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Farms Are Becoming a Bumper Crop for Golf Communities

Piqued interest in healthy living, after Covid pushed people to cook more at home, has made space for farming “a logical step” for golf properties.



Palmetto Bluff, a 20,000-acre residential community in Bluffton, S.C., began a farm in 2017 that expanded significantly in 2021. It grows crops throughout the year that supply four restaurants.
Palmetto Bluff

Top-of-the-line fitness centers, lavish spas, green spaces and kids’ clubs tend to be key amenities in upscale golf developments, and have been for the last half-decade or more. Lately, on-site farms are taking center stage.

In addition to growing produce that figures prominently into the development’s cuisine or is given to residents to enjoy at home, many of these farms have plots where homeowners can grow their own crops. Some farms also feature apiaries that produce honey and chicken coops that provide eggs.

Golf communities with their own farms are on the rise, with at least several dozen added in the last two years, according to multiple golf specialists and real estate agents who specialize in golf properties.

Bonneau Ansley, the founder and chairman of [Ansley Real Estate Christie's International](#), in Atlanta, said that these farms had proliferated during the Covid pandemic. "People started to cook more at home, and golf communities became and continue to be places that offer homeowners everything they need for their daily living," he said. "Having community farms was a logical step."

Jason Becker, the chief executive of [Golf Life Navigators](#), a matchmaking site that helps people find golf memberships and homes based on their criteria, attributed the rise to an interest in wellness.

According to a survey of 40,000 prospective golf home buyers that the site conducted last year, healthy living is one of the top three factors that they consider when searching for a community. "Homeowners are all over farms and a farm-to-table atmosphere that promotes a wellness-oriented lifestyle," Mr. Becker said.

These farms are a featured amenity, for example, at [Discovery Land Company](#) properties. The real estate business with more than 30 golf developments globally, including in Comporta, Portugal and Barbuda in the Caribbean, has farms in all of them, according to Jim Tripi, the director of culinary for [Driftwood Golf and Ranch Club](#) outside of Austin, Texas.

They cover an average of five to six acres and grow local produce, he said; several also have coops where chickens lay eggs. The bounty at Driftwood, for instance, includes Swiss chard, radishes, red and yellow okra, eight varieties of tomatoes, figs, and persimmons. Chefs rely on these vegetables and fruits to create seasonal dining experiences at the property's restaurants, Mr. Tripi said.

Similar to many Discovery communities, Driftwood's residents can reserve their own plots to harvest their favorite produce. "We help them with planting and maintaining these mini farms while educating the entire family about eating healthy together," Mr. Tripi said.

The farms also host programs such as food labs, cooking classes and Montessori-style children's classes. At Driftwood that means a collaboration with a nearby mill, [Barton Springs Mill](#), which mills local flour and grains for the property that are used in pizza and pasta menu items and culinary classes.



Going beyond Discovery, [Palmetto Bluff](#), a 20,000-acre residential community in Bluffton, S.C., also has a thriving farm. It includes two produce fields, two beehives, a coop, an orchard, four grapevines and a converted greenhouse where meals showcase seasonal produce.

The farm started as a small footprint in 2017, according to its manager, Shane Rahn, but expanded significantly in 2021. Now at 12 acres, the farm grows a variety of crops throughout the year. The recent fall harvest, for instance, included cabbage, Georgia collards, sorrel and turnip greens.

“We supply the four Palmetto Bluff Club restaurants with what we pick,” Mr. Rahn said. “We also invite all residents to help us care for the farm and give them anything extra that we grow. There’s pretty much something for the taking every day.”

Shari Darling, an aerospace engineer who lives in Palmetto Bluff, volunteers at the farm three days a week and described it as a “gem.”

“I love good, clean food and have been trying to eat a more plant-based diet, so produce is dear to my heart,” she said. “What’s rewarding is that it changes depending on the season so there’s always something different to look forward to.”

Ms. Darling added that she enjoyed trying new recipes with the farms’ yields — the spinach ravioli and ratatouille with tomatoes that she made from a recent harvest are now regulars in her cooking rotation.

The [Ford Field & River Club](#), in Richmond Hill, Ga., has an organic farm, Edsel Community Farm, that’s home to an abundance of fruit plants and trees that yield kumquats, tangelos, tangerines, blackberries and strawberries. “I love to create desserts that show off these fruits,” said the executive chef Frank Chiasera. A Lowcountry berry cobbler was on his menu this winter, and in spring he plans to offer a vanilla and tangelo panna cotta with kumquat marmalade.

Several golf communities in Hawaii incorporate their farms into a core part of their programming.

[Timbers Kauai at Hokuala](#) has a 16.5-acre organic farm where homeowners are invited to learn how to plant, tend and harvest crops. The list includes canoe crops that the island’s original settlers introduced such as kalo, noni and breadfruit. And the farm is currently expanding to harvest coffee beans to create its own blends and cocoa trees that will be used to make bean-to-bar chocolates.

[Kukui‘ula](#), also on the island of Kauai, has a 10-acre farm with a staff of farmers who help homeowners harvest fruits and vegetables that they can pick to take home — the papayas are a highlight.

The community’s golf course is lined with orchards that grow tangelos, bananas and macadamia nuts — golfers are encouraged to pick anything they want to snack on as they play their way through the 18 holes, said Kukui‘ula’s general manager, Brian Hallberg.



One of two beehives on the farm at Palmetto Bluff, which also includes two produce fields, a coop, an orchard, four grapevines and a converted greenhouse where meals showcase seasonal produce.
Palmetto Bluff

The concept of farming is particularly innovative at [Hokulia](#), in Kona on the Big Island of Hawaii. Carrie Nicholson, the director of sales and marketing, said that every property was constructed on one to two acres of land, and that residents were strongly encouraged to carve out a portion to harvest crops. “They can plant anything they want, and our farmers will help them with the maintenance,” she said. “We see everything from coffee trees to herb bushels.”

Hokulia’s owners have a tradition of sharing their bounty with one another at the development’s clubhouse, Ms. Nicholson said, and can bring it to the chefs who will create a custom dish for them if they have the time.

Roger Brasel, an architect, is a homeowner at Hokulia and said that he grows bananas, white pineapples that he described as “incredibly sweet,” avocados and limes. “I am a golf lover and moved here to play the game, but having the ability to farm at home is a huge draw,” he said.

Mr. Brasel said that he liked to make pineapple smoothies and guacamole and that he looked forward to sharing his extra crops with other residents: “There’s a sense of community here around fresh, delicious produce.”