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Red Barn

FARM LIVING IN THE HEART OF THE CITY

One of Bentonville's newest housing developments is also one of the most distinctive in the country: Red Barn is what's known as an "agrihood," a neighborhood organized around the concept of food grown on site. In an innovative response to a technologized culture that can alienate us from our food sources, agrihoods are popping up in a push to bring agriculture back into the purview of everyday life.



Volunteer night at Red Barn Farm brings residents together. (By Aubrey Forrest)



A volunteer working in the blueberry patch at Red Barn Farm. (By Aubrey Forrest)

INTEGRATED DESIGN

Initiated in 2017 by the sustainability-minded Green Circle Projects, Red Barn represents a new step in the community planning work of CEO Matt O'Reilly, whose draw to green projects started with LEED certification of developments in Springfield, Missouri. Initially attracted by Northwest Arkansas' bike trail system, O'Reilly found the rapidly growing community a natural fit for the sustainable urban design principles of GCP.

Red Barn is smack-dab in the middle of downtown Bentonville, which you'd never believe if you didn't know better. The first thing you notice is the trees towering happily over the property, unusual in your typical housing development. Matt Wagner, director of communications for GCP, says it was important to maintain the tree canopy and reuse what they harvested, which is just the first sign of the ethos at the heart of Red Barn.





Red Barn's inventive modeling of its concept and catchphrase "Ozarks Living" is evident in the design of the 45-acre property. Three housing sections, which include townhomes and one- and two-bedroom flats of varying floor plans, are strategically integrated into the landscape to protect and restore green space as well as provide great views of and access to a central common area that will soon be home to a different kind of resident: free-range chickens.

Farmer Melissa Millsap plans to keep the area planted year-round in cover crops, ensuring a green space for use by families, pets and a chicken tractor, a mobile coop that keeps hens safe and gives them access to new ground daily. You know what this means: fresh eggs!

THE FARM

But that's only the beginning of what experienced head farmers Millsap and her husband, Adam, who live on site, have planned. Already operating as a sustainable, self-sufficient, Certified Naturally Grown LLC, Red Barn Farm has made leaps and bounds in a matter of months. Two and a half acres to the north of the property constitute the heart of the farm and are already in the thick of production of summertime crops like tomatoes (which you can find at Red Barn's booth at the Bentonville Farmers Market).

Every day brings new developments that increase the farm's viability, such as season-extension equipment that will allow the farm to produce year-round, contributing to one of its major goals: education. An agrihood provides what Wagner calls "line-of-sight" to the food we eat and, moreover, hands-on experience in our own food production. Part of the objective is to present a new and accessible model of farming in hopes of inspiring the next generation of farmers, says O'Reilly, and Red Barn's design invites community members to find their role in furthering the local food system.

"People want to support a farm in their own capacity," says Millsap. "Maybe it's buying produce, maybe it's volunteering, maybe it's getting a job. We want them to find their place on the farm." Red Barn residents, while not required to garden, are always welcome, and community events of all kinds, from classes to cocktail nights, are in the works. A monthly community volunteer night has already met with huge success.



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The eventual plan is to have a farmstand on site for full-time access to fresh produce. Still under development are a wash-and-pack station and greenhouse. Over time, Millsap plans to identify further growing areas throughout the property's abundant green space. Near the entrance is a blueberry patch for community use, a demo garden to pick and smell, and a stand of young pawpaw trees – a tribute to the native Arkansas species.

FRONT PORCH LIVING

The Red Barn homes themselves are simple, modern and lovely, with open floor plans, creative splashes of color and tasteful rustic details interspersed, such as a sliding barn door in every unit. Spacious garages, stainless appliances and cool new features alongside large patios with views more suggestive of countryside than city center truly meld the rural and urban, a revolutionary concept for folks drawn to farm life but not to the isolation it has historically

entailed. In fact, this is one quality that sets Red Barn apart from other U.S. agrihoods. Most are farther out in the country, with large tracts of land sold for single-family homes.

So far, Red Barn is the only agrihood that consists entirely of leased property. It is among only a few that sell produce to both residents and the larger community. These factors, coupled with its smallness and proximity to town, mark Red Barn as distinctly inclusive. As Wagner says, "It's purposely designed to encourage interaction with your neighbors."

This community ethic is reflected in Red Barn's Core workforce housing program, an initiative that offers selective discounts to folks who live and

work in Bentonville — teachers, police officers, service industry workers — in other words, core community members.

"The whole model is designed to make the Ozarks lifestyle available to people moving to the area," says O'Reilly. As Northwest Arkansans know, our bike trails are indispensable to that lifestyle. Red Barn's placement directly at the intersection of five major trails is just one more aspect of the innovative connectivity it facilitates. Red Barn started welcoming residents in May, but it's well worth a visit for anyone who would like to be part of a thriving local community. ■

Visit redbarnbentonville.com for more information.