the United Nations has termed the current millennium as the Urban Millennium.

UPA is gaining increasing attention due to its role in diminishing hunger, increasing food security, recycling urban waste and creating low cost employment (Figure 1). The contribution of UPA to the global food supply is growing rapidly with the involvement of various governmental and non-governmental agencies.

Food security and proper nutrition is limited for a large number of people in southern countries due to poor soil fertility and high population growth rate. UPA greatly contributes to livelihood strategies and food security of the urban poor in major cities of developing countries (Hill et al. 2007), while at the same time allowing the recycling of urban waste (Ruel et al. 1999) and the temporary use of available open spaces.

Inadequate or costly food supply and an increase in the urban demand for food increases interest in new ways of utilizing open spaces in cities. Food production in cities has the advantage of reduced transportation and storage costs and a ready supply of perishable fresh products to the markets, especially meat, milk and vegetables. UPA also ensures proper nutrition to the marginalised poor, helps reduce poverty and supplies a balanced diet to the children of the weaker section of society.

Migration from rural to urban areas for betterment of living conditions is a common phenomenon in developing and underdeveloped countries. UPA activities may be started with little capital investment; they provide employment opportunities to unskilled local and migrant people. Since these opportunities are not seasonal but available throughout the year, UPA can provide full-time employment to poor people including street vendors. Farm to fork distribution of UPA products is less complicated and goods yield higher earnings for farmers and street vendors as compared to goods produced in rural areas.

The intensive mode of UPA production, which includes high amounts of mineral fertilizers as well as pesticides and veterinary drugs, and the frequent use of sewage water for irrigation of crops, calls into question the environmental sustainability of this mode of production (Cofie et al. 2003; Drechsel et al. 2005). The quality of UPA products may be affected by the pollution of air, water and land resources (Yasmeen 2001; Singare et al. 2010).
Figure 1. The importance of urban and peri-urban agriculture

References


