



# Here Comes the Agrihood: A Taste of California's New Farm-to-fork Community

*At The Cannery, the greens are reserved for tasting, not teeing off.*

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Located just west of Sacramento in the tomato-heavy heart of California's Central Valley, the city of Davis isn't the type of town that's afraid to take risks, to experiment, to do things a bit differently. The mindset of Davis, in a nutshell, is clearly spelled out in the name of the predominately rural county that it's located in.

Founded in the late 19th century as an agricultural outpost centered around grains and trains, the town formerly known as Davisville is best known today as being home to the most farmer-friendly of California's 10 public universities. Established in 1905 as the University of California's rural farm school, UC Davis has evolved into an esteemed institution that ranks as the top university in the world for agriculture, forestry and veterinary sciences.

In a town where cultivation is king, so is environmental stewardship. Rural traditions are observed — and celebrated — while emerging technology and planet-improving innovation is embraced in a manner unlike anywhere else in the country. It's a place where bikes rule the roads and dedicated freeway-bypassing tunnels are built for toads. In super-cool Davis, perhaps the closest thing California has to an eco-utopia, you'll find the world's first LEED-certified brewery *and* the country's largest net-zero energy planned community.

And then there's Davis' newest master-planned residential development, the first in some years, where two of the main selling points are “make meals with vegetables you picked today” and “walk to the store that sells fruits grown locally.”

Okay, sure, but what about tennis courts, golf courses, gated entrances and easy expressway access?



At the The Cannery, a sprawling, freshly uncorked development described as “California’s first farm-to-table new home community,” you’ll be hard-pressed to find the somewhat staid amenities associated with typical housing developments. The Cannery, which features 547 new homes spread out across a quartet of distinct neighborhoods, is what’s referred to as an “agrihood” — a down-on-the-farm New Urbanist housing model where the park ‘n’ path-heavy community is

centered around agriculture, usually in the form of a working farm.

In the case of The Cannery, said working farm is a 7.4-acre operation that “serves as a state-of-the-art example of sustainable urban farming and an agri-classroom for beginning farmers.” And because this is Davis, a town where picnicking and cycling are both activities to be taken *very* seriously, in addition to the farm, The Cannery boasts expansive bike trails and ample room (4.7 acres of public parks, plazas and dedicated open space) to hunker down on a blanket for a low-key al fresco luncheon.

While The Cannery — an infill and redevelopment project, the 100-acre development is situated on the former site of a Hunt-Wesson tomato processing facility near downtown Davis — may be California’s first self-identifying agrihood, it’s certainly not the first of its kind. Highly walkable, farm-centered planned communities have been around for years, even decades; it’s only recently have that they’ve been identified as a bona fide real estate trend by Bloomberg and the New York Times.

For starters, there’s Serenbe outside of Atlanta; Boise’s Hidden Springs; Willowsford in Loudoun County, Virginia; Agritopia in suburban Phoenix; and Prairie Crossing, an Illinois “Conservation Community” located equidistance between Chicago and Milwaukee that was established in 1991.



Numerous other agrihoods are in the works, including in California.

The Cannery differs from the increasingly abundant number of super-bucolic suburban enclaves in that it is, as previously mentioned, an urban infill project.

“Usually, agrihoods are taking over existing farmland, not reclaimed land,” Mary Kimball, executive director of the Center for Land-Based Learning (CLBL), explains to Civil Eats.

Based in Yolo County, Kimball’s organization heads up operations of the Cannery’s farm, which, uniquely, operates as an education-based nonprofit enterprise. While located in a residential

community, The Cannery's farm doesn't operate as traditional community farm in that residents won't be tending to the fields themselves. However, residents might be able to pitch in on a volunteer basis alongside the CLBL's real-deal farmers-in-training. The so called "incubator farmers" will live offsite.

"It's a model not just for California, but how these kinds of places can be reclaimed for innovative developments that have an urban farm," Kimball adds noting that the soil, previously covered with concrete, on The Cannery's farm site is not contaminated. However, much of the initial work will be dedicated to reclamation efforts to bring the ground up to crop-producing snuff.



Kimball elaborates on the goal of the farm to the Sacramento Bee: "The goal is to get farming businesses started and flourishing in the region. The (concept is) to incubate these beginning farmers, so their focus can be on farming, not on the cash outlays. It is like a graduate program."

Among the crops that are already being grown and harvested at The Cannery are, go figure, tomatoes.

While The Cannery may differ from other agrihoods in this regard, it finds common ground with many of its contemporaries like Serenbe, for example, in that the "green" extends well beyond the fields and into the homes themselves.

Working alongside builder Shea Homes on two of The Cannery's neighborhoods, developer the New Home Company incorporated sustainable design elements into all of the new residences, which offer a veritable salmagundi of sizes, layouts and price points. The Cannery's collection of cottages, bungalows, townhomes and more sprawling abodes are *all* equipped with 1.5kW solar systems (buyers who have the option to upgrade to net-zero energy), pre-wiring for EV charging, LED lighting, tankless water heaters, water-conserving fixtures and appliances and more. Special design considerations were also made for multigenerational living.

Gala, an additional neighborhood to include 96 "university flats" (presumably rental units open to UC Davis Students) is slated to open in 2016 in the Cannery's "commerce district" opposite the main community event space, the Amphitheater, and the Town Center, which will eventually feature a lively mix of retail and office space. Also that year, Beech, another new neighborhood with 72 detached single-family residences built by Standard Pacific Homes, will open for sales.

The Cannery's grand opening in August attracted an estimated 5,000 people from across the region. Thus far, sales of available models have been reportedly brisk.

While the mawkish marketing language of The Cannery's website ("Wake up where the sun smiles over a wide, green landscape. Nourish your life") may suggest that the Cannery's emphasis on the pastoral is a sales-boosting gimmick, the New Home Company means business.

"Ag is becoming a competitive differentiator in the development world," Ed McMahon, a sustainable development expert with the Urban Land Institute tells Civil Eats, noting that while roughly 5 percent of the residential housing market is composed of agriculture-centered neighborhoods like The Cannery, it's a niche market that picking up speed — growing faster, perhaps, than Yolo County's famed hothouse tomatoes.

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<http://www.mnn.com/your-home/organic-farming-gardening/blogs/here-comes-agrihood-california-farm-fork-community>