

Greenhouse

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the economy and make a foray into controlled-environment agriculture... and grow food year round for consumption,” Green said. “This facility is a prototype of what could be a new industry in John Day that’s run by the private sector, but we wanted to do it as part of our treatment plant concept to prove that it works.”

Green pitched this idea to the city council in his job interview. The idea matched what the council wanted, which helped him get his current position.

A common misconception people have about this project is that consumers will be getting produce nourished from untreated, raw sewage, according to Green. He said the treated wastewater used for the produce will be of drinking water quality that comes from a class A wastewater facility.

Keeping the agrarian roots in mind

Along with finding a purpose in

wastewater, the greenhouse was strategically placed in an area that promotes economic and community development.

A key part of this project has been to honor John Day’s past but continue into the future with the new resources available for the agriculture business of 2020.

“We’re making a new investment in a new hyrdo-ag industry at the site of an abandoned mill property because we want to honor the past, we want to stay true to our heritage as an agrarian society,” Green said. “We can’t go back to 1920 agricultural practices in a 2020 economy. We’ve got to plan for the future. Growing year-round and being able to control the environment demonstrates that rural is relevant even in the digital age.”

The project provides an exciting opportunity for the city to demonstrate new technology and create opportunities for people to learn about this industry, according to Green. The greenhouse currently has plans to implement a learning center where high school students can be trained and taught about

operating a greenhouse.

Green said he does not view the city as being in the agriculture industry, per se, because the goal is not to compete with industry. If the city is successful, they will bring companies or create local companies that can clone what the city is doing. There are no plans to expand beyond the 10,000 square feet as a city operation, and if it goes beyond that in the future, it will be because other companies have been brought in to do it.

The economics of the greenhouse have provided challenges when establishing the goal of the facility and what produce to grow. The goal for the city has been to grow a variety of crops to demonstrate that many things can grow using reclaimed water in the city’s environment and do it successfully.

“If a private company were to scale, they would scale one product line and dedicate greenhouses just to grow one product, and that’s where you become profitable,” Green said. “At this point, we are just trying to break even and recover our operating expenses,

and that’s the goal for next year.”

Benefits from the greenhouse and the future

Local contractors building the greenhouse was a highlight for Green in this experience. He said he loved putting money back into the community during a rough winter when people were struggling to get employed and find long-term projects.

“We were able to keep six or seven people employed, and they felt a sense of pride in what they did,” Green said. “It was a great opportunity for us to reinvest in John Day using John Day taxpayer money and it going back into the city.”

The produce from the greenhouse has been a flavorful benefit. Green said the produce tastes great, and he said the cucumbers were the best he has ever eaten.

He added that this is a huge benefit in a community that struggles to get fresh produce and keep it on the shelves. The greenhouse also addresses concerns with feeding a community as food security becomes a rising concern in the time of pan-

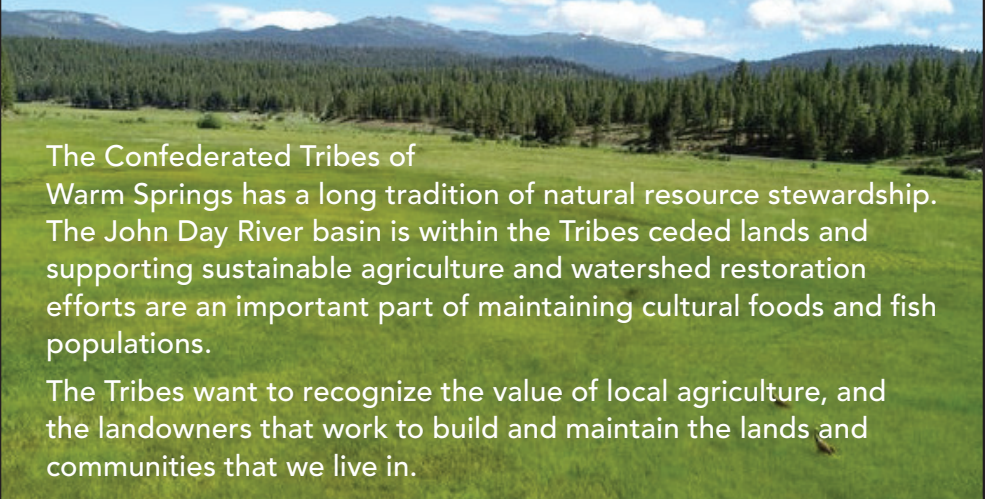
demic and the new coronavirus.

“We’re creating a self-reliant community by showing that we can use our local resources to grow food year-round and not become dependent on external companies to feed us,” Green said. “We can create an environment where we can feed ourselves, and I don’t think we’ll ever regret having the ability to feed ourselves.”

For the future, Green said more optimization is needed for the greenhouse to reach peak output, and the team is working toward that. Getting students into the greenhouse is something Green looks forward to since it will give them hands-on experience and an advantage if they are interested in going into agriculture production.

“If you’re supportive of the concept and want to sell our produce in your stores, we want you to reach out to us and we can start planning for that,” Green said. “If we are only capturing a quarter or fifth of the market locally and there is additional need, we want to know what the rest of the market is.”

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The Confederated Tribes of Warm Springs has a long tradition of natural resource stewardship. The John Day River basin is within the Tribes ceded lands and supporting sustainable agriculture and watershed restoration efforts are an important part of maintaining cultural foods and fish populations.

The Tribes want to recognize the value of local agriculture, and the landowners that work to build and maintain the lands and communities that we live in.



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