

Gardens Across Iowa!

an urban gardening program to heal Iowa

Part of the official platform of [Sondra Wilson for Iowa Governor](#)

We have some of the best soil in the world – why are we only using it in rural areas!? This section of my platform goes hand-in-hand with [Gardens Across Iowa](#), a public resource for making *gardening in Iowa* an efficient, practical, *fun* movement. This is one of the favorite sections of [my platform for Iowa Governor 2026](#):

- **New statewide program will teach students to manage gardens, with produce used in school lunches** – will teach kids to garden, and produce will be used in school meals to help reduce costs. Students will learn valuable lifelong skills which ultimately will help to keep Iowa safe by leaving us more prepared to handle economic collapse and/or natural disasters. We should not be debating “kicking kids off school lunch programs” – we need to be teaching students how to manage a garden, and a portion of the food should be used in school lunches (which of course will offset costs throughout the state!).



- **City governments will be required to zone for community garden spaces** – and/or “access to soil” for tenants. They are constantly approving real estate developments – especially large apartment complexes – without considering access to soil for tenants. By ensuring access to soil for tenants, Iowa will be safer in case of war, natural disaster, or economic uncertainty. Think about how the derecho flattened Iowa's crops – crops we all depend upon for our economic safety: by making cities more sustainable via encouraging gardens, we will be more prepared in the future. Worst case scenario? We have an increased GDP!
- **Create a community buyback program to open up more gardening space** – much like [the Cobell Settlement](#) enabled Native American tribes to buy back land for tribal use, Iowa's land buy back program will allow local governments to purchase land to create community garden spaces. Although the [City of Ames](#) is already modeling how community gardening can work, the city still has far too few plot spaces. I applied in 2023 on the first day the applications opened, and did not get selected. Therefore, as a renter I have no place to legally grow! Regardless, even if I had gotten approved, people should not have to drive across town to tend their garden every day. Iowa's buy back program will help communities open up spaces all throughout towns and cities, and our [Gardens Across Iowa](#) public resource will help coordinate it into a clean, efficient movement!
- **Hire horticulture specialists to manage community gardens** – As gardening plots are opened up for community use, Managers will be needed for overall maintenance of gardens, and to assist community members with advice and helpful tips. Iowa boasts some of the most renowned horticulture universities, with Iowa State University's horticulture department being one of the oldest and respected departments in the world.¹ It is time we put our homegrown experts to work helping to heal Iowa's urban and rural communities.
 - **How is it paid for, you ask?** Two different ways:
 - 1.) See [my Housing Initiative](#) for details on how a large percentage of this program will be paid for.
 - 2.) Remember how [the US Government sold War Bonds](#) to fund World War I and World War II (see pics of an actual war bond certificate [here](#))? Soon you will be able to purchase *Iowa Gardening Bonds* - aesthetically beautiful bond certificates you can hang on your wall as a proud sponsor of Iowa's new community gardening program. Yes - *this* is how we raise funds for the buy back program. We will make several beautiful, collectable Iowa

¹ “Home.” *Department of Horticulture*, Iowa State University, 6 May 2021, www.hort.iastate.edu/.

Gardening Bond certificates people can purchase to help fund the program. This is a way to make this a voluntary effort instead of raising taxes. If you are a graphic designer who would like to help with designing the certificates, email SondraWilson4Governor@gmail.com.

- 3.) The second way the buyback/management program will be paid for is an optional 2% tax on rental property owners (5% on out-of-state landlords, thus encouraging in-state buyers). Owners can opt out of the tax via making gardening space available to tenants who want to garden vegetables, fruit trees, and herbs. Please note that this is *not* and “us v them” scenario. This is a practical way landlords and tenants can work together in order to improve local food supplies. Gardening is not required, but it needs to be an option for people who strongly desire to grow at least some portion of their food for personal consumption.

**It's about moving, as a society,
from a place of scarcity to a place of abundance:**

Think about what a bright future it would be if more people begin gardening - neighbors helping neighbors, and getting people out under the open sky again. Elders throughout our communities having fresh food growing in their neighborhoods, young people learning valuable life skills and connecting with nature, and the joys that tending the earth can bring. *Oh dear... more of the plan is described below... but I can't help myself... I'm about to break out into....*  The Garden Song !!!

Video of Sondra on  Urban Gardens & Justice Reform - Sondra Wilson for Iowa Governor!

Save on Taxes, increase Iowa's economic production:

As people in urban areas become more self-sufficient (and cities begin producing a surplus of goods, as opposed to merely services), taxes and social services aimed at helping the impoverished will naturally become less stressed. This shift will create a boom in entrepreneurship throughout urban areas and people begin developing proprietary products. This will increase Iowa's export capacity and bring wealth to the state!

Access to food, access to nature:

People who want to grow their own food and live more self-sufficient lives ought to have access to the resources they need to do so. There would be a lot less garbage and pollution if we didn't import *all* of the food we eat. It is very wasteful and rather ridiculous that so few people in cities have no access to soil to grow at least some amount of food. Most of us renters are totally screwed with nowhere to legally grow (having only 5 feet of space on a porch is pretty offensive [tbh](#)).

With gardens, you don't have to:

- 1.) ship food from the farm to get packaged
- 2.) then to a store
- 3.) then have the individual drive to the store and back
- 4.) then throw the trash in the garbage,
- 5.) then have someone pick up the trash and haul it to the dump
- 6.) then have someone manage the landfill.

Think about all the garbage, waste, and labor used to create a meal.

With gardens, you simply:

- 1.) prepare the soil
- 2.) plant a seed and water it
- 3.) pick your food, not wrapping it in garbage
- 4.) compost the waste, which goes back into step one - preparing the soil.

