Peas are twining their way up the most unlikely sticks and fences these days. Sarah C. Rich's handsome, intelligent *Urban Farms* (*Abrams, $30*) chronicles a movement to bring kale to the people, an effort that stretches across the country, from Brooklyn to Oakland. It's a measure of how far behind we have left our rural roots that something considered as banal as a vegetable patch a mere 60 years ago is newsworthy today. Then again, we didn't have nature deficit disorder in the old days; it was probably more like nature surfeit anxiety.

Today, it's a shock — but a nice one — to find yourself face to face with the chicken, goat or donkey that lives down the block. A perceptive essay by one of Rich's contributors, Alissa Walker, called "Little Homestead in the City," captures the spirit of this new enterprise. "So if life in the city is better with a backyard beer factory, a basement incubating mushrooms, a few chickens, and maybe a goat, then the question remains: Why not just move to the country?" Her subjects answer by saying that they enjoy the best of both worlds — high-tech jobs by day, homesteading on weekends — as well as a chance to be part of a tight-knit community that wants to learn about gardening and enjoy good food.

For some, it's all about living off the land, even if that land is fenced in by row houses. Rich and her photographer, Matthew Benson, visit Mary Seton Corboy, who started a program called Greensgrow in Philadelphia more than a decade ago. The business now includes an apiary, a year-round nursery and a stand that sells jams, vegetable spreads, sauces and seasonal pies. Corboy is a no-nonsense businesswoman. "More work, less talk," as she says, could be what separates the farmer from the gardener.

*Above and top right: Bounty from ReVision Urban Farm in Boston, which began at a shelter. From "Urban Farms."*