

Food, livelihood and health

Farming in the city

They had been chatting about the business of raising pigs in Saracoto, a district of Lima's Lurigancho-Chosica municipality, and the mood was friendly until Rocio Oyola introduced the subject of health and cleanliness. Luis Céspedes and his colleagues stiffened; their smiles faded. Ms. Oyola is junior administrator for

urban agriculture in the municipality, and responsible for ensuring its farmers are aware of city health

urban agriculture in the municipality, and responsible for ensuring its farmers are aware of city health regulations. "You must clean up this place," she told Luis again.

Luis was not inclined to argue. Indeed, there could be no argument, and it was not just the pigsty that needed cleaning up: most of Saracoto was in desperate need of attention. Luis shrugged, and led the group away from the pigs, towards the shack in which he lived with his young wife. Their first child was due very soon. They had made a respectable home out of discarded corrugated iron and timber. It was clean. A cage with two song birds hung in the shade of an awning; purple-flowered bougainvillea climbed a corner post. Luis stood proudly now. The shack and his body language said it all: "Yes, we know, all of Saracoto should be as clean as this. Give us a water supply and we'll hose it down tomorrow".

And there's the problem. While the municipality is

responsible for enforcing health regulations, mains water is supplied courtesy of the state. Saracoto has yet to be scheduled for connection. Meanwhile, its residents must buy their water from private suppliers, and it is not cheap.

"We have to help – wherever we can"

The municipality is not insensitive to the difficulties facing Luis Céspedes and his colleagues in the Saracoto Association of Pig Marketers. "We know they must have somewhere to live", says Rocio Oyola, "They have to make a living. We are very concerned about the health risks, but we have to understand their situation too. Our job is not just to enforce regulations, we have to help as well – wherever we can."

It is at this interface, where urban agriculture confronts the edicts of an urban municipality that CGIAR's Urban Harvest initiative (see Box 8) operates. Rocio Oyola is employed by the

municipality with a brief to utilize the services and expertise of Urban Harvest, which CIP coordinates, wherever possible. Already this has allowed her to liaise effectively between farmers and local authorities on issues of land ownership and the legitimacy of pig raising as an urban occupation. Saracoto's water supply now features prominently on her agenda.

Farming in cities sounds like a contradiction in terms, but growing food has become a lifeline for millions of people in cities, bringing a measure of self-sufficiency to the poorest of families. Most of those crowding into the cities of the developing world are from rural communities. Any open piece of ground is an opportunity to feed themselves and earn some money as well. After all, cities are concentrations of wealth as well as poverty, with a constant demand for fresh vegetables, meat, cut flowers, ornamental plants and so forth.

Urban Harvest

Box8

Uganda is the largest producer of sweetpotato in Africa

CIP ARCHIVES



Urban Harvest provides strategic information and practical technology to practitioners and policy makers involved in urban agriculture. Its research is designed to enhance food security, augment nutrition and help urban families improve their earning capacity. In the process, Urban Harvest aims to reduce environmental pollution and mitigate the health risks stemming from poorly managed urban production. Fundamentally, its mission is to promote the view that urban and peri-urban agriculture – when practiced sustainably – is not only productive but can also make a valuable contribution to the development and well-being of the world’s urban centers.

“Urban Harvest is a response to a pressing need,” says anthropologist Gordon Prain, who co-ordinates the initiative from CIP’s headquarters in Lima. “The past 30 years have seen an explosion in urban populations and urban poverty. It can make a valuable contribution to the nutritional status and income of vulnerable households.”

Focusing its activities on large, rapidly growing cities with significant concentrations of poor people and a high proportion of food and nutritional insecurity, Urban Harvest has established platforms for stakeholder dialogue and policy analysis in a number of locations. “Stakeholder dialogue is crucial,” says Prain. “All parties must discuss the issues with one another. Often there is misunderstanding, sometimes hostility, but urban agriculture offers positive opportunities on many levels, and once that is understood and accepted, people begin working together towards a resolution.”

Millions of urban families depend on technically illegal activity

Urban farming is not an activity that municipal authorities facilitate or even approve of. In many instances, city ordinances condemn it. Yet an estimated 800 million people already earn their living in this way, a number that will continue to rise rapidly through the first half of the twenty-first century. So millions of urban families around the world depend on an activity that is technically illegal. Yet in total they make a significant contribution to urban food supply networks and economies. This is a paradox that Urban Harvest aims to resolve.

