

Grower Challenges; More Expansion; United Fresh Adds CEA Pavilion



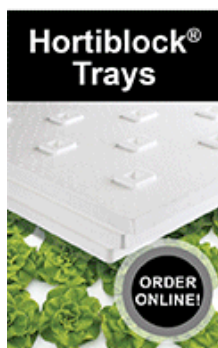
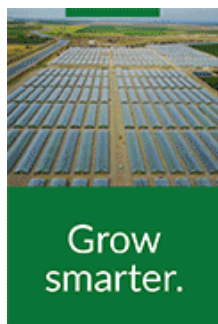
Greenhouse vegetable news from GrowerTalks magazine

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Controlled Environment Agriculture

COMING UP THIS WEEK:

Finding Growers
More Expansion News
United Fresh Adds CEA
Pavilion
Indoor Ag-Con Moves



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The Challenge of Finding Growers

I recently had the pleasure of traveling to Oneida, New York, to check out the newest addition to the Mastronardi Produce lineup: Green Empire Farms. Coming in at a whopping 74 acres, with 64 of those acres under glass, it's a beast. Dreamberry strawberries (from the WOW Berry line), tomatoes and cucumbers will be shipping out of the operation (strawberries are already being shipped out).



I was able to sit down with Chief Growing Officer Gert van Straalen and Director of Marketing—Brand & Innovation Julia Shreve to talk about the business as a whole. You can read that cover story in the February *Inside Grower* supplement.

Meanwhile, though, I wanted to share some of Gert's thoughts that didn't make it into the story (there was an awful lot of ground to cover—pun intended—in that story). When I asked him about the challenges facing his growing facilities, the main one he brought up is finding workers, especially growers. They offer an incentive structure where bonuses and increased pay are offered for quality performance, which has helped to attract local employees.

"We try to hire as many local people as possible," he notes. "We're happy to continue that in the next phase as well."

For higher level growers, they've worked with local colleges and offered internship programs, as well as international internships, to attract more talent. The difficulty isn't just at the new Oneida greenhouse, either; it's widespread among many of the company's locations.

They aren't the only operation experiencing this challenge—time and again when I talk to higher ups at CEA operations, they mention the labor challenge. I'd like to put the question out there: how have you been able to compensate for this? Is it more automation? Do you have a training system for higher level growers?

Email me and let me know—I'd love to share some helpful tips.



More Expansion News

Revol Greens, a hydroponic leafy greens grower in Medford, Minnesota, just announced plans to expand with a partnership that would land them in a 16-acre greenhouse in Tehachapi, California. That's a long way to go from Minnesota, but the move is part of the company's 5 Years–5 Facilities plan for strategically located greenhouses in the U.S. to "become the nationwide leader in the high quality, regionally sourced, safe and sustainable production of leafy greens," according to its announcement.

They aren't doing it alone, though. They've partnered with **Equilibrium**, a sustainably driven investment firm based in Portland, Oregon, to develop the lettuce and leafy greens greenhouse operation. It's part of Equilibrium's 64-acre greenhouse complex, which it acquired from SunSelect Produce.



An example of one of Revol Greens' products.

Okay, so who are these people? Revol Greens (cool name), has a 10-acre location in Minnesota, growing leafy greens for grocery retailers in Minnesota, Wisconsin and North Dakota, and food service customers. President Jay Johnson previously owned Bushel Boy, a tomato greenhouse company that he sold in 2011. He came together with four other partners to form Revol Greens in 2018 and began with 2.5 acres. It's already expanded to 10 acres and they have big plans for the future.

"Not only is Tehachapi an outstanding growing climate located near 22 million Southern California residents, but it is also just north of the Riverside area, which is a major distribution hub of many of our retail and foodservice customers," says Brendon Krieg, Revol Greens partner, in the announcement.

So who's Equilibrium? You've likely heard the name before—it invested \$82 million in AppHarvest, the Morehead, Kentucky, operation that's partnering with Mastronardi Produce to distribute the tomatoes and cucumbers it will grow in a state-of-the-art greenhouse. Equilibrium had already invested \$11.3 million into Revol Greens in 2018 and continues to support the company, as well as others in the CEA realm. It's committed to supporting sustainably driven companies and has identified CEA as a sector it's committed to expanding.



United Fresh Adds CEA Pavilion

Aside from the ubiquitous avocado growers, who were everywhere at United Fresh in 2019, the

controlled environment growers seemed to have a commanding presence at the show. This year, they'll continue to have a presence in the new Controlled Environment Pavilion, an effort that's part of a partnership with the Controlled Environment Agriculture Food Safety Coalition. Show attendees will find growers, allied vendor supplies tools and technologies for indoor growing, and thought leaders who are helping to grow indoor agriculture, according to a release from the United Fresh Produce Association.



The black label line of premium produce from NatureFresh Farms launched at last year's United Fresh Show—one of many new introductions from controlled environment growers there.

"Our members are pioneering new production models in fresh produce and we look forward to the opportunity to engage with participants at the United Fresh event—to share perspectives and create an opportunity for conversations across the entire supply chain," says Marni Karlin, executive director of the CEA Food Safety Coalition. Members of that coalition include BrightFarms, AeroFarms, Plenty, Little Leaf Farms, Revol Greens and Bowery.

Anyone interested in a booth or kiosk in the pavilion can contact [Erin Hutchison](#), United Fresh director, supply chain relations. United Fresh 2020 runs June 16-19 in San Diego, California. [CLICK HERE](#) for show details.



Indoor Ag-Con Moves

INDOOR AG-CON

Don't worry, the tech-focused indoor grower show is still in Las Vegas, it just moved from the convention center to Wynn Las Vegas. The show, which is scheduled for May 18-20, still focuses on indoor and vertical farming, and boasts new alliances with other industry associations and groups. It will be making announcements about those alliances in the near future.

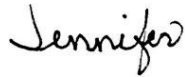
Meanwhile, the show has released keynote speakers and they're some familiar names in the lineup. One is Mike Zelkind, CEO of 80 Acres Farms, which we featured in the June *Inside Grower* supplement. Also speaking are David Rosenberg, CEO of AeroFarms, and Sonia Lo, CEO of Crop One Holdings.

New this year is a Start-Up Showcase, a dedicated section on the exhibition floor where early to mid-stage indoor farming and agtech company representatives can meet investors, growers and other attendees. The show also has an expanded exhibit floor and more networking opportunities.

[CLICK HERE](#) for more details on the event.

As always, feel free to email me at jpolanz@ballpublishing.com with comments, questions, news and views.

Until next time,



Jennifer Polanz
Editor-at-Large
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