

# Freeways and Farms: Veggielution & Taylor Street Urban Farms Study

Project 1890  
July 2020

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According to UN predictions, over 89% of the U.S. population will be urban residents by 2050. Freeways, highways, surface streets and other public thoroughways represent vital arteries for commerce and travel in and around cities. Though farming is not customarily considered part of the dense urban fabric, urban farms have contributed to the welfare of urban communities for decades. In rapidly urbanizing areas, such as the Santa Clara Valley, city open space is under intense development pressure. While commercial and residential development of city spaces are key contributors to vibrant cities, planners and decision-makers should also consider inclusion of open spaces which scholarship has demonstrated have quantifiable benefits for city residents. This case study explored the relationship between urban roadways and two urban farms in the San Jose Metropolitan area, specifically focusing on how nearby roadways impact the experiences of urban farm users.

## Study Methods

Following a comprehensive review of relevant literature, the researchers completed interviews between mid-July 2019 and early September 2019. The authors used convenience sampling to recruit participants until saturation had occurred (n=14). Interviews were conducted using a semi-structured approach in which a script was used to guide the interview process. A principal focus of the interviews was interviewees' motivations and expectations were for working at their respective farm sites.

The study sites for this project were Veggielution (located in Emma Prusch Farm Park) and Taylor Street Farm, both located in San Jose, CA. The authors carried out data analysis by iteratively reading and analyzing interview transcripts using an open-axial-selective coding method to complete data analysis.

## Findings

With no exceptions, our respondents expressed a lack of concern for nearby roadway noise or odors, which do not appear to negatively impact farm user experiences in urban settings. Respondents in this case study reported that traffic sounds are just part of being in the city and do not even register while they are working. No respondent replied that odors coming from the roadways were bothersome either.

One of the most pervasive themes in responses to the question of motivation was the notion of doing something that feels meaningful. For our respondents, doing something meaningful was exemplified by making a contribution that benefits others, in ways that included education about growing food and providing healthy food options for distribution to those in need. Meaningfully contributing to the welfare of others and the planet relates to interviewees' powerful interest in feeling connected to others and the planet.

Several categories of expectations were identified in the interview transcripts. First, farm staff and volunteers reported that they expected the experience to be educational. Social interaction was another expectation salient in responses. Interviewees reported that they were happy that farm events created social opportunities for children and families. Another example of the expectation for social interaction was evident in comments about interacting with diverse others. Respondents talked about how experiences at the farm allowed them to get to know people that they might not otherwise have met.

## Policy Recommendations

- The authors encourage public agencies to invest in additional research on this subject to contribute to inclusive and intentional sustainable urban planning.
- Urban open spaces, especially those that are not ideally suited to other commercial or residential uses (e.g., small patches of land abutting a freeway) could be developed for agricultural uses to produce healthy foods, especially in communities where healthy food options may be limited.

- City residents will benefit from urban planning that intentionally includes ecosystem services such as those provided by urban agricultural sites. Plans that explicitly include ecosystem services can result in improved community health and economic resiliency.
- Providing outdoor urban green spaces will contribute to the overall wellness of the publics city planners serve. Engagement in physical activity outdoors provides a host of benefits for participants including better health, more positive emotional states/better mood, increased cognitive function, improved spiritual wellness, and (of particular significance for sustainable management of urban natural resources) a stronger sense of connection to nature.

## About the Authors

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## To Learn More

For more details about the study, download the full report at [transweb.sjsu.edu/research/1890](https://transweb.sjsu.edu/research/1890)



MTI is a University Transportation Center sponsored by the U.S. Department of Transportation's Office of the Assistant Secretary for Research and Technology and by Caltrans. The Institute is located within San José State University's Lucas Graduate School of Business.