



Episode 1: Mars

June 2018

@NASAKennedy
#NASARocketRanch

New episodes every month!

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00:00:04,130 --> 00:00:07,810

Joshua Santora (Host): The soil beneath your feet, the food on your table, the roof over

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00:00:07,810 --> 00:00:11,220

your head...these are luxuries on Mars.

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00:00:11,220 --> 00:00:14,920

Getting there isn't a problem, it's surviving once you land.

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00:00:14,920 --> 00:00:17,790

Launch Countdown Sequence: EGS Program Chief Engineer, verify no constraints to launch.

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00:00:17,790 --> 00:00:19,710

EGS Chief Engineer team has no constraints.

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00:00:19,710 --> 00:00:20,710

I copy that.

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00:00:20,710 --> 00:00:21,710

You are clear to launch.

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00:00:21,710 --> 00:00:23,990

Five, four, three, two, one, and lift-off.

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00:00:23,990 --> 00:00:27,410

All clear.

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00:00:27,410 --> 00:00:41,110

Now passing through max q, maximum dynamic pressure.

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00:00:41,110 --> 00:00:42,110

Welcome to space.

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00:00:42,110 --> 00:00:43,110

Host: Welcome to the rocket ranch.

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00:00:43,110 --> 00:00:44,110

I'm Joshua Santora.

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00:00:44,110 --> 00:00:48,110

While our current focus is on the Moon, it is our stepping stone to the Red Planet.

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00:00:48,110 --> 00:00:51,990

In this episode we'll sit down with scientists and engineers exploring our planetary neighbor

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00:00:51,990 --> 00:00:55,010

and preparing for the survival of those who brave the journey.

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00:00:55,010 --> 00:00:59,480

First up, a trajectory analyst plotting million mile journeys to the Red Planet and beyond.

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00:00:59,480 --> 00:01:03,870

Next, we'll hear from two plant researchers who are figuring out how to grow food in space

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00:01:03,870 --> 00:01:05,030

and on alien planets.

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00:01:05,030 --> 00:01:09,420

And finally, we'll dig deep into the daunting challenges that still lie ahead before humans

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00:01:09,420 --> 00:01:16,179

can set foot on Mars.

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00:01:16,179 --> 00:01:19,200

Insight is a Mars lander designed to give the Red Planet its first thorough check-up

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00:01:19,200 --> 00:01:21,929
since it formed 4.5 billion years ago.

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00:01:21,929 --> 00:01:27,240
It is the first outer space robotic explorer
to study in depth the inner-space of mars--

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00:01:27,240 --> 00:01:29,299
its crust, mantle, and core.

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00:01:29,299 --> 00:01:33,939
A few days before the insight launch, Kennedy's
Amanda Griffin sat down with trajectory analyst

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00:01:33,939 --> 00:01:38,569
Caley Burke of NASA's Launch Services Program
to find out what it takes to send a spacecraft

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00:01:38,569 --> 00:01:39,569
to the red planet.

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00:01:39,569 --> 00:01:43,859
Amanda Griffin (Host): So, Caley, tell us
a little bit about your role for Insight.

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00:01:43,859 --> 00:01:48,259
Caley Burke: my role is the trajectory analyst
here at the Launch Services Program.

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00:01:48,259 --> 00:01:52,491
And so, my job's to make sure that the rocket
drops the spacecraft off at the right place

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00:01:52,491 --> 00:01:54,400
and time in space.

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00:01:54,400 --> 00:02:00,060
And so, we get these targets from the spacecraft
team, who look at where they're going, um,

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00:02:00,060 --> 00:02:01,979

and what the capabilities of the rocket is.

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00:02:01,979 --> 00:02:06,079

And so, I'm there to make sure that that rocket performs as it needs to together with

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00:02:06,079 --> 00:02:07,579

the launch vehicle company.

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00:02:07,579 --> 00:02:09,540

Host: that sounds like a lotta math to me.

