This piece of land has two drastically different conditions: a commercial area, 2. agricultural beds, and 3. community market.

Urban Farm Urban Barn

is a new interpretation of commercial area, 2. agricultural beds, and 3. community market. All of them function in synergy with one another.

This piece of land has two drastically different conditions: an abandoned farmland and an old textile factory. The abandoned farm area was once fertile with coconuts, banana, vegetables, fresh water fish and fireflies. As neighboring properties were cut and filled, various canals through the neighborhood are clogged and unattended. Officials ignore the odors and garbage collected in waterways. The once pristine and productive farm area near the Great Chao Praya River is now seriously under-utilized.

Urban Farm Urban Barn brings back natural flows of the waterways that clean, recycle and store water to support the cultivation of vegetables, flowers, mushrooms and industrious production methods. It is designed to serve neighboring areas with high condominiums and office towers while preserving cultural and agricultural heritage. Green and productive land with fresh-produce does not only shorten the food production but also provides a heat sink for the densely populated capital. The expansion of such a responsible and feasible development to other locations within the city will help revitalize the deteriorating urban conditions—which could be replicated in other cities around the world.

The jury commended this project for demonstrating an innovative way to respond to the detrimental consequences of urbanization in a rapidly-growing metropolis. Industrial wasteland, usually scarred by the urban fabric, is re-cultivated and more-over becomes a local point of attraction, providing a number of social and ecological benefits. This scheme has the potential to create a new urban culture, re-sensitizing the community to its ecological impacts, and offering a new perception of urbanity that is readily transferable. Since the project is commercially driven, it has a strong probability of being realized and will act as a test laboratory for this new kind of organisational structure—illustrating its capacity for economic performance and compatibility.

Urban agriculture and factory conversion, Bangkok, Thailand

Project data

Project group
Building and civil engineering works

Client
Isavaret Tamonut

Project background
Private investment

Estimated start of construction
June 2012

Main author

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Comment of the Holcim Awards jury Asia Pacific

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Project description by author

Urban Farm Urban Barn is a new interpretation of commercial space: a commercial development that cares about cities and its people’s quality of life. The project integrates “agricultural platforms” into all parts of architecture, despite its location in the urban environment.

Urban Farm Urban Barn consists of 3 main sections: 1. commercial area, 2. agricultural beds, and 3. community market.

All of them function in synergy with one another. Urban Farm Urban Barn brings back natural flows of the waterways that clean, recycle and store water to support the cultivation of vegetables, flowers, mushrooms and industrious production methods. It is designed to serve neighboring areas with high condominiums and office towers while preserving cultural and agricultural heritage. Green and productive land with fresh-produce does not only shorten the food production but also provides a heat sink for the densely-populated capital. The expansion of such a responsible and feasible development to other locations within the city will help revitalize the deteriorating urban conditions—which could be replicated in other cities around the world.

Relevance to target issues by author

Innovation and transferability – Progress

Food production in urban areas is a great challenge. A 3-component system of water management and cultivation support is a key strategy for Urban Farm Urban Barn; ie plant integrated architecture. Water from the river is stored in the ponds which act as water containers as well as a thermal buffer. The water is distributed via soft and rigid veins or dripping nozzles, depending on the type of plants. The cultivation supports are designed for specific plant types: creepers, fruits, herbs. Since the natural body of water fluctuates constantly, such a 3-component system is designed to stabilize water levels and provide a reliable distribution system. Integrating urban farming into buildings within river basins makes good sense since water collection, treatment and distribution is viable. This system can be replicated in other urban developments where rivers or large bodies of water are in the vicinity – and where green and productive areas are in need of rehabilitation.

Ethical standards and social equity – People

We witness that farmers are displaced by urbanites. Nature steadily disappears from Bangkok; air pollution is the norm. Urban Farm Urban Barn brings back agriculture to the city. It is a platform for farmers and urbanites to meet, learn and exchange. The project provides a place for farmers to survive without the need to move away from their quality of life. Farming once again co-exists amongst us. Farmers become teachers who demonstrate the need to balance nature with the built environment.

Environmental quality and resource efficiency – Planet

It was an existing farmland with water flowing from the Great Chao Praya River. Fireflies are the indicator that the site is pristine, uncontaminated. Though we were asked to develop commercial facilities, we decided to revitalize the farm and turn it into a showcase for the urban population to learn and support agricultural activities within the urban environment. We maximize the use of river water as well as reducing transportation cost for long distance product delivery. The communities surrounding the project are able to participate in the cultivation and harvesting of the produce on the site.

Economic performance and compatibility – Prosperity

The main difference between typical commercial developments and Urban Farm Urban Barn is the targeted users. Today urbanites care greatly about health and well-being, and understand the need for natural habitats. This development focuses on this growing group of people. The farm can also be harvested year round, bringing in income for farmers/co-owners. Survey shows that green developments are attractive to local and international companies. Such a sensitive development is non-existent in Thailand.

Contextual and aesthetic impact – Proficiency

Commercial block on the street front is laced with flower nurseries. This is a natural billboard that promotes the beauty of flowers and plants to passers-by. The flowers change colors with seasons. As visitors enter the building, a large river water pond emerges with a backdrop of fruit orchard hovering over community market. The experience comes into full understanding with the active farmland at the deepest end of the site.