

NETWORKED OBJECTS

# NOT FAR FROM THE TREE



Photo by Arnold and Shewin Dubren

# INTRO

As part of our project for the Networked Objects class at the Institute of Design, we looked for opportunity spaces in which Not Far From the Tree can improve the organization's operations in Toronto and expand to other cities such as Chicago.

In our research, we were very Chicago-centric. We focused on the broad spectrum of what it means to grow food in an urban environment. We reached out to local organizations and interview participants who are involved in urban agriculture and community gardening.

We also supplemented our findings with secondary research including journal articles, green blogs, and websites specifically geared towards horticulture and urban agriculture.

# RESEARCH METHODS

Contextual observations  
Ethnographic interviews  
Expert interviews  
Intercept interviews  
Secondary research



Spinach crop at Growing Home urban farm.

# RESEARCH PARTICIPANTS

## ORGANIZATIONS

Growing Home  
Midwest Fruit Explorers  
Midwest Tree Growers Association  
Morton Arboretum  
Logan Square Farmers' Market  
St. Charles Horticulture Research Center, U of I Crop Sciences  
Chicago Botanic Gardens

## INDIVIDUALS

Arnold and Sherwin Dubren - Urban Orchardists  
Ben Jaffee - Grower at the Botanic Garden  
Breanne Heath - Field Training Specialist  
Abigail Rea - Horticulture Manager  
Sharon Yiesla - Plant Clinic Assistant  
John - Cheese Vendor  
Kristin - Apple Vendor  
Ray - Customer, Organic Grocer  
Marsha - Customer - Organic Grocer  
Zach -Wheat Grass Vendor  
Brandon - Mushroom Vendor  
Zeph - CO-OP Sauce  
William H. Shoemaker - Experimental Horticulture Researcher  
Samantha C. - Youth Coordinator with Green Youth Farming initiative



The Logan Square Winter Farmer's Market.



MidFEx meeting. Photo by Arnold Dubren.



Arnold and Sherwin Dubren urban orchard.



Growing Home.

# RESEARCH FINDINGS . 1

## The ways participants learn about growing food.

Social networking websites are valuable resources for information and ways to start getting involved.

Record keeping is a tool for future action and decision making.

There are a lot of free resources out there, but people don't know how to access them.

Organization meetings are important for learning about current issues, production, growing techniques, resources and meeting people.

*“It’s not always in front of you, but when you start researching you realize there’s maybe more than what you wanna know.”*

*Ben Jaffee*

# RESEARCH FINDINGS . 2

## The context in which they get involved.

Unemployment seemed to be one of the main reasons for initial involvement with urban agriculture.

Most of our research participants expressed concern of where their food is coming from. They are aware of sustainability, food safety, and healthy food habits.

Growing food is a way of networking with people. All the participants showed some degree of social engagement; from sharing apples and pears with neighbors to providing job opportunities to underserved communities in Chicago.

*“I find a lot of trees in my neighborhood, either they have planted the tree and they forget about it or they moved in and it was already there.”*

*Arnold and Sherwin  
Dubren*

*“We’re seeing a real movement toward a return to the farm. We all left the farm generations ago and now we want to return to the farm but in an urban setting.”*

*Marsha*

# RESEARCH FINDINGS . 3

## Feelings and motivations associated with local grown food.

Safety was a topic raised in most interviews. Participants appreciate the opportunity to bring their family and children to participate.

Local food tastes better, is safer, and is of higher quality.

The ability to grow their own food gives them a great sense of pride.

Commercial appearance is not relevant. These people are looking for unique products they can't find in regular grocery stores.

Growing fruit trees is a possibility and an opportunity for future enjoyment.

*“One of the girls that I had, who is now in college, had her first fresh pear on our farm and she said to me ‘Oh, my God! That’s the best I’ve ever had in my entire life’.”*  
Samantha C.

*“I’m going to use my skills better in the dirt growing with people and educating other people about how to do it.”*  
Ben Jaffee

# RESEARCH FINDINGS . 4

## How organizations and groups in Chicago get people involved.

Word of mouth within social circles is one of the most important ways to get people involved.

Social interaction is a central piece in farmer's markets. Participants feel like it is a positive environment for meeting interesting people and building meaningful connections.

The combination of community organizations and individuals is key for growing food in an urban space.

Serving is a fundamental tool for educating both volunteers and the community.

*“Making people aware and having a call to action is the hardest part. Being established is very important.”*  
Samantha C.

*“We’re all naturally drawn to people with same interests.”*  
Ben Jaffee

# DESIGN PRINCIPLES

Based on our insights we developed 3 design principles to lead our ideation sections.

1. Build a community around the tree
2. Create a sense of ownership for the pickers
3. Empower owners

# IDEATION

How might we build communities around trees while helping the organization find more participants?

## User scenarios



## Wireframing



## Storytelling



# CONCEPT . URBAN JAR

Urban Jar is a virtual platform that connects the Not Far From the Tree organization with pickers and fruit tree owners.

