

Bangkok City Farm Program: promoting urban agriculture through networks

Roof garden on top of Laksi District Office Administration building

Cabannes, 2019

The case study¹ has been put together by the Dhaka Food System project, with support by the Kingdom of the Netherlands, and in association with the Bangladesh Institute of Planners. The case studies provide relevant international references to stakeholders, to inform how to best integrate food system considerations into urban planning.

Introduction: what is this case about?

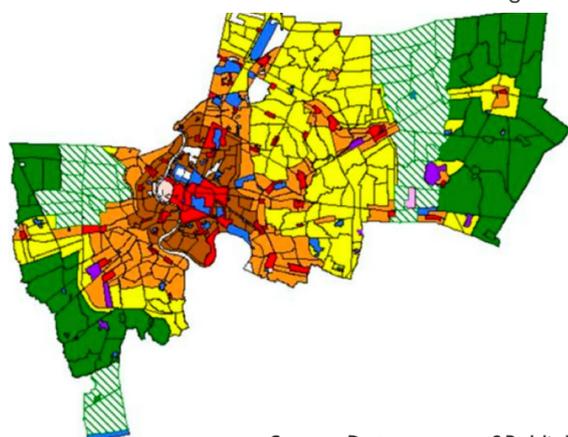
The Bangkok City Farm Program, publicly funded, has provided support over the last ten years to a broad spectrum of urban agriculture related local activities. Its implementation through a network of partners institutions and coordinated by a lean staffed *Thailand Sustainable Agriculture Foundation* (<http://sathai.org>, Thai Language only), has permitted reaching out and supporting hundreds of grassroots, through small financial award, training and awareness raising activities. One of its uniqueness lies in its quite high cost / benefit ratio, high level of efficiency, capacity to raise urban agriculture profile on the city and national agenda and strengthening urban farmers resilience in cases of floods or COVID, facilitating their access to nutritious food. As such, it might be a brilliant example for Bangladesh food champions to consider.

1. Context: Bangkok urban and food challenges

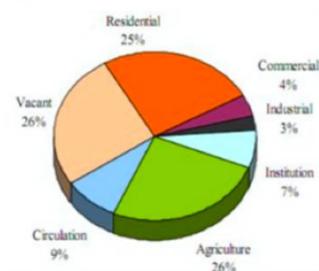
Quite Similar to Dhaka where rivers are part of the city life, wealth and threats, Bangkok' Chao Praya river remains a source of life and nourishment and central to development of agricultural sector. Another aspect shared by both capitals refers to very extremely population density: respectively: inner Bangkok 3662 pp/km² and 1542 for BMA compared to 28 600 pp/km² for Dhaka). Conversely though, sizeable agriculture land still surrounds Thailand capital. As cited by Dr. Piyapong Boosabong , a 2016 study found that farming households cultivated 37 310 hectares out of the total land area of 156 522 hectares (23.84 per cent), - see **figure 1** - with more than half for paddy, producing the significant amount of 125 000 tons of rice. In 2009, almost all vegetable and fruits consumed in Bangkok were produced within the city (DPU City profile, 2012, citing Ulfa research 2009), but this percentage kept decreasing over the years. Challenges faced by BKK have a lot in common with those faced by Dhaka:

- **Urban growth and development:** Land for farming is more difficult to access and secure in the inner city
- **Multiple poor environmental conditions:** Excessive river water usage upstream for agriculture purposes; Air pollution from motor vehicles and local industries; Poor water quality due to untreated sewers dumped into the river downstream;

Figure 1. Bangkok Land use map



R.1-R.4	Low-density residential areas
R.5-R.7	Medium-density residential areas
R.8-R.10	High-density residential areas
C.1-C.5	Commercial areas
I.1-I.2	Industrial areas
I.3	Warehouse areas
A.1-A.2	Rural and agricultural conservation areas
A.3-A.4	Rural and agricultural areas
H.1-H.2	Thai art and cultural conservation areas
G	Government, institute, infrastructure areas



"The City of Bangkok confirms our belief that sustainable environment plays significant and diverse roles in driving the development of our city and importantly contribute to the enhancement of the quality of life of our people." – Gov. Dr. Suwande

Source: Department of Public Works and Town & Country Planning (DPT), 2008

¹This case study largely draws on various publications from and emails exchanges with Dr. Boosabong -see references at the end -. It draws as well from UCL / DPU students city profiles, as part of on their Master course on Urban agriculture and author' field visits and exchange with actors complemented with a conference by CFP's coordinator in December 2019

²DPU students City profile 2011 / 2012, Based on different Sources: Dulyapark 2005; Suteethorn, 2009; Boosabong, 2012.

