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Agrihoods: A New Trend in Lifestyle Living

The pandemic has sent millions of people sprinting for the countryside. An increased interest in food production has stimulated local market shopping. Enthusiasm for environmental sustainability has pressed technological advancement in residential housing. It's the perfect storm for real estate innovation. Enter the Agrihood: a rustic answer to all three concerns.

Agricultural neighborhoods, affectionately deemed, "Agrihoods," are residential developments orbiting around a professionally managed farm. Innovation has long been a side effect of trying times and in topsy turvy 2020, this enterprising pursuit for sustainable living found an opening. These communities began cropping up around 2014 and found a significant foothold this year in particular when Covid-19 spurred millions of Americans to head for the pastoral embrace of ruburbia.

Chugging alongside this sweep-



ing migration is the uptick in people prioritizing local food production. According to the United States Department of Agriculture, the number of farmers' markets in the U.S. tripled from year 2000 to 2015. In 2009, the USDA launched the

"Know Your Farmer, Know Your Food" initiative and saw locally-produced food become the fastest-growing market sector.

In short, Americans care more about where food originates and want that location to be close by. How much more local can you get than your own back yard? Agrihood farms, the centerpiece of the development, typically operate under Community Supported Agriculture programming wherein benefactors retrieve fresh produce weekly from their friendly neighborhood farm.

Another important factor adding a feather to the cap of agrihoods everywhere this year is homebuyer preference for an energy efficient design. With an emphasis on sustainability, agrihood homes come equipped with sleek energy conservation features such as "net-zero" consumption - think solar panels and

geothermal, Energy Star appliances, fiber optics, and LEED certification. Nature-loving, going-green foodies are the bread and butter of America's new agrihoods and they are turning up in record numbers.

The word "Agrihood" was coined in 2014 in Southern California to describe planned communities with a farm at the core of the development. They are meant to connect tenants to the land, even in urban settings, by harboring emphasis around organic and sustainable agriculture. Food is more than fuel in these communities. It is intentional, it is enterprising, it is social.

While agrihoods have only stormed the mainstream housing development radar in the last five years or so, they are far from novel in concept. It is only in recent generations that consumers have become removed from the food pro-

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WELCOME TO THE AGRIHOOD

Housing, Shopping, and Gardening for a Farm-to-Table Lifestyle



ANNA DESIMONE

Includes National Directory of Agrihoods
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Learn More

As agrihoods crop up all over the nation (currently there are over one hundred), Anna DeSimone offers a descriptive guidebook, *Welcome to the Agrihood: Housing, Shopping and Gardening for a Farm-to-Table Lifestyle* (House Publishing 2020). In this book, she instructs on how you can convert your own space, no matter how big or small, into a personal working organic farm or garden. Her in-depth discussion of local food, backyard and urban farming, and community supported agriculture paints farm-to-table living as not just a niche for the few lucky ones in luxurious settings but an opportunity for the masses. She includes a robust directory of farms in each of the fifty states with markets and food hubs and community supported agriculture programs. Even if plans to relocate to an agrihood aren't in the

cards, DeSimone leads the charge on bringing the agrihood to you. For the sustainability-seeking, fresh produce, home-grown gardeners, or for anyone who loves food (so everyone), this book is groundbreaking. Literally. For details and to purchase, visit trianglegardener.com/garden-shop.

duction process. The Americans of a couple of generation ago either grew their own food or bought or traded it from a neighbor up the road.

The separation in consumption and production is unique to modern generations. Now however, with increased concern for environmental sustainability, there is a greater interest in sourcing. Agrihoods, in a way, have brought us full circle to the farm-centered, walkable communities of yore where your farmer was your neighbor and your neighbors were all farmers.

Fortuitously, this seemingly fateful timing has supplied no shortage of developments or occupants. With the surge in telecommuting, home buyers can work from anywhere. On the canvas of increased flexibility, the data show they are opting for a bucolic backdrop. Not just for environmentally conscious

millennials, agrihoods are also highly attractive to families seeking a safe community for their children and retirees eager to maintain socially rich schedules. Residents are rewarded with a peaceful, natural setting, built in amenities and the reassurance of year-round, fresh, organic food.

In North Carolina, one such agrihood has become a shining example of greener pastures. Olivette Riverside Community and Farm snuggles on 346 acres of land just north of Asheville along the French Broad River. It was founded in 2014 with quintessential agrihood amenities that include fishing, hiking, biking, paddle sports and, of course, daily fresh produce. After a 2020 marred by lockdown and quarantine, the open spaces, food security, and community of Olivette seem like a welcome exhale.

Before Olivette, the acreage was destined for a high-end, gated community. When plans spiraled into bankruptcy, the founding partners of Olivette purchased the land and tore down the gate. They planted blueberry bushes for good measure, signaling that this new development would grow around and through nature and not just on top of it.

One of the community's developers, Scott Austin, hopes that Olivette's residents feel like they are at summer camp all year round. The location is secluded and the homes are novel but what brings the vision to life is the scheduled programming for residents. A full-time event coordinator organizes gatherings such as farm-to-table dinners. It's exciting to think that the community campfire may not be a nostalgia steeped memory but a staple of future developments like Olivette.

A full-time farmer heads up the four-season, organic growing at Olivette. This year-round operation includes planting cover crops, greenhouse seed propagation, and transplant to Olivette's fields for spring and summer harvest.

On the other side of the state, the River Bluffs development in Castle Hayne includes a community farm on its 313 acres along the Cape Fear River. It also has a marina with access to boating and other water sports, parks, and trails.

In an era of supply shortage, public space closure and food insecurity, agrihoods all over are offering the warm reassurance of self-sufficiency and the sweet opportunity for close-knit community. As exhausted, uncertain and sheltered Americans of 2020 seek stability, agrihoods feel like the best kind of change: simple and back to basics.



Alli Hurley is a writer, actor, and musician.

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