

FARMING now part of curriculum ↳ from page 37

immediately to those ideas."

Battistelli says KLO was approved for several reasons: the potential to interest urban students in new farming methods and innovation, the possibility of using produce to feed kids and families, and KLO's intention to work with Kelowna Secondary School and Okanagan College, both across the street.

But KLO's commitment to develop a Grade 9 credit course rooted in the farm was the clincher.

"We recognize the limited capacity of all teachers to create new curriculum and/or lesson plans related to the farm and appreciate KLO's commitment to sharing the content they create," says Battistelli.

The charity fully funded the unit and equipment, transportation, set up and three years of 24-hour support, technical as well as servicing costs and supplies such as seed. The grant is worth approximately \$250,000 so far.

In addition, the school's parent advisory council committed \$50,000 towards site prep.

KLO chose the Canadian-made Growcer brand container system. The Ottawa-based company was founded three years ago by Corey Ellis and Alida Burke, who wanted a customizable plug-and-play hydroponic food-growing system northern communities could use to grow healthy food and help them become more self-

sufficient. The farm's hydroponic system doesn't require soil.

Lockwood says the students she's had working in the farm at this early stage are highly engaged. The farm has also piqued the curiosity of others.

"The farm is an amazing way to grow food really quickly and efficiently. Instead of taking up a lot of flat ground, we grow the plants in shelves so that there's more food growing at once," says Grade 8 student Arsh Rifan. "The automatic water chemical control is a very handy piece of equipment because we don't have to test the water every day. The hydroponic farm is the future of farm agriculture."

"It's a pretty amazing gift," says Tamara Knott of Bright Greens Canada when she learned about KLO's farm. "I hope the students will understand what they've been gifted."

Knott and her husband Bruce have been producing greens in converted shipping containers in Central Saanich since 2016. She and two farm helpers grow about 70-80 pounds of fresh produce each week in two containers, located on a property within the Agricultural Land Reserve. About 70% is marketed to direct to consumers and 30% to restaurants.

Knott sees KLO's farm as a great student learning opportunity. Her experience with Bright Greens has taught

her the need for strong scheduling and recording of farm data and procedures. She believes having a system to transfer knowledge between teachers and students working in the farm will be critical as things can be accidentally overlooked. A way to share knowledge between those working inside the farm is also important.

Lockwood and her colleagues are employing two apps to help coordinate farm operations. Growlink monitors the farm's system while Artemis AG helps schedule harvesting, cleaning and other chores.

"We can set up independent users and as farm tasks are done individuals can identify what they've completed, make notes and even post pictures as documentation," says Lockwood.

The farm has been a bright spot for the school in a year dominated by COVID-19. Future opportunities include using produce in cooking classes and the school lunch program as well as working with President's Choice Children's Charity to address challenges like creating enough fridge space for the harvested produce.

"We are working hard to create a culture of learning, not just one course ... it's about building an environment where, you know, everybody is involved, it becomes part of our fabric," says Ragoonaden.