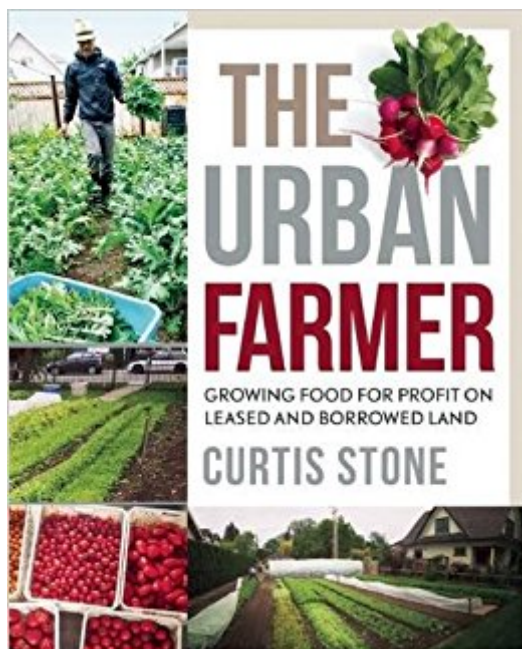


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# The Urban Farmer: Growing Food For Profit On Leased And Borrowed Land



## Synopsis

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.

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## Customer Reviews

There are 40 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 based in Kelowna, BC. Farming less than half an acre on a collection of urban plots, Green City Acres grows vegetables for farmers markets, restaurants and retail outlets. After five successful seasons, Curtis has demonstrated that one can grow an extraordinary amount of food in a backyard, and make a good living doing it. During his slower months, Curtis works as a public speaker, teacher, and consultant, sharing his story to inspire a new generation of farmers.

Curtis Stone succeeds extraordinarily well in the primary objective of this book. It is an attempt to tell the reader how to establish an urban farm. As the table of contents below indicates, he covers just about every aspect of the question. How to acquire the needed resources: urban land, primarily lawns and some equipment. He advises how to locate customers. He advises what crops to grow. The book is intensely practical. Although he is known as "the bike farmer" in this Canadian town where he lives, and thus might be taken for a counter-culture sort, he is very forthright in saying that this identity is a marketing tool. It identifies him to his customers, and a bicycle is the cheapest means of transportation. The book is relentlessly focused on the bottom line rather than being wedded to any idealistic principles. Farming is a business, and he tells you how to optimize every aspect of the operation to make it profitable. Obviously, locally grown organic food appeals to a well-defined sector of the population. Call them crunchy cons, yuppies, urban aesthetes, or whatever else, anybody familiar with the American or Canadian social scene will recognize his

customer base. There are people who did not want mass-produced, mass marketed food, and are willing to pay a premium for fresh, pure, locally grown produce. Stone serves three sets of customers: local farmers' markets, Community Supported Agriculture, and restaurants. Community supported agriculture (CSA) are groups in the community that contract with a grower such as Stone to take produce over the course of a growing season or year. This provides a steady customer base and some predictability. The other outlets being more profitable, Stone devotes more space to describing how to establish oneself with farmers markets and restaurants. Stone starts with several key insights. The first is that there is a broad market in North America for the kind of high quality, organic produce he is able to grow. The second insight is that lawns are a vast underused resource. There are 40 million acres of lawn in America. They account for between 30 and 60 percent of urban water use, and take a lot of time and gasoline to mow. Moreover, homeowners often see them as a pain and bother. Many lawn owners are happy to allow an urban farmer to use the land in exchange for some produce. A third is that urban land is very close to the consumer. A crop can go from field to table in a day. A fourth insight is that cities have their own ecology. There are warmer and better protected from wind than rural farms. Stone's approach all of these advantages to form a profitable business. The most amazing observation I found in the book is how little land it takes to succeed in urban farming. A half-acre is the greatest area he discusses in the book. Even that small amount, he observes, requires hired help according to his system. Observe that quarter acre lots are extremely common in the suburbs, and you can conclude that it is not difficult to satisfy the land requirements. Going to the bottom line, Stone writes about generating incomes in the five figure range, comparable with teachers and other professionals who will be among his customers. I will venture some observations that Stone only implies. A five figure income to an urban farmer is a lot more than it is to a teacher. The urban farmer doesn't need to spend a lot of money on clothes, a car to get to and from work, and the other trappings of a professional life. Being reliant on a bicycle (perhaps battery assisted, to pull around a Rototiller on a trailer) is an immediate money saver. A social life is built-in to an urban farmer's life. He is in constant contact with neighbors, chefs, customers in the farmers' market. Stone writes that he is often called upon to speak to community organizations. In the words of Nicholas Nassim Taleb he is "anti-fragile." He can handle customers coming and going, and he does not have a foundation of debt to be serviced. In fact, Stone is rather adamant on the subject of debt: don't use it. There is a lot of value in the book even to somebody who does not want to implement Stone's model. I live on a third of an acre in Kyiv, Ukraine. We do not have much of the yuppie restaurant market here. You could never get seven dollars a pound for fresh spinach. One or two is more like it. However, the book will be useful to me in

