

Wisconsin Business Alumni

[Home](#) > [Update](#) > [Spring 2009](#) > [Alumni Notes](#)

6 Questions for Keith Agoada of Sky Vegetables

Keith Agoada, BBA '08, is the founder of [Sky Vegetables](#), a company gaining national attention for its efforts to use aquaponics to grow vegetables in greenhouses placed atop grocery stores. The concept got its start with \$10,000 of seed money earned from winning top prize in the business school's G. Steven Burrill Business Plan Competition last spring. UPDATE's Kaylene Reilly talked to Agoada about his experiences as a newly minted entrepreneur.



Keith Agoada, BBA '08 Founder,
Sky Vegetables

You were recently **called a "visionary" by the New York Times**. Why?

Our concept of supermarket rooftop food production is simple and responsible. Produce is better when it's fresh and grown naturally. Traditionally, the agriculture industry depends on irresponsible amounts of oil and water in its production and transportation. We are looking at ways to make produce more readily available while having a positive environmental impact and supporting the local economy.

How much water are we talking?

Fresh water is becoming a very scarce resource. According to industry experts, about 3 percent of the world's water is fresh and the agriculture industry uses around 70 percent of that. The agriculture industry pays only cents on the dollar to consume it—a costly and irresponsible use of a valuable resource.

So how does Sky Vegetables solve that problem?

Sky Vegetables plans to use solutions to recycle the water we use to grow food. One example of this is aquaponics—the marriage between hydroponics (growing plants in a water-based solution) and aquaculture (fish farming). According to agriculture specialist James Kalin of Virtually Green, aquaponics uses less than 5 percent of the water on a monthly basis for select crops like lettuce and tomatoes compared to traditional agricultural methods. One of the world's best examples of an aquaponics operation is right in Wisconsin—Will Allen's Growing Power Farm in Milwaukee.

Coming to a rooftop near you?

We hope so. We are scouting locations and strategizing for initial installations in the San Francisco bay area and Boston. We are just finishing design details and hoping to begin construction on our first roof-top greenhouse in 2009.

Sounds like quite a project—what led you into this?

During a trip to Chicago I fell in love with community gardens and urban agriculture. Sky Vegetables started out as a project I was mildly interested in through an independent study

WISCONSIN BUSINESS ALUMNI

UPDATE

Spring 2009

Feature Stories

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[From the Dean](#)

[On Campus](#)

[Development News](#)

[Faculty-Staff News](#)

[Alumni News](#)

and grew during a couple of business classes I was taking. At the Wisconsin School of Business, one of the concepts that really stuck with me was the emphasis on the “triple bottom line” [profit, social, and environmental impacts]. My professors didn’t just hint at the idea of businesses being responsible members of society. Social and environmental responsibility was as important as economic profitability.

What will be the next Sky concept?

We’ve got our hands full at the moment. I am really looking forward to seeing Sky Vegetables to its full potential, but I might be a one-and-done type of guy. Starting a business comes with a lot of stress. For me, it may be a little like pledging a frat—something you learn a lot from, but only do once.

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