

GLASE Youth Certification; Indoor Ag-Con Advisory Board & Global Produce



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Controlled Environment Agriculture

COMING UP THIS WEEK:

GLASE E-GROW Cert.
UCR CEA Projects Funded
Little Leaf Farms Expands
Indoor Ag-Con 2025 Board
USDA Acreage Changes
UC Davis CEA Courses
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New Products at GP&FS

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GLASE Consortium Launches E-GROW Certification for Youth

The GLASE consortium recently announced the creation of a new workforce development initiative, funded by the USDA National Institute of Food and Agriculture (NIFA), with the hopes of inspiring the youth to gain competencies in the fields of AgTech and CEA. The Empowering Greenhouse Resiliency with an Optimized Workforce (E-GROW) project will have seven project collaborators alongside 10 middle and high schools, bridging the gap between agriculture, technology and the next generation of STEM students.

Empowering Greenhouse Resiliency with an Optimized Workforce (E-GROW)



Starting in New York, Pennsylvania, Virginia and Wyoming, the program plans to reach 500 to 1,000 students with an emphasis on historically underrepresented populations. "Whether or not a student ultimately pursues a career in CEA, we believe this project can be a useful springboard for getting students engaged in plant science, engineering, and computer science" stated Dr. Neil Mattson, Professor at Cornell University.

Participating students will work towards a CEA certification, and long-term the program is designed to evolve as project partners develop and refine an educational model that can be used to help it grow the certification into a national CEA workforce credentialing program.

For more information about the E-GROW initiative, visit the GLASE [press release](#) or contact GLASE Extension Support Specialist, Matthew Del Buono at mjd378@cornell.edu and follow GLASE on [LinkedIn](#).



UCR Receives Funding for CEA Related Projects

Three initiatives from The University of California, Riverside recently received funding from the California Department of Food and Agriculture to lead interconnected projects focused on advanced agricultural technologies, youth engagement and sustainable waste management. Each project was awarded around \$498,000 in funding to integrate research, education and practical application, with work taking place between November 1, 2024, and June 30, 2027.



Within the three projects, several components will directly relate to the CEA field, including the project titled “Sustainable Citrus: Unlocking the Potential of Controlled Environment Agriculture for Commercial Nursery Growers.” Focused on “optimizing light conditions to improve plant growth and stress resilience while also enhancing the quality of disease-free plants and improving energy and cost efficiencies,” the stated goal is to increase translation of scientific research and discovery into practical applications for use by commercial growers.

Similarly, the “Seeding Success: Youth Engagement and Skill Development for Sustainable and Resilient Specialty Crop Farming in California” project will include development of a new course, “Sustainable Agri-Food Systems and Circular Economy.” As a component of this course, high school and UCR undergraduate students will gain practical experience sustainable farming technologies, including climate-smart agriculture, insect-based farming, and CEA.

More information about the projects and the work to be done can be found [HERE](#).



New Greenhouses for Little Leaf Farms

[Little Leaf Farms](#) recently expanded their McAdoo, Pennsylvania, production with the opening of a 3rd greenhouse and groundbreaking of a 4th, slated to be opened in Fall 2025. Adding an

additional 20 acres to their PA campus, these mark the company's 6th and 7th greenhouses when combined with those in Devens, Massachusetts.



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Indoor Ag-Con Announces 2025 Advisory Board

Playing a role in helping guide the growth and development of the conferences program and events, IAC recently announced the seven members of their 2025 Advisory Board. Made up of industry leaders from across CEA, “Their ongoing contributions are essential in ensuring that our event continues to deliver cutting-edge content,” said Brian Sullivan, CEO of Indoor Ag-Con.

The 2025 Indoor Ag-Con Advisory Board Members include:

- Glenn Behrman, Founder & President, CEA Advisors
- Michelle Keller, Chief Horticulture Officer, Living Greens Farm
- Scott Lowman, Ph.D., VP Applied Research, IALR & Co-Director, Virginia Tech – IALR CEA Innovation Center
- Joe Swartz, Senior Vice President, AmHydro
- Nona Yehia, Co-Founder & CEO, Vertical Harvest
- Jennifer Waxman, Founder/Managing Partner, Seed2Source
- Tracy Lee Zogby, CEA Lead | Product Development, Sakata Seed America, Inc



The full press release with more information about the advisory board and their role can be found [here](#).

USDA Changes Acreage Reporting to Benefit Urban and Innovative Farming Methods

In a press release issued on the 24th, the USDA's Farm Service Agency (FSA) announced they will be providing more flexibility when it comes to reporting acreage on smaller scales while more accurately identifying alternative planting practices. Crucial for applying for and maintaining benefits within many USDA programs, "our small-scale agricultural producers, including urban and innovative producers, will notice a simpler acreage reporting process that better reflects the scope of their unique operations," noted Zach Ducheneaux, FSA Administrator.

