



The Urban Farmer: Growing Food for Profit on Leased and Borrowed Land

Curtis Allen Stone

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There are twenty million acres of lawns in North America. In their current form, these unproductive expanses of grass represent a significant financial and environmental cost. However, viewed through a different lens, they can also be seen as a tremendous source of opportunity. Access to land is a major barrier for many people who want to enter the agricultural sector, and urban and suburban yards have huge potential for would-be farmers wanting to become part of this growing movement.

The Urban Farmer is a comprehensive, hands-on, practical manual to help you learn the techniques and business strategies you need to make a good living growing high-yield, high-value crops right in your own backyard (or someone else's). Major benefits include:

Low capital investment and overhead costs Reduced need for expensive infrastructure Easy access to markets

Growing food in the city means that fresh crops may travel only a few blocks from field to table, making this innovative approach the next logical step in the local food movement. Based on a scalable, easily reproduced business model, *The Urban Farmer* is your complete guide to minimizing risk and maximizing profit by using intensive production in small leased or borrowed spaces.

Curtis Stone is the owner/operator of Green City Acres, a commercial urban farm growing vegetables for farmers markets, restaurants, and retail outlets. During his slower months, Curtis works as a public speaker, teacher, and consultant, sharing his story to inspire a new generation of farmers.

The Urban Farmer: Growing Food for Profit on Leased and Borrowed Land Details

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Kristi says

Stone's book is a wealth of information for the bio-intensive or urban market grower. While many things might be site specific, there is plenty of information here that could be applied to any intensive gardening or farming system, whether growing for profit or not. But the book's niche is certainly for the market grower, with his emphasis on efficiency, value, and reducing labor. Topics include choosing sites, marketing, equipment, crop selection, and a plethora of practical tips for preparing soil, harvesting, and post-harvest handling. He also provides you glimpses throughout into how he plans for his crops and markets as well as how he tracks and organizes data.

Rhode says

Absolutely one of the best how-to instructional books I've ever come across on pretty much any topic. Loaded with practical advice and plenty of useful illustrations. I was BLOWN AWAY (can you tell?)

Author Curtis Stone is famous in the urban farming field. Even people who don't know his name, know about his achievements. He's that guy who turned a few small spare lots into a profitable business. Freakishly profitable in fact. Most urban and local farm-to-table farmers are not profitable. It's the dirty secret of the biz. By innovating and experimenting, Stone was able to gross \$75,000 per year on a 15,000 square foot lot. That's unprecedented. By way of comparison, most market gardeners would be thrilled to make less than half of that per acre.

Profit aside, this is a super useful book for home gardeners as well. He includes details on how to rip up your lawn and get a high yield garden instead. He includes step by step info on plot layout, irrigation, fencing, organic pest control, harvesting, processing, packing, etc. And it's all written assuming you are a novice, but with enough advanced tips for experienced farmers to get something new as well.

Curtis Stone is now my hero. If you are at all interested in this topic, he should be yours too.

Navjeet Singh says

It's a great book and reference if you want to enter commercial urban farming. My goal of reading this was to have a sustainable garden of my own and this book might be a bit overkill for that goal. I'll probably recommend it to my dad who always wanted to have a small commercial operation in his back yard.

Sean says

It was a decent book. Curtis's youtube channel is decent so I figured I would check this out to get a more in depth understanding of what he's talking about. Urban farming isn't for me but it would be cool if you have dreams of living on top of other people like many do.

This point he made about lawns was interesting:

Right now in the US, there are 40 million acres of lawn. Between 30% to 60% of the fresh water in cities is used to water those lawns, and 580 million gallons of gasoline are used to mow them.¹ When we factor in all the costs it takes to maintain a lawn — such as watering, mowing, weeding and manicuring — it's easy to come to the conclusion that a lawn is nothing but a cost center, one that a lot of North Americans simply cannot afford.

I agree, lawns are useless. Sorry to Hank Hill for this opinion.

I see this more as a guide for beginners who want to get into farming. This book takes a very conservative approach to how you approach starting out then makes a mistake by telling you that you will make 65k a year farming microgreens when you start out. I don't doubt that this is a possibility, but it ain't a possibility for most.

