



AFTERTASTE

REMOTE FARMING

Smallhold's mushroom growers monitor and adjust mini-farms from afar.

Off the Jefferson L stop on a dead-end industrial street sit three 40-foot shipping containers that might just redefine what it means to eat local.

This corner of Bushwick is home to Smallhold Labs, a farm and tech start-up that wants to make quality produce more affordable and accessible.

"It's tough being a small farmer; we created this company to alleviate that," co-founder Andrew Carter says. "[My co-founder Adam DeMartino and I] developed the technology and the distribution to make urban agriculture more feasible in the city."

Their system works almost as a nursery: Smallhold grows the produce, which right now is about 100 pounds of mushrooms a week. Once the mushrooms—including king oysters, lion's mane, pioppino, maitake and shiitake as well as pink, blue and yellow oyster mushrooms—are three-quarters grown, Smallhold then distributes them to customers in "mini-farms" or 100-percent climate-controlled units.

These bookcase-size vertical farms come outfitted with WiFi and hook up to a water supply. Back at headquarters, Smallhold growers can then monitor and adjust the lighting or water circulation in the chamber from afar; customers (including chefs, supermarkets and individuals) just need to pick the produce when it's ready, giving them all the benefits of sourcing local produce without a large amount of the work.

"After learning about the produce and tasting it, we had to use them," chef and co-owner of Bunker Vietnamese Jimmy Tu says.

Bunker, which recently moved in next door to Smallhold HQ, is one of a number of restaurants including Claus Meyer's Agern using Smallhold mushrooms. You can taste Smallhold's king oyster and shiitake mushrooms in dishes such as Bunker's vegan summer rolls and vegan bánh mì among others.

"We like the idea of the sustainability, and the end product is amazing," Tu says.

Coming from a commercial agricultural background, Carter knows how expensive it can be to grow and distribute local produce. The Smallhold system cuts waste in terms of packaging, which, in addition to the environmental benefits, cuts the long-term price.

"We're the farmer; we just want them to open up the thing, pick the mushrooms and be able to use them." Carter says.

—Bridget Shirvell



The invisible hand. The Smallhold system cuts waste in terms of packaging, which, in addition to the environmental benefits, cuts the long-term price.