

Report shows 'greenwashing' a challenge in CEA crop production

We asked the question whether respondents believe the CEA industry is susceptible to excessive 'greenwashing'. 70% said yes.

NEW ZEALAND, December 1, 2021 /EINPresswire.com/ -- Greenwashing, future production and sustainability metrics were front and center in the 2021 Global CEA Census Report released today.

In the third annual Census Report, produced by [Agritecture](#) and [WayBeyond](#), growers in the Controlled Environment Agriculture (CEA) sector shared their insights on sustainability and their thoughts for the next 12 months.



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"Last year's Census reported on the impact of Covid-19 and the optimism felt toward the future of the industry. This year focused on sustainability. It's a topic that is growing in importance for governments, businesses and younger generations passionate about the impact of food production on the climate," says Darryn Keiller, CEO & Founder of WayBeyond.

"There were a couple key points that surprised us all, including the question on whether respondents believe the CEA industry is susceptible to excessive 'greenwashing'. 70% said yes. The fact that most growers believe misleading sustainability information is being shared is of concern and I'd say not entirely without merit although this is not just a CEA issue but agriculture as a whole. Further research would be required to confirm the accuracy of their beliefs."

According to S2G Ventures, global investment in CEA was USD\$2Billion in 2020 supporting advanced technology for new and existing farm operations. This shows the fast pace with which the industry is moving.

“From the Census 72% of respondents expect an improvement in net margin in the next year and 81% plan to increase their production area in the next year. This is a positive for everyone involved in the sector,” says Keiller.

What's been missing from a lot of the excitement, however, is a deeper analysis of the sector's natural resource use and overall sustainability outcomes. Henry Gordon-Smith, Founder & CEO of Agritecture, explains that the lack of transparency is a risk for the whole industry.

“In my ten years in this sector, the evolution has been phenomenal, but the transparency and discussion around sustainability hasn't advanced further than the usual commentary. As industry consultants, we've observed many instances of land and water savings, beneficial labor conditions, and increased product freshness - among other positive outcomes - when you compare CEA production with traditional field-grown produce. But we've also seen instances of individual operations relying on external case studies to make sweeping sustainability claims, rather than measuring their own data.”

“The Census showed us that there is still room for improvement when it comes to tracking and sharing these metrics. What we need to see more of is accountability. If you're doing great things - prove it. Tell your story with facts and data to back it up. Transparency is exactly what consumers want when it comes to the food they buy, and we want to be telling those positive, evidence-based stories that exist out there. Simply applying general industry claims to any one individual operation is likely what's leading so many in the sector to feel that there is excessive greenwashing.”

This year, 60% of respondents were Founders and/or CEOs. The annual Census of CEA operators is one of the few global measurements of industry players.

“In many ways the findings this year on sustainability raise more questions than answers and should bring to light opportunities for new research initiatives. Our two companies, Agritecture and WayBeyond, will continue to seek ways to get more progress from our amazing community of CEA growers around the world,” says Gordon-Smith.

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