

City lot a test in creative living'

by BRAD KNICKERBOCKER

Back during the Depression, Ralph Borsodi urged a return to simpler technologies and rural values. His book, "Flight from the City," chronicled his own family's experiences in working toward self-reliance, and has since become a bible of sorts for the "back-to-the-land" movement.

In Berkeley, Calif., is another "experiment in creative living on the land" (the subtitle of Borsodi's book). But it is an experiment with a distinct difference — it is taking place in the heart of an urban neighborhood and, in contrast to the "anti-establishment" theme Borsodi sounded, it is being seriously studied and in some ways copied by government officials and foreign observers.

table garden out back provides \$600 worth of crops a year without needing pesticides or commercial fertilizers. The backyard also has dwarf fruit trees, beehives and a fish pond. The hives are above the pond so dead bees fall into the water and feed the fish. Each hive has a daily turnover of 1,000 bees.

Along the other side of the house are rabbit pens, a compost pile, and chicken coops. One chicken a week is slaughtered for meat, and the others produce 30 eggs a week at an approximate cost of 40 cents a dozen.

The house has its own small greenhouse to raise seedlings and grow in containers, as well as solar collection panels for a system providing 95 per cent of the hot-water needs.

Through a system of pipes and valves, "graywater" is routed and stored for irrigation.

Javits points out that it is not possible to be totally self-sufficient in an urban environment, but his group has gone a long way toward that end. Aside from conserving and recycling, they also produce one-third of their protein need as well as nearly 40 per cent of the cost of all food.

The house is open for tours and also is frequently visited by government and research organizations. The day this reporter paid a visit, groups from the federal Energy Research and Development Administration and the

Swiss International Farming and Organic Agriculture Movement were there.

The Farallones Institute acts as adviser to the city of Berkeley and a regional utility company on community gardening, composting, recycling, and conservation. At the request of ERDA, the group soon will propose that similar demonstration projects be established in other cities around the United States, Javits said.

"We're selectively optimizing certain resources, determining what is efficient," he said. "It's a real testing ground."

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The Integral Urban House, as it is called, started out three years ago as a ramshackle dwelling in a Berkeley neighborhood that still sees buildings knocked down or trucked away in the name of "urban renewal."

The house and 6,000-square-foot lot were bought for \$11,500 by the Farallones Institute, a California-based research and education organization. Since then, another \$30,000 has been spent for a complete structural renovation, plus \$5,000 for a solar heating unit, garden and animal supplies, and waste removal and recycling systems.

The first thing a visitor notices is the small streetside yard. Instead of grass, alfalfa is grown and harvested every month or so to feed the rabbits (one buck and four does can provide a family of four with two pelts and four pounds of meat each week at a cost of 35 cents a pound). The sidewalk is woodchips (the only disadvantage is you can't rollerskate on it), and the hedges are mulberry trees that one day will feed silk worms.

THE SIDE YARD is a large and thriving strawberry patch and herb garden. The 2,500-square-foot vege-

Tom Javits, who teaches in the agriculture department of the University of California at Berkeley, and is one of four residents at the Integral Urban House, calls it "a blend of old technologies with new possibilities."

INSIDE THE HOUSE are an efficient Norwegian wood stove, passive solar heating systems (jugs of dark-colored water placed in sunlit windows), and an old-fashioned "cooler" vented on the shadier north side of the house to store food and thus save electricity.

Even the flies are "recycled" by being caught in wire traps and fed to the fish and chickens.

The average family of four uses nearly half its annual fresh-water supply (40,000 to 50,000 gallons) simply to flush the toilet. At the Integral Urban House this is saved through use of a waterless "clivus multtrum" (Swedish for "inclined tank") storage system. Kitchen garbage and human waste are stored for about two years in a vented basement tank, during which time 95 per cent of the bulk is lost as carbon dioxide and water vapor. The rest slowly decomposes into an odor-free and sanitary compost.