planning how to lay out our garden plots, how to use plastic tunnels to extend the growing season, how to control pests and weeds, and how to decide what to plant. I would recommend it to almost any gardener. Stone's bottom line perspective is useful even if you are only deciding what to grow for your own use. Stone writes about the qualities one looks for in an employee "Paying for labor is worth it only if it allows you to do tasks that cannot be delegated as easily." He comes across as a fair boss, but not one who is in any way committed to socialist notions. Using an employee is a business decision. If they don't contribute to the bottom line, you don't need them. An assessment of the capital that Stone himself brings to the business is illuminating. In terms of financial capital he is talking about \$10,000, give or take. In terms of the human capital that he himself evidently brings, it includes yeoman farmer attributes that we would all like to impute to our ancestors, but we have to observe are rather rare today. Here is the human capital that Stone himself appears to possess:

- An innate sense of entrepreneurship. He looks for opportunities, and assesses each situation in terms of possible benefit.
- Hard work. Stone finds what he is doing interesting and is willing to put the time and to make it successful.
- Facility with tools. Like any farmer, Stone has to invent, construct, repair, and jury-rig equipment to get the job done.
- Gregariousness. Throughout Stone's day he comes in contact with many, many potential customers, and has the patience and the graciousness to talk with all of them.
- Fairness. He does what it takes to be fair to customers, employees, and all around him.
- Curiosity. Stone acquires the knowledge he shares in this book by talking to people, reading, and tinkering and figuring things out.
- Facility with numbers. Stone describes how he uses spreadsheets extensively to plan his operations and record his outcomes.
- Facility with language. He is in constant communication.
- Facility with computers and technology. This is essential to support work with numbers and language in today's world.

Stone's background prior to farming would not at first appear promising. He concluded after a decade and a half as a rock musician that that was not going to be his profession, so he looked for something he could do. He credits his father with an entrepreneurial streak that the son seems to have inherited. So, on the one hand, he started from nothing: no education in farming, no real experience, and precious little capital. On the other hand, in terms of human capital he was extremely well endowed. He had what it took to succeed. Stone's story is a parable for Millennial youth. These kids emerge from the University chock-full of formal education but with no practical experience, and quite specifically, little notion of the fact that one earns a living by providing the kinds of goods and services that people are willing to pay for. What a blessing it would be to a 16-year-old with no discernible direction in life to get

involved in something like urban farming and learn the self-discipline and the talents required to make a success of this fairly basic undertaking. It would prepare one for life. In our yeoman farmer ancestors, such an understanding of how things work was implicit. Stone provides a recipe for going back to these fundamental values. It is a five-star effort all around. The table of contents below gives you an idea of the breadth and depth of the book.

