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Urban Soils Project Summary

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<http://cwmi.css.cornell.edu/soilquality.htm>

The Cornell Waste Management Institute, together with Cornell University Cooperative Extension-New York City and other partners, has initiated an education and outreach program in response to the need for more accessible, complete information about contaminants in urban soils. Desire for affordable, healthy foods (including organic and locally produced items) has increased public interest in home, school and community gardens. In addition to food security and economic savings, gardens provide urban green space, opportunities for recreation and community building activities, and benefits for public health. However, garden soils (and urban soils in particular) can contain a number of contaminants that may pose risks to human health. Many inner-city gardens are located on vacant lots and abandoned properties that may have a history of soil contamination, yet the extent of soil contamination in many communities remains uncertain. CWMI and partners recognize the need to assess existing levels of contamination, address community concerns, and implement effective and feasible strategies to minimize exposure to soil contaminants and improve soil quality.

Communities in New York City and elsewhere in New York State have identified several key needs related to soil contamination and public health, including requests for further research, education and training; the formation of workgroups (with community involvement) to address issues of concern, and the creation of a vehicle for better communication and collaborative research. We are working with gardening groups and other organizations in New York City and other urban areas of New York State to design and implement strategies for testing soils for lead and other contaminants of concern. We will continue to develop educational resources and programs using available research findings and other information in order to help communities conduct soil testing efforts, interpret test results, and make informed decisions about implementing effective strategies appropriate for particular situations. By providing guidance for soil testing efforts and increasing access to information about soil contaminants, we hope that this effort will help to improve the quality of garden produce grown in urban environments and protect the health of gardeners, their families, and others in contact with urban soils.