Urban and PU underground water contamination and salinisation.

- **Increasingly lower quality of food**, moving away from the healthy traditional diet (based on fruits, vegetable, rice, and protein) to processed, industrial food. This shift reduces people's incentive to grow their own food
- **Floods such as the 2011 one resulting largely from Climate Change** threatens food production and disrupts markets and peoples' access to food.

2. Highlights on Bangkok City Farm Program

2.1. Brief introduction

The City Farm Programme was launched in October 2010, funded by the Food and Nutrition Programme of the National Health Promotion Foundation, part of the Prime Minister's Office. Its emergence was a result of growing concerns about urban food insecurity (poor quality and rising food prices) as well as a positive response to the King's idea of low-input farming in an urban context.

The program has been granted seven million baht annually, (about US\$235 000) used to essentially support urban agriculture projects and a smaller portion to "*organising training courses and alternative food markets, providing inputs, sharing farming knowledge, promoting wide-ranging food initiatives, public campaigns, and fixed and operating costs of the programme*" (Mahasarakham University 2013, cited by P, Boosabong). The program therefore provides financial support of around 50,000 baht per farming project (± 1660 \$ in 2020 or $\pm 140,000$ Taka). The number of beneficiaries has grown from 50 on the first year to 267 in 2019. The subsidy is transferred from the Health Promotion Agency. Interestingly enough, its budget mainly originates from the nationally called "sin tax" (e.g., alcohol products) and the main agency's role is funding public programs related to health promotion. Through its ten years' existence the program contributed to bio diversity of food as at least 80 different local products are cultivated through the program

Quite interestingly, financial support is not limited to communities and their gardens even if 50 % of beneficiaries are from informal settlements. BFP also includes school gardens and institutions such as hospitals, factories and their premises.

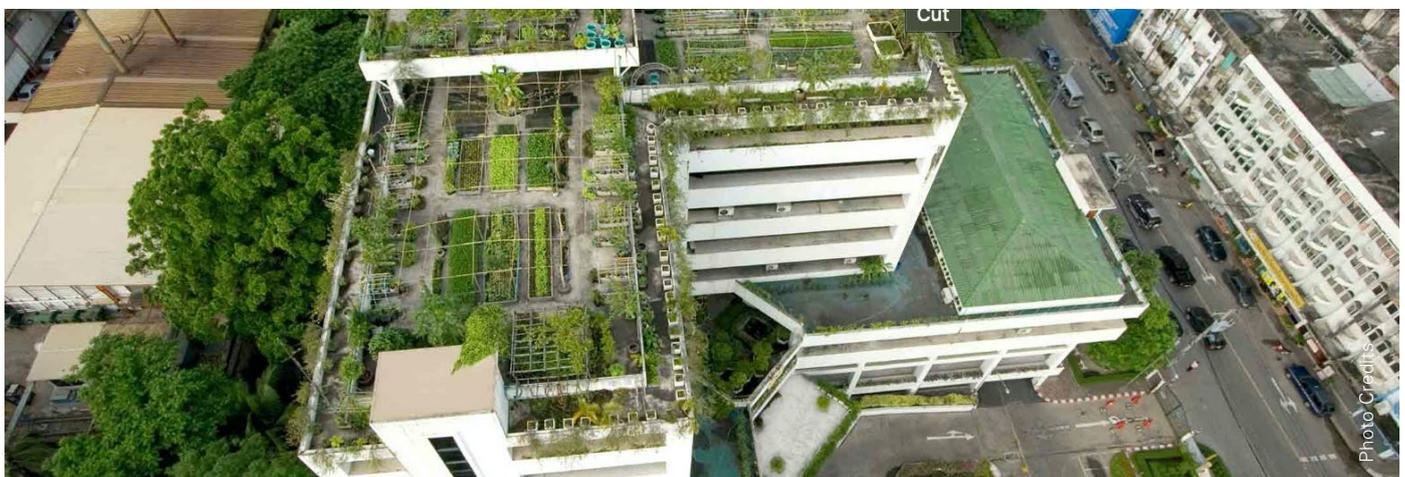
The Thailand Sustainable Agriculture Foundation (NGO) coordinates the program that in turn is managed and implemented through a multitude of civil society organisations and alliances: Green Market Networks, Slum Dwellers Networks and Informal Labour Networks, green food corporations, social enterprises, social activists and community-based organisations (Thailand Sustainable Agriculture Foundation, 2011; Hutapate, 2010; Boosabong, 2011).

2.2. Highlights on relevant aspects for Dhaka context and IFUP

Bridging local food farmers and actors with Central, Metropolitan and district governments.

