



URBAN AGRICULTURE

WHEAT RIDGE, COLORADO

A Case Study of a Coalition Fostering A Healthier Environment

BACKGROUND

LiveWell Wheat Ridge (LWWR), formerly named Thriving Wheat Ridge, was established in 2005 with a Thriving Communities grant from Kaiser Permanente. The mission was to advance healthy eating and active living (HEAL) through programming, policy and environmental changes that support a healthy food system, and a pedestrian and bicycle friendly community. In 2008, Thriving Wheat Ridge joined the newly formed nonprofit LiveWell Colorado, gaining the name LiveWell Wheat Ridge.

In 2012, LWWR stepped into the advanced implementation stage of the LiveWell Colorado Community Investment initiative. This set the stage for LWWR to develop active community coalitions and influence key changes to critical policies and plans. While funding for LWWR ended in 2014, the momentum created in the last few years will support continued implementation of HEAL policies, programs and environments for years to come.

HISTORY OF AGRICULTURE

Wheat Ridge was incorporated in 1969 as a suburban community with clear agricultural roots. Houses and businesses sprouted up between the fields of carnations and apple orchards. Development continued, but agriculture was never lost, and even today Wheat Ridge maintains a robust array of small- to mid-sized farms.

In recent years, there has been increased interest from both existing and new residents in Wheat Ridge to support a local food system, both by growing food themselves and by purchasing it from local producers. This trend in Wheat Ridge, and across the country, is known as urban agriculture. There is growing evidence that connecting with a local food system has community health benefits by supporting healthy eating, community resilience, and food literacy.

A curbside produce stand at Sweet Ridge Farm in Wheat Ridge



“LiveWell Wheat Ridge has had clear intentions to build local food capacity in local residents.”

**Tara Jahn,
Live Local Coordinator**

“Our citizens are owning their own city right now, that is why we are seeing so much success with urban agriculture.”

**Mayor Joyce Jay,
City of Wheat Ridge**

ESSENTIAL INGREDIENTS

Four key elements have made it possible for Wheat Ridge to be a leader on urban agriculture in the Denver metropolitan region: Skilled Organizational Capacity, Strategic Policy Change, Continuous Relationship Building, and Successful Infrastructure Change. These key elements have worked synergistically and have reinforced each other.

Skilled Organizational Capacity

A few crucial organizations have given structure and channeled resources to the urban agriculture movement in Wheat Ridge. Through strategic citizen empowerment and engagement, these organizations have been able to consistently remind policymakers of the value and opportunities available with a local urban agriculture movement.

LiveWell Wheat Ridge provided technical guidance on programming, policy and environmental change. Jefferson County Public Health, as fiscal agent, brought expertise in population-level interventions, county and national best practices, and community engagement.

Wheat Ridge 2020 has given citizens the opportunity to see and enjoy the benefits of local food production through events hosted by their Live Local Harvest and Live Local Dines programs. These fun events have built a sense of community and empowered citizens to be more involved in local decision making.

Strategic, Multi-Layered and Comprehensive Policy Change

Wheat Ridge has been a leader in supporting the local food system through thoughtful policies. The 2011 Urban Agriculture Zoning Code Amendments provide lenient rules towards gardens and small farms, allowing urban gardens and produce stands in all zones, and increased allowance for farmers markets and small-scale animal husbandry. These key policy changes clearly reflect the desires of the citizens of Wheat Ridge, and establish the city as a pioneering community in the resurgence of local food systems in the Denver metropolitan region.

City of Wheat Ridge staff, elected and appointed officials have been key partners in the development, adoption, and implementation of these policies. Their commitment to supporting urban agriculture efforts of citizens is clear from the many hours of work they have put in to refine these policies and to promote the new opportunities available for urban agriculture.

Continuous Relationship Building

Community members devoted to the cause of urban agriculture have made all of this possible. The consistent involvement of citizens is seen through regular attendance and commenting at city council meetings, the development of relevant data, and a public presence that promotes Wheat Ridge as an urban agriculture-friendly community. Policymakers have consistently stated that this involvement in public decision-making has been the primary driver of policy and environmental changes. Because the changes are coalition-driven, they are long-lasting and tailored to the specific needs of Wheat Ridge.

Successful Infrastructure Change

LiveWell Wheat Ridge and other community partners supported the creation of a number of community growing spaces. These include the Jefferson High School-Based "Little Saints" Community Garden, and garden beds at Highlands West and Highlands South retirement communities. These spaces have served important roles as models for urban agriculture tailored to youth and older adults, for public celebrations, and as educational sites for healthy food production and access.

SIGNIFICANT MILESTONES

2009

Adoption of [Envision Wheat Ridge Comprehensive Plan](#)

Creation of the Wheat Ridge Farmers Market Food Stamp Acceptance Program

Formation of the Access to Fresh Fruits and Vegetables (AFFV) Taskforce

Completion of a [Healthy Food Policy Assessment](#)

Completion of a Land and Asset Inventory of the Fruitdale District

Completion of an Evaluation of Greenhouses in Wheat Ridge

Passage of the [Urban Agriculture Zoning Code Amendment Ordinance](#)

Creation of the [Residential Zoning Guide to Urban Agriculture](#)

Facilitation of community trainings on implementation of community gardens

Formation of [Live Local Harvest and Live Local Dines](#)

2014

MOVING FORWARD

Though LiveWell Wheat Ridge will no longer receive funding from LiveWell Colorado, the momentum behind urban agriculture will keep going in Wheat Ridge. Here are key recommendations to ensure local agriculture efforts continue:

Strengthen the Urban Agriculture Community

Small-scale producers and those who wish to support them will benefit from regular networking opportunities. Connecting food producers, processors and consumers is one of the core benefits of a local food system and is critical to keep the urban agriculture model going. Whether through a food policy council, or existing civic organizations such as the Wheat Ridge Grange or Live Local Harvest, urban agriculture needs opportunities for skills exchange, political advocacy, and celebration.

Ensure Policies Continue to Incentivize Urban Agriculture

Food production is a core element of the City of Wheat Ridge's character and needs to continue to be supported by the city. As 38th Avenue and other parts of the city begin to draw real estate development, it is important that the zoning code, plan updates, and other policies are regularly looked at to ensure that space for local food production is maintained. As a core element of the city's history, it should be a high priority, even if shifting real estate demands pressure landowners to develop their properties. Continued outreach and interaction between the city and local producers will help ensure that policies reflect the needs of the urban agriculture community.

Establish Public-Private Partnerships

There are unique opportunities for the city of Wheat Ridge to partner with local producers for mutual benefit. Options include the lease of public lands to private producers, city-managed food production in public parks, and the hosting of public events at local private farms. In addition to supporting food production, these partnerships create opportunities for educational programming and community events. This is already modeled in Lakewood with the Sprouts City Farm at Mountair Park, and will be seen in Arvada with future agricultural production at the Majestic View Nature Center. It could also be seen in Wheat Ridge with historical farming at the Baugh House.

Support Creative Programming

A new farmers market that prioritizes local producers, and is located on the Ridge at 38 would strengthen Wheat Ridge's reputation as an urban agriculture-friendly community. The new farmers market would be a central gathering space for the community to support and celebrate the local food system with events and food swaps. Temporary gardens in public parks and underutilized spaces would pilot public-private partnerships and raise awareness of the versatility of urban agriculture. Bicycling routes between local farms would support local producers through a fun, healthy activity.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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