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00:02:09,540 --> 00:02:10,540

Caley Burke: It is.

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00:02:10,540 --> 00:02:11,540

There's a lot of equations.

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00:02:11,540 --> 00:02:15,781

Um, those of you who are familiar with "hidden figures," um, she developed a lot of the

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00:02:15,781 --> 00:02:18,280

math that we use in our computer programs.

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00:02:18,280 --> 00:02:21,230

But, um, we have to consider these really complex journeys.

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00:02:21,230 --> 00:02:23,920

You know, it's not just doing an equation once.

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00:02:23,920 --> 00:02:28,060

Um, we're always trying to-to make it as optimal as possible, and so there's all

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00:02:28,060 --> 00:02:29,220

these levers you have to push.

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00:02:29,220 --> 00:02:31,540

You know, I think of it as planning a summer vacation.

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00:02:31,540 --> 00:02:34,890

You know, how many different summer vacations are out there?

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00:02:34,890 --> 00:02:39,410

There's millions of ideas and so you have to kinda tailor it down to a reasonable one.

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00:02:39,410 --> 00:02:42,700

Say, like, okay, we're going on a camping trip and we're gonna go in the summer.

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00:02:42,700 --> 00:02:45,350

You start paring it down and finding the best one.

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00:02:45,350 --> 00:02:51,030

Host: So, speaking of all of these possibilities, I understand Insight has a lot of launch attempts,

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00:02:51,030 --> 00:02:55,820

and that's a paring down from like an endless-- seemingly endless possibility.

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00:02:55,820 --> 00:02:57,090

Caley Burke: There are.

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00:02:57,090 --> 00:03:02,010

The jet propulsion lab, they do these things called pork chop plots, and so they consider

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00:03:02,010 --> 00:03:05,590

many months they could launch and many months

they could land on mars.

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00:03:05,590 --> 00:03:06,750

And they look at different conditions.

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00:03:06,750 --> 00:03:09,910

They're saying, okay, you know, how fast does the rocket need to get the spacecraft

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00:03:09,910 --> 00:03:10,910

going?

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00:03:10,910 --> 00:03:12,420

How fast is it is-- if we arrive at mars?

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00:03:12,420 --> 00:03:15,530

You don't want the spacecraft crashing like an egg and breaking on mars.

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00:03:15,530 --> 00:03:16,530

Host: No.

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00:03:16,530 --> 00:03:19,280

Caley Burke: Yeah, we want a little bit softer of a landing.

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00:03:19,280 --> 00:03:22,450

Um, what's the weather conditions gonna be like when they get there?

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00:03:22,450 --> 00:03:26,202

We wanna get communication during landing, so are the right satellites in place or are

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00:03:26,202 --> 00:03:29,380

we looking back at earth at that time in the landing site?

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00:03:29,380 --> 00:03:34,880

So there's all these considerations they put into, and then they get it down to, um,

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00:03:34,880 --> 00:03:37,990
what they consider their ideal number of launch days.

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00:03:37,990 --> 00:03:42,400
And so, we're-- have 35 days we're looking at that we're launching, but only one day

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00:03:42,400 --> 00:03:43,980
that we're gonna land.

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00:03:43,980 --> 00:03:49,040
And so, that was all pared down, but then once we get there, um, we don't have just

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00:03:49,040 --> 00:03:51,740
35 opportunities, you know, one per day.

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00:03:51,740 --> 00:03:57,700
We actually have a two-hour window that we're able to do on each day, and so that's 25

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00:03:57,700 --> 00:03:58,700
opportunities.

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00:03:58,700 --> 00:04:01,530
So there's 875 possible ones we analyzed.

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00:04:01,530 --> 00:04:02,530
Host: Wow.

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00:04:02,530 --> 00:04:03,530
Caley Burke: Yeah.

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00:04:03,530 --> 00:04:07,630
And so a couple of those, um, we've already

said that they don't meet the requirements,

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00:04:07,630 --> 00:04:11,480

which we have so many it's not a problem to have a few that we lose.

