



# COLORADO REAL ESTATE JOURNAL

THE COMMUNICATION CHANNEL OF THE COMMERCIAL REAL ESTATE COMMUNITY

JANUARY 1-14, 2020

## 'Agrihood'

### Back to basics: Grow spaces are the next innovative amenity

Thirty years ago, consumers in the U.S. would need to chop and haul firewood if they wanted to enjoy the warmth and coziness of a flickering hearth in their homes. In 1986, 10 custom homebuilders in the Denver Parade of Homes featured gas logs or fireplaces – a total luxury, something not found in even the highest-end homes. These were the first the public would see. Since that year, every custom and production builder has incorporated the option of a gas hearth product as a standard feature. This happened because forward-thinking business leaders demonstrated their idea in a time and place when Denver was struggling to breathe through its brown cloud, and residents needed to stop burning so much wood. The idea spread, well, like wildfire.

Today, another conversation is taking place among builders, developers, city planners, educators and community leaders, but the focus is another human need: food production. For a variety of reasons, people are recognizing the importance of controlling their food supplies. For some it is health; a desire for high-quality, fresh,



**Sherry Glickman Knecht**  
Principal, Emedwriter

home-grown foods. For others, it is the environment and wanting to reduce their reliance on transporting food across states or even nations. Still others want to grow food to maintain independence for reasons of security, or for eventual financial gains. Educators are understanding the importance of teaching children how to grow food as part of their preparation for the future. Momentum is in place, as builders, developers and community leaders are beginning to respond.

■ **Grow spaces: A new standard.** The vision is to offer options for food production as planning and development of new communities, much like they now offer gas fireplaces as a standard or optional feature. Going forward, those building single-family homes could incorporate indoor or outdoor grow spaces, or both, in the form of greenhouses or indoor grow rooms. Multifamily developments could

offer community or individual growing spaces. Builders can incorporate growing spaces as standard options, and, in time, the marketplace will facilitate turnkey systems for consumers to start conveniently growing food on their own.

In addition to the benefits people enjoy from growing their own food, community grow spaces offer the opportunity to work together and share with neighbors. For builders and developers, providing indoor or outdoor grow spaces will provide an additional revenue stream. Agri-communities could become a premier living environment. Agri-office buildings can charge premium rates, because food-friendly work environments will create a new market with an all-time high demand. Why? Because people will feel the difference in what they eat. Work efficiencies will be realized via healthier employees.

The Colorado Real Estate and Food Alliance is leading this initiative in Denver and the Front Range and is receiving enthusiastic support. Phil Weiser, attorney general of Colorado, recently spoke at a CREFA meeting. "Local food

production needs to be a part of Colorado's future and that will require innovation and collaboration in how we manage our water," he said. "I look forward to working with leaders around the state to advance this goal."

Neal Paul believes that incorporating food production will be the most important innovation in building practices in our generation. Paul, now with CREFA and vice president of commercial, builder and transit services at North American Title Co., was instrumental in helping to create the gas hearth, alternative lighting, and natural gas vehicle markets during the 1980s-1990s, while at Public Service Company of Colorado.

"We have the technology today to incorporate the most economical means available for personal and community food production, including hydroponics, aquaponics, drip irrigation and many other efficient growing techniques," he said. "It's a win-win for all. Builders and developers will be able to charge for add-on growing facilities. Consumers will be able to enjoy all the benefits of growing food for themselves."

In the case of multifamily, senior housing or assisted

living, a potential workforce could be available with local residents. Data suggests that seniors and others can benefit from years of additional enjoyment and purpose to life from working in a garden.

"With the advent of legalization of cannabis, growing technology has evolved at a speed that only a cash crop could have driven," said Paul. "Due to that technology boost, systems are available to easily take food production to a new mass marketplace."

Some people will want to hire others to help maintain their grow spaces, which will create jobs servicing individuals and communities that may want assistance, education or support in maintaining their facilities.

Next steps include eliminating regulatory barriers to entry for those who want to include food production space on their property. This includes development of best practices based on location, climate, building product type, topography and other factors; it also includes addressing building codes, zoning regulations and planning rules at the state and federal levels. ▲