

The urbaRn Project: We Are What We Grow

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We have all heard the saying “We are what we eat”. Another idea that is just as true is, “We are what we grow”. With this in mind, the Farm Project brings together business, school and community around the concept of reclaiming impacted urban space and turning it into a working farm and urban green space. The one-acre organic farm will consist of a half-acre of growing plots and raised beds, a chicken coop, beehives and meeting and workspace. The Farm Project will provide space for gathering and enjoying the outdoors, teaching space for a local K-12 school and community groups, and it will have a farm store that will sell organic produce at affordable prices. The farm will not only provide students and community residents with nutritious meals, but will also get them connected to their food and introduce the various user groups to models of sustainable agriculture and healthy and sustainable lifestyles.

The first completed component of the Urban Farm is the “urbaRn” project; a classroom / meeting / lab facility which has been designed and constructed almost completely from waste stream materials and is intended to extend the lessons of the Urban Farm to that of the built environment. The urbaRn was designed and fabricated by a group of fourth year architecture students, and employs two re-purposed shipping containers, which have been extensively modified for use at the Urban Farm.

The students were challenged to design the facilities using low / no impact materials, and after some research came to recognize the containers as a potential waste stream resource. In addition to being at the end of their useful life, the containers selected for the project were contributing to a surplus of shipping containers in the region due to a regional trade imbalance. The choice of containers also facilitated the staging of the project, which was fabricated largely off-site and then delivered to the Farm, and allows for the potential of relocation in the future. Modifications included creating large openings with sliding panels and fitting out the interiors with shelving, rolling farm tables and windows created from salvaged materials diverted from the local landfill.

The students also used digital technologies to minimize waste in the production of 18 chairs for the facility. The chairs were designed to “scissor” together and could be milled and fabricated without the use of any adhesives. In addition to being light and functional, the chairs demonstrate an approach to sustainable design by being extremely efficient in their use of materials. Nesting programs allowed all components for the chairs to be milled out of sheet goods; a yield of four chairs coming from one 4’ x 8’ sheet.

Educational materials directed to various user groups ranging from community members to grade school students frame these principals and extend the lessons of the farm to the built environment.



The Farm Project: We Are What We Grow

We have all heard the saying “We are what we eat”. Another idea that is just as true is, “We are what we grow”. With this in mind, a groundbreaking collaborative involving educators, students, local farmers and local professionals is working together to create an urban farm on an abandoned brownfield site on the near north side of Indianapolis. The farm project is intended serve as a model for developing partnerships between schools and urban farmers in every Indianapolis neighborhood.

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