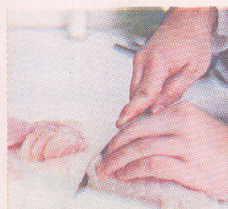


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FOOD

Japan's rice basket ... in Sacramento? John Henderson explains. »5D Root vegetables: Put a lid on 'em »3D



Larry Forrest shows off carrot shoots at Grow Anywhere in Frederick. The plants are grown without soil or sun. *Cyrus McCrimmon, The Denver Post*

He grows shoots, he scores

Microgreen “farm” is pleasing chefs, teasing palates

By Douglas Brown *The Denver Post*

Mark Haberer pinches a tuft of miniature greens growing in a tray.

“Try these,” he says.

A few chews.

“Curry?”

“Cumin,” he says. “Cumin greens.”

Haberer is one of the engines behind Grow Anywhere, a Weld County farm that coaxes “microgreens” — tiny shoots of lettuce, carrot, arugula, onion, sorrel and more — out of air, using something called aeroponics. The farm is the only one of its kind in the world,

says owner Larry Forrest.

“It’s beginning to become a farm,” says Forrest, an optometrist. “I knew there would be problems going from a garage to a production unit. But I knew somebody had to do it if aeroponics was ever to take off.”

It hasn’t quite taken off yet. Forrest sells 4-ounce boxes of microgreens exclusively to restaurants. They’re too expensive for most home cooks. But Forrest thinks one day, those cumin greens will find their way to your kitchen table.

“I’d love to sell this stuff to anybody, but it’s a numbers game,” he says. “You’ve got to make a living.”

Forrest and others affiliated with Grow Anywhere call it a farm. This is accurate. They do grow food and sell it. But the farm contains not a speck of soil. A metal structure shields the farm

from the sun. The farmers pay no attention to the skies; rainfall is irrelevant.

Forrest buys rectangular, white grates, the kind that are used to cap fluorescent lights — he gets them at hardware stores — and places a mesh over them. He or one of the employees sprinkles seeds over the mesh-skinned grates, which are then placed in a slot in a tall box outfitted with lots of little sprinkler heads.

Every 30 minutes or so, around the clock, the jets spray a mist of water over the seeds.

Once the seeds have sprouted roots, which poke through the mesh, they are taken into the operation’s greenhouse, 1,600 square feet of long tables lined with those white trays, which stand on their edges. Each tray leans into another tray, forming something like a tent.

MICROGREENS » 6D

When the seeds are still awakening, misters spray them twice an hour. When the racks get moved into their angled position, they're watered at the roots. Among the microgreens: bean, corn, cumin and radish plants.



MICROGREENS: Angled carpets of sprouts never touch soil on road to restaurants

◀◀ FROM 1D

Bright grow lights — the farm's "suns" — hang above each tray.

More sprinkler heads, about 400 of them, spray the trays, also about twice an hour. In less than a week or as long as a few weeks, depending upon the crop, employees pick up a tray, take it to a back room or outside, cut the greens with scissors and place them in 4-ounce plastic containers that are put in refrigerators until they get shipped.

"The radish sprout is hotter than the radish. Your bean sprout tastes more like a bean than a bean. Their sweet corn shoots, those are my favorite. They have a really sweet flavor that almost masks the corn flavor. It kind of explodes on your palate," says Eric Longhini, a chef at the Boulder Country Club.

Longhini says there are plenty of microgreen suppliers, but only Grow Anywhere uses aeroponics, which offers big advantages.

"We've gotten other kinds of microgreens where they are still attached to the root system and you have to remove them from the root system, then rinse them and dry them and remove the dirt that is left on them," he says. "And that's annoyance."

With Grow Anywhere microgreens, "You can just put it straight from the package to the plate," he says.

Forrest first got interested in aeroponics about 20 years ago through his friendship with Rick Stoner, who says he invented aeroponics and is a partner in Grow Anywhere.

Stoner's Berthoud company, Agri-



Grow Anywhere's Larry Forrest holds sorrel sprouts that will be snipped and packed into 4-ounce plastic containers. Photos by Cyrus McCrimmon, The Denver Post

house, develops a variety of products associated with aeroponics. He's working on establishing a much larger aeroponics farm near New York to service the large concentration of high-end restaurants that buy microgreens.

"What we are doing here with Grow Anywhere is trying to establish a brand," Stoner says. "That's our function. To put this up, develop a brand, and find acceptance for it and an economic model ... We can grow plants naturally without pesticides in an enclosed-loop system where you don't

need sunlight or dirt. We can grow any plant that is grown in the soil."

Plants clearly excite Stoner, but despite the last name, Forrest doesn't think much about them.

"I've never had a green plant in my house," he says. "I'm just beginning to understand what the plants are here."

"I'm not doing this because of a love of plants. I'm doing it to show that it can be done."

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