

# Kelowna school embraces new container farm

## Microgreens project promises many teaching moments

by MYRNA STARK LEADER

KELOWNA – The newest container farm in BC is at Kelowna's KLO Middle School. Since mid-November, a 40-foot shipping container just outside the school's front doors has produced lettuce, kale and bok choy. The next crop will include basil, thyme and oregano.

"Right now, we're only growing about one-sixth capacity but the farm could produce 525 lettuce plants every harvest," says Karla Lockwood, a Grade 9 math and science educator.

"This farm hits on the Grade 9 science curriculum of scientific method – starting with a question, developing a hypothesis, identifying variables, gathering data, analyzing it and reporting it. That's all the competencies," says Lockwood. "From a content standpoint, we teach nutrient cycles, the nitrogen, phosphorus and carbon cycles, which is exactly what a modular farm does. It's an automated version of nutrient cycling."

Raised in Kelowna, Lockwood watered plants at Lake Country Greenhouses in Winfield during high school and part of university. Her second teaching job was in Summerland, where the school also had a small outdoor greenhouse.

The container farm at KLO is much bigger since nearly every school subject across Grades 7-9 can be linked to the farm. Food classes, career education, math, physical education around healthy food choices, English and French classes where students can write about the project and even technical education, where students might design and build an entry area where students can prepare themselves to enter the farm.

KLO's farm is the second pilot project President's Choice Children's Charity has



KLO Middle School student farmers Riley Gayford, Arsh Rifan and Kaydence Aubin show off some of the produce grown in the school's new container farm. The farm was gifted to the school by President's Choice Children's Charity. PHOTO / KLO MIDDLE SCHOOL

funded. The first is at a school in La Loche, Saskatchewan. The charity helps combat child hunger by raising and distributing about \$16 million annually. Funds come from donations by Loblaws customers, employees and suppliers, as well as direct fundraising. The charity is the largest charitable funder of school meal programs across Canada.

"We're focused on tackling childhood hunger, food access and food-based education, but also innovation, which led us to offering container farms as a way to grow food year-round in the north, our first pilot project site," explains the charity's executive director Lisa Battistelli.

KLO's principal Ashley Ragoonaden learned of the La Loche project when his son and the son of Peter Boyd, owner of the Independent store in Kelowna, were playing soccer. Boyd mentioned La Loche to Ragoonaden, who sought more information through the charity and spearheaded KLO's grant application. He also won approval for the project from the local school district.

"I've seen schools with little gardens, but this was different," says Ragoonaden. "My teaching team are really working on our environmental stewardship and sustainability. The farm connected

See FARMING on next page >