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00:04:11,480 --> 00:04:17,010

I mean, it's great to have large windows because if there's any weather conditions,

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00:04:17,010 --> 00:04:22,020

if the range is clearing, if there's a mechanical issue on the rocket, we have time to possibly

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00:04:22,020 --> 00:04:25,270

fix it so that we don't have to completely scrub that day, but—

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00:04:25,270 --> 00:04:27,210

Host: And I know in Florida we often have weather conditions.

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00:04:27,210 --> 00:04:28,210

Caley Burke: Yeah.

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00:04:28,210 --> 00:04:30,260

Host: But the insight is launching from the west coast.

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00:04:30,260 --> 00:04:31,260

Caley Burke: mm-hmm.

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00:04:31,260 --> 00:04:33,380

Host: So you're talkin' about all the considerations you guys have to take into

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00:04:33,380 --> 00:04:34,380

account.

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00:04:34,380 --> 00:04:36,030

So to launch from California, what's different?

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00:04:36,030 --> 00:04:41,170

Caley Burke: So as a trajectory analyst, um, the main thing that I have to make sure is,

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00:04:41,170 --> 00:04:45,580

uh, first of all, I have to make sure my computer program puts us at the right I-launch site.

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00:04:45,580 --> 00:04:48,310

That, um, sometimes you get a trajectory--
Host: that helps.

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00:04:48,310 --> 00:04:51,060

Caley Burke: --and you're like, "hmm, that's not in the right place."

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00:04:51,060 --> 00:04:53,230

But usually it's pretty obvious at that point.

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00:04:53,230 --> 00:04:57,040

Um, but a-a big thing that's an indicator is what directions you can launch.

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00:04:57,040 --> 00:05:01,050

So, each launch site we work at the range to figure out what are the safe directions

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00:05:01,050 --> 00:05:02,440

we don't endanger the public?

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00:05:02,440 --> 00:05:03,440

Host: Sure.

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00:05:03,440 --> 00:05:06,740

Caley Burke: And so, here from Florida, we launch east safely, and we can go somewhat

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00:05:06,740 --> 00:05:08,490
to the north and somewhat from the south.

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00:05:08,490 --> 00:05:13,400
But from Vandenberg, um, if they launch east they're flying over people, and so we don't

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00:05:13,400 --> 00:05:14,400
want that.

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00:05:14,400 --> 00:05:18,840
So we can launch to the southeast, as we are for, um, insight, and then we can continue

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00:05:18,840 --> 00:05:21,720
going west and, uh, launch safely.

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00:05:21,720 --> 00:05:26,510
But, uh, we wanna make sure that everything happens with the rocket, uh, we don't endanger

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00:05:26,510 --> 00:05:28,340
anybody and nothing drops on somebody.

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00:05:28,340 --> 00:05:30,150
If-- it's a low risk as possible.

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00:05:30,150 --> 00:05:32,680
Host: I'm sure we all appreciate that.

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00:05:32,680 --> 00:05:41,889
Insight Launch Sequence: Lift-off of the Atlas V, launching the first interplanetary mission

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00:05:41,889 --> 00:05:46,190
from the west coast, and NASA's Insight, the first outer space robotic explorer to

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00:05:46,190 --> 00:05:47,190

study the interior of Mars.

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00:05:47,190 --> 00:05:49,470

Host: Speaking of risk, once you get to mars, or near mars, we've heard a lot about planetary

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00:05:49,470 --> 00:05:50,470

protection.

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00:05:50,470 --> 00:05:51,470

Caley Burke: mm-hmm.

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00:05:51,470 --> 00:05:54,400

Host: So what is that and what is your team doing to try to help mitigate that at Mars?

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00:05:54,400 --> 00:05:59,060

Caley Burke: So we have somebody here at NASA who's called the planetary protection officer.

