GoodLeaf Profitability, UA CEAC Gala & Strawberries

Greenhouse vegetable news from GrowerTalks magazine

GROWERTALKS MAGAZINE greenPROFIT MAGAZINE

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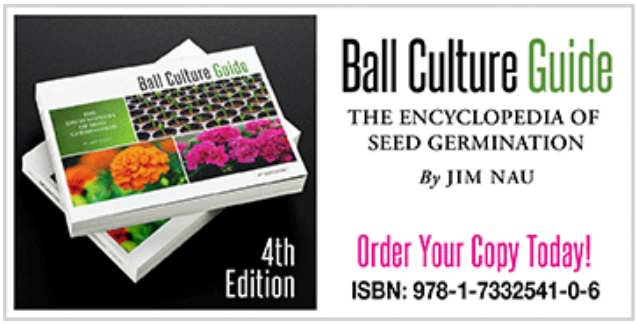
Controlled Environment Agriculture

COMING UP THIS WEEK:

Seed Your Future
U of A Gala
GoodLeaf Profits
Agritechture Designer Free
Field Strawberry Piece
Utah State Aquaponics
Grower Panel



Seed Your Future

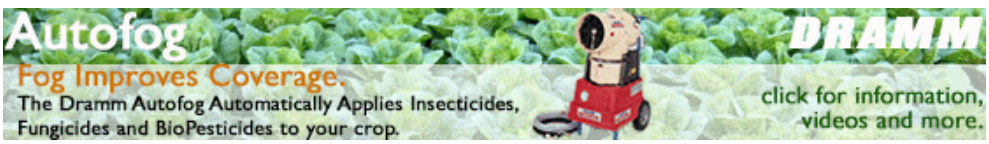
I had a great work double feature last week: I had the honor of meeting Jazmin Albarran, Executive Director of Seed Your Future, during a work meeting, only to see a press release about the organization two days later.

Seed Your Future is an organization creating pathways for students to learn about careers in horticulture. My first experience in greenhouses was at 19 and Seed Your Future aims to make sure students learn about opportunities in horticulture much sooner. Recently, their LinkedIn page has been publishing short videos highlighting the wide range of careers in horticulture, from growers, garden center staff and scientists to folks in sales and marketing. Seed Your Future does a lot more as well, including field trips to education.

In a recent press release, Seed Your Future outlined what they learned from a three-day meeting in early September. The meeting brought together high school Career and Technical Education (CTE) teachers, universities, and industry professionals to learn more about how education can support pathways to employment.

The big takeaway from the meeting centered on support for CTE programs, which are often where a student's career in horticulture begins.

I'm excited to have already begun supporting that cause. Please check out their website and consider contributing to their organization, as well.



U of Arizona CEA Gala

The University of Arizona is celebrating 25 years of its Controlled Environment Agriculture Center. The CEAC has been a cornerstone of North American horticulture and many of the people I know in the industry can trace a lineage back to U of A.

The Anniversary Celebration will take place in two parts: a mini-symposium with a tour and a Gala Dinner with a Silent Auction, both on Friday, October 23. The mini-symposium will run from 9:00 a.m. to 2:00 p.m., with the gala following that evening from 6:00 to 8:30 p.m.

If you're interested in attending, find out more and register here.

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GoodLeaf Profits

Canadian vertical farm GoodLeaf recently reported operational profitability across all three of its farms, reporting a big step up in revenue from $6.4M to $34M between 2023 and 2025, claiming an additional 31% growth this year.

This news comes only a short while after 80-Acres folded and it highlights an important nuance in profitability claims. GoodLeaf is claiming profitability in much the same way as 80-Acres did, stating that each of its three farms across Canada has achieved operational profitability.

However, it's important to note that finances aren't as simple as, "Did we make more than we spent this year?" Operational profits are different from company-wide income, EBITDA or audited results, something that took me a while to fully wrap my head around (thanks, Dr. T!). The long and short of it is that operational profits don't account for principal on loans, returns to investors or expenses outside the farms themselves, like corporate offices. While operational profitability is certainly the first step to a successful business, it isn't the only step.

