

A group of five people are working in a raised garden bed filled with green leafy plants. They are wearing casual clothing like t-shirts, tank tops, and caps. The garden is outdoors with other plants and structures visible in the background.

Tending a plot at CRUF. The farm offers robust programs, events, workshops and monthly community meals.

PHOTO: Nicola Nemy/Common Roots Urban Farm

# Urban Farming in Mi'kma'ki

by **CAITLIN SKERRATT** /// EAC Staff  
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We are struggling to feed ourselves here in Mi'kma'ki. Despite a rich history of agriculture, Nova Scotia is losing farms faster than the national average. The percentage of food-insecure households in Nova Scotia jumped to 28.9 per cent in 2023 and food prices have increased by 21 per cent over the last four years. Households are struggling to feed their families and food banks are overwhelmed.

Food insecurity is racialized. Nationally, 40 per cent of Black people, and 36 per cent of Indigenous people, live in food insecure households. This is far higher than the national average for non-racialized households. Income is the top determinant of food insecurity, and in 2022 racialized Nova Scotians had a poverty rate of 20.6 per cent, much higher than 8.6 per cent for non-racialized residents.

Urban agriculture across Mi'kma'ki offers a grassroots response. It reminds us that communities have the inherent ability to find unique, resilient and creative ways to support one another in times of crisis.

**Caitlin** (she/her) is a community food coordinator at the EAC. Caitlin is passionate about food systems and collaborative learning. She loves swimming, sewing clothing and her fluffy rescue cat, Penny.

**Florence** (she/her) is the Indigenous food coordinator at the Mi'kmaw Native Friendship Centre.

## What is urban agriculture?

Urban agriculture ranges from apartment balcony gardens and raised beds, to neighborhood community gardens and rooftop gardens, to large-scale production plots.

By transforming underused spaces into gardens, we can promote the resilience of urban environments. Many local governments now permit urban farming on municipal land, leading to projects like **HRM's Community Gardens Program**. More cities are incorporating urban farming into climate plans (see **HalifACT** actions to improve food security and resilience through strategies like the **JustFOOD Action Plan for Halifax**).

## Foodshed challenges

The Halifax region's foodshed (the geographic area that supplies a population with food) is vulnerable to climate change. As a coastal region, we can expect to see more extreme weather events, invasive species and rising sea levels leading to crop damage, poor livestock health and compromised water quality. This will make it more difficult and expensive to bring food into Nova Scotia and to produce our own food.

Urban agriculture promotes local food supply chains and reduces

the heavy carbon footprint of long-distance transportation. It also shows us that cities are not separate from nature. Unused fields and rooftops can be transformed into thriving garden spaces, restoring ecosystems and promoting biodiversity while supporting our pollinator friends and mitigating flood and drought risk.

Urban communities are taking food production into their own hands for many reasons, from relieving climate anxiety to taking pressure off household food budgets.

## Urban farm profile: Common Roots

Commons Roots Urban Farm (CRUF) Bi-Hi Park sits on municipal land at the



Exploring the raised beds and learning about urban agriculture.

PHOTO: Nicola Nemy/Common Roots Urban Farm

## Local Food Shops in HRM



- A Halifax Brewery Farmers' Market**  
1496 Lower Water Street, Saturday 8 a.m.–1 p.m.
- B Local Source Market.**  
2790 Windsor Street,  
Tuesday–Sunday 10 a.m.–7 p.m.
- C Halifax Forum Farmers' Market**  
6205 Almon Street, Saturday 8 a.m.–1 p.m.
- D Gateway Meat Market**  
667 Main Street,  
Dartmouth, open daily 8:30 a.m.–8 p.m.
- E Dave's Fruit and Vegetable Market**  
322 Main Street, open daily
- F Mobile Food Market**  
26 Courtney Road, Tuesday 4:30–7:30 p.m.  
2285 Gottingen Street, Saturday 12:30–2 p.m.  
44 Vimy Avenue, Saturday 9:30–11 a.m.