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00:05:59,060 --> 00:06:03,630

Um, which after a nine-year-old applied, I now-- jokingly, it's the guardian of the

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00:06:03,630 --> 00:06:04,630

galaxy.

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00:06:04,630 --> 00:06:06,800

Um, that's who-- why he said he'd be great.

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00:06:06,800 --> 00:06:11,640

But the planetary protection officer, um, looks to both protect earth from any microbes

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00:06:11,640 --> 00:06:12,930

we bring from space.

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00:06:12,930 --> 00:06:13,930

Host: Okay.

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00:06:13,930 --> 00:06:16,419

Caley Burke: And then, we also consider Mars and Europa, where we think there might be

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00:06:16,419 --> 00:06:21,620

life, we wanna protect them from any earth bugs and basically creating life somewhere

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00:06:21,620 --> 00:06:22,960

as opposed to finding it.

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00:06:22,960 --> 00:06:23,960

Host: Sure.

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00:06:23,960 --> 00:06:27,860

Caley Burke: So, we do that, um, with Insight in a couple different ways.

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00:06:27,860 --> 00:06:33,150

So, one, is the spacecraft, which we-we plan to have land on Mars, has been very specially

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00:06:33,150 --> 00:06:34,150

cleaned.

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00:06:34,150 --> 00:06:37,910

There's a whole team that is working to make sure that there's as few microbes as

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00:06:37,910 --> 00:06:39,500

possible, if any.

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00:06:39,500 --> 00:06:42,020

Um, but we don't do that with the rocket.

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00:06:42,020 --> 00:06:45,930

And so, we actually aim the trajectory a little bit away from Mars.

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00:06:45,930 --> 00:06:47,440

We don't aim it straight at Mars.

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00:06:47,440 --> 00:06:48,440

Host: Okay.

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00:06:48,440 --> 00:06:53,170

Caley Burke: Um, so that if, um, it doesn't perform as it should, or even if the spacecraft

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00:06:53,170 --> 00:06:56,450

doesn't perform as it should, we don't pollute Mars.

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00:06:56,450 --> 00:07:00,610

And so, what that means is the spacecraft has to carry extra fuel to account for that

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00:07:00,610 --> 00:07:03,010

correction, but they already have to do corrections.

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00:07:03,010 --> 00:07:07,600

They just have more fuel that they need to get closer to mars than if we could go straight

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00:07:07,600 --> 00:07:08,600

at it.

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00:07:08,600 --> 00:07:09,880

Host: So many things you have to think about.

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00:07:09,880 --> 00:07:12,150

So, what it-- it's gonna land in November, correct?

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00:07:12,150 --> 00:07:13,150

Caley Burke: Yes.

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00:07:13,150 --> 00:07:15,080

Host: So what do the next seven months have in store for you?

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00:07:15,080 --> 00:07:20,330

Caley Burke: So for me, um, it's really about that 90 minutes that starts at lift-off

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00:07:20,330 --> 00:07:21,600

to when we separate.

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00:07:21,600 --> 00:07:25,340

Um, and that's-- it varies a little bit day-by-day and time-by-time.

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00:07:25,340 --> 00:07:31,740

Um, but once insight separates, followed shortly by the Marcos, you know, I'm clapping and

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00:07:31,740 --> 00:07:32,740

celebrating.

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00:07:32,740 --> 00:07:34,270

Host: And the Marcos are CubeSat's?

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00:07:34,270 --> 00:07:35,710

Caley Burke: The Marcos, they are CubeSat's.

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00:07:35,710 --> 00:07:39,910

They're each the size of a b-briefcase and they're going along with insight to mars.

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00:07:39,910 --> 00:07:44,000

They're gonna be doing communications with it as it goes through the landing, which is

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00:07:44,000 --> 00:07:47,860

such a dangerous point that if something were to happen during landing, we'd like as much

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00:07:47,860 --> 00:07:50,710

data as possible so we can figure out what went wrong.

