

Ohio

Business and Cooperative Services | Rural Energy for America Program

Energy Grant Helps Keep Dinner Plates Fresh and Full Year-Round



Zach Jones of The Chef's Table, Inc., in Huron, Ohio, stands near the biomass fueled boilers that heat the farm's 400-acre greenhouse. The boilers were purchased with help from a USDA Rural Energy for America Program (REAP) grant. USDA Photo.

agricultural producer's budget. So, in 2017 The Chef's Garden worked with USDA's Ohio Rural Development team to apply for a [Rural Energy for America Program \(REAP\)](#) grant.

"With the grant, we've been able to take much bigger greenhouse space into production year-round," said Zach. "We still get an amazing quality product inside, so it's changed how we do business in the wintertime."

This funding made it possible for them to purchase and install two biomass fueled hot water boilers in the greenhouse. Using byproduct corn cobs from two neighboring seed corn operations for fuel, boilers heat water and push it through a system of pipes to create a temperature suitable for growing crops.

The Chef's Garden, Inc., is a year-round 400-acre production farm in Huron, Ohio, that grows more than 800 varieties of fruits, vegetables, and microgreens for dinner plates in homes and restaurants across the United States.

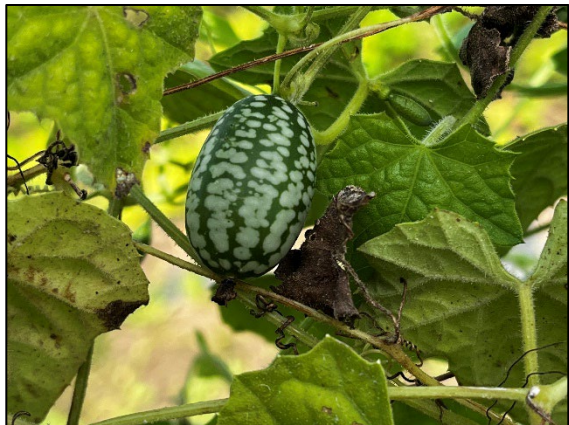
But keeping those plates filled year-round meant The Chef's Garden had to extend its growing season through the cold northern Ohio winters.

"Being able to grow produce here in the winter is huge," said Zach Jones, field production manager for The Chef's Garden.

Luckily the farm has two indoor greenhouses at its disposal. But the cost of heating these structures sufficiently can put a strain on a small



A new crop of tomatoes growing inside The Chef's Garden's four-acre greenhouse in Huron, Ohio. USDA Photo.



A vine-ripe cucamelon, just one of more than 800 varieties of fruits, vegetables, and microgreens grown at The Chef's Garden in Huron, Ohio. USDA Photo.

“During the past year or so, we’ve installed a line to take recycled cardboard from all over Erie County, grind it, mix it with straw from our cover crop, and compress the mixture into a log that’s burned to fuel the boilers,” said Zach. “It’s definitely a more labor-intensive process, but we’ve been able to heat our two largest greenhouses without burning fossil fuels for the last several years.”

According to Zach, this has kept the farm from installing large natural gas lines to fuel the boilers, so between the install and gas savings this whole process, “Has likely saved several hundred thousand dollars over the lives of the boilers.”

“We think it is important to be advocates for good agricultural practices, offering huge diversity,” said Zach. “Being able to increase our diversity we’re able to offer restaurants and home consumers more, and we’re able to grow those fresh items even through the wintertime when we’re not able to grow anything else outside.”

With 100 acres of the farm in production at any one time, the Chef’s Table has 180 full-time and 22 seasonal employees who harvest, pack, and ship everything by hand – no machines are used. This ensures all its fruits and vegetables go from “field to plate” in less than 24 hours so customers can enjoy the freshest possible produce items.

Seasonal fresh products from The Chef’s Garden are available for order [online](#) or at its nearby Farmer Jones Farm Market in Huron.

Obligation: \$204,043

Obligation Date: July 17, 2017

Congressional U.S. Rep. Marcy Kaptur (OH-09); U.S. Senators Sherrod Brown and J.D. Vance

Impact: Increases capacity to extend growing season year-round.