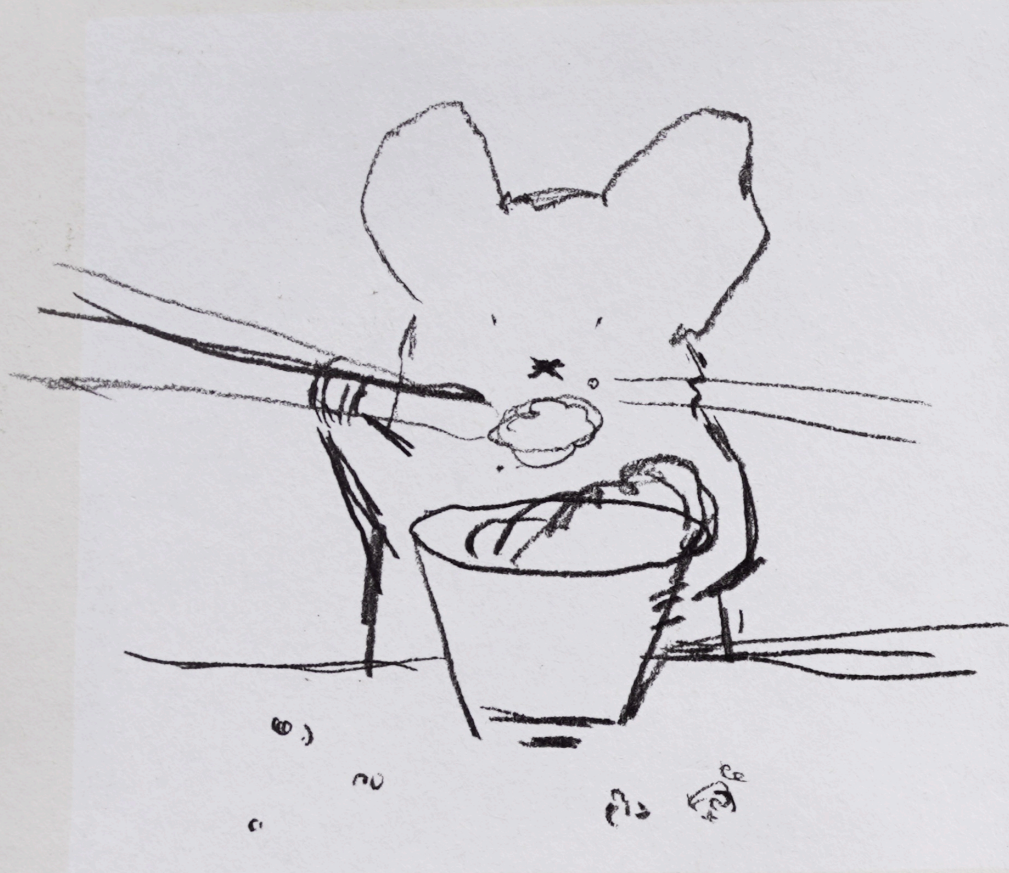




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kitchen

普通人如何参与 改变城市食物体系？

author: boho

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How Might
Ordinary People
Transform
the Urban Food
System?

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Over the past decade, a wave of new concepts has been sweeping through the world of kitchens. Ghost kitchens, dedicated solely to take-out orders, expanded rapidly during the pandemic. The ever-faster pace of professional life has given rise to ready-made meals, while ecological concerns have prompted people to consider the possibilities of cultivated meat. These shifts, driven by the rapid development of industrial food systems, seem to suggest that in the future, the houses people live in might not even have kitchens. Cooking could be entirely skipped or drastically simplified, and artificial foods could become a primary dietary option.

In 2023, food designer Li Leyu imagined three cultivated products that blend meat and plants, naming them Broccopork, Mushchicken, and Peaf. He posted short videos about these fictional cultivated meats on his TikTok account. The series racked up over three million views. Some viewers commented after watching, “Horrrifying—I’m vegan now.”