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00:07:50,710 --> 00:07:56,270

Um, but once insight and the Marcos separate, um, then I'm gonna clap and cheer.

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00:07:56,270 --> 00:08:01,770

And I began a process of data analysis, but all the systems I'm involved with have flown

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00:08:01,770 --> 00:08:02,950

and have done their jobs.

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00:08:02,950 --> 00:08:05,440

Host: So you can breathe easy about an hour and a half after launch?

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00:08:05,440 --> 00:08:07,610

Caley Burke: Yeah, about an hour and a half, I'll breathe easy.

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00:08:07,610 --> 00:08:11,960

Um, but I'll really-- I'll breathe easy once I get the data and I do the calculation

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00:08:11,960 --> 00:08:13,100

and we've met the requirement.

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00:08:13,100 --> 00:08:14,100

Host: Fair enough.

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00:08:14,100 --> 00:08:16,280

Caley Burke: Um, but, you know, it's tough.

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00:08:16,280 --> 00:08:21,020

If anything goes wrong at any part of the system, it's very-- it's devastating.

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00:08:21,020 --> 00:08:26,900

But, um, but you do wanna check, you know, that you've put it on the right path, and

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00:08:26,900 --> 00:08:30,890

hopefully it doesn't have to use a ton of fuel to correct for launch vehicle errors,

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00:08:30,890 --> 00:08:36,200

because the spacecraft has budgeted a certain amount of their fuel for the launch vehicle

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00:08:36,200 --> 00:08:37,529

errors, because we know they exist.

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00:08:37,529 --> 00:08:38,909

It's not gonna be a perfect shot.

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00:08:38,909 --> 00:08:40,539

They're gonna have to make corrections.

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00:08:40,539 --> 00:08:43,090

Host: And so, on launch day you're gonna be here at Kennedy watching?

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00:08:43,090 --> 00:08:44,090

Caley Burke: I am.

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00:08:44,090 --> 00:08:45,270

So I do have a role.

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00:08:45,270 --> 00:08:48,830

I'll be flight dynamics for NASA, but it's not a critical role.

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00:08:48,830 --> 00:08:52,140

And so, I'm here at Hangar AE in Cape Canaveral working on it.

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00:08:52,140 --> 00:08:56,240

So I'll be looking at the data, I'll have my headset on and I can talk with the chief

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00:08:56,240 --> 00:09:02,300

engineer, and so I'm ready to make sure, um, as we launch-- because we have all those

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00:09:02,300 --> 00:09:06,200

times that we can launch, but the amount of fuel for each of them is a little different.

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00:09:06,200 --> 00:09:11,610

So we'll be looking at the weather conditions and all that stuff and making sure that, um,

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00:09:11,610 --> 00:09:14,600

for everything that's going on for that time, we have enough fuel.

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00:09:14,600 --> 00:09:16,880

Now, for Insight, it's not-- that's not a big concern.

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00:09:16,880 --> 00:09:18,960

We have quite a bit of fuel on this mission.

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00:09:18,960 --> 00:09:25,610

Um, but then, after it launches I'm looking to see how the different numbers and parameters

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00:09:25,610 --> 00:09:27,790

look to what we call the nominal trajectory.

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00:09:27,790 --> 00:09:30,640

And so, that's the one where everything

is just as we modeled.

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00:09:30,640 --> 00:09:31,930

But let's say we're off nominal.

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00:09:31,930 --> 00:09:37,000

I'm there to let our chief engineer know, you know, if we can recover, if this is within

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00:09:37,000 --> 00:09:40,950

the bounds we've modeled, that it's just-- it's an off nominal day, but the rocket's

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00:09:40,950 --> 00:09:42,080

still getting where it needs to.

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00:09:42,080 --> 00:09:44,140

Host: All right, well let's all hope for a nominal day then.

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00:09:44,140 --> 00:09:45,140

Caley Burke: Yeah, that'd be great.

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00:09:45,140 --> 00:09:47,120

Host: And good luck to you and Insight.

