

# Community based on 'farm to fork' coming to Davis

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Work has started on the most ambitious expansion in Davis in more than a decade, a new residential and business development that city officials and developers say may be the first farm-to-fork community in the region, if not the state.

The project has prompted the question, though: Just what is a farm-to-fork community?

The site, where a Hunt-Wesson tomato processing plant once stood, is called The Cannery, and will include more than 550 homes on 100 acres off Covell Boulevard. The diverse housing mix, from garage units to condos to detached homes, is part of a push in Davis to provide neighborhoods for a broad variety of people: singles, couples, families with children, first-time buyers, empty nesters and renters.

Every home will have a fruit or nut tree in the yard. But it's the neighborhood's nonresidential features that will most reflect the town's farming roots.

Crews have carved out a 7-acre section along the eastern flank of the development where they have furrowed the ground and begun regenerating the soil for what will become a working farm. The city has enlisted the Center for Land-Based Learning in Winters to run the farm as a commercial enterprise. It will serve as a training ground for beginning farmers.

"The goal is to get farming businesses started and flourishing in the region," said the center's executive director, Mary Kimball. "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."

The project will include a large barn, under construction, near the front entrance to the community on Covell. Crews will hammer up distressed siding in the coming weeks to make the barn look as though it's been there a long time, a fixture on the landscape. Nearby, carpenters are framing a farmhouse with a wrap-around porch that will serve initially as a neighborhood sales and information center, then will be used by the city as a meeting space or farm-related education site.

City leaders say turning a concrete-covered former industrial site into shared space for residents and farmers lets Davis modernize and reconnect with its roots at the same time.

"We are surrounded by ag land," said Mike Webb, Davis' community development and sustainability director, "but there has been nothing in the city that allows a true interaction with the city and agriculture. You can't really learn about how it works."

Kevin Carson, Northern California president for The New Home Company, the site developer, said the project is unusual. He never thought he'd be building a barn. "This is cool stuff you don't normally get to do in homebuilding," he said. "All that adds to how much fun this is for us."

He said Davis residents have a distinct aesthetic. "They really value neighborhood and location more than they would, say, a fancy car."

His company is marketing The Cannery as "California's first farm-to-table new-home community." The New Home Company website talks about residents making meals with vegetables they picked that day, and declares: "Life tastes better here."

But Kimball of the Center for Land-Based Learning said The Cannery isn't a farm-to-fork community in one key sense. "You don't get to walk out into the rows and pick what you want. This is not a community garden. We want the farmers to be as connected with the community as possible, but it is definitely a working farm."

Residents, instead, will be able to observe the on-site farm through the seasons, gaining an appreciation of what goes on there, city officials say. There likely will be some sort of produce stand or small farmers market, possibly near the barn or the farmhouse, with products from this and other local farms. The on-site farmers potentially could sell boxed products to residents, and there may be opportunities for volunteer work on the farm.

Kimball calls the farmer training project an experiment. "We're going to learn a lot from this," she said. "It's not easy (but) we wouldn't be involved in it if we didn't see the long-term goals being worthwhile, and the potential for it to be a model for other places in the region, if not the state."

Davis officials say the project will pack together nearly two dozen housing types, including single-family detached homes, row houses, apartments, stacked condominiums, accessory dwelling units or granny flats, cottages and bungalows. They will range in size from 500 square feet to as much as 3,500 square feet.

"The city is pressing pretty hard to (build) diverse housing types," Webb said. "The cannery is representative of the new way of housing and neighborhood development in Davis. It encapsulates all that Davis holds dear into one package."

All housing in The Cannery will be built with universal design elements that allow people with physical limitations, including people in wheelchairs, to get around. The three-story row houses are designed so owners can add elevators. Each home will have a photo-voltaic solar system to produce electricity.

The neighborhood will include a clubhouse, pool, dog park and practice soccer field. Bike paths will wind through the site. The front of the property, along Covell Boulevard, will have commercial spaces that could house incubator businesses, shops, cafes and restaurants.

Home sales at The Cannery are scheduled to begin in late July. A few model homes will be up by then. Developers said they have not set prices, but similarly sized resale homes in Davis are fetching \$300,000 to \$800,000.

Regional planners have taken notice. Mike McKeever, head of the Sacramento Area Council of Governments, said the project breaks from the traditional development approach, in which all houses in a subdivision are nearly the same size and have the same designs.

The variety of housing and the site's tighter densities will help reduce "pressure to grow onto prime farmland," he said. "It's good growth, not just any growth."

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