NEWS RELEASE
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Congressional Briefing Held on Converting Brownfields to Urban Wealth for Underserved Communities

July 31, 2013 – Urban agriculture can address multiple needs in US cities, including adequate access to fresh, nutritious food. This was the topic at today’s Congressional educational briefing, “From Vacant Lots to Vegetable Plots: Converting Brownfields to Urban Wealth.”

Urban agriculturists turn abandoned and contaminated lots, known as Brownfields, into productive plots of land. More than 23.5 million people in urban areas frequently go without fresh produce. Redeveloping the approximately 5 million acres of Brownfields in the U.S. can turn the land into verdant fruit and vegetable gardens. “Transforming Brownfields into gardens that produce fresh vegetables helps communities provide greater access to affordable nutritious foods,” says Representative Chaka Fattah. “These gardens will serve the added benefit of removing eye-sores and tackling urban blight.”

According to the panelists, redevelopment can provide multiple social, financial, educational, environmental, and health benefits to urban communities. Urban agriculture helps increase access to quality foods, boost economic activity, and stabilize neighborhoods.

“Redeveloping Brownfields, along with the establishment and preservation of community parks, creates jobs, revitalizes abandoned properties, and bolsters local economies,” says Congressman Michael R. Turner. “The end result is a stronger community – benefitting everyone.” Turner co-chairs the Congressional Urban Caucus with Representative Fattah.

The briefing was co-sponsored by the House Urban Caucus and American Society of Agronomy (ASA), Crop Science Society of America (CSSA), and Soil Science Society of America (SSSA). “We wanted to promote the role of science-based strategies in converting Brownfields to agricultural production in underserved urban communities,” says Ellen Bergfeld, CEO of ASA, CSSA, and SSSA.

Participating panelists were Joe Schilling, the Director of the Metropolitan Institute at Virginia Tech University, Alexandria Campus; Art McCabe, Manager, Community Development Department, City of Lawrence, MA; and Anne Palmer, Program Director, Food Communities and Public Health, Johns Hopkins Center for a Livable Future, Bloomberg School of Public Health.

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The more than 18,000 members of the American Society of Agronomy, Crop Science Society of America, and Soil Science Society of America (ASA, CSSA, and SSSA) are dedicated to the conservation and wise use of natural resources to produce food, feed, fuel and fiber crops while maintaining and improving the environment.

A community garden project with raised beds turns an abandoned lot into productive land. Photo courtesy of Art McCabe, Manager, Community Development Department, City of Lawrence, MA