

Native community in Alaska grows plants indoors with help from company

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TOP: Will Anderson, president of Native Kikiktagruk Inupiat Corp., poses in his new indoor hydroponics farm in Kotzebue, Alaska. The goal of the venture is to grow kale, lettuces and other greens year-round. SECOND: Employee Joe Carr stands outside a new indoor hydroponics farm owned by a local Alaska Native corporation. Arctic Greens sells the soil-free produce at the local supermarket. Will Anderson via AP

ANCHORAGE, Alaska — Northwest Alaska is freezing cold. It's hard to farm up here. Even in the summer, it's too cold for plants to grow.

People there have to hunt and gather their food. They are not used to farming. Many are part of native tribes.

Indoor Lettuce

Now, the native peoples are trying something different. A local company is trying to grow plants indoors.

The company is farming kale, lettuces, basil and other greens weekly. Their growing system doesn't need soil. It uses technology. Bright lights and plant food help grow the plants.

The company is the first of its kind in the area.

A Long Time To Reach Alaska

Here, fruits and vegetables cost a lot of money. The towns are far from farms. Trucks with fruits and vegetables travel for a long time to reach Alaska. After this time, much of the food has gone bad.

Indoor farming helps this problem. Farmers can grow plants inside all year.

The plants don't need soil. The plants are placed in a special spongy material. They just need indoor lights and plant food to grow.

High Costs

But these indoor farms can have problems. They can cost a lot of money. They are large, and must be shipped to Alaska by plane. It also costs a lot of money to ship them and give them power.

It's also hard to move the produce. It needs to go from a warm indoor farm to a cold refrigerator.

Farming is a new idea for many people in Alaska towns. They are still learning how it works.

Popular Freshness

Fruits and veggies grown indoors are getting popular. They usually look and taste the same as those grown outdoors. They're safe to eat.

Lisa Adan often buys produce that is grown indoors. She likes it better than other fruits and veggies she has eaten before.

"It's so much better," she said. "It tastes like it just came out of your garden."

For now, indoor farming is an experiment. It must be tested first.

Some Issues To Work On

In northwest Alaska, many people have trouble getting food. There are not many jobs. Fresh food costs a lot of money, and it is hard to grow.

Food farmed indoors is fresh. It costs about the same as fruits and vegetables from other places.

Indoor farmers are trying to fix problems with the systems. They want to find ways to lower costs of energy.