Urban Gardens Solve Numerous Problems:

We desperately need an urban gardening movement in this society in order to solve a myriad of societal issues, such as:

- 1.) **End hunger** – food insecurity is reaching record highs in the Des Moines metro and across the state.²
- 2.) **Disaster preparedness** - Iowans depend on our farmers, but we are not prepared! The derecho and drought that hammered Iowa in 2020 destroyed \$802 million in corn, soybeans and pastures, with farmers absorbing nearly one-third of the losses! ³ It is *vital* that Iowans throughout all parts of Iowa are prepared for natural disaster and economic hardship. Food gardens are “nature’s insurance program”!
- 3.) **Reduce the amount of trash we produce as a society** - Iowans generate 2.8 million tons of solid waste per year.⁴ *Gardens aren’t wrapped in garbage!*
- 4.) **Enable low-income people** (including but not limited to people on EBT) **to produce their own food and live more self-sufficient lives.**
- 5.) **Connect people with nature** – without having to drive to a forest, which many of us can’t often afford.
- 6.) **Reduce the amount of unnecessary labor each individual performs in order to put food on the table** – I like to say, “Efficiency – *helps you move like a fish in the sea!*” (swiftly)

Work Smarter – Not Harder!

With our ability to automate watering systems and spread the best gardening techniques, we can work *smart* instead of working too hard. We can *produce more while working less*. Our ancestors would have killed for this technology, and we’re barely using it!

² More Iowans Face Food Insecurity as Food Pantries Report Record-High Demand, www.desmoinesregister.com/story/news/local/2023/09/07/more-iowans-face-food-insecurity-as-food-pantries-report-record-high-demand-dmarc-food-bank-iowa/70771259007/ . Accessed 16 Jan. 2024.

³ Eller, Donnelle. “Iowa Farmers Absorbed \$243 Million in Losses from Last Year’s Devastating Drought, Derecho, New Tally Says.” *The Des Moines Register*, Des Moines Register, 27 July 2021, www.desmoinesregister.com/story/money/agriculture/2021/07/27/iowa-2020-drought-derecho-new-tally-s-hows-size-farmers-losses-agriculture-corn-soybeans-noaa/7941506002/.

⁴ “Environmental Protection.” *Iowa Department of Natural Resources*, www.iowadnr.gov/Environmental-Protection/Land-Quality/Solid-Waste#:~:text=Solid%20Waste%20Section,land%2C%20water%20and%20air%20resources. Accessed 16 Jan. 2024.

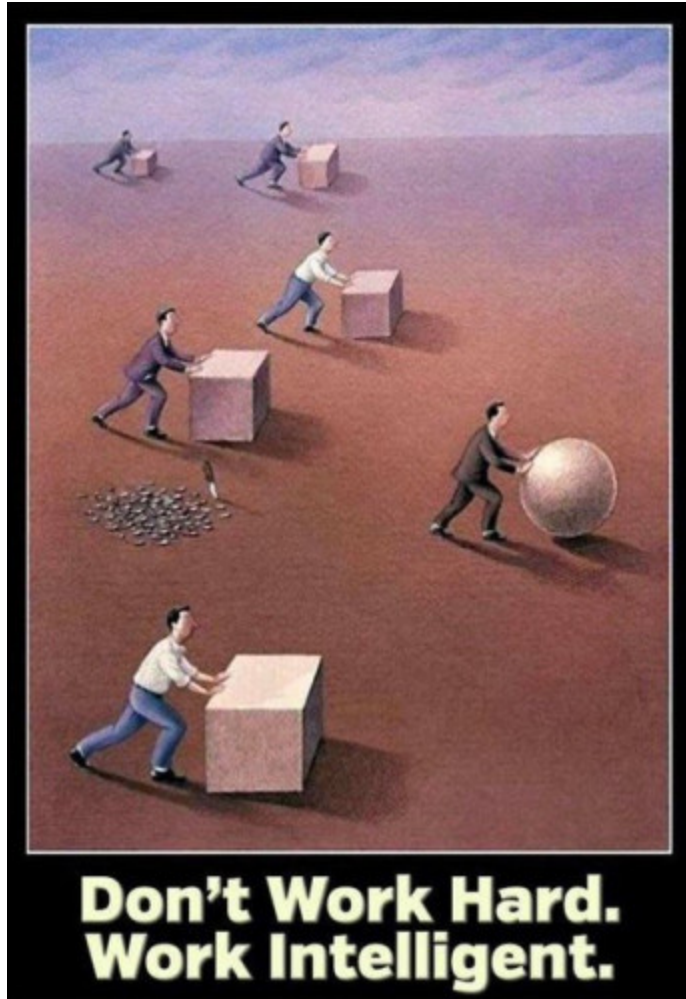


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A common sense solution:

Most politicians want to just throw money at these issues (EBT, environment): an urban gardening movement is a common sense solution.

**Give a person an ear of corn and you feed them for a day.
Teach them to plant and you feed them for a lifetime.**

Not everyone fits into the business world, and people who are reduced to welfare should not be left without any other option!

We have to think outside the economic box, and think about practical, common sense solutions right in front of us:

There is absolutely room on this planet for urban gardens; the problem is that so often the people who control the land only think about using it through the lens of business to the point that as a society we seem to have lost common sense. Way too much focus on "jobs, jobs, jobs" as the solution for everything. Jobs are important, but they do not solve everything. If you want the entire planet controlled by businesses, *that's on you*. For me? I want a future that values individual freedom, and encourages connection with nature. I believe that is how we create a healthier planet.

Thank you for reading,
Sondra Wilson

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References:

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Image of student gardening: LiveKindly's Facebook Page:

<https://www.facebook.com/livekindlyco/posts/do-you-think-gardening-should-be-taught-in-schools-/779994784330642/>