

CEA Research at Indoor Ag-Con; \$134M for Oishii; Meet Sofia Gómez





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# inside GROWER

Controlled Environment Agriculture

## COMING UP THIS WEEK:

CEA at Indoor Ag-Con  
Inaugural Vivid Canopy  
\$134M for Oishii  
CEA Alliance B.O.D.  
Green Career Week  
Sofia Gómez, Purdue

# BAG



## CEA Research Showcase at Indoor Ag-Con

For anyone attending the 11th Annual Indoor Ag-Con hosted at the Caesars Forum in Las Vegas from March 11-12, come to the “Academia & Research CEA Showcase: Taking Academic Research from the Lab to the Table” session to hear about efforts to increase the efficacy of university-based research in CEA production. I will be presenting alongside Kellie J. Walters, Ph.D. (Assistant Professor in the Department of Plant Sciences, University of Tennessee) as your very own *Inside Grower* Managing Editor, Jennifer Polanz, moderates the session. Check the associated [conference program](#) for more information about the sessions and make sure you get [registered](#) in time, as we look forward to seeing you all there to hear more about the great steps being taken in CEA research!

3:30pm - 4:20pm PST

Mar 12

### Academia & Research CEA Showcase: Taking Academic Research From the Lab to the Table

In this 45-minute session, members of the academic and research community will lead 20-minute sessions sharing their latest research findings. Join us and be part of the conversation shaping the future of agriculture!



**Dr. Sean Campbell**  
Senior Consultant, Grow Big



**Kellie J. Walters, Ph.D.**  
Assistant Professor in the Department of Plant Sciences, University of Tennessee



**Moderator: Jennifer Polanz**  
Managing Editor, Inside Grower

Track: Planning & Operations

Sponsored by PowerSecure

**Title:** Academia & Research CEA Showcase: Taking Academic Research from the Lab to the Table

**When:** 3:30-4:20 p.m. PT, Tuesday, March 12, 2024

**Track:** Planning & Operations

**Working Description:** In this session, members of the academic and research community will

lead 20-minute sessions sharing their latest research findings. Join us and be part of the conversation shaping the future of agriculture!



## Inaugural Vivid Canopy Program to Be Held at Indoor Ag-Con

While in attendance at Indoor Ag-Con in Las Vegas from March 11-12 make sure to also attend the launch event for the **Vivid Canopy** program. Developed by the **Greenhouse Lighting and Systems Engineering (GLASE)** consortium to celebrate and foster diversity in the CEA industry, the professional network will have its first session from 3:00-5:00 p.m. PT on Monday, March 11, where participants will be able to engage with panelists and other attendees during an interactive panel led by **Women in CEA (WiCEA)**.



As stated by Gretchen Schimelpfenig, Executive Director of GLASE, "Leaders of CEA companies have an opportunity to be transparent about the demographics of their workforce to attract more candidates and foster diversity in the industry," and I as your editor personally can't wait to see how efforts like these continue to shape the CEA field for the better.



## Oishii's Second Round of Funding Nets them \$134M

The New Jersey indoor farming company Oishii, known for **causing headlines** when their high value strawberries hit the market at \$50 for a clamshell of eight berries, has secured **\$134 million** in their second round of funding from a group of primarily Japanese-based investors. The new funding is reportedly going towards the construction of a new production facility in New Jersey, which will feature water recycling, on-site power generation and the use of robotics and AI as a source of automation for planting, maintenance and harvest. This move will increase the company's existing strawberry production alongside their latest addition, the **Rubī Tomato**.

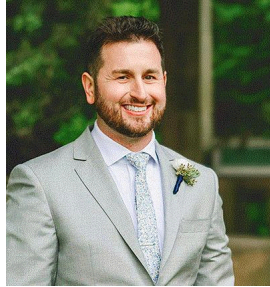


For anyone who hasn't had the opportunity to try Oishii berries, you are in luck. Since their introduction the berries dropped to **\$20/clamshell for those same eight berries in 2022**, and have

recently been reported at \$11 for a clamshell. If you're in the New York area and you have the opportunity, give them a try.



## Two New Members Added to CEA Alliance Board of Directors



The **CEA Alliance** welcomed two new members to their **board of directors** this week: Andrew Horowitz (North American Director of Strategic Development of KUBO Greenhouse Projects, pictured left) and Craig Hurlbert (CEO of Local Bounti, pictured right).

A membership trade organization with the stated goal of “representing and serving vertical farms and greenhouse producers growing fruits and vegetables in a highly controlled indoor production environment,” the board will now have 10 members representing CEA-based companies Plenty, AeroFarms and BrightFarms, to name a few.

