

The setup wasn't intentional, but launching production at Scissortail Farms shortly before the onset of cold weather is good timing, company CEO John Sulton said. Sulton and co-founder Rob Walenta have been running Scissortail Farms out of a 28,000-square-foot greenhouse in west Tulsa for about two months. Scissortail is a hydroponic farm, meaning that it grows its 40 varieties of leafy greens and herbs with nutrient-infused water and without soil. The method allows Scissortail to produce fresh greens daily without use of bio solids, pesticides or other chemicals. And at a time of year when farmers' markets have closed and it becomes more difficult to find fresh and affordable produce, Scissortail is still producing, the company boasts. Sulton and Walenta, the company's chief operations officer, became friends while attending high school at Cascia Hall Preparatory School. Sulton, part of the Class of '96, went on to earn an engineering degree from the University of Kansas and to work at NORDAM. Walenta, who graduated in 1997, went on to study construction science at the University of Oklahoma and to work for KMO Development Group Inc. It was the desire to start a business, not a specific interest in horticulture, that led to launching Scissortail Farms, Walenta said. While brainstorming business ideas, the friends came across hydroponic farming and the towers patented by Tim Blank, the man responsible for the hydroponic farm featured at Walt Disney World Resort in Florida. They liked that the product they would be producing would be sustainable, local and could provide consumers same-day freshness, they said. "One of the great things this does is we use less than 10 percent of the water and the land traditionally used for field crops," Walenta said. There is also no E. coli risk, Walenta said, because the ability to control nutrients in the water exactly means the use of fertilizer isn't necessary. Their first "greenhouse" operated off of Sulton's back porch for about a year and a half. Blue Dome District restaurant Juniper was Scissortail's first customer, and the restaurant still serves the farms' greens in its salads. "I love their attitude about producing great produce and doing it in a way that's sustainable,"

said Justin Thompson, owner of Juniper and several other area restaurants. "I love their passion for what they're doing." The produce Scissortail Farms provides seems to be a little more crisp than alternatives because it was harvested that day and didn't sit on a truck for 24 hours, Thompson said. The absence of pesticides also appeals to him. "It's a lot healthier for my guests," Thompson said. Since opening its west Tulsa operation, which currently has 12 employees, Scissortail's customer base has expanded to include several other area restaurants and Reasor's. Prepared salads can be found in five area Reasor's stores, and expanded produce offerings are going to be available in two of those stores soon. Members of the public can also stop by the greenhouse and office at 8450 W. 51st St. in Tulsa to purchase greens directly. Now that construction is near completion, the company's next step is to expand its customer base further, its founders said. "We have the capacity to put out 900 cases (of greens and herbs) a week and we're probably doing about one-quarter of that now," Walenta said. Casey Smith 918-732-8106 casey.smith@tulsaworld.com

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