

THE GRASS IS ALWAYS GREENA



The quest for a solution led them to a self-contained growing container in Ottawa. Intrigued by its potential, Fred visited the site, brainstorming ways to enhance the design to suit their unique needs. A primary concern was eliminating the risk of bug contamination, a crucial factor for their kosher produce. Fred brainstormed with Rabbi Matis Stebben after the visit. The real breakthrough came with the custom design of their container. Funded by a federal grant and generous donations, the team created a custom sliding door and a dual-door system with reverse pressure to prevent air contamination. This ingenious design ensured that the exterior door remains shut when the inner door is open, maintaining a hermetically sealed environment. Additionally, strict protocols, including mandatory PPE like lab coats, hairnets, and gloves, were implemented, drawing from their early adaptation of similar measures during the SARS outbreak in 2003.

In a world where adaptability is key to survival, Reena, an organization known for its dedication to individuals with diverse abilities, has branched out into an unexpected domain - indoor farming. Founded in 1973, Reena has always been a pillar in its community, and their latest venture, GReena, is no exception.

The story of GReena, and the Reena Community Farm initiative, began with a simple outdoor farm, an initiative born during the COVID-19 pandemic. This fun project, initially supported by Meals on Wheels, hit an unexpected roadblock when concerns about organic leafy greens' susceptibility to infestation were raised. Rather than seeing this as a setback, the Reena Community Farm team, led by the visionary Fred Winegust, saw an opportunity for growth and improvement.



By March 2023, the specially designed container was operational in Thornhill, Ontario. The first crops, planted post-Pesach, were ready by June, signaling the start of a new era. The Reena Community Farm began supplying top-tier produce to entities like Pure Greens, and COR certified restaurants. Their process, from growing to packaging, is meticulously overseen by a dedicated team, ensuring every batch is "bug-free." The harvested produce is washed, inspected, and sealed in a packaging facility located just ten meters from the cultivation site. This facility is managed by a team of committed Reena and Pure Greens employees, along with Rabbi Avigdor Lowin, a COR mashgiach recognized for his expertise in produce inspection. The team's mantra, "We guarantee the chain of custody," underscores their commitment. In instances of potential quality compromise, they proactively undertake secondary checks before the produce reaches the consumer. After nearly a year in operation, the Reena Community Farm produce has been sample-tested to ensure it is "bug-free," a testament to the success of their innovative design and implementation strategies. This venture symbolizes more than an agricultural breakthrough; it represents a steadfast commitment to maintaining the highest standards of quality.

Beyond the technological feats, the heart of GReena's mission lies in its social impact. The Reena Employment Zone is a testament to this, offering employment opportunities to individuals who otherwise might not find work in the community. Furthermore, consumers of GReena's produce, available at outlets like Ba-Li Laffa and La Briut, are not just purchasing quality greens but are also supporting a noble cause.

Staying true to its roots, every Reena group home strives to maintain a kosher kitchen, and Reena aligns with these values by not operating on yomim tovim or Shabbos whenever safe and possible. This commitment to tradition and ethical practices flows through every aspect of their operation.

The vision of the Reena Community Farm would not have been realized without the Federal grant and the generous support from organizations like the Robbins and Azrieli foundations. Their contributions have been instrumental in both the innovation and community support aspects of GReena.

GReena's journey from an outdoor farm to a state-of-the-art indoor growing facility is more than a story of agricultural success; it's a narrative of community, innovation, and resilience. As they continue to serve the community and uphold their core values, Reena stands as a shining example of what can be achieved when compassion meets innovation.



You can watch a 30 minute documentary chronicling the journey of the Reena Community Farm on YouTube - "Growing for our Community: A Reena Community Farm Documentary"