



Virginia State University

The Harding Street Urban Agriculture Center

The Harding Street Urban Agriculture Center, a Virginia Cooperative Extension Project at Virginia State University, is an indoor farm in the middle of a food desert in the city of Petersburg. The center is an example of how urban agriculture can be used to redevelop inner city communities through agriculture enterprise. The center serves as a year-round vegetable production facility, a retail storefront, and a research center.

The center uses an innovative approach to growing referred to as controlled-environment agriculture (CEA). It has developed (patent pending) portable growth chambers that allow for 100 percent off-grid climate-controlled environments. The entire production room uses solar panels for off-grid operation. The center also captures rainwater and condensation from the HVAC units. The center conducts research experiments with lighting,

grow methods, and nutrient combinations to develop high-efficient, year-round hydroponic and aquaponic production methods that are useful for both commercial applications and everyday citizens. In addition to the indoor farm, they also developed a micro-farm, urban orchard, urban vineyard, and composting site on vacant lots near the center, which are maintained by local citizens.

The major strength of the center is the collaboration with the city of Petersburg, its Department of Social Services, and its Health Department as well as several grassroots organizations to provide outreach regarding nutrition, entrepreneurship, economic development, and agricultural literacy. Soon the center will launch a mobile market unit that will conduct “pop-up markets” throughout the community. It will also open a kitchen for value-added food processing, culinary arts, and nutrition education.

The Harding Street Urban Agriculture Project is funded by a grant from the USDA National Institute for Food and Agriculture.

Learn more: <https://www.ext.vsu.edu/harding-st-project/>



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Former Harding Street Urban Agriculture Center director, Duran Chavis, checks the status of the greens in one of the center's growth chambers.