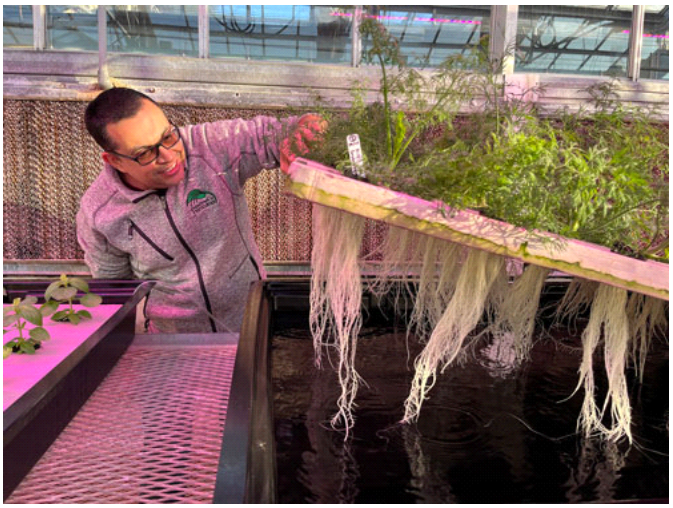
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USDA-Funded Culinary Herb Research

Jennifer Polanz



In the near future, growers will have better cultural information on growing culinary herbs indoors, thanks to a multi-institutional research and outreach team funded by a $3.4 million USDA Specialty Crop Research Initiative Grant.

Pictured: Roberto Lopez, associate professor in the Michigan State University Department of Horticulture, in a hydroponic herb production facility.

The goal is to evaluate the profitability and environmental sustainability of fresh-cut and potted culinary herbs produced in CEA environments like greenhouses and indoor farms. The team is called Controlled Environment Agriculture Herb Extension and Research Base, and includes researchers from Michigan State, Iowa State, North Carolina, Texas Tech, Tennessee and the USDA Agricultural Research Service (ARS).

According to MSU Researcher Roberto Lopez, the team will first conduct a survey looking at production methods, sensory experiences and marketing strategies. Then researchers will study production methods in controlled environments to identify practices that increase growth and improve quality, shelf life, disease management and food safety.

Finally, the group will take the results of the survey and their research and create effective marketing, production, plant protection, technology adoption, post-harvest and food safety resources for growers.

“We need to perform research trials at commercial facilities to test and validate our results, of course, but to truly understand what may help grow the industry, we also need to better understand consumers,” Roberto said. “Consumer profile development will allow for the identification of new markets and aid in increasing demand for U.S.-grown, fresh culinary herbs.

“It’s important that this project is a holistic research and outreach effort.”