

4.181 | 4.s32 | STS.20 Design-Build Workshop

Resilient Urbanism | Art & Agriculture

Coop Culture Co-Ops & Commoning

Teaching Team

Kate Brown	Thomas M. Siebel Distinguished Professor, MIT HASTS	kbrown@mit.edu
Nida Sinnokrot	Associate Professor, MIT ACT	nidasinn@mit.edu
Justin Brazier	Architect Researcher, MIT Urban Risk Lab	jbrazier@mit.edu

Collaborators

Kafi Dixon	Founder, Common Good Cooperatives
Kannan Thiruvengadam	Executive Director, Eastie Farm
Joel Seidner	Program Director, Eastie Farm

Schedule

Wed 2 - 5PM

Credits

3-0-9 G

Location

E-14-251 | Mars Lab

Introduction

Boston's urban agriculture community has long been at the forefront of transforming vacant lots and gray areas into productive green spaces and nodes of urban civic exchange. Urban agriculture is an essential act of self-reliance, self-preservation, and resistance.

Common Good Co-Operatives, who operate a quarter-acre farm in the Dorchester neighborhood of Boston, is dedicated to serving local BIPOC working class families. It was founded as a direct response to the present conditions of the City –"push[ing] back against the subtle politics of race, class and privilege... while establishing the capacity and competency of Black women's true resilience against marginalizing policies and practices" ([The Common Good Co-Op](#)).

Eastie Farm, is a community-based non-profit organization that pursues climate justice, food security, and community resilience through urban agriculture, education, and the building of an equitable local food system in East Boston. They began by transforming an overgrown, abandoned lot on Sumner Street into a thriving urban oasis. It's a place where people relax, enjoy nature, grow food together, share a meal together, make music together, pick up their CSA, or attend a comedy event. They now own two sites, operate five others, offer experiential and informal environmental education programs for school children, train teenagers for green jobs, and bring local fresh food to neighbors of all economic levels.

This hands-on studio investigates how artistic, architectural and historiological methodologies can shape ecological and civic systems through the collaborative adaptation and construction of two mobile,

sitespecific chicken coops. The course connects critical histories of urban farming in Boston with practical skills in community responsive design and fabrication. Students will work to develop adaptive proposals for Eastie Farms and Common Good Farm that merge form, function, and narrative, while interrogating how food systems, civic infrastructures, and public space can be reimagined through creative, operational aesthetics.

Objectives

In a continuation of work with Common Good Co-Operatives and now joined by Eastie Farm, this course will engage students to both envision expansive possibilities for the farm as a comprehensive farming system that can support, among others, essential workforce development and readiness programs, small-business incubation, co-op services, and community sovereignty and empowerment.

As a Team we will work to demonstrate these ideas through the development, design and build of a set of mobile chicken coops,

The class begins with establishing common grounds between processes in Architecture, Planning, and History, building off of previous work by students who jointly conducted research to understand context, including mapping, case studies, site analysis, and interviews with participatory and co-design methods.

Utilizing this contextual base, students will jointly envision the future of urban agriculture applied to Common Good Co-Operatives. The tools of each discipline will be in dialogue with one another to develop feasible plans throughout design ideation and development. Historical considerations (ethnography, deep reading, contextual analysis), planning considerations (public policy, land use planning, project execution and evaluation, funding mechanisms), and architectural considerations (tectonic and constructive systems, visualization and representation styles, siting and climatic analysis) will inform joint outcomes.

Class Format

We will begin the first half of semester with understanding, reviewing the setting, contexts, and histories of urban farming while establishing a baseline of knowledge of the Common Good Co-operative in Dorchester through the analysis of a document completed previously and that of Eastie Farm through interviews. Guest lectures, speakers, and community members will join us (and sometimes, we will visit the farm) to share perspectives, ideas, and feedback.

Simultaneously, we will be researching precedents, creating models, designing and making drawings in an effort to reach class consensus on a design proposal.

In the second half of the class, the collective class will settle on two designs to build towards the goals of Common Good Co-op and Eastie Farm respectively. During these weeks, we will focus on construction, site prep and materials with the goal of erecting a structure by the end of the semester with our partners.

Assignments

Students will be responsible for design and research components of this project.

Design features include foundations, dome/cladding, roost, run, enclosures, nesting boxes, mobility of the coops, and communication between the two sites. Working in teams, students will design in the first third of the course and build in the second.

