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Research News

Commercial Aeroponics: The Grow Anywhere Story

Optometrist Larry Forrest was an early investor with a pioneering aeroponic researcher named Rick Stoner and his company Agrihouse – <http://www.agrihouse.com/>. Seeing plants grow in thin air on a very small scale led Dr. Forrest to want to see if he could grow plants via the aeroponic method on a large, commercial scale. (The best information on growing plants via aeroponics is available at <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Aeroponics>. Most of this site was populated by Mr. Stoner mentioned above.)

This desire, coupled with the knowledge that microgreens were a sought after item for chefs, made garnishment plants the perfect candidate for an entrepreneurial venture. (See attached pictures and picture description below of the aeroponic growing method.)



With that as his goal, he started Grow Anywhere in mid-2005. The first year was filled with "growing pains" - literally. "We killed a lot of plants in that first year," recalls Dr. Forrest. Without soil, plants need moisture about every 20 minutes or they die. So, the eye doctor had to become a hydro engineer to make sure the irrigation system would not only work but work consistently. Another of the unforeseen tribulations was the negatives of a water intensive business in a warehouse. "A couple of times we had floods that crept under our party walls and into the neighbors units. Needless to say, they were not happy," recounts Forrest. The high humidity produced by the requisite misting also displeased fellow tenants as their windows quickly fogged in the winter months. Refining the system of providing correctly

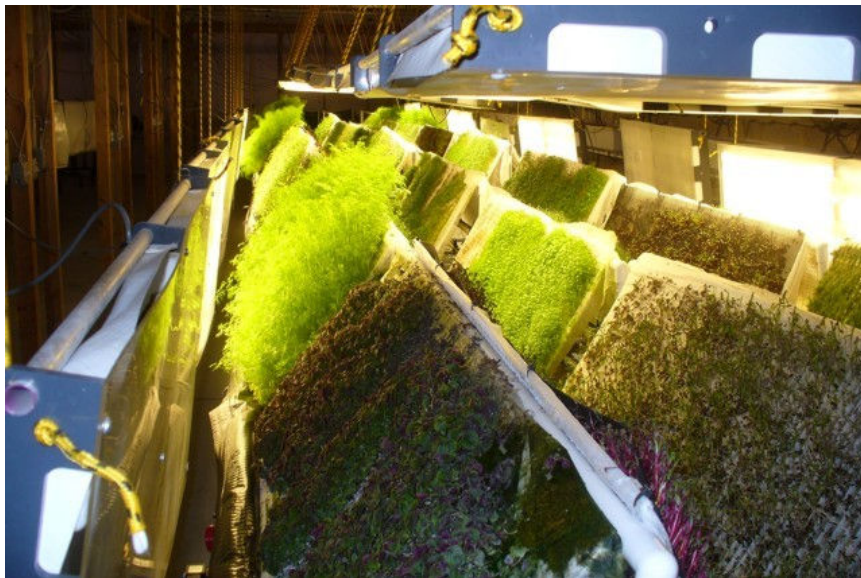
windows quickly fogged in the winter months. Refining the system of providing correctly balanced water pH also required a lot of persistence and ingenuity.

The rewards of all this innovative struggle became apparent when Grow Anywhere began dropping off micro-green samples to local chefs. "Often chefs would become customers with their first sample," says Forrest. The key with micro-greens is taste, and the aeroponic growing method produces superior tasting greens. "Chefs also tell us our greens stand up to heat better than any micro-greens they've seen before. They don't wilt on a hot dish or entrée," Forrest comments. The shelf life tends to exceed that of soil grown garnishments. Another important quality of micro-greens for chefs is the look and texture of the plant. "Our plants get high marks in the physical characteristic category," said Forrest. "It makes sense because our greens are simply cut and placed in the plastic container for distribution. If we were growing these in soil, we'd have to handle and clean the greens, which just ups the chances we'd damage the plants."

Grow Anywhere has received a full food safety audit. Next up is to get organic certification. Having already met all the criteria to become organically certified, Forrest said it was just a matter of filling out the paperwork and paying the fee.

For Dr. Forrest, the first goal was growing a great product aeroponically on a commercial scale. With that objective met, the focus now turns to marketing and distribution.

Surprisingly, Dr. Forrest is more than willing to help other chefs or entrepreneurs set up their own "farms" in major cities around the US or internationally. This might bode very well for chefs as a real trend in restaurants is to control supply by growing and raising the ingredients that go into their menu items.



Rows of different micro-greens being grown aeroponically





Owner and founder Larry Forrest checking on his crops

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