

REGION

NEWS FROM NORTHWEST LOWER MICHIGAN

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NEWS TIP LINE (231) 933-1472



Above, Jim Beaton "harvests" a row of Bibb lettuce by removing it from a growing bed to process for his customers. Below right, Toni Beaton picks basil.

A GARDEN VARIETY

Jim and Toni Beaton bought a small hydroponic farm near Suttons Bay five years ago. It turned out they had green thumbs in more ways than one.

TLC Tomatoes now produces 35,000 pounds of tomatoes and 35,000 heads of Bibb lettuce, as well as other hydroponic produce, each year.

"It all just started as a retirement venture and something we could do together and enjoy," Jim said. "Each year we have grown a little; in fact the first year we doubled the production of the farm from the previous owners, but we never thought it would get this big in just five years."

The Beatons said they have added or improved something

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every year.

"The first year we improved our hydroponic equipment to state-of-the-art," Jim said. "The second year we added flowers and other small garden items. The fourth year we added a commercial kitchen and started producing things like spaghetti sauce. The fifth year we added the 'Dinner on the Farm' series. It seemed to go with the kitchen, getting the people here to eat."

The farm now has been enlarged to four greenhouses that produce tomatoes, Bibb lettuce, cucumbers, basil and flowers. "Even with the growth we still enjoy it," Beaton said.



Above, Jim Beaton monitors hydroponic equipment that feeds tomato plants and other produce. At right, green tomatoes waiting to ripen hang on the vine at TLC Tomatoes.



STORY AND
PHOTOS BY
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