

For Immediate Release

Simplified Access to Water for Chicago's Urban Growers Announced

Urban farms and gardens provide tremendous value to our communities by increasing access to healthy food, creating jobs, supporting local economies, providing youth programming, cultivating biodiverse green space, mitigating the impacts of climate change, and fostering safer and more resilient communities. Chicago's urban growers are instrumental to building a more equitable Chicago.

As a result of the COVID-19 pandemic, food supply chains have been heavily disrupted, highlighting the growing importance of urban farms and gardens as essential operations. However, most urban growing operations do not have the land security or capital to invest in a permanent water source (which can cost up to \$40,000). In this case, many farms and gardens depend on temporary water access through a City of Chicago hydrant. **To keep urban agriculture and the local food system thriving in Chicago, access to affordable water is critical.**

In preparation for the 2021 growing season, a simplified permitting process for hydrant water access has been created by the City of Chicago Department of Water Management (DWM), with support from several urban agriculture partners (UAP), including Advocates for Urban Agriculture (AUA), NeighborSpace, Chicago Lawyers' Committee for Civil Rights, the Chicago Food Policy Action Council, the Food Systems Resource Navigator Project, Grow Greater Englewood, and others.

In addition to the changes being made to the Hydrant Use Permitting Process, UAP partners have worked to create a robust technical assistance pilot program designed to help growers determine the best option for water access, navigate the current application, and receive tailored financial, legal, and administrative support. These resources are available through a [Technical Assistance Form](#) or by scheduling [Office Hours](#), where growers can talk directly with representatives from UAP. **Office Hours were extended through the end of April 2021.**

"The resources on hydrant water access that AUA and Neighborspace have provided to Chicago Lights Urban Farm have been extremely helpful in distilling a complex city process," said Ben Jaffe, Director of Chicago Lights Urban Farm in Chicago. "As an urban farm with a diversity of community programming, it's helpful to have these kinds of organizations doing this work to allow us to concentrate on our programs. The '[Water Access Guide](#)' and collective 'RPZ unit recertification day' were both really helpful in getting our season off on a good foot."

Through the technical assistance program launch in February 2021, over 30 growers have scheduled office hours with representatives from UAP. On February 27th, more than 30 Reduced Pressure Zone (RPZ) units were distributed to growers who have received hydrant permits, accounting for more than a 300% increase in grower's need to access the hydrant since many growing sites lost water access in 2020.

The main objective of the pilot program is to listen and learn from Chicagoland growers to deliver affordable access to water. This will ensure, both now and in the future, that these essential operations can continue to grow healthy, nutritious food for their communities, and collectively contribute to the sustainable development of Chicago.

If you are interested in learning more, please join the AUA [ListServ](#) for updates on equitable water access sent to your email, or visit the following UAP web pages dedicated to water access updates:

[AUA Water Access](#)

[NeighborSpace Water Access](#)

[Chicago Lawyers' Committee Water Access](#)

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