According to scientist and artist Oron Catts, producing one kilogram of cultivated meat requires hundreds of liters of liquefied bovine tissue and the fetal bovine serum required for production cannot be replaced by any vegetables or minerals. A 2019 study from the University of Oxford found that, compared with conventionally farmed meat, producing cultivated meat using non-renewable energy could have potentially more severe impacts on the climate.

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“ Eating meat comes at a cost,
you can’t try every possible way to
avoid paying it.
To address global warming and food scarcity,
address them directly,
rather than introducing a new problem.”

by Leyu

As a food designer, Leyu works alongside chefs to create imaginative dining experiences, while also prompting people to reflect on the issues behind what they eat. In the face of climate change and food crises, some designers and artists, like Leyu, have begun to treat the kitchen as a medium to reveal new relationships that might emerge between people, cities, and nature, encouraging people to think and to act. They do not wish for the kitchen to disappear or lose its significance.

On the contrary, in the future, the kitchen could encompass processes such as growing and producing food, dealing with surplus, and nurturing the land, resisting the alienation that industrial production imposes on people and everyday life. The kitchen will become a conduit, ensuring continued access to food for all, enabling healthier ways of living, and contribute, in its own way, to a vision of a society that better serves the many. To some extent, such a future for the kitchen is not especially difficult to realize. One need only start from the familiar rhythms of daily life and take a small step forward.

Communal Growing and Caring

你的温室厨房：公共种植与照料食物

The “greenhouse kitchen” has become a popular interior design trend in recent years. These open kitchens, featuring large areas of natural light and surrounded by plants, are usually found in restaurants, creating the illusion of dining in a natural environment. The architectural installation *Your Greenhouse is Your Kitchen is Your Living Kitchen*, designed collaboratively by Round Table Studio and JXY Studio, brings the kitchen outdoors, prompting people to imagine a “low-cost urban pastoral dream.”

This urban pastoral dream began on balconies. In cities such as Shanghai, Beijing, and Suzhou, growing vegetables on one’s own balcony has become a popular trend. According to Taobao’s *2022 Balcony Gardening*

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Report, the number of people purchasing various vegetable seeds has increased by over 100% for three consecutive years, with leek seeds alone seeing a year-on-year sales increase of 370%. During the COVID lockdowns, people also cultivated food at home and shared their vegetable gardening experiences both in self-organized vegetable gardening groups and on Weibo. These facts prompted Round Table Studio to explore the significance of personal production and cultivation, seeking to closely connect the act of growing with the kitchen.

“Growing food requires a lot of attention. You have to care for what you grow. If you don’t, it will die,” said Li Leyuan, a member of Round Table Studio. Before the creation of *Your Greenhouse is Your Kitchen is Your Living Kitchen*, Round Table Studio had first completed the architectural installation *BALCHEN Project*. Built from inexpensive, easy-to-assemble materials, the installation included vegetable-growing racks, kitchen countertops, and foldable chairs.

During the winter of 2022, while the project was exhibited at the 9th Shenzhen & Hong Kong Bi-City Biennale of Urbanism/Architecture, the design team mixed coconut coir into the soil of the growing racks and

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fig. 123: *BALCHEN Project* at the 9th Shenzhen & Hong Kong Bi-City Biennale of Urbanism/Architecture

sowed vegetable seeds, which sprouted quickly. They then discovered, quite unexpectedly, that local residents would come to the top floor of the exhibition space every day to water the vegetables. Cleaning staff would proactively move the pots to ensure the plants received enough sunlight. This surprised the team and made them realize that caring for plants could foster a new form of collective awareness in the city. As team member Jiang Shan remarked, “People’s relationship with food promotes connections and exchanges between people.”