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00:09:47,120 --> 00:09:49,710

Caley Burke: Thank you.

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00:09:49,710 --> 00:09:54,240

Thankfully, all calls were nominal and insight successfully launched from Vandenberg on May

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00:09:54,240 --> 00:09:58,070

5th, and Caley was able to relax just a few hours later.

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00:09:58,070 --> 00:10:02,070

At the time of this recording, the spacecraft

is already more than 6 million miles from

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00:10:02,070 --> 00:10:05,220

Earth and is scheduled to arrive at the Red Planet on November 26th.

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00:10:05,220 --> 00:10:07,800

Happy trails.

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00:10:07,800 --> 00:10:17,060

Dr. Gioia Massa: We've seen the movie "The Martian", and Mark Watney uses his botany

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00:10:17,060 --> 00:10:18,460

skills to save his life.

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00:10:18,460 --> 00:10:19,460

We will need plants to survive on mars.

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00:10:19,460 --> 00:10:21,740

Host: So that was our own Mark Watney, Dr. Gioia Massa.

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00:10:21,740 --> 00:10:23,750

She's a scientist here at Kennedy Space Center.

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00:10:23,750 --> 00:10:25,800

Her research is growing food in space.

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00:10:25,800 --> 00:10:29,020

And also with us is Ralph Fritsche, who works on long duration food production.

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00:10:29,020 --> 00:10:31,300

We'll get to what that means a little bit later.

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00:10:31,300 --> 00:10:33,450

So, Gioia, tell us a little bit about what you've been working on.

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00:10:33,450 --> 00:10:38,430

Dr. Gioia Massa: So we work on food production to help grow food for the astronauts.

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00:10:38,430 --> 00:10:42,700

We're growing fresh vegetables right now on the International Space Station to supplement

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00:10:42,700 --> 00:10:44,370

the astronauts' diet.

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00:10:44,370 --> 00:10:48,840

You can bring a lot of food with you when you go, and we do that on Space Station, and

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00:10:48,840 --> 00:10:50,240

the packaged food is really good.

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00:10:50,240 --> 00:10:56,630

There's a lot of variety, but over time vac-packaged food loses its nutritional quality.

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00:10:56,630 --> 00:11:00,930

And so, one of the things that's really important is to figure out how to grow fresh

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00:11:00,930 --> 00:11:03,839

vegetables to supplement that packaged diet.

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00:11:03,839 --> 00:11:07,800

And doing that without gravity and without, you know, the sun, and all the other things

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00:11:07,800 --> 00:11:10,370

we take for granted on earth is kind of a challenge.

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00:11:10,370 --> 00:11:11,370

>>

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00:11:11,370 --> 00:11:12,370

Host: So how exactly do you do that?

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00:11:12,370 --> 00:11:16,220

The Space Station, as, you know, many of our listeners probably know, is 225, 250 miles

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00:11:16,220 --> 00:11:17,220

above Earth.

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00:11:17,220 --> 00:11:19,540

So, you know, we have microgravity.

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00:11:19,540 --> 00:11:22,920

It doesn't have sunshine to the plant, so how do you-- how do you take care of that?

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00:11:22,920 --> 00:11:27,190

Dr. Gioia Massa: Well, we do a lot of our growing in what we call controlled environments.

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00:11:27,190 --> 00:11:29,320

So we're actually controlling the light.

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00:11:29,320 --> 00:11:33,350

We use LED's, light emitting diodes, to provide the light for plants, and we have

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00:11:33,350 --> 00:11:37,260

a lot of research on that here at Kennedy Space Center, figuring out what's the best

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00:11:37,260 --> 00:11:42,460

light recipe to give the plants to get them to grow well and to taste good and to be very

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00:11:42,460 --> 00:11:43,460

nutritious.

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00:11:43,460 --> 00:11:44,800

Host: Have you figured out that light recipe yet?

