

Fostering growth: in produce and pupils

[Previous Post](#) << >> [Next Post](#)

Pinellas PAL First Fruits Hydroponic Farm

Every strawberry, zucchini, and tomato that ripens to its fullest potential at First Fruit Hydroponic Farm helps the children of Pinellas PAL do the same.

A 501(c)3 nonprofit “u-pick” farm tucked inconspicuously behind Kellogs Kennel in St. Petersburg, [Pinellas PAL First Fruit Hydroponic Farm](#) organically grows a variety of crops for patrons to browse and pluck from the stems themselves, with all profits benefitting the at-risk youth of Pinellas County through the [Police Athletic League](#) (PAL).

As many as 200 people – parents, children, church groups, and garden clubs alike – flock to First Fruit every Wednesday and Saturday to pick St. Petersburg’s freshest crops, ranging from cucumbers, squash, green beans, and snap peas, to lesser-known kohlrabi, and most-popular strawberries.

An auto-feed drip system that uses “media” instead of soil, hydroponics is a simple, fruitful method of farming in Florida’s harsh, growth-restrictive climate that is often inhospitable to plant life.

“It’s a simple way to grow a lot of vegetables in a small space, but you have to put work into it,” said First Fruit farmer, Steve Endrodi. “Yes, it will auto-feed, but you still have to weed a little bit, plant, and of course, talk to your vegetables – some things never change.”

Endrodi, who grew up in New Jersey, learned about farming from his father, a produce broker whom he accompanied on several business trips to Maine and New York.

Although he served in the Navy for four years and had a thriving – albeit stressful – career in software tech support, gardening and farming were his constant escape from life’s pressures.

“This is my wheelhouse,” said Endrodi, now a vegetarian who lives off his personal hydroponic farm. “So, this was just a natural way to go.”

PAL leases the about 1/3-acre farm and the 500 hydroponic stackers it houses with \$35,000 in grant funds. Since its opening in March 2016, First Fruit has brought in \$12,000 in sales.

The profits, however, are secondary.

“No. 1, it’s about the kids – about educating kids,” Endrodi said. “And no. 2, it’s about fresh food for the community, especially Lealman, which is a food desert.”

Throughout the week, First Fruit hosts groups of all types, from adults who are interested in starting their own gardens to children learning about sustainable farming, nutritious food choices, and how to incorporate them into their diets.

Fifteen-year-old PAL student Isaiah said he has only been working at First Fruit for a little more than a week, but he has already learned a lot: about pruning, about planting, and about life.

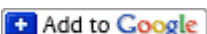
“What I’ve been doing is basically managing the plants and making sure there are no dead leaves or roots, so they look appealing,” Isaiah said. “But it’s also about being kind to people and always smiling, because first impressions are important.”

Together, Steve and Isaiah strive to create a fun, friendly, and inviting atmosphere with produce aisles as clean and stocked as the grocery store, but instead of off the shelves, visitors pick produce off the plants.

“Parents will come up, worried their son or daughter ate four or five strawberries, but I say that’s part of the fun!” Endrodi said. “If they have a smile on their face, it’s worth it.”

Pinellas PAL First Fruit Hydroponic Farm, 3215 46th Avenue North in St. Petersburg, sells its produce from 1 p.m. to 5 p.m. Wednesdays and Saturdays. Visit its [Facebook page](#) for a list of available produce and upcoming events, and visit [www.pinellaspalfirstfruihydroponics.com](#) to learn more and donate.

-	April 2017						+
S	M	T	W	T	F	S	
26	27	28	29	30	31	1	
2	3	4	5	6	7	8	
9	10	11	12	13	14	15	
16	17	18	19	20	21	22	
23	24	25	26	27	28	29	
30	1	2	3	4	5	6	

- 
- 
- 
- 
- 

Archives

- [January, 2018 \(1\)](#)
- [December, 2017 \(1\)](#)
- [November, 2017 \(1\)](#)
- [October, 2017 \(1\)](#)
- [September, 2017 \(1\)](#)
- [August, 2017 \(1\)](#)
- [July, 2017 \(1\)](#)
- [June, 2017 \(1\)](#)
- [May, 2017 \(1\)](#)
- [April, 2017 \(1\)](#)
- [March, 2017 \(1\)](#)
- [February, 2017 \(1\)](#)
- [January, 2017 \(1\)](#)



[Previous Post](#) << >> [Next Post](#)