

Sponsor(s):

Passed 9-0-1

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RESOLUTION 2025-03

TO RECOMMEND CLEAR DEFINITIONS FOR URBAN AGRICULTURE AND ASSOCIATED BUSINESS STRUCTURES

WHEREAS, the Bloomington Commission on Sustainability (BCOS) advises the City of Bloomington on sustainability, climate resilience, and food access policies to ensure a just and thriving community that needs to meet resilience, economic, and health goals; and

WHEREAS, existing Bloomington Municipal Code does not provide adequate definitions or distinctions between homesteads, farmsteads, farms, nonprofit educational agriculture, or accessory agricultural sales.

NOW THEREFORE, BE IT HEREBY RESOLVED BY THE BLOOMINGTON COMMISSION ON SUSTAINABILITY, THAT:

SECTION 1. The Bloomington Commission on Sustainability recommends the City incorporate the following definitions into the Unified Development Ordinance, zoning policy, permitting processes, and applicable departmental guidelines:

Urban Agriculture Definitions & Structures

Term	Definition	Notes / Examples
Urban Agriculture	The practice of cultivating, processing, and distributing food or other agricultural products in or near urban areas.	Includes growing vegetables, herbs, fruits, mushrooms, flowers, or raising small livestock (e.g., poultry or bees) within city limits.

Homestead	A residence where food is grown or produced solely for home use and personal consumption.	Common examples: backyard gardens, home egg-laying hens, or personal composting systems.
Farmstead	A residence where food is produced for both personal use and sales , making accessory use of the property to earn income.	May include sale of eggs, honey, produce, herbs, seeds, plants or value-added products (e.g., soaps, tinctures, jams). Accessory sales are allowed without full commercial zoning. Example sales: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Direct-to-consumer models (farm stand, CSA, farmers market) • Wholesale (restaurants, co-ops, grocers) • Consignment (e.g., providing goods to a cooperative or retail outlet who sells on their behalf, keeping a percentage)
Farm (Urban Farm)	A site primarily used for the purpose of income generation through the sale of farm products or value-added farm goods. May or may not include a residence.	May operate as a business, nonprofit, or cooperative. Can sell through direct sales, wholesale, or local cooperatives. May include vertical farms, greenhouses, or market gardens. Example sales: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Direct-to-consumer models (farm stand, CSA, farmers market) • Wholesale (restaurants, co-ops, grocers) • Consignment (e.g., providing goods to a cooperative or retail outlet who sells on their behalf, keeping a percentage)
Commercial Urban Agriculture	Any urban agriculture operation whose primary purpose is to earn income .	Includes market farms, farm stops, CSA programs, and direct-to-restaurant sales. May include value-added processing (e.g., canning, drying).
Wholesale Urban Agriculture	Urban farms that sell products in bulk to institutions or resellers , rather than directly to consumers.	Includes sales to grocers, restaurants, food hubs, or food co-ops. May include microgreens, mushrooms, greens, etc.

Consignment Sales	A form of sale where a producer provides goods (e.g., seeds, produce, value-added items) to a third party (e.g., farm cooperative or store), who sells them and returns a percentage of the proceeds to the producer after sale.	Common for small-scale producers using farm stops, food co-ops, or local retailers. A hybrid of indirect retail and wholesale. Consignment is particularly useful for small-scale urban growers who may not have their own storefront or consistent sales outlet, and it supports flexible distribution while maintaining producer control and local economic retention.
Non-Commercial Urban Agriculture	Growing or keeping food-producing plants or animals without intent to sell , often for community resilience, education, or personal use.	Examples: community gardens, educational plots, backyard gardens.
Accessory Use Sales	Sale of produce or goods grown on-site as a secondary use of a residential property.	Examples: small CSA shares, farm stands, cottage foods. Allowed at appropriate scale without triggering a zoning change.
Value-Added Products	Products made by processing raw farm goods to increase market value.	Includes herbal products, jams, soaps, tinctures, fermented goods, and more.
Educational / Nonprofit Urban Agriculture	Agricultural operations managed by a nonprofit or educational entity for the purposes of teaching, community engagement, or health promotion , not private profit.	Examples: youth programs, cooking classes, permaculture training, therapeutic gardens. May include on-site sales to support programs.
Vertical Farming/ Hydroponic & Smart Tech/ Indoor Agriculture	The growing of crops in vertically stacked layers within a controlled environment. These facilities need artificial lighting, climate control , and other systems to maintain optimal growing conditions. Energy intensive.	Examples: multi-story buildings or preconstructed and sometimes stackable structures that utilize the Internet of Things (IoT) by connecting various components of the farming system for real-time monitoring, predictive analytics, and may utilize robotics. [Not suited to residential zoning.]

Permaculture / Regenerative Agriculture	A method of ecological design that focuses on long-term sustainability through soil health, biodiversity, and closed-loop systems..	Encouraged in both commercial and non-commercial models. May include food forests, guild planting, compost systems, and water conservation.
Aquaculture	The cultivation of aquatic organisms such as fish, crustaceans, mollusks, and aquatic plants in controlled or semi-controlled environments, including tanks, ponds, and other water-based systems, for food production, habitat restoration, or other purposes.	Raising tilapia in an indoor recirculating tank system within a converted warehouse for local seafood sales.
Aquaponics	A food production system that combines aquaculture (raising aquatic animals such as fish) with hydroponics (cultivating plants in water) in a symbiotic environment, where nutrient-rich water from the aquaculture system feeds the plants, and the plants help filter and purify the water for the aquatic animals.	Operating a rooftop greenhouse where lettuce and herbs are grown using nutrient water from an on-site koi or catfish tank, supplying both produce and fish to local markets.
Produce	Vegetables and fruits produced by a grower, gardener, farmer, orchard, or vintner.	Perennial fruits such as apples, grapes, and berries, and annuals such lettuces and kale, melons, tomatoes, and squashes.

SECTION 2. The Bloomington Commission on Sustainability recommends the City of Bloomington ensure that educational and nonprofit farm operations are supported through flexible permitting, especially those offering classes, public programming, or donation-based production.

SECTION 3. The Bloomington Commission on Sustainability recommends the City of Bloomington create a clear zoning and permitting framework that accommodates homesteads, farmsteads, farms, and vertical high-tech farms differently—based on scale, intensity, and purpose.

PASSED AND ADOPTED by the Bloomington Commission on Sustainability upon this 12th day of August, 2025.

The views expressed here are solely those of the Bloomington Commission on Sustainability, as approved in their public meetings, and do not necessarily reflect the views, policies, or positions of the City of Bloomington. Only the Office of the Mayor has the authority to issue policy statements on behalf of the Executive Branch of the City of Bloomington.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Justin Vasel', written over a horizontal line.

JUSTIN VASEL, Chair

Bloomington Commission on Sustainability