

The Possibilities of Local Urban Herbal Production

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Medicinal plants are produced in large quantities to meet the demand for herbal and botanical dietary supplements in the United States. Sales of the twenty most used single ingredient herbal supplements reached a reported \$1.7 billion in 2010. The significant amount of foreign plant material currently found in the United States market raises questions about sustainability and quality control. Local cultivation of medicinal herbs has the potential to bring quality products to local consumers at low economic and environmental costs. The concept of bringing herbal cultivation into the city meant determining the amount of land required to produce selected herbs used for common conditions. Information about consumer preference, harvest amounts, and agronomic technique was used to estimate the area required to produce the amount consumed in the local market. The purpose of this analysis was to find if the St. Louis medicinal herb market could be met within city limits and provide opportunities for small businesses. The demand for herbal ingredients among common species could be met with 2.75 acres. This translates into about 37 vacant lots within the city. Therefore we believe that the localization of herbal production could provide St. Louis consumers with enough material to meet the demand for selected medicinal herbs. We roughly estimate that a selected group of commonly used botanicals could be supplied in to the St. Louis market on about 2.75 acres. This is the equivalent of 37 vacant properties located in two wards in the St. Louis City area. The botanicals included are used to treat colds and flu, stomach distress, depression, migraines, menopausal symptoms and rheumatism, and liver problems and as mild sedatives and tonics. Local cultivation of these botanicals could inexpensively and sustainably respond to several common health care needs. There are several limitations to our study. Estimates of both consumption and production are very limited. Actual yields of all species would vary depend on factors including agronomic skill, pests/disease, weather, and soil composition. Some popular species on the market could not be cultivated here or would require greenhouse production. Also, consumers could potentially increase their demand for herbal products that were locally manufactured, requiring increased cultivation area.