

Growing Food and Business in the Sky

Social enterprise Rooftop Republic shows the world how farming can be done in a densely populated financial hub.

Agriculture was once a vital industry of Hong Kong before the mid-20th century. While traditional farming practices are diminishing, urban farming emerges as a way to bring us back to our food-growing origin. Rooftop Republic was founded in 2015 out of a simple passion: grow what you eat, and eat what you grow.

Disrupting import-reliant food system

“The more I learned about the issues behind our food system, the more I became interested in urban farming,” said Pol Fabrega, co-founder of Rooftop Republic. “The pandemic has reminded us how little resilience we have in food security – about 98 percent of our food is imported. When we started, there were already a number of organic farms in the New Territories, but we wanted to take farming to the heart of the city, among the skyscrapers in a financial centre, making it accessible for city dwellers. What started as a naïve, passion project has evolved into today’s Rooftop Republic.”

Rooftop Republic aims to promote sustainable living practices by helping individuals or organisations to transform outdoor spaces - rooftop, terrace, or gardens - into their own urban farm. From consultation, design, set up to management, the multidisciplinary team provides a one-stop urban farming solution that fits each client’s needs.

Bringing urban farming to the business world

To Fabrega, Hong Kong’s status as a global financial hub makes it an ideal location to start Rooftop Republic. “Hong Kong is a futuristic city, very dense and vertical; more and more cities will look like Hong Kong in the future. If we can make it work in Hong Kong, then it could work anywhere. We have the unique opportunity to show the world how urban farming can be done here, and how cities can have their own sustainable food system.”

To maximise benefits of urban farming, the social enterprise engages different corporate and institutional partners, such as property developers, hotels and restaurants, multinational companies, as well as schools and other green organisations. Moreover, it has established the Rooftop Republic Academy to nurture the next generation of urban farmers by hosting regular educational programmes such as talks and workshops.

Fabrega added that the response from their corporate partners is extremely positive. As businesses and the community are more aware of the importance of sustainable living, their support has fuelled Rooftop Republic’s success.

“We want to be part of a broader local food ecosystem within the city, not only creating an industry for urban farming, but also a

local circular economy that will shape the future of our food systems,” he remarked.

Like traditional farming, urban farming also involves a big investment in human resources, and that is why Rooftop Republic is exploring ways to harness technology and scale up. “We are looking at developing a scalable business from all the experiences we have gained so far and take this to the next level with technology. We are also seeing lots of opportunities in other regions, such as the Guangdong-Hong Kong-Macao Bay Area and other Asian cities, and we are excited about the potential to expand beyond Hong Kong.”

Rooftop Republic

- Since its inception, Rooftop Republic has transformed over 80,000 sq. ft. into more than 70 urban farms in Hong Kong and beyond, and engaged 18,000 city dwellers through events around organic farming and sustainable living
- Comprises of 11 full-time and part-time staff, as well as additional freelance urban farmers

 rooftoprepublic.com



Photo taken at Lok Fu Place Urban Farm

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Pol Fabrega
Co-founder
Rooftop Republic