

## IN THE NEWS

# Freight Farms provides year-round urban garden

HOLYOKE – From the outside, it looks like a shipping container you might see stacked on a barge out in the middle of the ocean, but that was its old purpose.

It has been re-purposed by a company called Freight Farms into a self-contained, hydroponic garden unit called a “Leafy Green Machine.” And now Holyoke has two of them.

Each large metal box can grow as much produce in a year as an acre of farmland. They sit side-by-side in a vacant lot on Race Street, next to the HCC MGM Culinary Arts Institute, where some of the leafy green vegetables grown inside will eventually make their way into the hands of culinary arts students.

As part of the Holyoke’s Innovate Week, Jay Ash, state secretary of Housing and Economic Development, officially announced the Holyoke Freight Farms urban agriculture project, at an event on Thursday, April 26, at 150 Race St. site.

It was at the event that visitors got their first peek inside these innovative farm when visitors will get their first opportunity to look inside this new method of farming. The pair of 40-foot-long Freight Farms containers was delivered last week, just in time for the Holyoke Innovation Week, thanks to



COURTESY PHOTO

**What had been used to haul freight is now going green after being repurposed by Freight Farms as a self-contained, hydroponic garden called a “Leafy Green Machine.”**

an investment of nearly \$180,000 from the state.

The funds were provided by MassDevelopment, as part of its Transformative Development Initiative, which is meant to accelerate economic

growth in its Gateway Cities’ communities. The project will provide year-round urban agriculture, education and training opportunities for city residents and Holyoke Community College students.

The containers will be used to teach hydroponic growing techniques to agricultural interns from the community and HCC.

Some of the harvested produce – lettuce, spinach, basil, cilantro and other leafy greens and herbs with shallow roots – will be sold to the HCC MGM Culinary Arts Institute, HCC on-campus dining services, and local restaurants. Some will be donated to help feed hungry people on campus and in the community.

“These container farms provide a means of addressing food insecurity in Holyoke while at the same time offering experiential learning opportunities for resident interns and students in HCC’s sustainability, nutrition, culinary arts and health programs,” said HCC president Christina Royal.

“Partnerships such as these are key to transforming Holyoke and enabling our community to thrive,” she said.

Other their partners in this green endeavor include Nuestras Raices, the city of Holyoke, and the Holyoke Redevelopment Authority.

Nuestras Raices, a nonprofit that manages community gardens throughout the city, will run the day-to-day container operations. The city and HCC will share the costs of utilities, maintenance and labor.