

## Fruits and Veggies Going Through the Roof

More and more leaders in the food world, being nuanced and deliberate by nature, with ideals balanced by business acumen, are looking to not one but to three bottom lines: financial, environmental, and social. As a result, some stupendous ideas are surfacing as the 2.0 incarnation of the green revolution steamrolls on. One such idea that recently attracted my attention is [Sky Vegetables'](#) plan to use grocery-store rooftops for the growing and distribution of fresh food.

Two University of Wisconsin graduates came up with the idea while they were still students, won several business plan awards, got funding from the governor's office and the Wisconsin Technology Council, and believe their plan can be implemented on grocery-store roofs anywhere, at any time of year. According to their vision, covered greenhouses on the roof would grow vegetables using hydroponics, with a live video feed sent downstairs to the produce section for customers to view. Wind and solar energy would power the operation, harvested rainwater used to water the plants, and scraps composted. Vegetables would be picked as they ripen and taken the short distance downstairs, where consumers would learn about the benefits of low food mileage: higher quality and better flavor — because you're not limited in what you can grow to species and strains that can survive days or weeks in a truck — along with a lower carbon footprint.

While German, French, Austrian, and Swiss governments have given considerable legislative and financial support to green roof initiatives (and in doing so, spawned a multi-million-dollar market), the U.S. — other than exceptions like Chicago's City Hall — has been slower to move. As we get better and better at coaxing food out of the soil (check out [Little Homestead on the Prairie](#), which harvests tens of thousands of pounds of food from a tiny plot of land, and [Gotreaux Family Farms](#)), it'll make sense to farm in cities, where half of the world already lives and, according to one study, 80% of the population will live by 2050.

Kudos, too, to another Wisconsinite, 2008 [MacArthur Foundation Fellow Will Allen](#), a former pro basketball player turned urban farmer. Using compost-heated greenhouses, vermiculture, raised beds, and aquaculture, Allen's [Growing Power](#) grows tons of food a year on just two acres within Milwaukee's city limits. The company has also formed partnerships with over 300 small family farmers in the Rainbow Farmer's Cooperative to distribute their produce, grass-fed meats, and value-added product, via a Farm-to-City Market Basket Program, to the people of Milwaukee (including, at a reduced cost, low-income urban residents).

This kind of evolved (and constantly evolving) thinking is the way forward. It's the way we'll prove that sustainable and organic agriculture can be as — if not more — productive than conventional agriculture without the deleterious environmental effects. And it's the way to ensure that we'll be able to feed ourselves sustainably in a rapidly-growing world.

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