

# New tech offers an edge

Innovations help growers boost yields, improve shelf life and cut input costs.

By Andy Nelson  
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Grower-shippers and importers of greenhouse-grown vegetables continue to reap the benefits of technological innovations.

Leamington, Ontario-based Nature Fresh Farms is owned by a company that also manufactures greenhouses, which gives it a leg up when it comes to taking advantage of the latest technologies, said Jay Colasanti, who handles sales and market development for the company.

"We're always on the cutting edge of technologies when it comes to automation, less handling, more efficiencies," he said.

## Combatting winter dry air

One recent innovation at Nature Fresh has been the installation of a "heat curtain," a transparent plastic curtain that raises humidity levels in greenhouses, Colasanti said.

"It helps maintain a little better climate in the very cold months," he said. "Typically, when it's cold, it gets too dry."

New greenhouse technologies are allowing growers to increase yields and extend shelf-life of vegetables, said Aaron Quon, greenhouse category director for Vancouver, British Columbia-based The Oppenheimer Group.

## Input cost efficiency

Cutting back on their input

costs is another incentive, he said.

The company's California growing partner powers its greenhouses in part with solar energy and recycles its water, Quon said.

While Oppenheimer's growers haven't experimented yet with co-generation or finding other methods to share energy with other facilities, there are "a lot of discussions" about it, Quon said.

"There are opportunities, and I see it happening in the future for sure," he said.

BC Hot House, Langley, British Columbia, is in constant contact with its box manufacturers on ways to increase compostable and recycling packaging, said Kevin Batt, sales director.

Its growers use the highest-quality boilers to minimize energy use and capture and recycle their water for repeating uses in their greenhouses.

"It's always top of mind," Batt said. "The new greenhouses are built to the highest technology available."

## Closed-system safety

The patented Gates greenhouse technology Eatontown, N.J.-based Village Farms uses to grow tomatoes helps make sure product is grown in the safest environment possible, said Helen Aquino, marketing manager.

"It's a completely closed growing system," she said. "Nothing can get in, it has remotely-controlled climate control and with it's possible to grow tomatoes almost anywhere."

The company will likely sell the technology to companies in industries in which it doesn't compete "in the not too distant future," said Doug Kling, chief sales and marketing officer.

## Smart tags, RFID

Increased use of smart tags, RFID and temperature tags, and a greater reliance on managing inventory with wireless automated inventory management are among the latest technologies that Ruthven, Ontario-based Clifford Produce is tapping into, said Anthony Totta, marketing director.

"Greenhouse growing is highly technical by nature and leads the industry in applying technology," he said.