

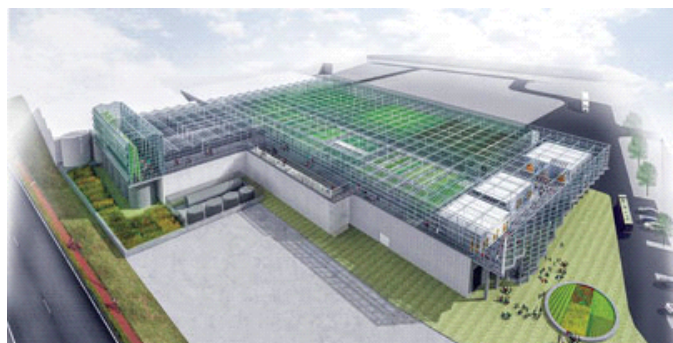
GROWERTALKS

GT in Brief

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Agrotopia: Europe's Largest Rooftop Greenhouse

Chris Beytes



Built on top of the crate warehouse at REO Veiling, a fruit and vegetable auction in Roeselare, Belgium, Inagro Agrotopia is a research and demonstration greenhouse for urban farming. It opened to visitors, researchers and the industry in September.

The unusual site was selected because Roeselare is in Belgium's West Flanders region, long known as "Europe's vegetable garden" (although that title is being usurped by Almeria in Spain). The idea was to

demonstrate to the public and the industry the feasibility of rooftop agriculture in an urban setting. Inside will be a range of greenhouse production demonstrations, including hydroponic growing systems for tomatoes, peppers, strawberries and leafy greens.

The rooftop project was designed by Van Bergen Kolpa Architects, with input from numerous sources. The greenhouse was designed by Deforche. It's a Venlo-style, 95,000 sq. ft., with 12-meter (40-ft.) wide bays and gutter heights from 6.2 meters (20 ft.) to 12 meters (40 ft.). There's also 3,760 sq. ft. of service area. Heat comes from a nearby waste incinerator. Water is collected on the roof and recycled. Cost of the project is said to be 15 million Euros (about \$160 per sq. ft., so not the sort of project you'd pay back with tomato and lettuce sales).



But it's not designed to generate a profit. Inagro is a research and information center, established in 1956 to support farmers in what were then ailing industrial crops of flax and tobacco. Now they work for all sorts of farmers and horticulturists, with a focus on improving cultivation techniques, introducing new crops, improving profitability and quality, and reducing environmental impact. As a public-facing project, Agrotopia puts urban agriculture in the spotlight.

"We are very pleased with this ambitious project and the clients; Inagro and REO Auction show that professional food production can be connected to the city," said architect Jago van Bergen, director of Van Bergen Kolpa.

To see more, search "Agrotopia" on YouTube. **GT**