

Cuba: Sustainable Agriculture

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producing more food, especially in the areas where it is most needed. In response to these reforms, the people of this society, with the support of their government and universities, launched a massive campaign to make widespread, diversified, and well-distributed sustainable and organic agriculture a reality.

One major initiative of the Special Period was implementation of urban agriculture, with folks farming their backyards, or bringing new life to abandoned lots or defunct manufacturing sites. We were amazed to find that there is enough organic produce grown within the city limits of Havana to feed each of the city's 2.5 million residents a minimum of 300 grams (about 10 ounces) of fruits and vegetables each day.

Some of the urban farmers we met had left very stable professional careers to engage in agriculture for the first time. For instance, we met a couple, a former veterinarian and chemist respectively, who had originally switched to farming to keep their

children fed. They now make considerably more money farming than they had in their former careers, and each of them operates a separate private farm as part of a larger cooperative.

Another strategy has been to divide large, previously state-owned farms into smaller units, or Basic Units of Cooperative Production (UBPC), as they are called. Our group visited one that employed 55 farmers working a total of about eight acres, with each of the farmers earning approximately four times the national average wage (to keep things in perspective, the national average is the equivalent of about \$10 U.S. per month). This is achieved despite the fact that such farms must first provide, as part of their social obligation, food for local schools, hospitals, and nursing homes before selling on the open market.

The key to success of urban agriculture in Cuba is that the farms are located in the same neighborhoods as their customers. For instance, the UBPC we visited maintains a modest roadside stand that serves between 4,000-5,000 people from the local



A Basic Unit of Cooperative Production (UBPC) on the outskirts of Havana. Eight acres of ground supports 55 farmers at a relatively high standard of living and serves as many as 5,000 people each day. Note that the apartment dwellings of customers are located literally next door to the farm.

community each day. This particular farm has also diversified its operation to include several value-added products through both nursery sales and a processing kitchen.

In addition to the food-for-schools obligation mentioned above, which basically takes the place of property taxes as we know them, taxes are imposed on direct agricultural sales, though

the rate decreases dramatically for produce sold in urban areas. Most Cuban farmers own their land, sometimes collectively, or are engaged in permanent lease

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An experimental dairy farm at the Agrarian University of Havana, where students from 77 countries worldwide have graduated. These cows can graze year-round, but in this picture are also being fed sugarcane as a replacement for silage. Research at the university has determined that the most efficient size for a dairy is 20 cows.

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