Urban Harvest initiatives in Hanoi, Manila and Kampala are already producing positive results (see CIP Annual Reports 2001, '02 & '03). Most recently, stakeholder dialogues in Kampala led to new regulations being drawn up by the City Council. "These will simplify or nullify dozens of

superfluous laws, set the stage for real reforms that will reduce health risks to farmers and consumers, and improve the quality of life in the city," says Diana Lee-Smith, Urban Harvest's Regional Co-ordinator for SubSaharan Africa.

"Kampala is the model for what we would like to achieve here in Lima," says Dr. Blanca Arce, a specialist in animal production systems who co-ordinates Urban Harvest initiatives in Latin America. Stakeholder dialogues involving farmers and city officials are already ongoing, and Dr. Arce is directing the research and development activities of the urban agriculture project in Lurijancho-Chosica, on the north-eastern fringes of Lima. The appointment of Urban Harvest liaison officers to municipal administrations in two of Lurijancho-Chosica's five sectors is an encouraging measure of progress. One of them is Rocio Oyola.

As Lima has grown from a city of 973,000 in 1950 to approaching 9 million in 2005 it has swallowed up

the surrounding agricultural land. The projected plan for Lima in 2010 makes no provision whatsoever for agriculture in Lurijancho-Chosica. It is this unquestioned assumption of inexorable urban expansion that Blanca Arce's work is tackling – both in the meeting rooms of the city administration and in the fields, gardens and livestock pens of Lurijancho-Chosica. "There are 20,000 families who are involved in agriculture in some way or other," she points out. "70% of their plots are less than 1 ha, some are very small, a few range up to 10 ha, but in all cases, farming is a crucial part of the household economy."

250 families are directly involved with the program. They have good fertile land: with irrigation it can be cropped continuously, producing 3 or 4 harvests of various crops a year. "We don't preach," Dr. Arce insists. "We respond to the farmers' enquiries – with workshops on how to improve productivity and marketing, for instance, and

Lima has grown... it has swallowed up the surrounding agricultural land

by helping farmers to set up Field Farm Schools that can give advice on specific issues, such as fertilizers and pest control.”

“The neighbours laughed at me - but it worked”

On the meticulously furrowed hectare of land in the Ñaña district of Lima that has supported Leoncio Rivera Hajar and his family for 25 years, insect pests had become a problem. Pesticides were prohibitively expensive, so Mr. Rivera Hajar turned to Urban Harvest for advice. “They told me to put up fly-traps made of yellow plastic and smeared with grease. The neighbours laughed at me. It was embarrassing. But it worked.” Now he is president of the local Field Farm School and the

neighbors are working with him on experimental plots that should tell them which fertilizer is best suited to which crop – chicken manure, stable manure or commercial fertilizer.

Over at Carapongo, Estabán Malpartida looks on approvingly as a local farmer harvests a hectare of radishes. Mr. Malpartida is President of the elected 8-person committee responsible for ensuring that the complex irrigation network of the former hacienda is kept in good order, and its waters equitably distributed. “That’s a good crop,” he says of the radishes, but does not need reminding that the stream of water in which the bunches are being washed has previously run through the village on the

hill above – where it could have been contaminated with household effluents. “This is something we are working on,” he says.

Lima is hungry for pork

And then there is Luis Céspedes and his colleagues in the Saracoto Association of Pig Marketers. Out on the dirt road that runs through Saracoto’s ramshackle buildings and pigsties he explains that although the Association bought the land ten years ago, they obtained legal title to it only in November 2004 – after Urban Harvest advisors had helped to clarify crucial ownership issues. Just recently, the Lima city authority officially recognized pig raising as a legitimate livelihood. Urban Harvest advisors were involved with that development too, and now Mr. Céspedes is hoping they can help the Saracoto Association improve their husbandry and living conditions. “At present we market an average of around 10 pigs a day,” he says. “It could be more. We

could sell 100 a day. Lima is hungry for pork.”

Like most cities, Lima does not yet fully appreciate the value of what urban farmers have to offer. The Saracoto Association is already making a positive contribution to the food budget of the city – and doing the municipality a favour in the process. “80% of what we feed our pigs is kitchen waste we collect from restaurants and factory canteens,” Mr. Céspedes explains. “If we didn’t collect it, the municipality would have to pay someone else to do it.”



Pigs grow well in the city and offer a profitable livelihood to urban families. They also eat kitchen waste which would otherwise be a refuse problem

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