



Rural Business-Cooperative Service • Rural Business Development Grant

Agricultural Innovation Encouraged by USDA Grant

Strong Vertical Gardens (SVG) began in January of 2012 when Debbie and Grant Strong decided to make their personal interest of growing microgreens in their Park City, Utah home into a business which caters to the cutting edge of culinary creativity. “The demand for microgreens in the chef market is very high in our area due to the high end clientele,” said Debbie. “A lot of the chefs had been flying these into Utah for years and it’s very costly.” As the Strongs made connections with local chefs and grocery stores, they realized to meet the demand for their product (tiny greens with big flavor and bigger nutritional value) they had to find more space.

Acquiring larger space meant the Strongs had to move out of Park City. They identified the rural town of Charleston as an ideal location to build a specialty building for their vertical grow towers but required a loan. To secure the loan, the Strongs needed a business plan and feasibility study to help identify the business’ potential for growth. USDA Rural Development partnered with the Utah Small Business Loan Fund to offer a grant for SVG to develop these reports, which enabled the business to secure the building loan. “The process was very eye-opening,” said Debbie of completing the feasibility study. “It helped me to learn business a lot more.” The person who conducted the study informed her that SVG turns over more crops in one year than an average farmer does in a lifetime, an encouraging fact that shows just how unique the product is. “This is sustainable agriculture,” said Grant. “We can grow on this footprint what they can grow on several acres. It makes sense for the future.”

The Strongs have been able to offer local job opportunities and once they build out completely, they anticipate employing up to ten people. So far, the public response to SVG’s products has been positive and their rural community has been the right place to encourage the innovation that drives SVG. “You know, everything that we’ve tried to do the path has been open for us,” said Debbie. “In every direction I went the door was open because it’s a new product.”



Debbie and Grant Strong at Strong Vertical Gardens operations in Charleston, Utah.

Obligation Amount: \$22,000 grant

Date of Obligation: July 2016

Congressional District: Representative Stewart, 2; Senators Hatch and Lee

Partners: Utah Small Business Loan Fund

Demographics: Charleston, Utah, population: 451

Impact: Rural job creation, rural business growth, agricultural innovation