Your Greenhouse is Your Kitchen is Your Living Kitchen was born from this idea. The installation looks like several sets of movable, IKEA-style furniture—easy to assemble, lightweight, and suitable for holding plant pots. It was exhibited earlier this year on a lush lawn at the Fei Art Museum in Guangzhou. When sunlight filters through the semi-transparent façade onto the vegetables in the pots, such as bok choy and tomatoes, one could call it a greenhouse. Adjust the plant-growing racks to form a round dining table and kitchen countertops, and one could call it an open kitchen. Xu Jiaxun of JXY Studio believes that while kitchens are usually architectural spaces planned by



fig. 124: *Your Greenhouse is Your Kitchen is Your Living Kitchen* at the Fei Art Museum

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real estate developers, “where the vegetables are picked, to where they are eaten and chopped, is actually the whole concept of a kitchen.”

The designers say that, ideally, they hope these pieces of furniture could be placed in public spaces on vacant lots within residential areas, encouraging neighbors to use them together. Where does the planted food come from? How do the plants grow? How can tomatoes get the right amount of sunlight and water? How can the food be used? Answers to

“ Whether it’s taking control of the food production process, or transforming the kitchen spatially or conceptually, you can completely change the way you live.”

by Xu Jiaxun

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fig. 125: Inside *Your Greenhouse is Your Kitchen is Your Living Kitchen*, the movable plant-growing racks can be unfolded into a round dining table and kitchen countertop.

these questions emerge through the process of neighbors planting and caring for the food together.

Considering the challenges of community management, this is a “rather idealistic proposal.” Yet Xu Jiaxun notes, “Whether it’s taking control of the food production process, or transforming the kitchen spatially or conceptually, you can completely change the way you live.”

A More Equitable Food Distribution

Network

更公平的食物送达网络

In Europe and North America, many community kitchens aim to provide healthy food assistance. These kitchens are typically run by community groups or charitable organizations, supplying free or very low-cost meals to those in need, especially people living in poverty. The operation of these community kitchens is facing some challenges. Service designers Revati Naik and Saumya Sahni, working in the UK, have focused on these challenges and are attempting to build an alternative food delivery network that can benefit the vast majority of people in society.

Last year, Revati and Saumya volunteered at several community kitchens in London, including Food Cycle, Nourish Hub, and Good Through Food. They worked alongside kitchen staff and other volunteers, peeling carrots and onions, chopping vegetables, washing dishes, and talking with the people dining there. Saumya observed that Food Cycle cooks vegetarian meals using surplus food donated by supermarkets, small grocery stores, markets, and food banks. The kitchen operates with a high degree of flexibility. Volunteers can design the menus, diners can take meals to go, and workshops are sometimes held. “This is not just about grabbing the food and eating it. It's about connecting with people, connecting with

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things around you and eating mindfully,” said Revati. What impressed them most was that, “That is how it's like how real restaurants are. At Food Cycle, people will not feel like they are in a special place.”

In the UK, many people feel a strong sense of shame when claiming food at food banks, and receiving food assistance is socially stigmatized. According to YouGov, 35% of people feel very uncomfortable telling friends or family that they are receiving food aid. Food Cycle emphasizes on their website that while food banks provide ingredients for people to take home and cook, community kitchens not only help address food insecurity but also offer a warm dining environment, making people feel less lonely.

Revati and Saumya believe that many people also misunderstand community kitchens, equating them with food banks. In the future, it will be crucial to destigmatize community kitchens. If public perception changes, and it becomes a shared understanding that everyone can go to community kitchens to eat with dignity and choice, the food system in society could also be transformed.

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“ There is enough food in the system to feed everyone, yet we have failed to distribute it equitably to those in need.”

“ The food system is upside down where cheaper avenues are unhealthy and processed, whereas eating well and good cooked meals is a luxury...”

by Revati and Saumya

Over the past three years, the cost of living for residents in the UK has risen sharply. Prices in the country have increased by 20%, with food prices up by 30%. According to 2024 UK government statistics, 7.2 million residents are experiencing food insecurity. Low-income people, trying to fill their stomachs, often have limited options: either eat cheap fast food or claim food assistance. Meanwhile, around 10 million tons of food are wasted in the UK each year. “Surplus food is food which is fit for human consumption, but has no commercial value for the retailer. This food, which may ultimately go to waste, may have become damaged in transit, might be past its ‘best before’ date or might have been over-ordered. It’s still perfectly good food,” reads Food Cycle’s website.