One of the Program achievement has been its capacity to remain deeply grounded in local networks, grassroots and urban farmers practices, and in parallel link up with some district municipalities such as Laksi District Office Administration (see **figure 2 and top picture page 1**) and until recently Bangkok Metropolitan Administration (BMA) that provided support, for instance allowing the program to use vacant public lands. As a result of this withdrawal, CFP remains a public program supported essentially by the central government.

Figure 2. Roof garden on top of Laksi District Office Administration



Educational, experimentation and demonstration urban agriculture centre

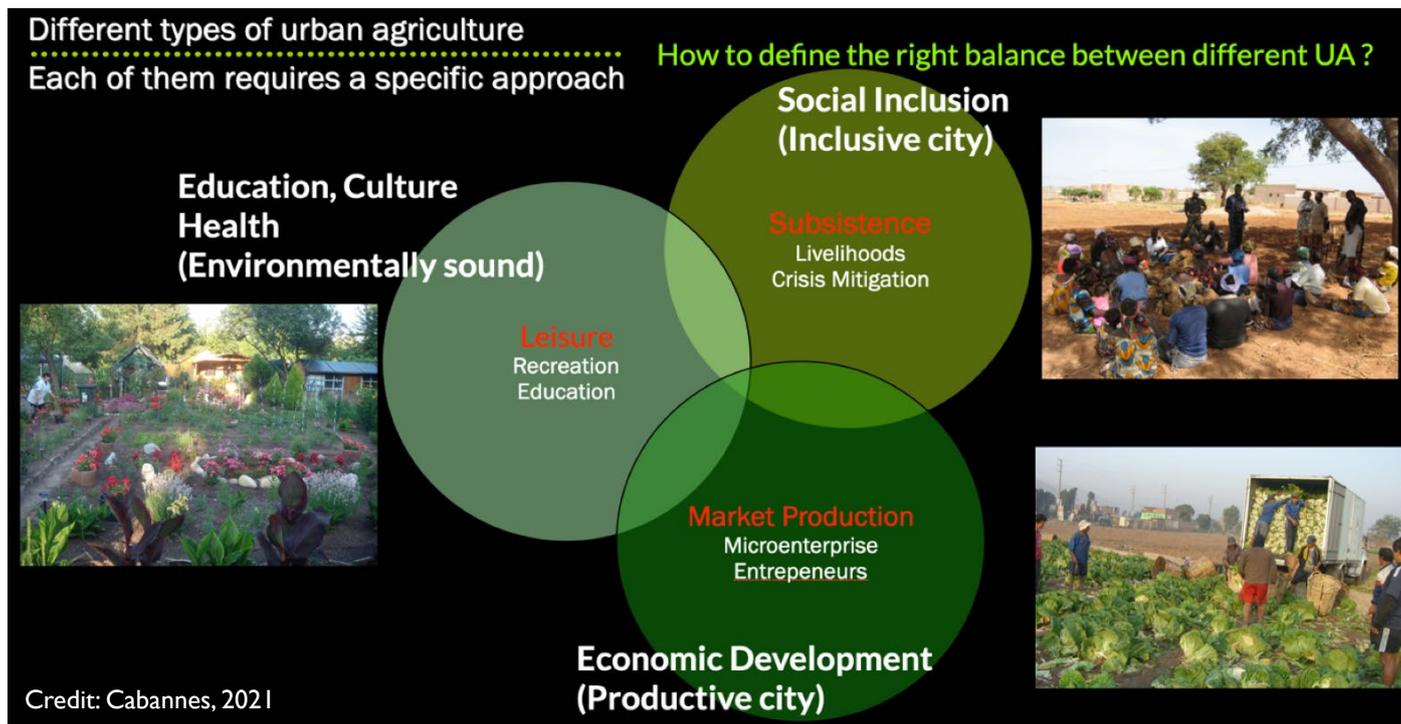
Source: Laksi District Administration Office, open access

³Boosabong, P, 2012, "Policy Networks on Urban Agriculture in Bangkok, Thailand: The Response to Economic, Political and Environmental Crises", Draft, Mphil/PhD, Development Planning Unit, University College London.

