

Home-Grown Greenhouses Help Communities Grow

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Northwest Ohio is fertile land. And, whether you are a gardener or not, you know it.

In fact, Northwest Ohio is in the top 5 percent of America's greenhouse-producing regions. There are about 80 greenhouses in Northwest Ohio.

Many greenhouse owners in Northwest Ohio are second- and third-generation owners. All are small business owners who have a stake in their communities. According to a University of Toledo survey of Ohio greenhouses, nearly 70 percent of the respondents are operated either as a family business or sole proprietorship.

That survey also found that 72 percent of the greenhouses have eight or more full-time and part-time employees.

Despite the abundance and variety of "home-grown" greenhouses in the area, surprisingly there's still a lot of outside competition for your gardening dollars. Each year, plants from Indiana, Michigan and Ontario, as well as other states, are shipped in and sold through large, national chain home and garden centers, and those "greenhouses" that pop up in grocery store and other retail parking lots.

They may have the buying power, but are you really getting your money's worth?

To help Northwest Ohio greenhouses compete and continue to grow, the Maumee Valley Growers association took root last summer. The Maumee Valley Growers is an economic cluster – a geographic concentration of businesses in a particular industry. The objective is to have cluster members work together, share best practices, and other resources to effectively compete against outside competitors and improve their products and services.

The Maumee Valley Growers is guided by an advisory board that includes representatives from eight greenhouses, U.S. Representative Marcy Kaptur's office, the Northwest Ohio Regional Growth Partnership, the extension offices in Lucas and Wood counties, and Bowling Green State University and the University of Toledo.

Business-wise and garden-wise, it just makes sense to support your local greenhouses. Why?

- You can talk with experts who best know the native plants and climate conditions to answer your questions.
- Because the plants and flowers are grown locally, you get fresh, mature, high-quality plants. This means your plants and flowers have a much better chance for survival vs. plants and flowers grown elsewhere and shipped in.
- You support local business owners who have a solid stake in the community's best interest.

So, the next time your green thumb is itching to get growing, get going to your local greenhouse.