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# Urban farmer tells it all in her "Farm City" book

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HAYWARD -- The farm started small, with some beekeeping and chickens. It grew to encompass goats, rabbits and pigs on what had been a 4,500 square foot vacant lot in West Oakland.

That's the plot of the national bestselling book Farm City: The Education of an Urban Farmer by author Novella Carpenter. On Saturday, Carpenter detailed some of her urban farming adventures, answered questions and read from her book at the Hayward Library.

The event, which drew about 75 people, was part of the library's first Book-To-Action program, which included a book discussion on March 21. As part of t he program, a communitywide volunteer day at the Ochoa Middle School garden will be held from 10 a. m.-1 p.m. May 14.

Four students from Ochoa Middle School gave their own presentation about the garden at the Saturday event. The garden is one of 25 school gardens operated in the Hayward Unified School District and overseen by Project EAT, which is coordinated by the Alameda County Office of Education.

Following the presentation, Carpenter said she's found that it was the younger people in their teens and 20s who were most enthusiastic about urban gardening and farming.

"They're the most psyched," she said. "It's their issue, I always feel old next to them."

Carpenter said she got involved in urban farming after moving next to an open lot in West Oakland eight years ago. She started with beekeeping, and then began raising turkeys, chickens and

more.

She recounted her experience of buying piglets at an auction -- first from Chinatown, and then from higher-end restaurants and grocery stores -- and feeding them food found in Dumpsters. "The pigs ate really well," she said.

She showed photos of the two pigs' heads after the animals went to the slaughterhouse. With the help of a Berkeley chef, the bodies were used to make prosciutto and the heads were boiled and used to make sopressata, a type of headcheese.

Showing a slide of a federal government advertisement from the 1940s that encouraged people to grow food at home, Carpenter pointed out that the idea of urban farming is not new nor is it unique to the Bay Area.

"Of course, everywhere people are doing this," she said. "In any major city, there's urban farmers. Every city reflects its community style. It's interesting to see how it's done in different places."

As a UC Berkeley graduate student from the school of journalism, she said she was encouraged to write about her urban farming experiences and had a piece published on Salon.com about killing turkeys for her Thanksgiving meal. From there, she was approached by agents to write the book, which was published in 2009.

Some 50 Amazon.com buyers have given the book five stars, lauding it for its humor as well as the contrast between the farm and the gritty urban life that surrounded it.

Hayward librarian Sally Thomas said she chose the book for the Book-To-Action program and will decide on another book within the next few months.

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The Book-To-Action program is funded in part by the United States Institute of Museum and Library Services as part of the Transforming Life After 50 Project, which is intended to reach out to the baby boomer generation.

While the event attracted baby boomers, it also drew from the wider community, including students from Chabot College, who are reading the book in a language arts class, Thomas said.

"People really like this idea of the action part, the community part," Thomas said, "and we feel very happy to facilitate that role in the community."

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