



Farm Service Agency  
U.S. DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE

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## USDA Programs Help City Roots: Columbia's In-Town Sustainable Farm and Urban Farms Nationwide

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*By Sabrenna Bryant, Outreach Coordinator, Farm Service Agency*

For more than a decade, City Roots Organic Farm, located in downtown Columbia, South Carolina, has worked with USDA; participating in numerous programs offered by USDA agencies. A family operation owned by father and son Eric and Robbie McClam; this eight-acre urban farm grows USDA certified organic microgreens year-round. Their produce is sold to restaurants, grocery retailers and food distributors throughout the eastern U.S. from New York to Florida.

Since 2009, City Roots has worked with both USDA's Farm Service Agency (FSA) and Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) to install facilities and conservation practices on their farm. They used two FSA farm operating loans to purchase equipment and build a washing and packing facility. City Roots also utilized NRCS' Environmental Quality Incentives Program to install micro-irrigation, cover crops, compost sheds, water wells, and implement soil preservation and nutrient management practices.

"Once we learned about USDA programs, mainly by word of mouth and through other agriculture organizations, we immediately started applying for as many programs as we were eligible for," Eric said. "I can say with certainty that we would not be successful without utilizing these programs."

In the Fall 2023, City Roots expanded its operation to include a 90-acre organic farm in rural Richland County. In addition to a 73,000-square-foot greenhouse and a distribution facility on the recently acquired property, City Roots has received grants through USDA Rural Development's Rural Energy for America Program for solar panels, LED lighting and a geothermal radiant floor system, which will be used for heating and cooling the floor where they grow their microgreens. This expansion significantly increases production by six to seven times and expands City Roots' capacity into markets well beyond their current marketing geography. As for their downtown Columbia location, City Roots continues operating their urban farm, which also includes two event rental facilities.

“I enjoy operating a farm in an urban area because it allows us to grow food where our community is,” said Eric. “We get to personally connect food to consumer.”

Eric’s advice to anyone pursuing their urban agriculture dream, “ensure you have season extension infrastructure, such as high tunnels or greenhouses in place in order to maximize your production and fulfill your customers’ needs year-round.”

Urban ag producers who, like Eric and his father, want to start, maintain, and expand an urban agriculture operation, should contact their local USDA Service Center for information regarding available programs.

The U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) is committed to increasing services to producers in urban locations throughout the U.S. Big or small, USDA works with agricultural operations of all sizes, including small-scale urban farms, and offers various resources to help urban producers start, expand and grow their operations. For more information about USDA assistance for urban farmers, visit [farmers.gov/urban](https://farmers.gov/urban) and [usda.gov/urban](https://usda.gov/urban). Need assistance? Local USDA Service Centers connect producers with Farm Service Agency, Natural Resources Conservation Service, or Rural Development employees. To locate your local USDA Service Center, please visit [farmers.gov/service-center-locator](https://farmers.gov/service-center-locator).

### **Farm Service Agency:**

1400 Independence Ave.  
SW Washington, DC 20250

### **Contact:**

FPAC Press Desk  
[FPAC.BC.Press@usda.gov](mailto:FPAC.BC.Press@usda.gov)