

Agriculture **(2014, R2017, R2025¹)**



Policy Statement

The American Society of Landscape Architects (ASLA) believes responsible agricultural practices at all scales are vital for the well-being of the planet. ASLA supports approaches that provide food, textiles, timber resources, plant materials, and other products while protecting the environment, preserving natural resources and agricultural land, and strengthening communities and the economy.

ASLA encourages:

- Land use policies that preserve farmland and promote sustainable agricultural practices.
- Regenerative climate-smart practices that preserve soil and soil health, enhance biodiversity, promote the efficient use of resources, and support locally owned and produced goods.
- Efforts to measure, monitor, and restore ecosystem services on agricultural lands.
- The use of green infrastructure to manage stormwater, reduce runoff, and filter pollutants.
- Reducing dependency on the use of chemicals to minimize risks to human health and the environment.
- Implementing agricultural and waste management methods that minimize waste and reduce environmental harm.
- Expanding opportunities for local and urban agriculture to enhance food security, improve access to local produce, create economic opportunities, and enhance social connectivity and community resiliency.
- Incorporating school gardens into campuses to expand knowledge and appreciation of agriculture and to promote healthy eating and active living.

Justification

Landscape architects play a crucial role in agriculture by integrating ecological, spatial, and infrastructure design to create more resilient, productive, and sustainable agricultural systems. Landscape architects' education and expertise address modern agricultural challenges, including climate change, decreased soil health, and loss of biodiversity. These skills translate to high-value contributions that support the adoption of sustainable practices and diversified agricultural systems that are responsive to the land's capabilities.

Multifunctional systems designed by landscape architects integrate food production with wildlife habitats, recreational trails, and educational spaces. These design services create new revenue opportunities for landowners through agritourism, carbon offsets, water quality credits, and biomass fuel production.

Additionally, landscape architects develop creative solutions to introduce food and forest production to diverse sites, including green roofs, school gardens, vacant lots, and floating aquatic structures. These practices create environmental and health benefits as

¹ The 2025 policy incorporates the sunsetted Urban & Local Agriculture public policy

well as promote awareness and educate the public on the ecological and cultural value of sustainable agriculture in both urban and rural settings.

Issue

Land is a vital yet limited resource. Nearly half (45 percent) of the earth's habitable land is devoted to agriculture; one-third of that is used as cropland, with two-thirds used as grazing land.² Agriculture at all scales faces a range of interconnected challenges that impact its sustainability and productivity. Critical areas of concern to agricultural production include water, nutrient, and pest management; grazing practices; and rising land costs. Agricultural lands near the fringes of cities and towns are subject to pressure from development, which may result in land-use patterns being characterized as suburban sprawl.

Industrial farming comes with environmental and social costs. Large-scale farming systems emphasize high output and efficiency through modern technology and mechanization and are credited with helping to provide the world with cheap and abundant food. Environmental and social costs are a result of monoculture crops and concentrated animal feeding operations that rely on large quantities of water, fossil fuel, industrial chemicals, and antibiotics.

Alternatives to industrial farming, such as regenerative farming and organic farming, reduce the use of fertilizers and pesticides. Climate-smart agricultural techniques include agroforestry, crop rotation, cover cropping, reduced tillage, integrated pest management, and organic composting. These tools rebuild high-quality soils, store carbon, and manage water efficiently. Landscape buffers, riparian zones, and green infrastructure filter runoff and reduce nutrient pollution as well as support biodiversity.

Water

Water availability and quality are critical to agriculture. Agricultural landowners face increasing challenges like drought, flooding, and competition for limited water, pressures often worsened by climate change. Conservation practices, including cover crops, vegetated buffers, and reduced tillage, improve soil health, boost water retention, and limit nutrient runoff.

Grazing

Livestock grazing on public lands is a significant economic and cultural activity. However, it can lead to soil erosion, loss and degradation of native vegetation, and impede wildlife habitat. The U.S. Bureau of Land Management permitted 155 million acres for grazing in 2024. Best management practices facilitate stakeholder coordination and reconcile environmental concerns, including guiding livestock grazing patterns, improving watershed conditions, and enhancing wildlife habitat.

Land & Property Costs

The average cost per acre of U.S. farmland has increased by approximately 95 percent between 2010 and 2024.³ With land supply inherently limited, land use planning plays a significant role in shaping the value of farmland. Regionally, development patterns that encourage sprawl tend to drive prices even higher. At the site level, adopting land use

² Hannah Ritchie and Max Roser (2019). "Half of the world's habitable land is used for agriculture." Published online at OurWorldinData.org. Retrieved from: <https://ourworldindata.org/global-land-for-agriculture> [Online Resource]

³ Land Values 2024 Summary, USDA, National Agricultural Statistics Service. Retrieved from: https://www.nass.usda.gov/Publications/Todays_Reports/reports/land0824.pdf

practices that enhance resource efficiency and boost productivity can help sustain profitability, even on smaller or constrained plots of land.

Value for Underutilized Spaces

Repurposing vacant lots, remediating brownfields, and zoning for agricultural production build food security, community resilience, and local wealth. Through policy changes, municipal governments can streamline the approval process for agricultural projects, increase the number of sites that are eligible for local production, and support community food gardens. Community food gardens are important tools to help improve public health, increase access to fresh food, reduce food costs, and enhance environmental conditions and social well-being.

Green Schoolyards

School campuses can be designed with green spaces to provide students hands-on experience with crop cycles, soil science, composting, pest control, ecosystem balance, and other food production processes. These collaborative activities not only foster social development but also promote lifelong habits of healthy eating and active living. Green schoolyards can be integrated across multiple areas of the curriculum, serving as powerful tools to build responsibility, teamwork, self-reliance, environmental literacy, and practical skills. They also help cultivate a deeper connection to the environment and to one another.

Resources

<https://www.fws.gov/service/agriculture>

<https://www.blm.gov/programs/natural-resources/rangelands-and-grazing/livestock-grazing>

<https://www.epa.gov/brownfields/steps-creating-community-garden-or-expand-urban-agriculture-brownfields-site>

<https://agecon.ca.uky.edu/2023-farmland-values>

<https://www.climatehubs.usda.gov/hubs/northwest/topic/agricultural-biomass-biofuel>

<https://www.asla.org/2019awards/639727->

[Where Agriculture Meets Coastal Woodlands.html](#)

<https://www.greenschoolyards.org/>

Inter-Related Public Policies

[Biodiversity](#)

[Environmental Sustainability](#)

[Human Health and Well-Being](#)

[Rural Landscapes](#)

[Water Quality and Conservation](#)

[Waterways](#)

[Wetlands](#)