The largest changes to the reporting system include:

- Producers will be able to report acreage-based crops at a minimum size of 0.000001 acre, or approximately 2.5 in.2, rather than the previously allowed 0.0001 acres, or approximately 4 ft2.
- Producer can distinguish between alternative growing methods, including crops grown on multi-layer or multi-level production methods, such as those used in vertical farming.



The full details can be found on the FSA [press release](#), and the agency encourages producers to contact the FSA at their local USDA Service Center for county specific acreage reporting.

UC Davis Online CEA Courses Start Soon!

For anyone looking to learn new CEA skills or brush up on old ones, UC Davis has two online courses starting in January 2025 that might be for you! As part of their Continuing and Professional Education program and in partnership with University of California Agriculture and Natural Resources (UC ANR), the courses provide students with "comprehensive training in the technical and business aspects of vertical farming, urban agriculture and indoor farming" and can be taken individually or as part of the larger Controlled Environment Agriculture Professional Concentration. Courses include:

- **Introduction to Controlled Environment Agriculture:** This course will provide fundamental knowledge of indoor farming under controlled environment conditions and build a foundation for those entering, advancing or investing in the Controlled Environment Agriculture (CEA) industry. At the end of the course, attendees will understand the history of CEA, the range of employment opportunities, common business models, the major processes of indoor farming, current technologies, and the challenges and drivers of success and profitability of indoor farming.
- **Plant Production and Indoor Farming Operations:** Designed for those in facility management, plant science or system operations roles where an understanding of plant production and environmental control systems in CEA is required, this course will build the foundation needed for the planning and implementation of indoor farming operations. Topics include plant physiology, plant nutrition, pest and disease management, nutrient management and environmental control systems.

Each course will run from January 13 to March 30, 2025, at a cost of \$2,000 per student. More information about the courses being offered, including how to register, can be found [here](#).

A Whirlwind at Global Produce & Floral Show by Jen Polanz

JP here—Holy moly, is Global Produce & Floral Show a BIG event. And it's getting bigger—according to show runners, this year's event in Atlanta was one of the largest expo floors in a decade, with more than 1,100 exhibitors from 32 countries. About 130 of those exhibited for the first time. And, one of our CEA growers received an award for it: Little Leaf Farms received best First-Time Exhibitor!

What did we see at the show? Well, what didn't we see. But some of the continued trends included sustainable packaging, automation to reduce labor stressors and AI-driven technology. On the product introduction side, growers continued to expand salad kit offerings, as well as their tomato and pepper offerings. There's a seedless mini pepper battle brewing as growers begin figuring out how to grow them effectively at a mass scale for zero seeds inside (it involves growing only seedless peppers in that greenhouse to prevent cross-pollination, which otherwise produces seeds). It does seem like this could be a nice niche product category for CEA to capitalize on, if the response from retailers and consumers is there.

In talking with lots of people on the exhibit floor, it was clear, too, Tomato Brown Rugose Fruit Virus (ToBRFV) continues to be an issue on the tomato side, and fusarium an issue on the pepper side. For rugose, it's about prevention versus treatment, and I had included some information from an industry supplier about prevention a while back. You can find it [HERE](#).

On the pepper side, I asked Bill Calkins, who works with Ball's Tech Team, about some basic resources for Fusarium on peppers. He gave me links to [University of Florida Extension](#) information, as well as [University of Minnesota Extension](#).

We'll continue to cover these, too—if you are a researcher or breeder working on these two issues, please reach out to me at jpolanz@ballpublishing.com.

On to the New Products by Jen Polanz

So, what did we actually see at the show? Lots of new offerings from CEA growers. Unfortunately, we didn't get to all the CEA grower booths, but we did hit quite a few. Here's just one look at a new intro, with more to come in upcoming issues of *Inside Grower*.

The indoor vertical farm leafy greens grower **Bowery** introduced four new spinach-focused products at the show. Spinach, of course, is the holy grail of leafy greens as it is very difficult to grow in hydroponic production. Bowery has seemingly cracked the code with a proprietary technology just for the spinach production. There are three blends, a Super Blend (a third each Spinach, Kale and Bok Choy), 50/50 Blend (half spinach and half spring mix) and Spinach & Butter blend, as well as Baby Spinach only. All are available in 4 oz., while the Baby Spinach and 50/50 Blend are available in 8 oz., too.



Stay tuned for more!

Stay curious, ask questions and let me know how it goes at scampbell@ballpublishing.com.



Dr. Sean Campbell

Editor-at-Large

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