

Fresh urban farming trends

 By [Cari Coetzee](#)

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Urban farming is growing popular and necessary to support urban populations' needs regarding the availability of nutritious food. We spoke to Marlaen Straathof, the marketing manager at [RAW](#), a seed company who believes that the tiniest patch of earth can be transformed into a vegetable wonderland.



Marlaen Straathof

What are the top trends that you think will influence the urban farming landscape?

Farm to table - consumers want fresh veggies and herbs that have not consumed carbon miles during transport or have been subjected to irradiation to keep them fresh during long transport routes.

Eating with the seasons also taps into the trend of reducing carbon emissions, as imported foods cost more and travel more than local produce.

Consumers are also tapping into supporting local businesses and farmers - The sharp rise in local markets both here, in the USA and Europe shows this.

Which trend will be particularly influential and why?

Greater support of local business will be important as people are encouraged to provide more local employment opportunities, encourage small-scale entrepreneurs and know the “story” behind the origins of their food.

How have views on urban farming and the importance of the practice changed in recent times and why?

When times were good it was easy to go to the shops and buy produce, additionally, prices were reasonable. Increasing pay packets meant that it was considered a sign of “being poor” to still have to grow your own veggies in the backyard

Rising unemployment, economic stagnation, food price inflation and a drought also affecting food prices have meant that more and more people are returning to growing their own food. Add to this the modern view of eating healthily and fresh and it becomes trendy to have some pots of veggie plants growing in the backyard.

More conventionally, larger scale farming in urban areas is seen as creating employment and efficient use of urban space. The perception is that this food is healthier and cheaper than in larger supermarkets.



■ ***What opportunities are available in terms of the commercialisation of urban farms and their products/produce and what are the essentials that urban farmers will need to capitalise on these opportunities?***

If South Africans follow international trends, the opportunities are boundless. Large American cities already have viable commercial farms on city rooftops or in old warehouses.

Urban farmers will need capital to help pay for irrigation and good planting soil. On a commercial level, producers cannot rely on rainfall alone.

Education in intensive farming methods, marketing, and basic finance is essential.

Urban farmers will need to market the benefits of their products on health and social levels.

■ ***What would you like to see more of in the urban farming industry this coming year?***

Consumers need to be made aware of where urban farms are, what their stories are, and who farmers are who are passionate about these concepts. Hopefully, this will also inspire other entrepreneurs willing to join this industry.

Home gardeners must be encouraged to grow their own food, and learn the benefits of growing in containers. They need to learn that growing for a family is not complicated and the standards are not as high as for commercial purposes

ABOUT CARI COETZEE

Cari Coetzee is a contributor to Bizcommunity Tourism, Agriculture and Lifestyle.

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