



CASE STUDY

FarmedHere Using Illumitex Grow Lights to Feed Chicago



It was a chance attendance at a 2010 book-promotion talk by vertical farm advocate Dickson Despommier that led to the founding of one of the country's largest vertical farms, Chicago's FarmedHere. Business associates Steve Denenberg and Paul Hardej were reeling from the 2010 downturn in the real estate market, and were intrigued by what they heard from the author of "The Vertical Farm." "(Despommier) said we need to grow food where people live, in urban centers," says Denenberg, who's now president of FarmedHere.

Denenberg says the pair were struck by Despommier's assertion that global population growth means there won't be enough food to feed Earth's inhabitants by 2050. Wondering if they could make money at vertical farming, "We took him literally and started doing all sorts of research about how people were growing food indoors," he says. They concluded that they could indeed turn a profit, and FarmedHere was born.

They started growing basil, selling it in Ziploc bags. "We were in a food desert here in Chicago, here in the neighborhood of Englewood," says Denenberg. "One thing led to another and we wound up selling to Whole Foods. They were saying, 'We've been waiting for you guys.'"

After experimenting with a variety of lighting types, FarmedHere now uses Illumitex Eclipse LED grow lights to grow not only basil, but also a wide variety of leafy greens. A massive installation in



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Aesthetics Important

January 2015 brought the number of Eclipse fixtures at the farm to well over 1000. More Illumitex lights will be installed throughout 2015, according to Denenberg, as the farm phases out its remaining legacy lighting and converts completely to Illumitex LED grow lights.

The farm's tasty greens are produced in an aquaponics system, with Blue Nile tilapia providing the nutrients for the vertically stacked trays of plants. "We're growing food that's pesticide-free. We're growing food that's organic. We're not using any chemicals; it's all natural," says Denenberg. "At any one time, we can have over 75,000 plants of basil growing."

FarmedHere chose Illumitex LEDs not only for the superior technology Illumitex LED grow lights provide, but also because of the service we offer. "It came down to the people. Paul Gray is fantastic. The level of support and the science that we got from Paul was amazing," says Denenberg. "To have that level of knowledge at our fingertips, just a phone call away, is really important to us and was a differentiator for why we chose Illumitex."

The move to Illumitex LED grow lights was a smart one, says Denenberg. FarmedHere's energy usage is greatly reduced — they're seeing more than 30% savings, and "our yields are 25% more than before when we used the fluorescents," he adds.

The increased yields translate to higher profitability, says Denenberg. "The more yield we can get from a smaller amount of space, the better our margins are. So we're more profitable as a result of the Illumitex lights. It's all about improving our margins and our profitability, which is why we chose LEDs."

FarmedHere saw better quality in its produce, too, after switching to Illumitex LED grow lights. "The quality of our basil has improved over what we got under the fluorescent lights. The basil leaves are a little bit thicker; the nodes are closer together," says Denenberg. "And that gives us a more consistent product."

Vertical farm guru Despommier is honored to have inspired such a successful enterprise. "I am humbled by the fact that an idea that first arose in a classroom in 1999 has grown so rapidly into an industry that continues to 'spread its wings'," he says.



**Steve
Denenberg**

CASE STUDY JOB SPECIFICS

Customer: **FarmedHere**

Sector: **Horticulture**

Plant/crop: **Various leafy greens**

Location: **Chicago, Illinois**

Solution: **Illumitex Eclipse ES2 LED grow lights**

Results: **Increased production, shorter growth cycles**