



27.04.2016 - This year, with the implementation of the [Paris Agreement on Climate Change](#) and the [Sustainable Development Goals](#) (including sustainable consumption and production) on the horizon, Stefán Karl's ideas are certainly in tune with the agenda of the international community.

Actor Stefán Karl Stefánsson is best known for his role as Robbie the Rotten, who promotes physical inactivity and consumption of junk food in the popular TV series Lazy Town, which currently airs worldwide in over 103 countries. Yet in real life the actor is anything but rotten when it comes to his own lifestyle choices, which involve growing so-called microgreens in a discarded containers, re-using old office lighting in the process.

Geographically Iceland is hardly any farmer's dream. Whilst all of its cereals are imported, so is a large part of its fruits and vegetables. A large part, yes, but interestingly not all. Iceland is the only European country to have grown and exported bananas. Its waterfalls and geysers provide an abundance of clean and cheap energy, which provide fruits, flowers and vegetables at an affordable cost in greenhouses.

"We have all this energy," Stefánsson told UNRIC's Nordic Newsletter, explaining his decision to experiment in a special kind of sustainable farming. "Iceland should be the food supplier of the Nordic family, perhaps also on a European scale. And then of course we have our carbon footprint to think of." Sustainable living is of course quite fashionable in California, which is where Stefán Karl first heard about microgreens whilst he was living the Californian dream as an actor.

"Microgreens became popular in the late 70s and 80s," explains Stefánsson. "According to scientists in Stanford University in California they are 4-7 times more nutritious than full grown plants."



Microgreens, are a variety of edible ripe greens, harvested with scissors less than a month after germination, when the plants are up to 2 inches tall. Many seeds will do, salad greens, leafy vegetables, herbs and even edible flowers can be grown as microgreens.

But that's not all; Stefán Karl acts locally but thinks globally and conserves water by growing his greens vertically. Still, lack of space and water are not the first things that spring to mind about Iceland. It rains 15-20 days a month on average in the capital Reykjavik and the population density is only 3.2 souls per square kilometer, compared to 21,200 in Macau, the world record holder.

“You know we don't want to drown our country in reservoirs,” explains Stefán Karl, referring to a controversial issue in Iceland on how much land should be sacrificed to facilitate the harnessing of the country's hydroelectric power. “And neither is it pretty to have greenhouses all over the place with their light pollution.”

He found a simple solution in his quest for growing “vertically” – and saving space, something that could be copied elsewhere where the need is bigger, than in big but population starved Iceland.

“There is a lot of discarded refrigerating containers in this country that both imports and exports food, and they are equipped with a perfect insulation. And in addition they facilitate vertical growing” says Stefánsson.

“So I acquired one of these and started my microgreen business. I found out that greenery likes cold blue light. It so happens that people are getting rid of the old fluorescent lighting, which has become obsolete. I found lights used to illuminate offices, which had been thrown away. They are bad for people but plants love them. Not only they provide light, but also heat!”

It may never rain in southern California but to conserve water in Iceland may sound as smart as conserving sand in Sahara. “I know,” says container-farmer Stefánsson. “I know that people may laugh at me. I know that people say that the rain just flows to the sea and that it doesn't matter if we conserve it or not. But I do think that if we respect nature and all unite in being modest and thrifty in what we take from it, there will plenty left for everyone.”

Who would have thought that Robbie Rotten would be a poster boy for sustainability!

UNRICs Related Links:

- [UN Conference on Climate Change](#)
- [UN Sustainable Development Knowledge Platform](#)

Photos: Copyright Stefán Karl Stéfansson.