



# VERTICAL HARVEST

## INNOVATING TO UNLEASH HUMAN POTENTIAL: VERTICAL HARVEST FARMS IS A 2022 TONY HSIEH AWARD WINNER

*The award recognizes innovators who are disrupting business-as-usual human capital models to innovate new approaches to unlocking human potential in the workplace*

Jackson, WY (October 18, 2022) – [Vertical Harvest, Inc.](#), a hydroponic, vertical farming company based in Jackson, WY, is honored to win a [2022 Tony Hsieh Award](#) celebrating its pioneering Grow Well approach to customized, integrated employment.

Vertical Harvest practices Competitive Integrated Employment designed for the disability community. It's based on competitive wages, opportunities for advancement, integration in the workplace and access to full benefits. In practice, Grow Well not only cultivates meaningful careers, but also soft skills development that people who've been excluded from economic opportunity often haven't had the chance to develop elsewhere. CEO Nona Yehia maintains, their approach not only "delivers 'good' to the community but is also 'good business'" and a burgeoning body of research supports the company's theory for change.

[Accenture](#) estimates that companies who champion disability inclusion achieved – on average – **28 percent higher revenue, double the net income and 30 percent higher economic profit margins**. Additionally, in this era of labor shortages and quiet quitting, they estimate that if companies embraced disability inclusion they would gain access to 10.7 million new employees. Similarly, the national GDP could get **a boost up to \$25B if just 1% more of persons with disabilities joined the US labor force**.

With unemployment rates nearly double that of the general population, Vertical Harvest provides five major types of training (on-boarding apprenticeship to CEA farming, career-specific and on-going job training, cross-training to expand skillsets across departments inclusive of managerial training, as well as non-career-specific lifeskills training, coaching and mentorship) in the fast-growing, green jobs-oriented AgriTech industry. And for this, the Tony Hsieh award recognizes their disruption of the \$5 Trillion Agriculture Industry.

Keith Ferrazzi, entrepreneur, thought-leader and close friend of the late Zappos CEO Tony Hsieh, announced this year's winners at Reid Hoffman's Masters of Scale Conference last week. His call-to-action to the many start-up CEOs and tech luminaries in attendance was to, "disrupt human capital models just like we're disrupting business models. We need to get ahead of the curve and join these innovators on this journey and make sure... that while nobody can fill Tony's shoes as many of us knew him... maybe hundreds and thousands of us coming together and building a movement in his legacy could begin to approach that."

Bjorn Oste, founder of [Oatly](#), recently remarked upon visiting the Jackson Hole greenhouse, that he'd never seen anything like it. "Here, inclusion and equity aren't buzz words, they're the norm. And the interactions between employees are easy, comfortable and very honest, very real."

Vertical Harvest's Chief of Human Potential, Caroline Croft Estay credits this to the customized employment approach being foundational to the company. "When Vertical Harvest was just starting, people encouraged Nona and me to open the greenhouse and implement inclusive employment afterward. But to her credit,

that was non-negotiable. Not only because she has a brother with development disabilities herself, but because she knew in this case our diversity was an asset and not a liability.”

By and large the CEA industry and agriculture in general, has intense labor challenges and employment issues, and the Tony Hsieh Award recognizes that the management philosophies underpinning Vertical Harvest's business model and company culture are clear differentiators and this exchange of loyalty and love, flows through employees to customers and back into business and brand, as surely as the water in their hydroponic system. They also recognized outstanding start-up entrepreneurs such as Etienne Salborn founder of SINA: The Social Innovation Academy; Ranil Piyaratna & Geetesh Goyal, co-founders of Human Bees and established entrepreneurs and innovators, Drew Houston, CEO of Dropbox and Dylan Beynon, CEO of Mindbloom.

For more information, please follow @verticalharvestfarms on Instagram, Facebook, and visit [www.verticalharvestfarms.com](http://www.verticalharvestfarms.com)

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**About the Tony Hsieh Award:**

Tony Hsieh was a pioneer. He challenged existing concepts of what the workplace was and how it worked. He redefined how leaders look at the value of their employees as well as what employees expect from their leaders. He constantly inspired and provoked us to think differently about the role of leadership and business itself. We want that inspiration and those insights to continue for generations. In the wake of Tony Hsieh's passing, The Tony Hsieh Award seeks out progressive, value-driven leaders, innovators and entrepreneurs who embody Hsieh's spirit in business through transforming their organization's quality of work and life, engagement, and productivity to allow members or employees to maximize their fullest potential. They search for people and companies reinventing the way we work.

**About Vertical Harvest Farms:**

Vertical Harvest is a hydroponic, vertical farming company dedicated to sustainable farms, food and futures. In addition to our passion for local, healthy food grown sustainably, Vertical Harvest also operates on an inclusive employment model. Our farms are designed for accessibility and staffed via hiring practices developed for people with disabilities, and our mission is to energize local food economies by using food as a medium for meaningful change. As we bring food production back to the city, we are partnering with civic leaders and local developers to co-locate our farms with affordable housing, bolster local green energy efforts, keep dollars in-community longer and reestablish people's connection to their farmers and the fresh, flavorful, food we grow.

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