

MSU Production of Herbs in Bailey Greenhouse for Food Service Transcript

Marta Mittermaier: We, with a collaboration of Laurie Thorp and others at the Student Organic Farm. We saw the continuing need having used product off of the farm. Could we even bring it more local and have on-site production right here with access to the Brody Dining Room, which is one of our largest food centers.

Laurie Thorp: This started about five years ago. John Biernbaum and I were observing the incoming freshman had a strong desire to go to the Student Organic Farm. So we went to Vennie Gore, the Vice President for Residential and Hospitality Services, and shared our vision, said, what if we had something like the farm, but it was right on campus? So we were very fortunate. Vennie is visionary and came from the west coast and said, yep, that's not a crazy idea, let's talk about it. So we entered into an agreement, a partnership with RHS, Residential Hospitality Services, a student organic farm in the RISE Program, and we signed a memo of understanding and agreement that we would co-own and co-operate and manage this beautiful Hoophouse as part of the RISE Program.

Dr. John Biernbaum: So my role in getting Bailey started was working with the whole team and the process, which started, you know, quite a few years ago. And giving the information that it is possible to do this on a small footprint and about the Hoophouse and in this location, and then it came down to the interior of the structure, you know, how were we going to grow? I was very interested in trying to make sure that it could be certified organic from the start. So other than the Hoophouse, figuring out the soil part and then the ongoing soil management has been key. And then the other was really the herb selection. So listening to what they had been buying, using my experience growing herbs, which I started working on herbs and herbal flowers, that's how I got started into organic back in the mid-90s. So this was finally a chance to use all that information. So it was putting that together, coming up with a planting plan, and then adjusting it as needed.

Charles Defever: I think the biggest thing is that the institution is so large and it's such an efficient system already in place, that it's difficult to sort of bring small amounts of our herbs into the dining hall each week. It's very easy for purchases to go from normal system and go through our computerized automated system, get an easy delivery. But I've been really happy that they're there to work with us. And usually the purchases, they'll check, you know, the list that the chef needs, and then they'll just see my e-mail. And then if we have it, they order it from us. So it's worked pretty well. We've just had to really build a lot of personal relationships with the chefs and the purchases that they know who I am and know what we have to offer.



David Brown: The quality of it is superb. And I can tell them cut it differently, deliver it differently, package it differently, a lot more control when it comes to that aspect of it. I know one, it's educational, with Michigan State University. Two, we kind of complete the cycle. We compost the food, which goes into the greenhouse, which in turn we get herbs and lettuces from there, proving it can be done, it's fresh and it's some of the best herbs that I've gotten, you know, compared to the commercial setting.

Mittermaier: While our culinary team has quite a passion to begin with, but the opportunity to bring it to them affordably, as well as the local element and the organic piece, has been really a strong sell point for them. And it's not only just here at the Brody Residential Dining, but it's also for Kellogg Center and Catering. And we've found that we've had an adequate enough supply to, you know, sustain us for the school year.

Thorp: What we really want to show is how much food can you produce in a small urban footprint? Because this is a simulated urban environment.