

BRIAN DONNELLY: A HEARTFELT HERO OF SUSTAINABILITY

By PowerHouse Growers | [*Features*](#), [*Visionary*](#)

The business of sustainability has evolved significantly over the past 20 years. Finding its roots as a movement, Sustainability rapidly developed into a full blown industry by the early 2000's, generating significant buy-in from both the public and private sectors. When the global financial crisis hit, some suggest that big-s "Sustainability" lost traction as businesses entered survival-mode and re-prioritized. These strong eco-centric convictions appeared to fall to the wayside, and all the work that had been done to carve out a new market, was struggling to find a foothold and demonstrate its value.



But for the idealistic few, sustainability has never been an option. These people do the right thing because it's the right thing to do – they don't know any other way. And while the "green business" has swelled with politics, jargon, academia, and the unbelievable ability to argue over the same points, these aforementioned visionaries stay focused on what they do best – helping others in the most impactful and sustainable ways possible.

I recently had the humbling experience of studying the story of Brian Donnelly, an entrepreneurial big-picture thinker with the most genuine motives any "green biz" expert could ever hope to emulate.

The Profile of a Pioneer

Brian is a Partner at [Sun State Organics](#), a company which develops sustainable organic waste management and processing systems aimed at offering community members the tools to improve their local environment in the most ecological ways. In addition to the waste processing equipment, Donnelly is also the distributor of complete and efficient organic agriculture products which enable farmers to increase their earnings and reduce operating expenses.



The Growpol Vertical Gardening System. Available from [Amazon](#).

One of these products is a vertical growing system called the [Growpol](#). This product maximizes space and water efficiency for growers, allowing 20 separate containers for more organic crop outputs per system. The product was developed out of Donnelly's passion for helping others benefit from his work. He believes in equipping growers and communities with the skills to take charge of their own food security and in the process igniting a chain reaction of environmental and social benefits. "I am trying to make a difference and I work a lot to do it" says Donnelly upon reflection of his major accomplishments that 2013 afforded him.

A Social Enterprise's Success Story

This past year, Brian was part of the group that was named to [Sustainia's](#) Top 100 Sustainable Companies of 2013, as well as part of the group that won the People's Choice award at [Sustainable Brands](#) Innovation Open '13. In October of 2013, Brian installed his Growpol at a farm to fork café, [Cymply Fresh](#) – part of the group [Cimplify](#) in Gainesville, FL. The Growpol was purchased by the local [Buchholz High School](#) and is operated by a group of [special education students](#). These autistic students are [learning](#) valuable life skills that will prepare them for life after high school, boosting their confidence and giving them a purpose to work towards. The sense of accomplishment they feel knowing that their own-grown fresh food is being served to local patrons 20 feet away is a story of triumph on its own. In fact, this story gained so much attention that Donnelly is now putting his talent and expertise to good use at Loften High School in Gainesville making it the first sustainable school.

Sky's the Limit in 2014

Recently, Brian was asked to attend the Global Forum for Innovations in Agriculture which will be held in Abu Dhabi, UAE on February 3-4. Brian will be speaking at the 2014 [GFIA](#) event and presenting his system on a global stage to show the leaders in attendance – including Bill Gates- the importance of shifting

traditional agriculture output from big-industry with large and complex supply chains, to small-scale and economically viable operations that benefit the farmers and their families.

Brian has a busy year ahead as he's aiming to have a larger system set up in Atlanta, GA by the Spring, as well as a major facility to be up and running in the UK this year. He is now working with NGO's in Africa, Nepal, and in the Philippines.

From a personal standpoint, Brian is on an ardent mission to communicate the value of integrating special needs people into the urban farming arena. He knows the benefits they can offer the workforce from their reliability, to their honesty and integrity, to their boundless work ethic. Brian also sees a future where this practice becomes mainstay and where companies will place greater value on this type of human resource both from an economic and social-good standpoint. This is the true meaning of sustainability and is where others can find their own inspiration.

Click [here](#) to learn more from Brian on the topic of the integration of Autistic people into urban farming. This transcript from a speech he gave at the University of Florida's Autism Symposium in the summer of 2013 will be sure to change your perspective in more ways than one. It precisely describes who Brian is down to his soul more than this writer could ever convey with justice.