

PROJECT SPOTLIGHT



Columbus Artisan Growers

Hydroponic Farmers Capitalize on Compact Space with ActivRAC

Local produce within ten minutes of downtown Columbus? That's what The Ohio State University graduates Jason Hu and Andrew Herczak wanted to develop in 2019. The duo built a hydroponic farm, Columbus Artisan Growers (CAG), to provide local produce to area restaurants and distributors. Yet, as the business bloomed, the farm began to run out of growing space. Installing Spacesaver's mobile, vertical ActivRAC system expanded crop area and added process efficiency.

THE PROBLEM

"Food distribution is one of the biggest challenges in this country," said CAG co-founder and CEO Hu. Looking to help address that issue and ensure more people have access to sustainably grown food, the agri-entrepreneurs researched storage systems that could maximize the available area for operations within their warehouse.

After all, grow space is at a premium, and real estate is expensive. "Every square foot of space matters, especially for indoor hydroponic farms," Hu said. Plus, "you can only do so much on one tier."

Growing familiar produce and micro greens and more unique products like edible flowers and specialty herbs, the company needed a system that supported propagation cycles from one week to two months. *"We need to make sure that we're timing all these things...so that we can always make sure that we have something on hand for our customers,"* Herczak said. CAG needed a flexible growing system.



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"This allows us to really capitalize on the space."

Andrew Herczak
Co-Founder, Columbus Artisan Growers

THE SOLUTION

Patterson Pope's storage specialists suggested industrial mobile shelving to maximize existing warehouse space. *"The beauty of that is that we can grow more in a smaller space,"* Hu said.

The ActivRAC mobile racking provided room for more crops, making every square foot more profitable. *"That's one of the reasons we chose the mobile rack system,"* Hu said.

The high-density solution allows CAG to have as much production as possible within the compact space while maintaining plant health, said co-founder Herczak. *"This allows us to really capitalize on the space."*

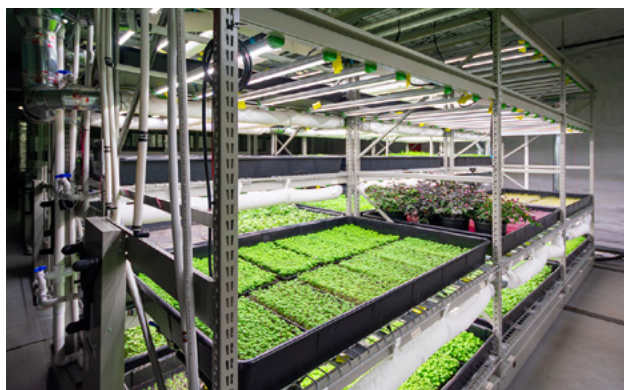
They were also able to install ActivRAC for use with their ventilation, watering, and water recycling system. The system could handle most sizes of standard hydroponic equipment as well.

Further, the mobile storage proved flexible enough for the urban farmers to modify their shelving solution. *"They had a lot of utility holes and whatnot that we could take advantage of to make the racks our own,"* Hu said.

The flexibility also gives the company more control of crop cycles, Herczak said. *"Because we grow so many different plants, that does matter to us."*

CAG can designate spots for different growing heights, lead schedules, and watering cycles. For example, some shelves are set up with more available room to allow slightly better ventilation and longer light periods to grow bigger plants or crops that need more light (e.g., peppers or cucumbers). Meanwhile, the crops that are planted and picked faster go to areas with more compact shelving, yet *"they are still happy and healthy and getting everything they need."*

Finally, both partners are enthusiastic about the convenience and flexibility the ActivRAC provides. They can easily condense shelves and move racks as needed. Having racks on carriages makes for more aisle space and a conveniently sized workspace without sacrificing the overall grow area.



"Everything was made easy with the Patterson Pope team...It was a very professional service."

Jason Hu
CEO and Co-Founder, Columbus Artisan Growers

THE OUTCOME

"Everything was made easy with the Patterson Pope team," Hu said. "It was a very professional service." The partners were designing the system from scratch, without a template, but Patterson Pope accommodated countless design changes along the way, he says. "They worked with us as well as our engineer to fit where things were going."

"Everything came on time, everything was great quality," Herczak said. "We have no problem with the racks. They don't break. They don't rust. We've already ordered from Patterson Pope twice, and we're going to keep ordering whenever we need new racks."

Ultimately, the vertical storage solution made sense for CAG. That's appropriate in light of their perspective on what their farming operation can do. As Herczak told Tech Ohio, *"There is a lot of impact*

we're trying to make on a lot of levels."

Now, they have multi-level racking to bring fresh, local produce to the community and provide restaurants with the exact ingredients they need. In fact, their crop selection is expanding, and they plan to start growing fruit and launch mushrooms soon. With the ease of retrofitting its existing ActivRAC system, CAG can affordably meet new crop needs.

Columbus, a fast-growing city with a booming restaurant scene, has been touted by the New York Times as a food destination. With the help of Patterson Pope's ActivRAC solution, CAG has planted itself in a great position to, as Hu puts it, *"be a catalyst to boost Columbus into that next level."*



ABOUT THE CLIENT

Founded by two OSU graduates straight out of college, Columbus Artisan Growers provides restaurants and distributors with ethnic, exotic, and artisanal ingredients all grown on a local hydroponic farm. The company's FSMA-certified farm is located just minutes away from downtown Columbus.