Where We Come From Research involves gathering information and images on historic Boston Area Feminist Collectives and Food Sovereignty Movements. In teams, students will find images and write text for short exhibits for the exterior of the coops.

Among them: The [Combahee River Collective](#), Cambridge Women's Center and Women's School, the Boston Area Socialist Feminist Organization (BASFO) which became Boston Women's Union (BWU), RESIST Foundation, Abortion Action Coalition (AAC), Women's Institute for Leadership Development (WILD), United Association for Labor Education (UALE), Gay and Lesbian Labor Activist Network (GALLAN), Feeding Ourselves, Women's Health Collective, [Boston Urban Gardeners](#) (BUGS)

Lots of material in collections housed at UMass/[Boston Special Collections](#) (appointment needed)

Tentative Schedule

Wednesdays 2pm-5pm
ARCH 4.181
STS .S20

Date / Milestones	#	Agenda
2/4 Introduction and Collaboration	1	Introduction to Common Good Co-Op Introductions: Do chickens belong in a city? <u>Foundations:</u> historical grounding, legitimacy, soil health, contamination <u>Dome/Cladding:</u> shelter and security, transparency, protection. Framework and sites Nida intro Coup
2/11	2	Visit to Eastie Farm, Chelsea, Boston. <u>Meet in front of the List Museum at 2 pm sharp. We will load into ubers and head off.</u> <u>Roost:</u> Power, Representation and Perception <u>Run and Enclosure:</u> territory, borders, commons, segregation, and zoning

		<p>Readings:</p> <p>* Isabelle Anguelovski, <i>Neighborhood as Refuge: Community Reconstruction, Place Remaking, and Environmental Justice in the City</i> (The MIT Press, 2014): 55-130.</p> <p>Paul Milbourne, "Growing public spaces in the city: Community gardening and the making of new urban environments of publicness," <i>Urban Studies</i>, Vol. 58, No. 14 (November 2021), pp. 2901-2919.</p> <p>Gina Warren, Hatched: Dispatches from the Backyard Chicken Movement, chapters 1-4.</p> <p>ASSIGNMENT: Please have some questions informed by the readings prepared for Kannan Thiruvengadam about the farm, access to it, participations and participants, plans for the chickens, siting, zoning, etc.</p>
2/18	3	<p><u>Compost and Metabolism</u></p> <p>Sylvia Botinelli, artists and the practice of agriculture</p> <p><u>Nesting Boxes:</u> reproductive labor, economies of care, incubation, archiving</p> <p><u>Mobility/Nomadology:</u> assembly/disassembly, ephemeral infrastructure</p> <p><i>Compilation of Composting methods- Nitrogen? Metabolic Manure</i> Hugh S. Gorman, <i>The Story of N: A Social History of the Nitrogen Cycle and the Challenge of Sustainability</i></p> <p>Greta Marchesi, Justus von Liebig Makes the World</p> <p>Palestine Papers-Unlikely Identities: Abu Ibrahim and the Politics of Possibility</p>
2/25	4	<p>Jordan Weber, ecology, inner-city participatory practice</p> <p>Karilyn Crockett, People Before Highways: Boston Activists, Urban Planners, and a New Movement for City Making, Chapters 2 and 3 (online) [confirmed]</p>

3/4	5	<p>Visit to Common Good Coop, Dorchester, Boston</p> <p>Watch: “A Reckoning in Boston,” James Rutenbeck, 2020</p> <p>Nathan McClintock, ““Earth work,” Black agrarianism, and urban theory,” URBAN GEOGRAPHY ANNUAL PLENARY LECTURE 2025</p> <p>Rehearsals for Living- Simpson</p>
3/11	6	<p><u>Feed and Water Systems</u>: Economy, supply chains, sustenance, inequality, alt food systems as public utility</p> <p>Jennifer Hashley, Poultry expert At 2:00: More than Human Design: When Chickens are your Clients Jennifer Hashley, new entry program Tufts re chickens [confirmed]</p> <p>Reading: Gina Warren, Hatched: <i>Dispatches from the Backyard Chicken Movement</i>, chapters 5-11.</p>
3/18	7	Mid term Review
3/25	8	Spring Break
4/1	9	U/Mass-Boston special collections visit
4/8	10	<p>Build</p> <p>Dominique Laporte, <i>History of Shit</i></p>
4/15	11	<p>build</p> <p>Monica White, <i>Freedom Farmers</i></p>

4/22	12	build
4/29	13	build
5/6	14	Final Review: common meal
5/13	15	Final Exam Period