

Carlo Ratti: MIT's Future Food District for EXPO 2015 in Milan



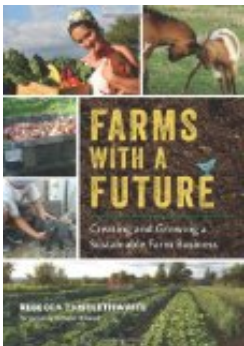
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With traditional industrial age methods of food production and delivery proving to be highly unsustainable, humanity is in search of an alternative model for our future. Carlo Ratti and MIT have designed a micro-environment that puts housing, markets, and “farms” in close proximity, and are calling it the Future Food District. They will present this model at EXPO 2015 in Milan (itself themed upon sustainable development).

The Future Food District is based on the Internet of Things concept, coined by technologist Kevin Ashton in 1999. The concept is that the internet be connected to the physical world through sensors and the like. In the context of the Future Food District, food products would have identifiers that allow information about it to be uploaded to an active data network, which in turn can be used to best streamline production, maintain quality of goods, and provide the consumer with information.

To risk using a term played out to mean basically nothing, its a sort of “smart” market system. Good for consumers, good for producers, good for distributors, and good for the environment.



What is truly futuristic about the Future Food District is the systems ability to learn on its own, and adjust to best serve the people it exists for. It could get rid of rotten tomatoes on its own, and let the nearby growers know that tomatoes need to be brought to the market. The Future Food District is truly an information-based system. It gathers info, it learns from it, and it adjusts accordingly. This is how technology can be used to better the world around us.

Future Implications

If humans want to create sustainable and efficient industries, we'll need to upgrade the information infrastructure like Ratti and MIT envision. Our current models of food production are dreadfully unsustainable, but food

is not the only industry that would benefit from a smarter information system. Modern computing allows us to quantify massive troves of information that would be nigh impossible to track by hand, so why don't we use it? There's a ton of information being created every day: the time your train takes to get from point A to point B, the daily bicycle traffic around a city, etc. Yes some of this is being used to make things more efficient, but not all of it. Perhaps when a system the Future Food District begins to show dividends more industries will look at new ways to work.

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