

The Growing Edge Blog

What's growing and what's going on at Growing Edge

Mike at the GE Office

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The “Greenest” Market: Sky Vegetables Concept for Rooftop Gardens

A new venture is looking at creating sustainable urban gardens on top of supermarkets under the name: [Sky Vegetables](#). If you click on that link, it pulls up an illustration of what they are proposing. The idea started out as an entrepreneurial challenge to students in the business school at the University of Wisconsin. Along with a big hydroponic greenhouse, the model on their site also has a row of barrels to collect rainwater, which they will use in an aquaponics system to create nutrient from fish waste. The model also features solar panels and a wind turbine on the roof and composting barrels where produce workers can chuck rotting fruit and veggies. So, not only do consumers get the most fresh, most local food possible, but it seems as if produce workers will also get a little recreational therapy while they work (one of the qualifiers for Best Companies to Work For awards). I'm not sure this model allows workers to do a little gardening and composting on the clock, but if so, working in the produce dept of a market just got a little sexier. . . sign me up. What a great idea! Do you think it will catch on?

I wonder what kind of investment markets would have to make. One of the hurdles, I can imagine, to sustainable production, is getting the technical expertise to man the hydroponic and aquaponic systems. Hydroponic farmers are a special breed, they stay in the business by knowing intimately the intricacies of growing. It seems if this model were to work, the market would have to hire an on-site greenhouse manager with lots of technical and hands-on knowledge. Another hurdle might be educating consumers that hydroponic growing can be sustainable. Typically it has gotten a bad rap for issues like synthetic nutrient run-off and high energy consumption from use of grow lights, etc. But don't forget what Growing Edge's own Lynette Morgan said about the [Myths of Hydroponics](#) "Hydroponic crops can most certainly

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be grown without "chemical" pesticides and many currently are," writes Morgan. And though growing in soil in many countries is still considered the cornerstone of the organic growing, "That's not to say that fully organically-certified soilless or hydroponic growers don't exist, because in some countries, such as the U.S., they certainly do and many are highly successful with this system. . . We no longer see a separate division between organics and hydroponics which gives rise to a whole host of hybrid systems incorporating the best of both methodologies."

I also recently found this post on the blog [Ethicurean](#) about hydroponics and organic growing and it's worth a read. The author writes: "I believe that Hydroponic plant growth can be the closest to organic growth as possible. I'll explain why. . . for the most part, I use organic methods. I use composted steer manure, et al. I also enjoy seeing and visiting areas of natural plant growth. Living in the Northwest I see the wonders of nature daily; the old-growth forest whose trees sustain themselves through natural moisture and composting. It's really a perfect example of how little moisture and nutrition it takes to maintain plant growth..."

How would this idea also influence food security issues if markets didn't have to track down their veggies thousands of miles away to some remote operation in South America, but rather could track the origin of their food by running up the stairs to their greenhouse.

Growing hydroponically doesn't have to run counter to sustainability. In fact, there are several products and suppliers whose mission it to offer sustainable products. And shouldn't issues of water usage and the high costs of transporting food play into this equation? Growing food on the roof of a market- it's a brilliant idea, why didn't I think of it? Seems I've seen a model of this somewhere, perhaps in Australia, I'll have to get back to you on this!

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