These reasons inspired Revati and Saumya to conceive Full Fill, a service organization connecting community kitchens. Through the network platform established by Full Fill, more people can become aware of nearby community kitchens and decide where to eat and what to eat. Community kitchens also have greater opportunities to recruit volunteers and keep their doors open on a regular daily schedule. The organization also plans

to place shelves in the dining areas of community kitchens, where people can access surplus food.

However, Saumya noted that Full Fill has had difficulty finding investors, as the project appears to offer little financial return. The good news is that some experts in the food industry, such as professor Peter Jackson from the University of Sheffield’s Sustainable Food Institute, are very interested in their project. Local government councils have also consistently supported community kitchens, stating that they are building sustainable food models and actively promoting solutions to food insecurity.

At the same time, Revati believes that Full Fill’s vision may need to be implemented in phases. “We don’t want the rush of new people to mean that the people who are in real need will stop accessing it. Our first step is not to change public perception of community kitchens so that it will not really hamper the lives of people who are going in right now,” she explained.

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fig. 126: Full Fill proposes placing surplus food ingredient kits at Nourish Hub.

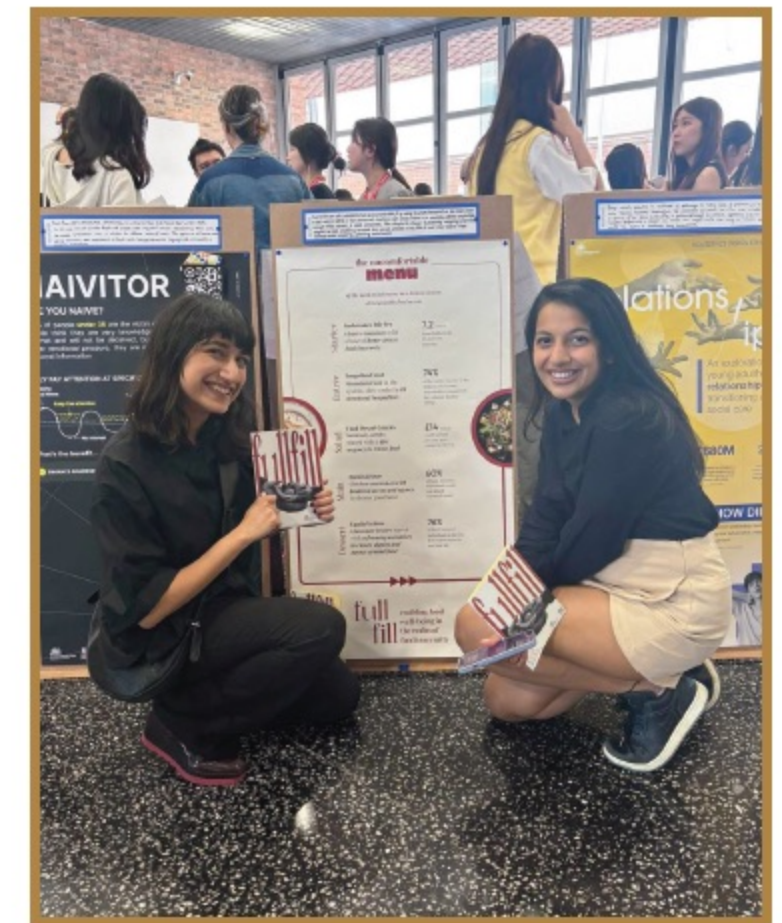


fig. 127: Revati Naik and Saumya Sahni pose with the Full Fill poster they designed.