Promotion of different types of urban agriculture

Another quite unique aspect of City Farm Program relates to the promotion of multiple types of urban agriculture and their combination (see **Figure 3**), as summarised by Boosabong:

Figure 3. Types of Urban Agriculture



- **Subsistence-oriented urban farming practices:**

Building community gardens as edible social space:
Promoting community gardens as self-sufficiency economic practices among community members/workers (see **figure 4**)

Figure 4. Subsistence-oriented urban farming



Bangkok Burapa 7 project. Women are actively involved in City Farm Program

- **Market oriented practices:**

Promoting alternative markets as reciprocal exchange spaces (see **figure 6 and 7**)

- **Leisure and recreation-oriented practices:**

- **Market oriented practices:**

creating community and institutional gardens as healthy and enjoyable learning spaces: new playground for urban kids (see **figure 5**)

Figure 5. Leisure and recreation-oriented practices



Learning veggie gardening, the “Organic Way”

Figure 6. Market oriented practices, Weekly green Food Market



Providing food for the most vulnerable people during disasters

Another unique aspect of the food Program lies in its capacity to increase food resilience of the most deprived and to act as a food safety network in crisis situations, such as dramatic floods that regularly hit the city, or in case of health pandemics like COVID (see Bangkok Post, 31 May 2020). In Dr Boosabong own words:

“While the most vulnerable households, such as the urban poor and the marginalised groups, did not receive specific attention from the mainstream food aid system, the networks on urban agriculture involved in the City Food Program prioritised, as a policy, their support to them. As vegetables were rare and very expensive during the 2011 flood period, the networks mainly provided vegetables collected from local sources and the urban agriculture projects developed by them” .

2.3. Time line and key dates over last ten years

1989. Alternative Agriculture Network AAN

1997. New Theory of farming promoted by the King Rama: The king: 'growing diversity food in limited areas; explicit concern for ecological balance, self-sufficiency and self-reliance

1998. Establishment of Thailand Sustainable Agriculture Foundation [TSAF] a year after the economic crisis

2004: BMA establishes city farm learning centre and City Green Farm Project

2007-2011: Env. Quality Manag. Plan 2007-2011: Preservation of the green belt and Sustainable Urban Green Space

2009. Working Group on Food for Change (Various civil society organisations, such as AAN ; Green Market Network

2009. Development planning for Bangkok 2020 as 'Green and Good Life City' and including Community Vegetable Gardens

2010. Formal launching of City Farm Program: about 40 initiatives supported

2020. City Farm supports through networks around 300 gardens and initiatives

3. Key messages

- Bangkok City Farm through a unique program bridges a 10 million+ Metropolitan scale with extremely decentralised urban agriculture activities of all types (green markets, different types of urban agriculture, rooftop gardening, specialised training, etc.)
- It highlights the steps and period of time (10 years) to shift from the pilot and project approach to more ambitious prospects. It shows how to connect multiple actors; different scales (from growing food on balconies to urban voids, under railways, etc) and different urban sectors: health, waste recycling, green fairs, etc.
- Implementation is carried out through associates of different networks, with a hands-off and efficient coordination style led by a NGO.

4. To deepen your knowledge on The Bangkok City Farm Program

Boossabong, P, 2018, Articulating public agencies, experts, corporations, civil society and the informal sector in planning food systems in Bangkok, in Cabannes Y. and Marocchino, C. (eds.) Integrating Food into Urban Planning. UCL Press: London; FAO: Rome, <https://www.ucl.ac.uk/ucl-press/browse-books/integrating-food-into-urban-planning>

Joslin Isaacson, Diogo Martins, Drin Mulliqi, Nayani Nasa, Mariangela Veronesi, 2012, Bangkok: The River City. Agriculture as a Way of Life in Bangkok's Urban Dynamics, Module Urban Agriculture, UCL /Development Planning Unit

Bangkok Post, 31 May 2020, New-wave urban farming: Lockdown gives new impetus to sustainable vegetable growing, <https://www.bangkokpost.com/thailand/special-reports/1926852/new-wave-urban-farming>

5. FAO/BIP Case study series

Case 1. Multi-stakeholder Policy formulation and Action Planning, MPAP Learning from Accra, Ghana, January 2021 / Cabannes Y / FAO / BIP: Dhaka

Case 2. Bangkok City Farm Program: promoting urban agriculture through networks, January 2021 / Cabannes Y / FAO / BIP: Dhaka

Case 3. Food Charters in Canadian Cities: a key milestone for building Food Strategies, Food Policies and Food Plans, January 2021 / Cabannes Y / FAO / BIP: Dhaka

Case 4. Quito 20 years' experience in building an urban centred Agro Food System, January 2021 / Cabannes Y / FAO / BIP: Dhaka

6. Credits

Coordination of the series:

Coordination of the series: John Taylor, CTA FAO Dhaka, House 37; Road 8, Dhanmondi, Dhaka-1205, Bangladesh

Lead Author:

Yves Cabannes, 2021,

Figure 7. Lunch time at TSAF, Thailand Sustainable Agriculture Foundation, coordinator of CFP. Catering and food from local producers participating in CFP

