

UAE firm 'to grow a tonne of tomatoes a day' in the desert

The high-tech indoor farm will reduce reliance on food imports.

UAE residents will soon be able to buy fresher produce after plans were unveiled to grow a tonne of tomatoes a day in the Abu Dhabi desert.

Madar Farms in Dubai said it would open a high-tech indoor facility by the end of the year spanning 7,000 square metres.

It is said to be the largest, most water-efficient nursery of its kind worldwide, using LED lighting to grow plants rather than sunlight and was announced at Abu Dhabi Sustainability Week.

It is planned that more than a tonne of tomatoes will be produced on site every day, with the scientific growing methods using 30 per cent less water than those of commercial greenhouses.

The technique and location of the farm means there is no need for preservatives, with tomatoes going 'from farm to fork' within hours.

"Not only is this more productive, but we are able to grow in industrial areas, in the middle of the desert," said Abdulaziz AlMulla, chief executive of Madar Farms.

"This will represent the largest indoor tomato farm in the world.

"By growing indoor, it means the environment is fully controlled whether that is oxygen, temperature or biological factors."

Mr AlMulla said that while the farm was a commercial operation, the project was well aligned with UAE government ambitions to improve water efficiency and reduce the country's reliance on food imports.



Only this week, Dr Thani Al Zeyoudi, Minister of Climate Change and Environment, said up to 90 per cent of the UAE's food comes from other countries and described the situation as "very risky" and "unsustainable".

Madar Farms already has plans for more facilities in future, where other crops would be grown indoors using similar methods, and Mr AlMulla believes his business would soon attract more partners and backing.

"The obstacle we are facing, and the challenge we are trying to address, is so big and so needed that there are allies and partners popping up left, right and centre," he said.

"As the population in the UAE continues to grow and there's more focus on sustainability, the new farm will help to meet this increasing demand and give UAE consumers more options to enjoy the best-quality fresh, locally grown produce."

Of the 7,000 sq m site, the growing area will take up 5,000 sq m.

The farm will be built in Khalifa industrial zone in Abu Dhabi, a location chosen because it is between Abu Dhabi and Dubai, enabling fresh produce to be quickly taken to the country's two largest population centres.

Nutrients for the plants will be delivered not through soil but in water using a method known as hydroponic farming.

An indoor 'microgreens' farm will also be built, to serve the growing demand for edible shoots.

"We are extremely proud to announce the construction of the most water-efficient tomato farm in the world," said Kyle Wagner, head of operations at Madar Farms.

"It will make sure we are making a long-term, sustainable impact. Inside, we will use groundbreaking technology to minimise water consumption and will be growing microgreens as well.





“We will be delivering fresh produce, from farm to fork, within 24 hours on a consistent basis.”

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