

"Agriburbia" sprouts on Colorado's Front Range

Combines homes and harvests

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Matthew "Quint" Redmond walks a lettuce field in Lakewood. Redmond sees a future where homes are engulfed by farms that feed them — and make income by also selling to local restaurants. His 944-home project in Milliken is ready to break ground. (Craig F. Walker | The Denver Post)

Six years ago, Matthew "Quint" Redmond suggested to Milliken planners that a corn farm north of Denver could increase its agricultural value and still anchor nearly a thousand homes.

"I got laughed out of the room," Redmond said.

Today, Milliken's 618-acre Platte River Village is ready for construction, with 944 planned homes surrounded by 108 acres of backyard farms and 152 acres of drip-irrigated community farms. The plan is for the farms to feed local residents and supply restaurants while paying for community upkeep. And Redmond, a 47-year-old planner-farmer, has 13 other Front Range projects mulling his "agriburbia" concept.

Redmond, co-founder of the Golden-based design firm TSR Group, travels the country preaching his urban farming and development idea. He envisions a future where the nation's 31 million acres of lawn are converted to food production. He sees golf-course greens redefined with herbs; sand traps as "kale traps." He sees retirement homes engulfed by farms and office buildings where workers escape cubicles on farming breaks.

Redmond, along with his born-on-a-farm biologist turned planner wife, Jennifer, sees an urban landscape like none before.

"This is where we are all going to go. We need this," said Redmond. "Everyone thinks they are so smart by crafting a 2030 plan for the future. I say we need a \$180-a-barrel plan, on how our communities can be self-sufficient when oil becomes too expensive to ship food across the country."

Self-sufficient. Sustainable. Locally produced. Agriburbia incorporates all three concepts.

"Is there a better use of the land than growing your own food right where you are going to be eating it?" said Janie Lichtfuss, mayor of Milliken, which is positioned to become the first agriburbia community.

"This seems to me to be the best of both worlds, with good use of the land for development and agricultural production too."

The Redmonds are pursuing three avenues when pushing agriburbia. First, their TSR Group works with homeowners with less than an acre, designing an "edible landscape" that not only provides food for the family but also contributes to the group's network of restaurants.

The Redmonds also work with landowners sitting on their property and waiting for the economic revival when they can begin building and selling. The Redmonds manage those empty parcels as "steward lots" that feed local restaurants and deliver cash to the landowner.

And thirdly, the Redmonds are trying to develop farm-cultured communities like Platte River Village in Milliken. Homes surrounding farms already are planned for the middle of Littleton and Boulder, using small spaces



Jenny Redmond, Matthew's wife, inspects lettuce in the Lakewood plot. (Craig F. Walker, The Denver Post) to grow organic produce.

Planners in Lakewood two months ago approved agriburbia in the city's Solterra community.

In Douglas County, the Redmonds are proposing agriburbia in the development of Sterling Ranch near Roxborough State Park.

Right now, the county is looking at the water requirements as well as what crops could thrive.

"If the people support it, we are in position to retrofit some lots for agricultural use," said Terence Quinn, Douglas County's director of planning services. "Agriburbia is one of many different angles we as a community can pursue to become sustainable in the long run. "

The idea is to save farming and feed communities.

"If you grow your own food, you make the land that much more efficient, and our carbon footprint as a human race is going to shrink so much," said Jennifer Redmond, noting that in the traditional food model, as many as 20 entities touch food as it travels from farm to table. "We shorten that supply chain, and everyone wins."

But it's not just the right thing to do, Redmond said. It's profitable. Redmond predicts homeowners and developers will realize that food-production revenue never declines, unlike traditional development models where revenue stops flowing once all the homes are sold.

"Everyone thinks the most efficient, intense use for land is always density," Redmond said as he harvested lettuce and carrots from a formerly weed-choked acre he manages in Lakewood. "There are more intensive uses for urban land."

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