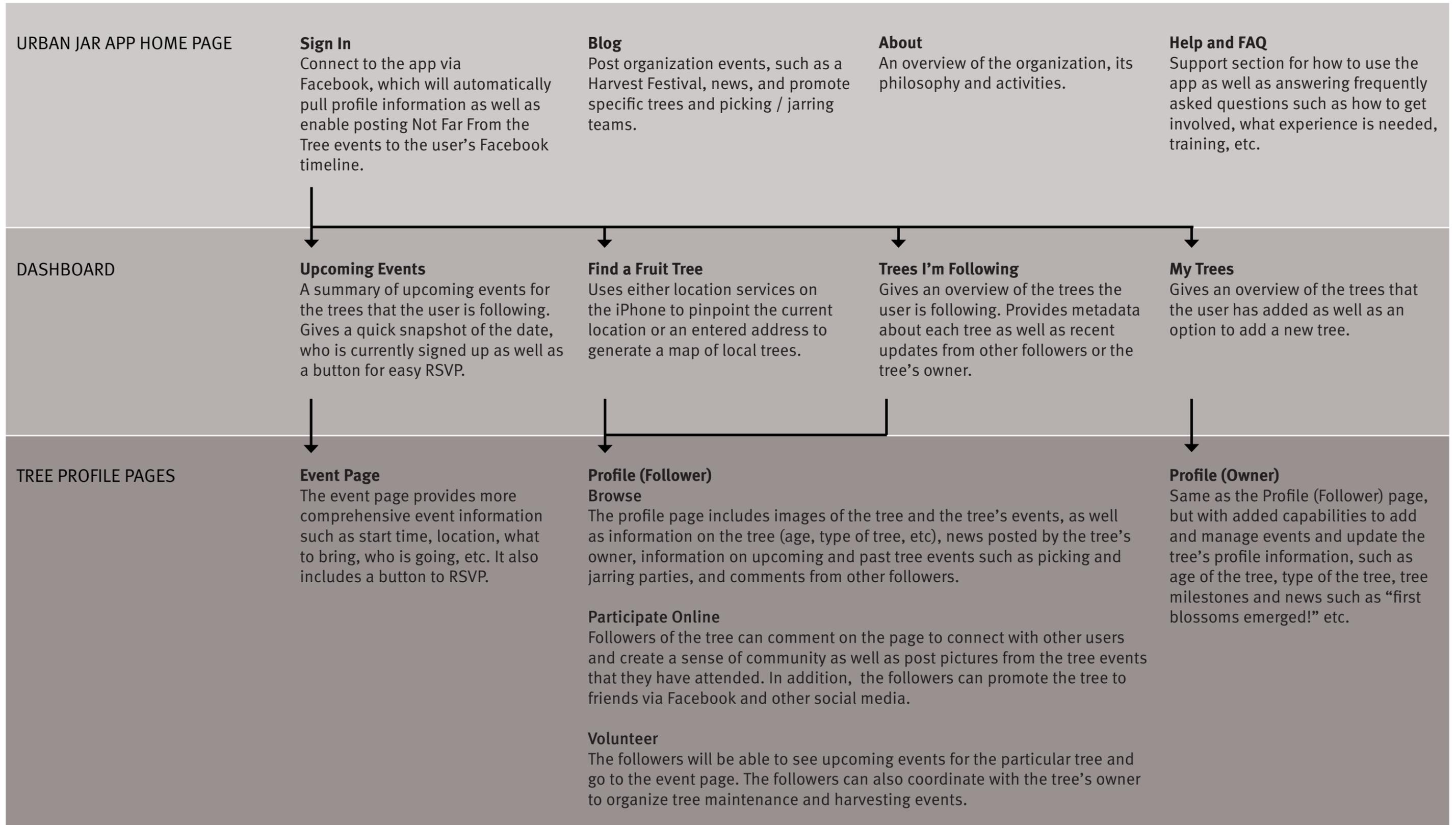
The system is able to map fruit trees in urban sites according to information provided by owners at the time of registering their trees. Participants can search for fruits trees around their area and subscribe to a tree of their interest.

By the time of the harvest, pickers subscribed to a tree receive a notification and can join the group for harvesting. After picking their fruits and processing them into jams or fruit sauces, the system helps users to customize their own labels and share their products with friends and family. Also, they can add QR codes that lead to Urban Jar blog.

The platform is a tool for helping Not Far From the Tree organize harvests and provide participants with a safe environment for networking with people, sharing stories and products, and getting more involved with urban agriculture.



# URBAN JAR . FEATURES



# CONCLUSION

Whether it is a program for integrating people back to society (Growing Home), the desire to share knowledge (Ben Jaffee), or sharing fruits with neighbors (Arnold and Sherwin Dubren), urban food growers value connecting with people above all.

Sharing and serving increases the sense of belonging and community ownership. Consequently, people become more engaged in social activities and more willing to share their knowledge, skills and harvest with others.

We believe that Not Far From the Tree has the potential for exploring the different connections between tree growers and volunteers that happen throughout the process of harvesting the trees at a much deeper level by allowing participants on both sides to not only share fruits, but also share their experiences, accomplishments, stories, and knowledge.



Arnold and Sherwin Dubren's apple tree.  
Photo by Arnold Dubren.