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# Horticulture Discotech: LED Grow Lights Power Sustainable Farming

Laure Stark | Wed Oct 26 2011



## What if we could grow fruits and vegetables in half the time with no pesticides or hormones and use 90 percent less water to do it? What if we could grow those fruits and vegetables anywhere in the world, during any season?

A Netherlands-based company called [PlantLab](#) believes we can.

Apples from Chile, asparagus from Peru—an average of six to 12 percent of every dollar we spend on food goes to transportation costs.

Traditionally, most agriculture has been limited to large swaths of land with rich soil, controllable pests, and a predictable climate, but even under optimum conditions traditional methods of agriculture drain our [water supply](#), require intensive resources, and produce a crop dependent on an undependable climate. PlantLab believes it might be time to start thinking outside the farm.

### THE BIG IDEA

"In order to keep a planet that's worth living on, we have to change our methods," says PlantLab's Gertjan Meeuws in an interview with the *Associated Press*.

The methods PlantLab is suggesting are revolutionary. The company grows plants indoors, vertically stacking acres upon acres of plants. They use LED lamps to grow the plants and water them with a slow trickle that drains through the soil and is collected and reused. The neon pink light of the lamps make the space look more like a nightclub than an indoor farm.

Computers capture over 160,000 reports per second to determine the exact amount, cycle, and color spectrum of light that's optimal for the plant, as well as water, so that no resource is

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wasted and the plant is neither undernourished nor overexposed.

“ It would be wonderful if in 50 years’ time everyone in the world had decent food.

Plants convert light from the sun into energy through the process of photosynthesis, but plants only need some parts of the sun’s color spectrum. Blue and red LEDs can provide just the light a plant needs, making the process more efficient and growing a stronger, healthier plant.

#### A BRIGHT FUTURE

LEDs and climate-controlled indoor farms not only use less energy, less water, and less space than traditional agriculture; they also reduce the unpredictability of our food supply. Indoor farms aren’t at the mercy of droughts, torrential rains, unexpected frosts, and pests. They reduce the danger of food shortages and waste.

The vision for [urban agriculture](#) is simple—farms below grocery stores, farms above schools, city skyscrapers filled with fruits and vegetables instead of copy machines. The vision is fresh, local food grown and transported with minimal resources, no matter where in the world you live.

John van Gemert, a PlantLab engineer, says his dream for the company is to empower communities to produce their own food all over the world. “It would be wonderful if in 50 years’ time everyone in the world had decent food.”

*Photography by Gemma Durgio*



Laurie Stark is a writer based in Madison, WI. You can find her writing on [Your ill-fitting Overcoat](#) and in [Isthmus](#), Madison’s art...

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