

Putting Down Roots

Agrihoods help you commune with nature and like-minded neighbors



By Sarah Sekula

IN THE FIRST 10 minutes of strolling past pineapple patches and mango trees with organic farm specialist Aaron Shapiro, here's what I learned: Breadfruit in Brazil can grow to be the size of a small child. Avocados despise salty air. And it's best to pick passion fruit off the ground rather than plucking it from the tree.

Just imagine what you could glean if you lived near the farm he runs. When I say near, I mean just

Aaron Shapiro with tangelo and grapefruit at Kohanaiki in Hawaii

GREEN PRACTICES



Gardening at Kohanaiki

KOHANAIKI



Hartness Village Kitchen restaurant, South Carolina

LILLIA CALLUM-PENSO/GREENVILLE (S.C.) NEWS

“A community farm can be the centerpiece of a development, and associated programming and educational opportunities can foster community social ties.”

**— MATTHEW NORRIS,
director, Building Healthy Places Initiative**



Walking trails on Miralon's repurposed golf course in Palm Springs, Calif.

CHET FROHLICH PHOTOGRAPHY

steps away: The 2-acre biodynamic farm is part of Kohanaiki, a private community on the island of Hawaii. Centered around a grottolike farm, it's what's known as an agrihood, a neighborhood that focuses on sustainable living, wide-open spaces and fostering a genuine sense of community.

With myna birds as our soundtrack, Shapiro explains his love for all things agricultural. It stems from growing up on a mango and avocado farm with “hippie parents,” he says with a grin. In short, he found living off the land so appealing that he devoted his life to tending crops.

These days, he passes on his knowledge to Kohanaiki residents with plant propagation classes and lessons in creating Japanese moss balls. He also teaches neighborhood kids how to plant beans and sunflowers, how irrigation works and how to play in the sprinklers.

And Kohanaiki residents get to pick the garden's produce as often as they like. One neighbor swings by almost every day in pursuit of hot peppers to make chili flakes.

Beyond the educational classes, the farm also serves as a gathering spot for morning yoga, massages and ukulele classes. Fancy amenities, yes, but this is a community with cozy homesites priced from \$1.25 million and some houses selling for as much as \$25 million.

FARM-FOCUSED LIVING

Communities like Kohanaiki are popping up across the nation in different forms and at different price points. In fact, the Urban Land Institute (ULI) estimated there were more than 90 agrihoods operating or in development in the U.S. in 2019. The fundamental appeal: Why go to a farmers market when you can live at one?

The developers of Miralon in Palm Springs, Calif., scrapped the idea of refurbishing a golf course on their 309-acre site, opting instead to plant 7,000 olive trees. Residents get an

allotment of the oil each year, and there are 26 raised garden beds where they can pick their own organic herbs and edible flowers. The developers also left 97 acres of green space for citrus groves, walking trails and parks in the community, which features single-family homes from \$900,000.

Hartness in Greenville, S.C., has cottages, townhomes, manor homes and estates ranging from around \$400,000 to \$2 million. The 449-acre development features a restaurant that serves dishes made with local ingredients and a community garden with 16 raised plots for its residents, who can also participate in special events to harvest corn and pecans.

Arden in Palm Beach County, Fla., offers organic gardening workshops and classes on home composting. Single-family homes range from \$400,000 to \$700,000.

Arden's 5-acre farm is run by two full-time directors, Tripp and Carmen Eldridge, who are experts in small-scale organic farming and got their start in the Peace Corps.

The momentum around agrihoods and other farm-to-table trends “has been building all through the ‘good food’ movement,” says Tripp. “As millennials come of age and move into their own homes, we're seeing that a connection to nature and to each other is important to people when they're deciding where to live. Connecting with where your food comes from, from seed to plate, is a really easy way to achieve this.”

Interest in agrihoods continues to grow, says Matthew Norris, director of ULI's Building Healthy Places Initiative. “People are looking for access to locally grown food and are more aware of the health and environmental benefits of eating local produce.”

COMMUNITY TIES

According to ULI, 73 percent of U.S. residents consider access to fresh, healthy foods to

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be a top or high priority when deciding where to live.

An added bonus of agrihood living is the focus on community. “Agrihoods promote social interaction, which people are increasingly prioritizing,” Norris says. “A community farm can be the centerpiece of a development, and associated programming and educational opportunities can foster community social ties.”

JOY OF SHARING

“Growing and sharing food brings people a lot of joy,” says Carmen Eldridge. “(At Arden) we grow over 30 varieties of vegetables from November to May, including many of the regular favorites like tomatoes, peppers and cucumbers, but also unique items like Japanese salad turnips and French breakfast radishes.”

Residents have access to the fresh fruits and vegetables throughout the respective growing seasons. Households receive a farm share based on their preferences each month from November to May. There’s even a food-share app that allows residents to rate the vegetables and customize their shares.

The farm at Arden houses a big red barn complete with a general store that hosts special events like the annual tropical fruit tasting soiree and a fall pumpkin patch. Nearby are a children’s learning garden and two you-pick gardens with culinary herbs for residents to grab on their way home from work. Future plans include additional acreage for vegetables, a community you-pick orchard, adopt-a-bed garden and meditation garden.

Katie and Matt Hazi moved to Arden with their newborn in October 2020. “I had never even heard of a farm share before Arden,” says Matt. “It’s been such a great experience learning about how all of that works and trying new things. I found some new vegetables, like turnips, that I didn’t even know I liked.”

“We fell in love with the

idea of a community that very intentionally put agriculture at its center,” says Katie. “It’s really rewarding to be a part of that excitement and share our passion with people interested in learning more about where their food comes from.”

DIP YOUR TOES

Not quite ready to commit to the agrihood lifestyle? Consider visiting a teaching farm instead.

Singer-songwriter Jack Johnson may be known for soothing tunes like *Better Together* and *Banana Pancakes*. Turns out, he and his wife, Kim, are also passionate about encouraging others to support local food growers. They are developing Kokua Learning Farm, a hands-on agricultural education space on the north shore of O’ahu.

“You could be a kid or a grandparent, you could be living here or visiting, whoever you are, you’re walking in here, and you’re going to get inspired to create a change in your life, whatever that might be,” says Kim, president and CEO of the nonprofit environmental education Kokua Hawaii Foundation the couple founded two decades ago.

The farm is a haven where people will be able to master composting, take pesto-making classes, learn from local artisans and buy in bulk from the general store. Right now, people can come to community workdays the first Saturday of every month to help with chores like planting or harvesting.

The fields are full of arugula, eggplant and cassava. Beehives are tucked away at the back of the property, and soon there will be an orchard, edible garden and an agroforestry composting area — all with a view of Mount Ka’ala, the highest mountain on O’ahu.

“I really wanted to do something that gave back to the community by connecting people back to their land and where their food comes from and making healthy choices for themselves and for the planet,” Kim says.



Gardens at Arden, Fla.

CHET FROHLICH PHOTOGRAPHY

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– KIM JOHNSON,
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Jack and Kim Johnson

TAHNEI ROY