



Institute for Agriculture and Trade Policy

Civic Agriculture 101

Sociologist Thomas Lyson coined the term “civic agriculture” in 2002 in contrast to commodity agriculture. Instead of producing raw materials for the global industrial food system, civic agriculture is linked to local and regional markets. Examples of civic agriculture include farmers markets, Community Supported Agriculture (CSA) and other forms of direct marketing, gardens, and urban farming enterprises like Growing Power in Milwaukee, Wisconsin. Key elements include the focus on face-to-face relationships and producing not just commodities but jobs, health, a connection to nature and a sense of community. Through their purchasing decisions, “eaters” are active participants in shaping their local food system, not passive consumers of food products that been stripped of their geographic identity or social context. As author Michael Pollan likes to say, we get to vote for what kind of food system we want three times a day.

At the Institute for Agriculture and Trade Policy, we believe in a deeper and broader notion of civic agriculture—deeper because we believe people should not just vote with their forks, but also with their voices and their ballots. A vibrant farm economy and healthy food system is a public good, and citizens have the right and responsibility to hold elected officials and private companies accountable for the well-being of that system. And broader because a food system that serves all Americans will require not just more farmers markets, but fundamental changes to commodity agriculture that will guarantee farmers a fair price and consumers good food.

In practice, IATP is using civic agriculture principles to expand local food systems and promote rural community development. We are working with:

- Local and national organizations to help schools expand the use of local, sustainably produced and healthier foods;
- The state Department of Health, distributors and corner store owners to increase access to fresh produce at corner stores across Minnesota;
- The Homegrown Minneapolis Initiative to support the production, sale and consumption of local, sustainably produced foods in Minneapolis;
- Community organizations to host 12 small farmers markets in Minneapolis neighborhoods that lack access to fresh, local produce;
- Faith communities to support healthy eating, sustainable food production, good nutrition and improved food access; and
- Rural communities to promote dialogue, information sharing, and planning and civic engagement to support sustainable, community-based development that includes agriculture and renewable energy.

Learn more at www.iatp.org