insideGROWER

FROM YOUR EDITOR

10/30/2026

I Still Ate Lettuce

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To say it was a rough summer for produce is an understatement. At the peak of the cyclosporiasis outbreak, packaged lettuce sales dropped 14% compared to previous year's sales, according to Nelson IQ data. It wasn't just lettuce, although that category bore the brunt of it due to the CDC linking part of the outbreak to processed iceberg lettuce from Taylor Farms de Mexico.

I can honestly say, though, I continued to eat lettuce (and other greenhouse-grown fresh produce) throughout the summer and felt confident doing it because I know how indoor production works and I've been in many of your greenhouses. And I advocated for others to do so, as well, from well-known greenhouse-grown brands like Little Leaf Farms, BrightFarms, Gotham Greens and local growers like Great Lakes Growers and Fresh 'n Crisp, among many others. It's a testament to the dedication of growers and the method of growing that reduces the chances of pathogens and makes consumers (including me) more confident in the end product. The challenge is continuing to get the word out about it so everyone looks to greenhouse produce as a safe option for their families.

This issue's cover story, ironically, came out of another health crisis, the COVID pandemic, and it's a story I didn't know about until seeing a panel at Indoor Ag-Con in February. There are lots of entry points for getting into growing produce indoors, and for the Cornett family, it started when the demand for locally grown food crops skyrocketed during the pandemic. At that point a 500-acre farm in Kentucky, they added Cornett Farm Fresh, a market, and then added greenhouse production to keep produce in stock during shoulder seasons and even winter. It also shows how a farm can add greenhouse production without breaking the bank. Read about their journey from field to adding greenhouses.

Kyle Barnett has been watching the CEA space for years, and has been interviewing industry members since 2019 on his "CropTalk" podcast. He offered up his take on recent industry closures, as well as how some greenhouse growers were able to respond to the aforementioned food safety outbreak. You can read his thoughts here.

And while greenhouse production reduces the chance of outbreaks like the ones we witnessed this summer, it's not foolproof. Food safety expert Kellie Worrell is back in this issue with more information on monitoring your operation for pathogens and how to create protocols for testing.

And, finally, while we continue to perfect our growing systems here on Earth, Dr. Gene Giacomelli zooms us

out to the big picture of learning the lessons of Biosphere 2 in order to further space exploration and survival of distant space travel. If you haven't heard the story of Biosphere 2 and the other research programs designed to help us progress into deep space (and how they can help us here on Earth), click here.

I leave you with a goal for 2027: Let's all find new ways to communicate the benefits of indoor-grown produce, whether it's highlighting safe options at the grocery store, greater local availability at farmers markets in multiple seasons or just all-around great-tasting fresh food that lasts longer. **IG**