Arizona ripe for hydroponic tomato

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farm venture

Jensen, a international expert on hydroponics, said the Sonoran Desert offers near perfect conditions for greenhouse growing. He explained that the hydroponic greenhouses are made with high-strength transparent glass. The first large fiberglass greenhouse operation in the United States was brought to the region in the early 1990s to Wilton.

Officials said Douglas was chosen as the facility site because it has the greatest number of annual sunshine hours in the continental United States and because Scripture was able to secure an adequate water supply for the tomato plants.

"At some point in the season like nothing else can," Jensen said. "And this facility will have virtually the highest amount of sunshine in the world. It also has high evaporation and high air quality nearby and the wells were grandfathered in. We utilize a centralized system that makes this the most water efficient food crop in the world."

"Hydroponics simply means it's a controlled environment," he added.

"The tomatoes don't grow in soil. They're soilless, so we grow it in a synthetic growing media. The advantage is that growing in soil there is a massive root system, but not in the greenhouse. We have full control of the amount of water, the type of water and the entire mineral nutrition of the plants," he said.

Worfeld said hydroponics allows tomatoes, which are biologically considered fruits, to grow at a faster rate in a computer-controlled, water-seeking atmosphere.

Components control the amount of light and heat in order to optimize the plants four to five times a week.

Tecumseh will be able to produce a constant year-round supply, even during the winter months when product production is normally down.

He said a constant supply should close both growers and consumers by keeping the price down. Tecumseh hopes these growers will buy the hydroponic tomatoes in the winter and stay with one supplier throughout the year.

Jensen said the farm was certified through the National Business Administration's (F) program.

"If the bank financing and everything else grows, we could possibly have a bunch of tomatoes in about three months," he said.