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00:11:44,800 --> 00:11:48,390

Dr. Gioia Massa: It differs for every single plant we grow, so it's a big challenge,

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00:11:48,390 --> 00:11:49,390

actually.

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00:11:49,390 --> 00:11:50,390

We have to do a lot of research.

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00:11:50,390 --> 00:11:54,320

Um, the other thing that we're working a lot on is water delivery.

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00:11:54,320 --> 00:11:57,110

Delivering water to plants without gravity is a real challenge.

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00:11:57,110 --> 00:12:01,120

And plant roots don't just need water, but they also need oxygen.

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00:12:01,120 --> 00:12:04,240

And in space, air and water just don't mix very well.

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00:12:04,240 --> 00:12:07,170

You may have seen the video of the astronaut wringing out the wet washcloth.

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00:12:07,170 --> 00:12:08,170

Host: mm-hmm.

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00:12:08,170 --> 00:12:10,850

Dr. Gioia Massa: Where the water crawls around his hand, you know.

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00:12:10,850 --> 00:12:13,269

It's surface, um, surface tension.

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00:12:13,269 --> 00:12:17,120

And so, if you think of that as a plant root, it just gets drowned in water.

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00:12:17,120 --> 00:12:20,550

So we have to figure out the right way to do a lot of water and air balancing.

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00:12:20,550 --> 00:12:23,800

And-and actually, that's one of the things we're working on with food production.

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00:12:23,800 --> 00:12:25,020

Ralph can talk more about that.

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00:12:25,020 --> 00:12:27,440

Ralph Fritsche: Yeah, that's where I come in.

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00:12:27,440 --> 00:12:30,019

Um, we have the plant scientists and we also have engineers.

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00:12:30,019 --> 00:12:34,850

And I think the real challenge is to take the knowledge that the scientists have in

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00:12:34,850 --> 00:12:39,890

how to grow plants and kind of merge that with the engineering expertise that the talent

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00:12:39,890 --> 00:12:42,200
we have here at KSC can provide.

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00:12:42,200 --> 00:12:46,420
It-it's interesting that you get to a certain
point with the plant scientists where their

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00:12:46,420 --> 00:12:48,560
engineering skills tend to run out.

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00:12:48,560 --> 00:12:50,959
You're at the fringe of-- the boundary of
their knowledge.

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00:12:50,959 --> 00:12:53,990
And then you have the engineers come along
and-and they really-- most-- for the most

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00:12:53,990 --> 00:12:57,880
part know little to nothing about plants,
unless they grew on a farm.

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00:12:57,880 --> 00:13:02,860
So it's trying to merge those two cultures
into a successful collaboration that really

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00:13:02,860 --> 00:13:04,600
enables us to push forward.

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00:13:04,600 --> 00:13:07,100
And water delivery right now is our first
challenge.

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00:13:07,100 --> 00:13:08,260
Host: you've had successes.

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00:13:08,260 --> 00:13:09,500
I've seen astronauts eating lettuce.

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00:13:09,500 --> 00:13:11,180

Astronauts on the Space Station: that's awesome.

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00:13:11,180 --> 00:13:12,640

It's good-- tastes good?

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00:13:12,640 --> 00:13:13,640

Yeah.

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00:13:13,640 --> 00:13:14,640

I like that.

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00:13:14,640 --> 00:13:15,910

Kind of like arugula.

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00:13:15,910 --> 00:13:20,650

Host: I know here on earth we-we've kinda had a lot of scares with lettuce lately.

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00:13:20,650 --> 00:13:22,980

Um, are there the same concerns in space?

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00:13:22,980 --> 00:13:24,570

Dr. Gioia Massa: Actually, no.

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00:13:24,570 --> 00:13:28,790

There are some food safety concerns in space, 'cause we have to worry about what microorganisms

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00:13:28,790 --> 00:13:31,680

might be in the environment just kinda floating around.

