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HUFF POST SUCCESS STORIES

SMALL BUSINESS

Cleveland Start-Up Seeing Green

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Nothing exemplifies the spirit of entrepreneurs like a community cooperative project designed to employ more than 25 employee-owners within the first year. This is just what one Cleveland, Ohio based company has undertaken, thanks to the support of the Economic & Community Development Institute.

ECDI has infused the Cleveland market with \$400,000 in loan dollars to assist with The Evergreen Cooperative's latest venture, Green City Growers Cooperative. Green City Growers operates a 3.25 acre hydroponic greenhouse and packing facility on Cleveland's east side. The Greenhouse, and its employee-owners, will produce over 6,000,000 heads of lettuce and other leafy vegetables a year, all intended for local consumption.

Green City Growers is an Ohio worker cooperative association, with the mission of supporting local economies through an innovative approach to job creation and wealth building. Employees of the greenhouse have the opportunity to become part-owners of the business over time. These worker-owners are then able to share in the profits of the company while earning a living wage.

Inna Kinney, ECDI's Founder and CEO, stated "ECDI anticipates that Green City Growers will employ 25-30 people at start-up. Both the jobs and the healthy lifestyle created by the cooperative will bring measurable positive change to Cleveland."

When ECDI was determining how to allocate funding for job growth initiatives in the healthy food industry, Green City Growers and their business model stood out. The loan was one of the first major projects of the Cleveland office of ECDI, which opened in July 2012. The work of Green City Growers closely parallels the ECDI mission of "Investing in people to create measurable and enduring social and economic change." The opportunity to work with Green City Growers' cooperative provided the perfect starting point for ECDI to get involved in healthy food initiatives across the Northeast Ohio region.

The loan to Green City Growers was made possible through funding from the United States Department of Health and Human Services. The funds remain in after the cooperative project are currently being used by ECDI to create and sustain healthy food and community initiatives in the Greater University Circle area of Cleveland. How do we do this? **We invest, educate and innovate with the businesses and people we inspire.**

Every dollar counts in assisting small business owners achieve their dreams. You can help ECDI fund businesses and create jobs in Ohio by donating to our CrowdRise campaign: www.crowdrise.com/ecdi-jr.

Together, we can make a world of difference for current and aspiring entrepreneurs and bring jobs back to Ohio!