

# Get the Greens: Gotham Greens is bringing locally grown greens to RI year-round

Your typical bag of leafy greens starts thousands of miles from PVD. It's grown outside in heavily irrigated row after row out in California, Arizona or Mexico. Then it's picked, sorted, washed and packed into a refrigerated truck where it will stay for about a week, losing freshness and nutritional value as it's jostled around over 18 bouncing wheels until it arrives, a little worse for wear, in our grocery stores, waiting to be bought while Vanessa Carlton plays over the speakers.

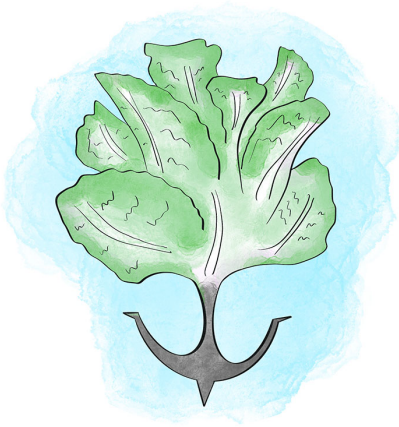


Illustration by Dan Shay

Up until now, this has made sense because it was the only viable option to produce greens on a large scale, year-round. For most of the year, it's simply too cold to grow many greens — many things really — in RI and the surrounding areas. But Gotham Greens hopes to change all that, not by heating up the entire state, but rather a small building within it.

While the masterminds of the sprawling white glass and steel of PVD's latest greenhouse, Gotham Greens, can't ensure that you eat your greens, they can make sure you get them faster, fresher and locally year-round.

The facility, on the corner of Harris Street and Atwells Avenue in Olneyville, is set to grow greens and herbs that can't weather the harsh New England winter. Using entirely renewable energy and a tenth of the water that traditional farming does, it's truly a marvel. It's also no wonder that much of the technology is not yet available for the public eye.

"Our greenhouse will utilize proprietary growing methods that include recirculating hydroponics and data-driven climate control intelligence," Gotham Greens CEO Viraj Puri told me via email. Yields will be as high as 30 times greater per acre than traditional farming methods, quite a boon when the plot of land, once home to General Electric's Base Works, had been abandoned for two decades and was not suited to traditional agriculture in any way.

"Urban revitalization is a cornerstone of our company's mission; from a development perspective it would have been easier to build a greenhouse in a rural area, but we were instead drawn to the prospect of revitalizing a blighted site that had been vacant for 20 years with a model for 21st century

manufacturing and food production,” Puri elaborated. The new facility will even have bikeways, allowing access to the Woonasquatucket greenway.

As for why little old Rhody was chosen, it certainly helps that PVD is nestled right in one of the most populous areas of New England, which will greatly cut down on distribution distance for the restaurants and grocers that Gotham Greens will supply. Having a thriving local food scene, which Gotham Greens will take part in with its in-house collection of sauces and dips, also doesn’t hurt. The veggies from Gotham will be fresher for locals without cutting into RI’s traditional crops such as apples, corn and a whole lot of hay.

PVD, once a city of industry producing jewelry, furniture, textbooks and other exciting products, now has much of its employment secured through service jobs. Brown University students and staff support an economy of their own, but we can’t all make lattes for each other. Gotham Greens’ new facility supports scores of full-time construction jobs as it goes up and will provide at least 50 permanent jobs upon completion. These will pay above a living wage, Puri assured me.

He has reason to be confident.

Greens has facilities up and running in New York and Chicago. They’re also developing more land in our neighbor to the south, Baltimore. They’ve been at it since 2011, and it doesn’t look like they’ll be stopping soon.

Opening the PVD facility is still a ways off, but the Rhode Island Commerce Corporation predicts an increase of state GDP of more than six million dollars in 2019 during construction, in addition to more than two million more dollars in personal income, sales and business taxes over 12 years. To this end, the project has been granted \$2.2 million in tax breaks, much of which is not applicable until workers have completed a year of employment. RI is not alone in providing tax incentives to Gotham Greens, and it’s safe to say that Puri has more experience in his field than, say, Curt Schilling did about video games.