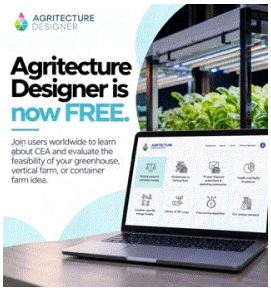
Read more about it here.

Agritechture Designer Now Free

Agritecture, a well-known organization in vertical farming, has released its Agritecture Designer web-based software for free.

This design tool is an amazing way to compare farming models, including both greenhouses and fully indoor vertical farms. It includes a learning center, crop pricing and economic models, farm-building tools, and a link to Agritecture's newsfeed.

Accessing the tool is quick and easy. Check it out here.



Field Strawberry Farmer Advocacy Piece

More Perfect Union, an independent nonprofit newsroom, recently published a video on Driscoll's and the mainstream produce industry that casts it in a dark light. This advocacy piece focuses on the claim that Driscoll's, while growing no berries itself, is squeezing farmers for profit along with other members of the supply chain like Walmart, all while overlooking unsafe conditions, including, but not limited to, unsafe pesticide practices.

It's certainly worth a watch and there are a few takeaways I think are worth considering through a CEA lens.

The reporter visits Hugh Kent, a specialty blueberry farmer, but much to his dismay, he visits during the off season, meaning no blueberries (an important note about the video in general). Still, when he asks how to get some blueberries, he learns that this farmer doesn't sell to retail stores so that he can get a better price for his crop. During my time in New York, I got to occasionally harvest from a research blueberry grove, and it ruined store-bought blueberries for me, so I fully understand how the right buyer appreciates quality. Selling to retail stores would not only be less profitable for him, it would pay less than he needs to make a living as a farmer.

There's a brief parenthetical that something similar is going on with lettuce, which is something to think about as we continue to discuss vertical farming. The point is that profitability is tough when other parts of the industry are being squeezed on price. Grocery store distribution channels may be broken when it comes to giving new lettuce companies a fair chance.

Even so, this presents a clear opportunity. I don't talk about Oishii much, but now is perhaps the time. They're featured in the video, though somewhat neutrally and not as a true alternative, since the point of the piece was to fix things for field farmers. What's clear to everyone is that a good strawberry is really good and everyone is familiar with the occasional flavorless, hard, crunchy one.

Oishii continues to grow strawberries indoors without making much news, aside from recently opening a pop-up strawberry shop at Chelsea Market in New York City. And much of the news they do get is reporters balking at their prices, which I'm sure they promptly pay once they finish reporting. When we all joked that you'd have to sell your produce for $100 a pop to make vertical farming profitable, perhaps Oishii just said, "Okay, let's do that." And with strawberries, that model is possible.

As an aside, here's a brief personal story I like to tell. My undergrad was in Marine Science and I was fortunate enough to tour the Scripps Institution of Oceanography's fish collection. It's essentially a large warehouse full of pickled fish, but with all sorts of fish you wouldn't believe. They even got the coelacanth out for us.

Anyway, we got to talking with the collection manager, and he explained that they rarely add to the collection anymore because the warehouse is basically full and the science has shifted to DNA sequencing. So his job was to digitally catalog each fish and take a nickel-sized sample for DNA, and then the rest of the fish was discarded. He went on to say that he often just filleted and ate the fish so

they didn't go to waste. Out of the hundreds, maybe thousands, of different species he'd tried, he didn't hesitate to say the best tasting by far was salmon.

All that to say, strawberries are CEA's salmon. I can make a similar, if more modest, claim from my time helping prepare the exotic fruit samples for Field Day in Davis. Strawberries are the best.

Watch the video here.

Utah State Starts Aquaponic Research

Utah State University has officially started up a research aquaponic system. Under the direction of Dr. Noah Langenfeld, this system will serve as an important research tool for his program.

Dr. Langenfeld's work includes pioneering a new paradigm in hydroponic fertilizer application alongside eminent Professor Bruce Bugbee. This new fertilizer method based on mass-balance has the potential to dramatically lower fertilizer requirements while maintaining yields.

