insideGROWER

FROM YOUR EDITOR

11/1/2023

Finding Your Own Way

Jennifer Polanz



There's a lot of chatter in the CEA industry right now. Chatter about new, state-of-the-art facilities, about bankruptcies, about expensive new equipment and more. It can be difficult to keep up with it all and try to figure out the "right" way to go to market.

But I think what all this chatter shows is there's no one right way to get a product to market. There are lots of wrong ways to do it, unfortunately. And some ways are more successful than others. But it seems to me, if you follow the key fundamentals of growing produce, you can make it there any number of ways.

Take, for instance, Paul and Raynette Mock, who co-own Mock's Greenhouses in Berkeley Springs, West Virginia. Paul grew up in the bedding plant growing business in Windber, Pennsylvania. When he married Raynette and moved to her home in Berkeley Springs, it was an unlikely location for a hydroponic growing operation. It's on quite a steep hill (I wasn't sure my car would make it up the road, but it did), and on a clear day you can easily see peaks in Pennsylvania from there. But they've made it work for 17 years, leveling ground and adding on as they went. They started with one new and two used greenhouses, and pulled together an assortment of equipment to launch into the world of hydroponic Bibb lettuce and red greenhouse tomatoes.

The keys to their business (and anyone else who's trying to make a living at this) is understanding their customers and their needs, understanding the expansion potential of their own business, and how they can marry the two for mutually beneficial relationships. You can find how they've created that synergy. In the end, though, their story shows there are many ways to be successful in indoor production, and it doesn't always have to start with a multi-million-dollar greenhouse or vertical farm.

There's an underlying current in this issue of getting started on a successful path, too. Freelance writer Dave Kuack takes a hard look at site selection for vertical farming and how those decisions factor into your overall business. Read that, then check out Erika Summers' look at the pitfalls that new operations need to know about and avoid when starting up. That's a complement to her story in August on building the right team (if you missed it, you can find that and all our other archived stories here at inside-grower.com).

Our university researchers are there to help you navigate your way through the intricacies of growing a crop, too. In this issue's Research Corner segment, we're starting two series. One is new research out of Clemson University on cannabis production in the vegetative phase. If that's your crop, you'll be interested in finding out

how you can save space and labor in that story. The second is from researchers at Michigan State University highlighting end-of-crop production lighting strategies for leafy greens—that’s a four-part series starting this month.

Hopefully, with the stories in this issue, we can help you chart your own course for continued success.