



In the Fall of 2010, CrookedWorks guided a group of first-year Tulane University students as they designed and built four mobile chicken coops using salvaged shopping carts. Each of the carts was built for less than \$50 and all were donated to local growers through the New Orleans Food and Farm Network, a local urban agriculture non-profit organization. The final designs ranged from a nest-like tangle of willow branches woven for shady perching to the quirky “Green Wave” with its arched top and hatches fashioned out of found license plates.

Over the course of two separate work days, the teams of two students learned the basic principles and requirements of chicken coop design, developed initial design schemes, mocked-up their designs on salvaged carts, and then built coops to be donated to a local urban agriculture non-profit organization. The Cart Coop_ design-build project presented newly-arrived students with a tangible, hands-on opportunity to engage with these issues of local food production and food security as well as wider issues of disaster preparedness and the materiality of consumer culture. In researching, designing, and building the coops the students were invited to explore, intellectual and physical, a new critical engagement with the city.

Why a chicken coop?

With the development of the local food and food security movements over the last 10 years, raising chickens for household use in urban environments has become increasingly popular. Caring for chickens is relatively simple. They are ideal as urban livestock since they require relatively little space and demand little maintenance and attention aside from daily feeding. They eat scraps, pick through compost, and feed on insects and worms that naturally occur in every yard. While most hens should be released into a run during the day and only spend their nights in the cart, their droppings would collect on the ground under the cart, forming a diurnal chicken tractor.

Because hens lay nearly one egg per day, and their eggs are a great affordable source of protein, they are valuable additions to households and cities. This investment of \$1.50 per bird and ongoing feeding with free scraps could produce more than 400 eggs over the course of one bird’s lifetime. Eggs from locally-raised, organically-fed chickens

reared on an urban house lot, vacant lot, or community garden can be sold at a premium to generate income or could be consumed as an affordable, healthy, local food.

Why a shopping cart?

Abandoned shopping carts have become ubiquitous detritus in the urban realm; littering underused parking lots, streets, and even fragile urban ecosystems. The shopping cart is given special status in the urban and suburban landscape because of its status as the ultimate vehicle of consumer culture. The cart is a part of a special class of urban material culture along with shopping bags and campaign signs that is perceived to have no inherent value, but is only valuable in its enabling capacity. By separating the shopping cart from its familiar enabling function, the CartCoop invites a wholesale re-examination of the material culture of the contemporary capitalist city.

The robust structure, human scale, durable materials, and ease of mobility make the shopping cart an ideal chassis on which to build a coop. While they vary widely in both measurements and capacity, most carts share the same basic DNA in their fundamental components and shape. This standardization allows for the carts to become an adaptable modular unit for chicken coop construction; one available to any person of any means, in any city in the U.S.

Depending on size and modifications, each cart coop could house 1-4 chickens. As a flock grows, the farmer can simply add more carts to accommodate more hens. Carts can be rearranged to fit a wide variety of spaces, from the narrow alley between New Orleans shotgun houses to larger vacant parcels and community gardens. Their sturdy mesh sides provide protection from predators, plentiful ventilation, and positive drainage when the unit is hosed down.