

# Producing produce year-round

## ■ Hydroponic greenhouse one of just a few in Monroe County.

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Once the area's farm fields are covered in snow, and herbs and salad greens are tougher to come by, Freshwise Farms in Penfield will be busy packaging their fresh greens.

Freshwise's secret to keeping summerlike produce year-round is water without soil. The hydroponic greenhouse, located at 1345 Penfield Center Road, was the first and now is among just a few of its kind in Monroe County.

The greenhouse part of the farm grows greens such as arugula, lettuce and Swiss chard, and herbs such as cilantro and basil. They also have vegetables such as seedless cucumbers and green beans. What is grown in the greenhouse, which is less than half an acre, would take up about 5 acres if grown outside, says farm operations manager Tom Sheridan.

The farm has a small, bumpy lot toward the back of the property that is used in the summer to grow potatoes, onions, leeks and other produce, but it is only 1.25 acres. All

the produce is grown without the use of pesticides or other chemicals.

"We use organic methods, but we are not an organic farm," Sheridan says.

Though the farm has been around for many years, The Foodlink Foundation purchased the property in 2004. Most of the produce grown now goes to the Foodlink food bank to be distributed to various programs that help the homeless or people who can't afford daily meals.

Freshwise chief of staff Jill Rowell says they are trying to expand their growing area to be able to produce more — and therefore be able to send more to the food kitchens.

The farm has a core of six full-time employees but depends a lot on its volunteers, who work from five to 15 hours each week.

One of those volunteers, Pat Tobin, says she especially likes volunteering during the winter because it is an oasis in the midst of all the snow and overcast skies.

"Even on a gray day, as soon as you walk in, it's bright in there and you

feel the oxygen coming off the plants," Tobin says. "It's almost like going to the spa."

Tobin, a Penfield resident, volunteers there once a week but is also a frequent customer. She says she often goes in to buy mixed greens or herbs.

Heritage Christian Services brings in volunteers daily to the farm, and they are busy bees, checking on the seeds and transplanting the midsize blooms and then packaging the produce that is ready to be picked and sold.

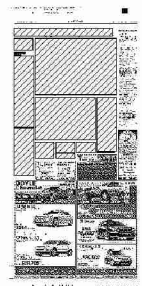
The mixed greens and other produce are harvested daily so the general public can go in and have the freshest lettuce mix.

The farm is open Monday through Friday, but starting this month, it also will be open for a few hours on Saturdays.

Freshwise Farms also has a stand at the Rochester Public Market a few times each week and it also sells produce at many area farm markets.

For more information, go to [freshwise.org](http://freshwise.org). □

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ANNETTE LEIN staff photographer

**Laura Kleiman of Irondequoit bags arugula at Freshwise Farms in Penfield. The greenhouse part of the farm grows greens such as arugula, lettuce and Swiss chard, and herbs such as cilantro and basil.**



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**David Krebs of Brighton, left, and Jarmila Haseler of Irondequoit work on raising irrigation hoses above peppers growing at Freshwise Farms.**