

# Emanuel Urban Farm Network: Mayor Launches New Agriculture Plan To Transform Vacant Lots

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Under a recently-announced new agriculture plan, vacant lots on Chicago's South Side could be transformed into thriving — and profitable — urban farms in just three years.

Under Mayor Rahm Emanuel's new plan, [Farmers for Chicago](#), will make up to five acres of city-owned lots available to local non-profits who will in turn cultivate the land and create a network of area farmers, according to a Friday release from the city.

In a statement, Emanuel said the farm lots will help "stabilize" the surrounding communities and help relieve food desert-related issues. "Farmers for Chicago will give local residents a chance to not only learn how to grow food in their communities, but also build their own food enterprise."

The local agriculturally-oriented NPO's like [Growing Home](#) and the [Chicago Botanic Garden](#) will train up to 25 recruits for the new program and provide the technical assistance for farmers-in-training to learn how to run a food business.

The environmental blog [Grist](#) notes [the incubator network](#) will "only take applicants with prior farmer training who submit a business plan."

Training a new crop of farmers is key if Chicago is to become an urban agri-business hub. [Grist](#) reports it takes the work of one farmer to care for just a quarter-acre of

land among the 15,000 vacant lots the city owns. Additionally, with requirements like new soil, compost, fencing, and adding a water supply, Grist says it costs the city \$250,000 to get a half-acre of vacant land suitable for farming.

One of the Growing Homes farms grew and sold more than 13,000 pounds of local, USDA Certified Organic produce with an earned income topping \$45,000, according to the city.

The Associated Press reports food from the farms will be distributed to more than a dozen farmer's markets, corner stores, restaurants and grocery chains in the area.

The city program will be a partnership with Growing Power, a Milwaukee-based urban farming organization whose founder Will Allen was awarded a MacArthur "Genius" grant for his agricultural work in 2008.

South Side neighborhoods such as Englewood, with plenty of vacant lots but sparse commerce, have drawn the attention of urban agriculture leaders in recent months; The neighborhood is ground zero for the city's Department of Housing and Economic Development's (DHE) Green Healthy Neighborhoods initiative announced in November.

The city hails the program among the first of its kind in the nation.