



February 5, 2010

Sister Jeremias:

After visiting her facility in Sylvania, it is abundantly clear Sister Jeremias has done a wonderful job blending research with reality. As a pragmatist, she has demonstrated that a variety of food products can successfully be grown in our northern Ohio climate.

Combining basic geo and solar thermal with a small input of grid power, she is able to heat the soil of her modest greenhouse operation to a level conducive to producing yields sufficient enough for cultivation and distribution. So, the question remains...can this facility be duplicated at other Toledo area neighborhood garden locations and scalable economically for larger 1-2 acre greenhouse operations?

Not without challenges of course, we are fortunately blessed in NW Ohio with plenty of expertise that can assist in fine tuning this operation. Whether it is biological or economic, a closer look at this operation seems to warrant merit.

Opportunities to duplicate this effort within our community have promise. Locating a facility such as this in strategic neighborhood locations has enormous potential encouraging greater food awareness, pride and general goodwill as it promotes participants (and others) food knowledge and needs.

At another level, this effort should be examined for scalability and economic viability. Many of our existing growers in the area have the skill sets to grow produce under glass. But the question remains...is it economically feasible? This was common place 3+ decades ago. But utility costs, competition from warm weather states and Canadian subsidies all but eliminated this economic practicality. Maybe it's time to take another look? Has technology advanced to the point where facilities like this and those at a commercial scale are now economically feasible?

Both solar thermal, solar electric, geo thermal and wind are logical "off the grid" first choices. Combining the fact that hoop houses are inexpensive to build and renewable energy technology grants both at the state and federal levels are available tools to offset initial infrastructure investments should be applied for.

Both duplicating Sister Jeremias model and scaling it up to 1-2 acre greenhouse “under glass” deserves serious consideration. To no one’s surprise...it comes down to investment return and a lot of coordination. I am hopeful both barriers of entry can be overcome.

History has shown when economic times are challenging, many communities and individuals return back to basic needs such as food and safety. Certainly this is the case now. However, maybe we can learn from the past and develop this food “fad” to a sustainable “trend.”

Again, I’d like to thank Sr. Jeremias for her kind invitation showcasing her efforts. Perhaps “others” can continue this endeavor and take the project(s) to the next level.

Thanks,



Joe Perlaky

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