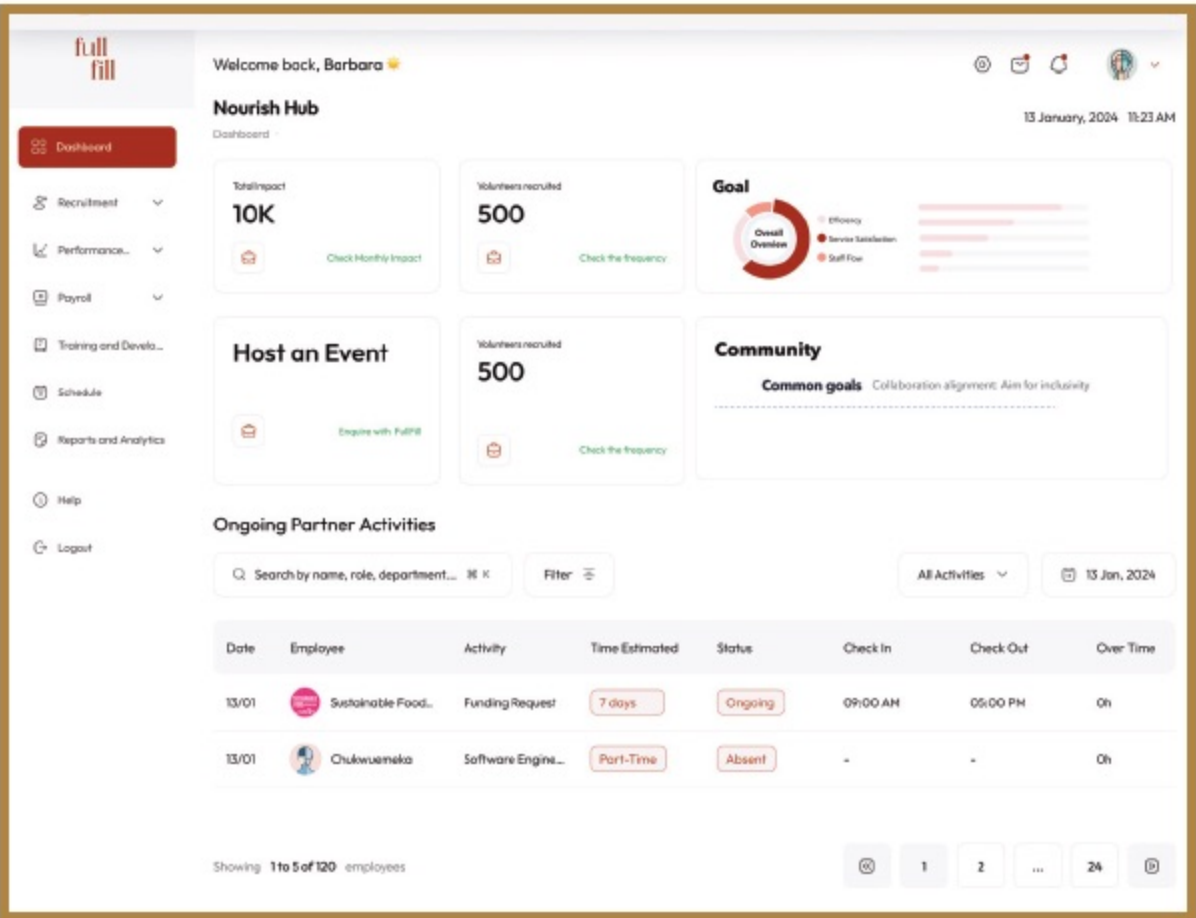


fig. 128: A schematic diagram of the Full Fill online platform

Kitchen-Toilet-Garden

“便便三明治”餐车：厨房 - 厕所 - 花园

Outdoor venues for festivals and events often feature mobile kitchens or food trucks. Food trucks create a space where people can taste snacks on the spot and interact face-to-face with chefs. Unlike restaurants, however, food trucks generally don’t have restrooms, because they cannot be connected to the underground sewage systems that restaurants rely on. Dutch social designer Fides Lapidaire noticed this and saw it as an experimental opportunity, creating the food truck “Shit Sandwiches,” which caused a sensation at Dutch Design Week.

