# City of San Antonio

**Agenda Memorandum**

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**Agenda Item Number:** {{item.number}}

**Agenda Date:** May 25, 2023

**In Control:** Community Health, Environment and Culture Committee

**DEPARTMENT:** Office of Innovation

**DEPARTMENT HEAD:** Brian Dillard

**COUNCIL DISTRICTS IMPACTED:** Citywide

**SUBJECT:**

A briefing on the results of a study exploring multiple benefits of food forests and urban agriculture (food, urban cooling, etc.) and how those benefits could be targeted to vulnerable populations.

**SUMMARY:**

Food forests and urban agriculture on underutilized public lands could provide substantial amounts of food to vulnerable families while providing urban cooling and other services.

**BACKGROUND INFORMATION:**

Urban green spaces (e.g., parks, urban farms, and food forests) provide a diverse suite of benefits to people. These include: climate change mitigation, urban cooling, flood mitigation, recreational opportunities, increased access to healthy foods, and other mental and physical health benefits. Mapping and quantifying the benefits of urban green spaces during urban planning and design can maximize the positive effects and equitable distribution of nature's benefits.

To support decision-makers in natural resource decisions, the Natural Capital Project (a partnership centered at Stanford University) has developed an approach and a suite of decision-support tools called InVEST (Integrated Valuation of Ecosystem Services and Tradeoffs) designed to quantify and map the diverse benefits that nature provides to people. InVEST is free software that measures the biophysical and socio-economic benefits nature provides to people. A more focused version of InVEST, Urban InVEST works specifically at urban scales to map and quantify where benefits of urban green spaces are generated and who has access to them.

In collaboration with the Food Policy Council of San Antonio and three City of San Antonio Departments (Office of Sustainability, Office of Innovation, and Metro Health) the Natural Capital Project is exploring the potential for new investments in urban green spaces, specifically urban agriculture, in underutilized public lands. Urban farms and food forests can increase access to healthy food and recreational opportunities, reduce flooding risks, and increase urban cooling. Current San Antonio urban agriculture sites, such as Tamox Talom Food Forest and Garcia Street Urban Farm, were used to project food yields alongside state-of-the-art environmental service modeling using remote sensing and production functions. Quantifying these benefits will enable decision makers to measure the environmental, mental, and physical health value provided by urban green space to inform urban planning. This briefing describes the results of these analyses and identifies strategic opportunities for agricultural uses on under-utilized properties (such as city-owned vacant lots). San Antonio is a pilot city in the development of a generalized user-friendly toolkit for urban planners to apply Urban InVEST and explore how different development scenarios would affect the equitable distribution of nature's benefits.

**ISSUE:**

Many residents struggle with food insecurity. Vulnerable families tend to also be more at risk from urban heat and other stressors. Urban agriculture (food forests and urban farms) has the potential to address these issues together. This briefing highlights the results of a study conducted by Stanford University and collaborators in San Antonio to map and measure the benefits and co-benefits of urban agriculture.

**FISCAL IMPACT:**

This item is for briefing purposes only.

**ALTERNATIVES:**

This item is for briefing purposes only.

**RECOMMENDATION:**

This item is for briefing purposes only.