## Green Career Week March 4 to 8

For anyone who loves horticulture and wants to help inspire the next generation of professionals, this is your week! Designated as Green Career Week by the **Seed Your Future** movement, participants are tasked with increasing awareness of careers in the green industries while building relationships with local schools and universities.

Businesses, organizations or even individuals can get in contact with their local educational institutions to inquire about visiting their classes or having field trips come to your business. Seed Your Future also provides step-by-step guidance on how to set up a successful Green Careers Week, including sample itineraries and lesson plans, social media help and other frequently asked questions. Click the [link](#) to get started!



## Student Profile: Sofia Gómez, Purdue University



For this week's student profile, I was fortunate enough to sit down with Sofia Gómez of Purdue University to hear more about her work optimizing environmental conditions for cuttings, a brief mention of her time at the University of Florida (go Gators!) and her plans for after graduation. As always, we encourage all readers to reach out to the students if you have any other questions and hopefully this is just the beginning of the conversation!



**1. Before we begin, can you tell all your (soon to be) fans who you are? Bonus points for all the things that make you interesting outside of your work.**

I am originally from the beautiful country of El Salvador. I am a plant scientist. I like plants but I love all the technology being developed to better understand plants and optimize their growing systems. Since my major advisor Dr. Celina Gomez gave me the opportunity to join her lab in 2021, I have been fascinated by CEA as an amazing tool to understand plant physiology, optimize plant production and enable us to grow plants virtually anywhere. I'm not even close to being good at painting but what I enjoy the most in my free time is painting canvases as a way to relax.

**2. Can you tell us a bit about your research? Skip the Intro and Materials & Methods sections and just give us the conclusions.**

My M.S. research is focused on understanding how different environmental factors affect water loss of cuttings during acclimation in indoor vertical propagation systems. I am specifically looking at the effects of light intensity and quality, carbon dioxide (CO<sub>2</sub>) and relative humidity on cutting dehydration, development and morphology. The goal is to provide a better understanding of the effect that these environmental factors have on water loss in cuttings to provide a baseline for optimum environmental setpoints for young plant growers looking to either start their indoor acclimation systems or optimize their existing ones.



**3. While most are familiar with the elevator pitch, I find that I get more mileage out of my cocktail pitch, aka how would you describe a simplified version of what you do to someone new at a cocktail party?**

I would start by introducing myself. I am an M.S. student in the department of Horticulture at Purdue University. I have worked in a diversity of topics within controlled environment agriculture, but recently I work with young plants, specifically with Chrysanthemum and Begonia. For the past two years I have spent my time visiting growers, learning from the young plant industry about the challenges that growers face with "problematic crops" (hard to root or slow to root crops) during propagation. With my research I'm interested in understanding the optimum environmental

setpoints to limit water loss of cuttings that are being acclimated in indoor propagation systems.

**4. If you could recommend anything to a younger version of yourself, or any new student for that matter, what would it be?**

As a kid and early in my career I used to be a very shy person. If I could recommend one thing to my younger self or any person with that type of personality, I would say there is no such thing as the right question or the wrong answer; get out there and have that conversation with that professor, professional or any person you admire. Don't be afraid of asking that question you want an answer for and keep increasing your curiosity every day.

**5. What's next for you? How about if you could do anything in the world?**

When I was at the University of Florida, I had the opportunity to work and be mentored by an extraordinary group of Agricultural and Biological engineering students. During my M.S. program I

have had fun (and often struggled) building sensors and learning from all the cutting-edge technology that Purdue has to understand plant responses to the environment. However, I think more plant physiologists with engineering knowledge should be involved in the process of developing these technologies and I would love to develop my career in that area. In the short term, first I want to get a taste of the industry so I'm planning on joining the workforce as soon as I graduate and after that I would like to continue my education in an engineering program. Crazy dream: Since I was a kid, I have always wanted to be an astronaut!

**6. Finally and for my own benefit, what's your favorite outdoor activity? (In honor of my close friend Frank, "these hands were made for typing, not being outdoors" is also an acceptable answer.)**

Sun and fresh air are my fuel. I am originally from a topical, sunny and warm country. I love any outdoor activity (especially during the summer). I enjoy anywhere where there is body of water. Hiking around a river, camping at the beach or just enjoying going to the farmers market or a brewery outdoors.

Stay curious, ask questions and let me know how it goes at [scampbell@ballpublishing.com](mailto:scampbell@ballpublishing.com).



Dr. Sean Campbell  
Editor-at-Large  
*Inside Grower*

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