Sustainability reports getting "fluffier"; plus less screen and more green



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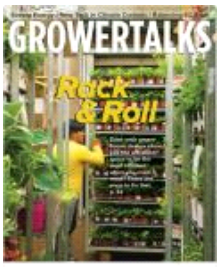
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COMING UP THIS WEEK:

Doors Close at NH Greenhouse
More Fluff in Sust. Reports
CEA Nominations Now Open!
Less Screen, More Green
Report from the MT Outpost



Foreclosure for North Country Growers

Over the years, I've written about hydroponic vegetable grower North Country Growers in Berlin, New Hampshire—they put out a lot of PR early on as they were getting started. And I grew up nearby, traveling to Berlin for basketball games and track meets in my youth. So I was especially curious to see the former papermill town eager to embrace a large greenhouse operation. But this week, it's being offered at a foreclosure auction.





The 8-acre hydroponic greenhouse and its 168 acres of land are up for sale. According to a local newspaper article, North Country Growers ceased growing at the end of March 2026. The paper reports that “Portsmouth-based Service Credit Union said it could no longer extend financial credit, including money needed to cover North Country Growers' payroll.”

The hydroponic operation was producing lettuce and had plans to construct additional greenhouses for tomato production. Their journey began in 2017, with a $25 million USDA Rural Development loan to construct two 10-acre greenhouses. They touted sustainable production, but faced many delays during the development/construction stage, finally hosting a grand opening in May 2024. Two years later, they were done.



More Fluff in Sustainability Reports

A recent study conducted by the University of Chicago Law School found an increasing number of “fluff” reports containing a high ratio of sentences and claims that were either vague or meaningless. The study looked at sustainability reports from 2,100 large companies, analyzing more than 15,000 disclosures.

Study authors say a few things stood out. Sustainability reporting has mainstreamed. But they say reports have moved the wrong way over the years.

“As reporting spread, reports became less specific, less quantitative (especially after 2015), and fluffier, even as the use of data tables and figures grew. Part of this reflects a wave of thinner first-time reporters. But for specificity and quantitative content, it also reflects declines within firms that kept reporting.”

Their measure of the “fluff ratio” increased across all reports over the last 20 years.

Want to improve your reporting? Replace general claims with specific numbers. Watch what your peers are doing and pay close attention to those who have quantitative content and specificity. Be thoughtful and VERY specific about your framework.



Nominations Are Now Open for the CEAs

An update from Inside Grower *managing editor Jen Polanz:*

I am thrilled to announce we have launched the nominations page for the third annual CEAs—Cultivating Excellence Awards, presented by Indoor Ag-Con and *Inside Grower* magazine with award sponsor Premier Tech. Winners will be announced at the Gala Luncheon at Indoor Ag-Con March 24 at the Westgate in Las Vegas.

Click here for the nomination forms and full award descriptions.



This is the third year *Inside Grower* magazine has partnered with Indoor Ag-Con to offer up awards that highlight the best in growing operations and product innovation, and last year we began the Trailblazer Award to recognize the innovators who paved the way early on. As a refresher, our awards are:

- Operational Excellence Award
- The Product Innovation Award
- Trailblazer Award

Full descriptions are available on the nominations home page. The deadline for entry is Friday, November 20, so don't delay! Do you have a recommendation for a future Trailblazer—someone who has helped the CEA industry break new ground? Jen would love to hear it—drop her an email.

Join us at Indoor Ag-Con March 24-25, 2027, at the Westgate in Las Vegas, where we will hold the CEAs Gala Luncheon on March 24 and announce our winners! Register today!



Less Screen, More Green



The cascading effects of kids and teens spending more time on devices and not enough time outside continues to be documented and begroaned. So I love it when I see actual change happening. And honestly, I think it's also telling how receptive most people are to more Vitamin N (nature) and less screen time.

The Children & Nature Network has an initiative called Nature Everywhere Communities, which

helps local areas expand children's access to nature. One of the projects they sponsor is the Project One Health JAX in Jacksonville, Florida. Their neighborhood programs got kids outside for 4,300 hours in the first year, including through community gardens, walking trails and green spaces. One youth survey indicated a 60% increase in the number of kids spending times outdoors after the program began. And there was an 11% increase in children who kept screen time under an hour a day.

It's easy to look at more kids gardening/outside as a benefit to horticulture industry. But the more pressing reason? They NEED it!

Report from the MT Outpost

Here's why I seek less screen time:

It's that time of year when I spend as much time as possible getting my prairie fix. These are non-negotiable days spent wandering rolling hills, breaks and draws with my dogs. This last trip, squeezed into a long weekend, delivered ice in the dog dish each morning and sweat by noon. It's wild country to get to know—at times unfathomable in scope—and I know it mostly by how the dogs navigate those draws and how they swing into the leeward slopes with cautious expectation. You can drive two, sometimes three hours without hitting any kind of town.

I've heard this country called a lot of things, most of them not so nice: desolate, nothing and nowhere. I've learned otherwise, but no one understands it like the people who live scattered across this wide-pressed place. A guy from the adjacent ranch pulled into our camp one frosty morning, calling us hardy folks. He delivered a litany of observations, from the weather to the elk herd, to where to find buffalo berries. You might see a ranch house, a cow grazing in sagebrush or a section of wheat, but the way they see the land, the wildlife, the weather, the particularities of a clutch of sharptail grouse is encyclopedic in nature.

There are still places where life revolves around the old things. I like that reminder, being out there and that sense that everything that matters is before me, or moving in on the wind.

Until next time,



Jennifer Duffield White
jwhite@ballpublishing.com

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