Contents---

1. Why Urban Farming?
2. Connecting the Dots: An Urban Farmer's Place in the Community
3. Quick Breakdown of Economics---
4. A Viable Farming Business On 1/2 Acre Or Less
5. The Zones of Your Farm and Your Life
6. Crops Better Suited for the City
7. Introduction to Urban Infrastructure
8. Start-Up Farm Models---
9. The Business of Urban Farming
10. Starting Small
11. Market Streams
12. Working with Chefs
13. Labor
14. Software and Organization
15. Self-Promotion
16. Finance Options---
17. Finding the Right Site
18. Scouting for Land
19. Urban, Suburban and Peri-Urban Land
20. Multiple or Single-Plot Farming
21. Urban Soil
22. Land Agreements and Leases
23. Urban Pests---
24. Building Your Farm, One Site at a Time
25. Turning a Lawn Into a Farm Plot
26. Choosing A Site
27. Garden Layout
28. The Perimeter
29. Irrigation
30. Infrastructure and Equipment
31. Base of Operations
32. Tools
33. Special Growing Areas
34. Inexpensive Season Extension
35. Transportation---
36. Operations
37. Work Smarter not Harder
38. Harvesting
39. Post-Harvest Processing
40. Portioning and Packing---
41. Production Systems
42. Beds for Production
43. Planting
44. Microgreens
45. Extending the Season---
46. Basic Crop Planning
47. Determine Your Outcome
48. The Base Plan---
49. Crops for the Urban Farmer
50. Parting Words

I love listening to Curtis Stone speak and I think the book could be very useful for some. I personally was looking more for growing insight and methods which I didn't get much of. I've been gardening for years but still have so much to learn. Decent blue print just lacking in details in my opinion. Read it, but unless you are specifically looking to rent/borrow land in an urban setting I wouldn't make it my first read.

We recently built a hoop house and have future plans of selling produce. We aren't raking in the \$ yet as we're just getting started with feeding our own family with our home grown goods, but if we ever decide to do sell produce, I can thank Curtis Stone for writing this book. He lays everything out and I mean EVERYTHING. Curtis isn't keeping any secrets to himself. He seems to be very concerned about food production or processing and wants everyone to grow their own food. He lays out all the steps and things to think about when selling produce. It's an educational and fantastic and easy read. He's also got YouTube videos you should check out. I love this guy. I made my

husband and kids watch the videos and now one of our kids is interested in growing her own food to sell and got herself her own little greenhouse.

Covers the subject matter pretty comprehensively, and is written by a man who really wants to share his knowledge. The lifestyle however is not for the faint hearted. I suspect Curtis Allen Stone operates most of his life in overdrive. All credit to him.

I bought this book for my husbands mid life crisis. Some men buy fancy cars but mine buys a farm. All jokes aside this book is extremely informative. It has reassured my husband that he is on the right path to becoming an urban farmer with a profitable market farm. This book tells you what to grow/not to grow & why. How to maximize small spaces because it's not always the size that matters. I plan on reading it as soon as I can pry it from my hubbys fingers. Great buy.

Watching Curtis Stone on YouTube will make you appreciate this book even more as you can literally see that he is a smart guy who is freely offering help and encouragement to budding farmers just starting out or simply dreaming of starting their own farm. His attention to detail and down-to-earth delivery make this book a good read for anyone interested in small scale, intensive farming. Traditional farmers are dying, and the next generation has to have a survival plan. This is exactly the kind of encouragement the next generation needs. Read it cover to cover, take his advice, and go for it!

Curtis Stone does a great job and puts in a lot of detail in this book. It is a must have for beginners and anyone in market gardening.

This guy knows what he's talking about, and he's motivated to help men and women **MAKE MONEY AS FARMERS**. (Or if you **MUST** call it "Market Gardening" or whatever term you're more comfortable with, so be it. He grows food to feed people, and with this book, he's helping others do the same.) Curtis' model requires no land ownership, and as long as a person is willing to work hard, these systems are incredible for growing product for customers. Thank you, Curtis, for this book, for your YouTube videos, and for your tenacity as an educator (and "entertainer" if you will). You've changed my life for the better by opening up my mind to agricultural possibilities that I'd never considered before listening to you on Permaculture Voices. My mind is open, my hands are

working, and my taste buds are loving fresh food. To anyone reading this review, I highly recommend this book to anyone who wants to make a damn good living while growing food in a city or suburb.

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