- G Warehouse Market**  
2867 Isleville Street,  
Wednesday–Saturday, 9 a.m.–6 p.m.
- H Common Roots Urban Farm seasonal markets**  
296 Pleasant Street, Wednesday 2–5:30 p.m.  
298 Pleasant Street, Thursday 12–1 p.m.
- I Alderney Landing Farmers Market**  
2 Ochterloney Street, Saturday 8 a.m.–1 p.m.
- J Fairview Farmers Market**  
27 Vimy Ave, Thursday (June–October) 4–7 p.m.
- K Seaport Farmers Market**  
961 Marginal Road,  
Saturday 8 a.m.–2 p.m., Sunday 10 a.m.–2 p.m.

- L Hope Blooms Market**  
2346 Brunswick Street,  
Thursday (June–September) 4:30–6:30 p.m.
- M Musquodoboit Harbour Farmers' Market**  
7895 Highway 7,  
Sunday (May–September) 10 a.m.–2 p.m.  
67 Park Road,  
Sunday (October–April) 10 a.m.–1 p.m.
- N Novalea Farmers' Market**  
3540 Novalea Drive,  
Saturday (July–October) 8 a.m.–12 p.m.
- O Prospect Communities Farmers' Market**  
2141 Prospect Road,  
Wednesday (June–October) 4:30–7 p.m.,  
with bi-weekly online ordering October–June
- P Sackville Farmers' Market**  
650 Sackville Drive,  
Saturday (May–December) 9 a.m.–1 p.m.
- Q Spryfield Farmers' Market**  
205 Herring Cove Road,  
Sunday (June–October) 12–3 p.m.
- R Tantallon Village Farmers' Market**  
16 Sonny's Road,  
Tuesday (June–October) 2–6 p.m.



Produce and flowers grown at CRUF for weekly markets.

PHOTO: Nicola Nemy/Common Roots Urban Farm

## TAKE ACTION

There are many ways the Halifax Regional Municipality (HRM) can promote urban agriculture, from increasing access to land for growing to expanding support for existing community gardens. Contact your municipal councillor and tell them you want to see council promote community food production through continued funding of the [JustFOOD Action Plan](#).

## Cultural resurgence by Florence Blackett

Adapting to the environment has long been crucial for the survival of the Mi'kmaw people. Land occupation, landscape changes and environmental shifts have necessitated resilient approaches in the methods used to sustain traditional practices.

Knowledge keepers are once again harvesting from the land and waters to provide community members with traditional foods. Communities are coming together to plant and harvest gardens using traditional companion planting methods, train butchers to process traditional meats, and return to the waters to harvest fish.

Indigenous individuals living in urban areas often face more challenges in accessing these foods and teachings. They rely on community connections built through organizations like the Friendship Centre and initiatives like a new food security program, Pusgialikg's'gwet, that integrates traditional teachings and sustainable food practices. This Two-Eyed Seeing approach respects cultural heritage while promoting food sovereignty and community health.

## Resilient communities

From an urban farm with plots cared for by newcomers to the resurgence of traditional Mi'kmaw harvesting practices, local food production strengthens the social and economic well-being of our communities, protects the environment and builds resilience to supply challenges and price fluctuations.

In the face of rising food insecurity and climate change, urban farming offers hope. By diving into these grassroots solutions and supporting local food initiatives, we're not just growing food – we're growing a stronger, more connected community for ourselves and for future generations.

bottom of Bayers Road in Kjiptuk/Halifax. CRUF is a non-profit hybrid farm with 100 community plots, a bustling market garden and common plots where passersby can help themselves to what's growing. Nicola Nemy, coordinator of Bi-Hi Park, says that over half of the community plots are gardened by newcomers. Many self-identify as consistently food insecure.

CRUF's community plots waitlist has surpassed 100 people, and Nemy hears from volunteers, plotters and farm staff that being on the farm has huge impacts on mental and community health. Teaching people how to grow food increases knowledge about and access to seasonal, preferred foods, while also promoting community wellness. CRUF offers robust volunteer and newcomer programs, diverse events and workshops and monthly community meals that offer a chance to gather.

Nemy says that we should be using every available greenspace to nourish our growing population, noting that there is lots of capacity to share the knowledge and benefits of urban farming.