AGNR

FIVE STRATEGIC INITIATIVES

Optimize Urban Environments Through Design, Green Technology, and Community Engagement

- **Define and improve the process and perception of urban/rural interface.**
- **Build capacity to develop and adapt sustainable communities.**
- **Encourage adoption of green technology by disseminating their benefits.**

BACKGROUND: WHERE WE ARE NOW

One challenge for the AGNR Strategic Initiative team charged with optimizing urban environments is the complexity of urban and urbanized communities in Maryland. According to the U.S. Census Bureau, urban areas are classified as areas of 50K people or greater, with "urban clusters" having between 2,500 and 50K. Nationwide, there are 486 urbanized areas and 3,087 urban clusters and according to the 2010 census, these areas account for more than 80% of the US population (USCB, 2012). These population numbers are expected to increase for the new 2020 census, but growth increase has slowed from 2.4% to 1% annually since 1960 (World Bank, 2018). Within urban environments, population increase, food insecurity, and environmental stressors including violence and poor environmental quality, to name a few, can have negative impacts on the quality of life. Although the traditional assumption in the U.S. is that urban areas are characterized by agricultural consumption rather than production, in many urbanized areas, demographic and social changes are driving a shift towards a more heterogeneous global model. This change is evident in Maryland, where a majority of the population lives in or close to urbanized environments.

OUR AREAS OF FOCUS

Our initiative addresses multiple issues associated with urban zones and the urban/rural interface. The ultimate strategic goal is to frame the College of Agriculture and Natural Resources (AGNR) and the University of Maryland (UMD) as a leader and first-rank resource for information about and solutions to environmental and social urban sustainability problems. These include, but are not limited to creation and improvement of healthy and healthful environments, urban resilience in conditions of climate change, social justice, impacts of built environments on community health, maintenance of human dignity, equitable access to nutritious food, and access to formal / informal agricultural and environmental design education.

To learn more about this strategic initiative or to connect with an initiative team leader, please visit go.umd.edu/AGNR_Urban

GOALS FOR THE FUTURE

We have already launched a college-wide survey aimed at identifying the multi-disciplinary research, and teaching and outreach programs including non-faculty research and work related to our strategic initiative. From that survey, we will develop a database. Further out, we can link programs (research, academics and Extension) between disciplines. We are looking forward to coordinating the Global Challenges interdisciplinary conference on Optimizing Urban Environments Through Design, Green Technology, and Community Engagement. Eventually we can coordinate coherent interdisciplinary, inter-agency, and inter-community programs involving AGNR (Academic Departments and the four UME programs of Agriculture, Natural Resources, 4-H, and Family and Consumer Sciences) and other colleges or schools that are addressing urban-social, economic and environmental problems.

ACTION FOR 2021

1. Our team is focused on building a searchable database of related, ongoing projects or programs in which UMD faculty and staff are involved. This data base will be managed by the initiative team and used to identify opportunities for collaboration both on and off the UMD campus. It will be housed on AGNR's Ag Dashboard.
2. The team is pursuing extramural funding.
3. The team is busy planning for hosting the AGNR 2021 Cornerstone Event.

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