So far, Fides has brought her dark green food truck to several festival celebrations. She sells chickpea sandwiches made on site and encourages

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people to use the mobile restroom attached to the truck. The rule of the “Shit Sandwiches” food truck is that those willing to contribute waste to the toilet receive a discount when purchasing a sandwich. People find the sandwiches delicious, though some cautiously sniff before taking a bite, showing slight concern. This is because a sign at the counter explains that all the vegetables used to make these sandwiches come from Fides’s “Shit Garden,” which is fertilized with compost made from the truck’s toilet waste.

“ In the Netherlands, we’re very ashamed about our toilet visits. We think shit is dirty and just flush it away or burn it. But our land still needs nutrients.”

“ I hope in the future we will be more aware of ourselves as humans, not just as consumers of things, eating only for a delicious meal, but as producers and collaborators within this world, feeding the soil as we eat.”

by Fides

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The Netherlands is the world’s second-largest exporter of agricultural food products. However, since 2019, the country, proud of its livestock and crop farming, has been facing a severe nitrogen crisis, which has dealt a heavy blow to agriculture. Farms, relying heavily on nitrogen fertilizers produced from fossil fuels, are causing the soil to become increasingly infertile, and forest biodiversity is declining as a result. According to Dutch government statistics, in 2023 the agricultural sector emitted



fig. 129: Fides Lapidaire and her "Shit Sandwiches" food truck

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fig. 130: Fides at Dutch Design Week tasting the "shit sandwich"

24.9 million tons of CO₂, accounting for about 18% of the nation's annual greenhouse gas emissions, while studies show that the use of chemical fertilizers generates significant greenhouse gas emissions.

Fides lives in North Brabant, the Dutch province with the largest amount of agricultural land. As a social designer, her work is to offer new perspectives on issues and collaborate with government agencies to tackle environmental and social challenges. "A lot of societal and environmental problems feel very distant from us. I don't feel that I have much impact on it. What I really want to do with this project is to create people give a creative system around us that allows us as individuals to have that impact," she said.

Part of the inspiration for the "Shit Sandwiches" food truck comes from China's historical practice of fertilizing vegetables with manure water, dating back to the Shang dynasty. Fides went to China to explore and observe. She admired the country's current compost transport and sanitation systems. "Is waste generally valued in China today?" she wondered, adding, "I hope it can work on a global scale."

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When Fides stands in the truck’s workspace, she wants to communicate and talk with people about health. On her food truck, her kitchen directly demonstrates a 100% circular system that could exist between land and food.

“ The food you eat makes you healthy.
You poo and pee them out,
and the soil needs those nutrients feed
itself and to grow more food.”

fig. 131:
Poster of
the “Shit
Sandwiches” food
truck



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Fides believes that in the future, the “kitchen-to-toilet-to-garden” model of the “Shit Sandwiches” food truck still holds the most promise, and it could potentially be extended to homes and restaurants. She also observed that during the pandemic, it was difficult to operate a compost transport system from the city to the village, suggesting that implementing it on a smaller, local scale within urban areas might be more feasible. “If the government wants to ban chemical fertilizers before 2030, and phosphate mines are depleted, we must consider this method of composting. It’s time to use alternatives. Poop is worth gold,” she joked.

In 2019, the Ellen MacArthur Foundation published the report *Cities and Circular Economy for Food*, which projected that by 2050, 80% of food will be consumed in urban areas. Governments in major cities such as Hong Kong, London, and Toronto have already begun to engage with urban food circularity, promoting new models such as rooftop farming and the reuse of food waste as animal feed.

So, what can individuals do if they hope to help improve urban food systems? The three design projects mentioned above offer one possible approach: By using the kitchen, people don’t have to become consumers if they want to participate in the process of food production and use. *Your Greenhouse is Your Kitchen is Your Living Kitchen* emphasizes community-based cultivation; Full Fill focuses on food distribution networks; and the “Shit Sandwiches” food truck traces a direct connection between the kitchen and the land. These speculative kitchen models suggest that urban dwellers could develop more diverse and transparent relationships with food, and have higher-quality food.

What the kitchen might become, in turn, will keep shaping the future of urban life.