Aquaponic systems can be a hassle to work on at universities and, believe me, I have one. They're complicated to navigate. Universities require permits for the fish, even if they're just meant to provide fertilizer and otherwise live long, healthy lives. In addition, aquaponic systems can't be turned on and off as needed. Long-term stability and year-round care are vital for healthy systems.

It's exciting to see someone on the leading edge of fertilizer research start up a system that's in need of better scientific understanding.

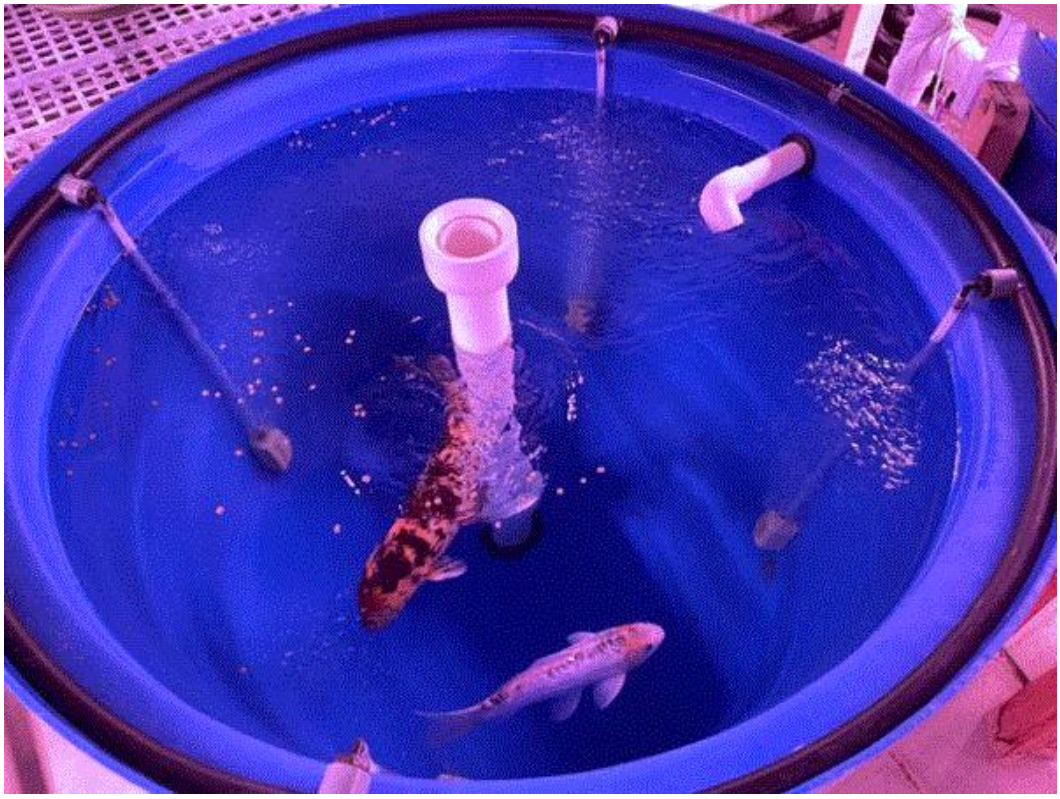


Photo credit: Dr. Noah Langenfeld via LinkedIn.

Grower Panel: Growing Plants for Retail Success

From Editor-in-Chief Chris Beytes:

Join moderator Jack Bobo from Berger for a wide-ranging discussion with Andrew Butler of Green Valley Greenhouses in Ramsey, Minnesota, and Mike Busch of Meyers Farms in Niagara-on-the-Lake, Ontario. The conversation will explore how today's substrate choices—including mixes incorporating wood fiber—can strengthen root development, improve moisture management and enhance overall plant resilience.

They'll share practical insights drawn directly from their own production systems, highlighting what works, what doesn't and how these materials behave from propagation all the way through retail. You'll come away with real-world strategies for growing plants that hold their quality long after they leave the greenhouse.

Date: TOMORROW Wednesday, September 30, 2026

Time: 1:00 p.m. Eastern/12:00 p.m. Central

Dr. Jake Holley
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