Alli Wilson says

It's nice to see a farmer making money. It's a good description of operating an urban farm as a business and I would use it as such. The farming techniques themselves are common knowledge and I would use other sources if looking for that kind of information.

Todd says

Excellent and inspiring.

Andrew Hodgson says

Definitely helpful and practical, even if just trying to backyard garden more effectively.

Tacoman says

Really could have used a further proofread.

The first 200 pages or so are covered on the author's youtube channel. The last 50 pages are where any value lies, which is strongly tied to his specific climate. Author calls revenue, 'profit', apparently unaware of the difference. There was no distinction between gross and net either. This results in his business conclusions not being clearly logical. Nearly all the information within this book is available in other, better, more complete sources. The flow of the book was very odd and difficult to follow to boot.

Jody Wall says

An excellent book. Well written, in an easy style. Curtis knows what he is doing with this style of farming.

His experience is real, it's lived. He combines the entrepreneurial spirit, with good business sense, and a great desire to sell, and that's just the money side of things. With that knowledge comes a bounty of dos, and don'ts (many from his own experiences) on how to prepare to grow, to grow, to harvest, to package, and market, and to sell produce grown on urban property. Though many of will see this more as suburban property, don't let the lingo confuse things. This is a guy making good money on borrowed land, people's backyards. Do you have a back yard? Why can't you start making an extra buck? Go on. Get to it.

Matthew Kelly says

Great information for not only how to grow market crops, but how to market them!

Sourabh Rohilla says

On the surface, this book is about Curtis Stone showing how you can convert backyards in US into profitable farming business. When a guy talks about making "\$19,200 on a 2400 sqft in 7 months", and you know that farming is not even considered a viable business in your country, you take notes. Curtis outlines the way he operates his business in the book. He talks about farm selection, irrigation, fencing, fertilisers, crop selection, seeding, harvesting, packing, processing, marketing, customer mix. His rigour of business model shines through in the book. All I could think about was, if every farmer in India knew what's written in this book and then evolve our own models for agriculture and optimise a farm the way we obsess about optimising manufacturing processes and business processes, the possibilities are simply a lot. India has 50% population working in agriculture, has second largest arable land in the world (behind US), is second largest producer of fruits and vegetable in the world, and yet contribute 17% to GDP. You know something is broken, and we got to fix it.

Sergei Silnov says

Good book on how to earn in small scale agriculture

Don says

Full disclosure: I did not read this entire book. I did read the first chapter and then skimmed. I gave it three stars because it seemed complete and well written for what is basically a text book.

This truly is an instructional treatise on converting suburban and urban lawns to sustainable and profitable farms. It got much more involved in teaching the business of farming and marketing of your produce than I would ever understand or contemplate attempting.

The guy seems to know his business though!

Benjamin says

A guide to growing food that is simple and direct.

The style of food production that is covered is applicable anywhere on the scale from large backyard garden to small farm. While Curtis designed his layout to maximize cash-flow since this is his job, you could just as well use a similar system but change the crops to suit a different goal, provide X% of your calories or Y% of your vegetable needs for example. Either way the information covered is well organized and concise and features plenty of tables and charts.

Need to know what you should purchase to set up an a low cost irrigation system? Check. What's the best way to turn a lawn into a garden? Well how much time do you have? Here are three approaches. Check. How much should you seed each intensive bed for a specific crop? Look there's a table. What do you need for a small nursery to save money on transplants? Check. (Also there are YouTube videos)

However, the real benefit of this book is that it serves as a good counter to the "cute" factor often found in some gardening books. For example the narrative, "Oh no, modern agriculture is bad, let's solve things by planting a garden, oh look 3 tomato plants. Look at us saving the world". To really make things work at scale (and make a difference) you need efficient layouts and systems to produce the most value (in whatever form that takes for you) with the least long term effort. So you can either make or good living or grow food in your spare time without burning out. The real value in this book is coming up the learning curve quickly, being efficient, and realizing you can do a lot with a small land space but you're not going to save the world.

Andrea says

Wow, if you want a step-by-step instruction book on how to make a living as an urban farmer, here's your guide.

Stone is very thorough in teaching: the benefits of urban farming, how to find land to farm, how to run a successful farm business, how to find people to buy your produce, how to make a profit as a farmer, how to keep costs low while still providing a quality product, etc.
