

UAE food companies aim to stack up 500 vertical farms

04 December 2024 | News

Crysp Farms and Alesca Technologies entered five year agreement to provide vertical farming



Crysp Farms and Alesca Technologies entered five year agreement to provide vertical farming

Two UAE companies have signed a deal to roll out 500 vertical farms across the Middle East.

Crysp Farms, which provides vertical farms to hotels and resorts, has made the five-year agreement with agtech business Alesca Technologies.

The companies said the partnership would “significantly improve the efficiency of vertical farming” and provide more than 130 varieties of fresh produce year-round for Crysp’s hospitality clients.

Crysp said this would expand its “farming-as-a-service” offering, which allows hotels to grow a mix of produce based on their daily needs.

- Emirates’ catering arm buys out Bustanica vertical farm
- Turkey’s olive growers mine liquid gold
- PIF and AeroFarms to build indoor vertical farms across Mena

Alesca will install AI-powered monitoring and automation systems into Crysp’s existing and future vertical farms to improve their efficiency.

Crysp’s vertical farms typically use 90 percent less water and 99 percent less land than traditional agriculture.

Once harvested, the produce can be served to customers in less than an hour.

Maan Said, founder and CEO of Crysp Farms, said the deal would allow it to "significantly accelerate our regional expansion".

Stuart Oda, founder and CEO of Alesca Technologies, said the company had "spent the past 10 years focused on improving the unit economics of vertical farming, and Crysp's proven business model will allow us to seamlessly integrate our technology with more clients and communities across the Middle East".

The region's vertical farming industry has received significant investment in recent years, as private and public sector funders try to tackle food security challenges.

The world's largest indoor vertical farm, Emirates Bustanica, is in Dubai. The 330,000-square-foot facility, near Al Maktoum International Airport, produces more than 1 million kilograms of leafy greens each year for Emirates Flight Catering.

However, it remains significantly cheaper to import conventionally produced fresh food, according to Ibrahim Malas, senior business development manager at Elite Agro Holding in Abu Dhabi.

"Everyone's trying to invest in CEA [controlled-environment agriculture]. That's very much the flavour of the month because it's year-round production," he told *AGBI*.

"But so far, no one has been able to really crack the technology to be able to produce a low enough unit cost for the market to accept in large numbers."

AGBI columnist Orlando Crowcroft pointed out last month that more than \$1.5 billion has been poured into the global vertical farming industry by venture capitalists. Billions more has come in government funding, including in the Middle East.

"Vertical farms require enormous amounts of electricity to power their LED lighting systems. Add to that the costs of climate control, high-tech sensors and urban real estate, and you've got a production model that is not even remotely cost effective," he said.