



## SISSY'S FRESH FARMS GROWS WITH LOCAL SUPPORT

*Company accessed Anoka County program to support growing sustainable agriculture business*

An 800-sq.-ft. space located in a Coon Rapids book bindery holds an unexpected surprise—an indoor farm. Lisa Fahey's family owns Graphic Finishing Services, where she works full time. In her spare time, she pursues her passion to promote health, nutrition and sustainability by growing microgreens through her second business, Sissy's Fresh Farms. Fahey had the idea to open the microgreens business while caring for a sick relative and researching the connection between Americans' health and their diets.

"We live in the greatest nation in the world and we're the sickest people. Why is that?" she asked. "I believe it's our food system."

Fahey said she began growing microgreens—pea, sunflower, broccoli, kale, kohlrabi, arugula, radish, cauliflower and cilantro, for example—because they pack 40 percent more nutrition than a mature plant. From a business standpoint, the microgreens also open her up to a niche market that can earn a higher profit margin. Fahey sells directly to restaurants that will pay a premium for her unique, quality product.

Still, the first year of business has been difficult. Fahey turned to Open to Business seeking support in finding an affordable grantwriter who could help her tap into government funds supporting sustainable agriculture. Fahey's Open to Business advisor, Kathleen DuChene, connected her with local nonprofits offering grantwriting training and provided connections to experts in new markets. Fahey said the support from programs like Open to Business is critical to helping a new entrepreneur find his or her way.

"I'm always an entrepreneur at heart. I personally feel there's never enough to learn, so I always try to find available free resources," she said. "It's important because when you're starting a business you don't have money to pay consultants to come in and do the work."

Fahey's family business earned the support of a second program available through Anoka County called Economic Gardening. Despite the name, the program isn't connected to the agricultural sector—it's about growing strong small businesses. The program offers expert market research, search engine optimization, geographic information services and web analytics to help entrepreneurs support their decisions with data. "Economic Gardening has so much value," said Fahey. "Every entrepreneur should go through it."

She says programs like Economic Gardening and Open to Business open up new doors for entrepreneurs who otherwise wouldn't have access. "I have gained a ton of knowledge for this company to run with and gain new customers," Fahey said. "If they give you even one good idea that's great for an entrepreneur."

The next step for Sissy's Fresh Farms is to place the product in more restaurants, co-ops and traditional grocery stores. The best advice she can offer to new entrepreneurs is to let their passion fuel their patience.

"What I've learned is that starting your own business is a huge struggle and you want to give up because that's the easiest thing to do. The perseverance to keep going is what I think is hard," she said. "My motivation is that I feel like I'm meant to do this."

*You can purchase Sissy's Fresh Farms microgreens at 11490 Xeon Street NW in Coon Rapids, MN. Follow Sissy's Fresh Farms on Facebook to learn more.*