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00:13:31,680 --> 00:13:35,750

But most of the lettuce concerns or the food safety scares we have on earth are from things

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00:13:35,750 --> 00:13:38,320

like animals getting into the field.

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00:13:38,320 --> 00:13:42,830

So we don't really have any of those issues,
but we do have to, you know, do due diligence.

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00:13:42,830 --> 00:13:47,070

We-we don't want to put the astronauts at
risk, so we wanna make sure that the food

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00:13:47,070 --> 00:13:48,070

is safe to eat.

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00:13:48,070 --> 00:13:52,270

And we're also looking at new ways to clean
the produce, because, you know, you-- it's--

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00:13:52,270 --> 00:13:55,899

just like it's hard to wash or, to water
plants, it's also really hard to wash your

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00:13:55,899 --> 00:13:57,279

vegetables in space.

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00:13:57,279 --> 00:13:59,850

Uh, so we have, um, groups working on that
as well.

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00:13:59,850 --> 00:14:04,370

Host: so for the space station, it makes sense
that, you know, we can send resupply missions

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00:14:04,370 --> 00:14:06,760

up often so they have, uh, a food supply.

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00:14:06,760 --> 00:14:11,029

So, when we go to further destinations like
Mars, where it takes six to nine months to

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00:14:11,029 --> 00:14:13,560

get there, why is your work so important?

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00:14:13,560 --> 00:14:19,930

Ralph Fritsche: So right now, I think we're kind of, um, really at the benefit of having

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00:14:19,930 --> 00:14:21,450

this close proximity to the earth.

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00:14:21,450 --> 00:14:25,740

We don't worry so much about the food that we are growing, uh, because it's not really

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00:14:25,740 --> 00:14:30,170

being required to s-- really supply additional calories and nutrition to the crew.

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00:14:30,170 --> 00:14:35,279

Right now, it's been primarily research and as an additive just to demonstrate a capability.

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00:14:35,279 --> 00:14:40,070

But the further away we go, the more important and critical having that food as part of--

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00:14:40,070 --> 00:14:43,690

that we grow as part of the system, uh, capability requirements.

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00:14:43,690 --> 00:14:49,940

It-it takes a lot of energy and a lot of money to get food sent from the ground up into deep

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00:14:49,940 --> 00:14:50,940

space.

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00:14:50,940 --> 00:14:56,980

Uh, we know that a crew of six, one-year stay on mars, its 26,000 pounds of food, 31 cubic

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00:14:56,980 --> 00:14:58,709
meters of volume.

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00:14:58,709 --> 00:15:04,130
And when I look at the next vehicle that we're
planning on putting up in, um, cis-lunar space,

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00:15:04,130 --> 00:15:09,520
the lunar orbital platform, the gateway, that
internal volume is only 51 cubic meters.

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00:15:09,520 --> 00:15:15,180
So if we think about the amount of space required
and the weight, uh, required to get off the

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00:15:15,180 --> 00:15:19,720
ground to get to Mars, to get on the surface
of Mars, to feed crews, we're not gonna

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00:15:19,720 --> 00:15:21,020
be able to sustain that.

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00:15:21,020 --> 00:15:25,610
We really, for the long haul, need to be able
to come up with a bio-regenerative capability

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00:15:25,610 --> 00:15:27,861
where we can really truly start looking at
Earth independence.

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00:15:27,861 --> 00:15:32,730
And so, you're gonna see a transition from
the pick and eat type of crops that we grow

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00:15:32,730 --> 00:15:37,709
now into the staple crops, which really supply
our calories, so that we can kind of offload

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00:15:37,709 --> 00:15:40,089

that weight penalty for bringing things from earth.

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00:15:40,089 --> 00:15:43,390

Host: so pick and eat-- so Gioia, can you talk a little about the difference between

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00:15:43,390 --> 00:15:44,390

those?

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00:15:44,390 --> 00:15:45,390

>>

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00:15:45,390 --> 00:15:46,410

Dr. Gioia Massa: Yeah, so pick and eat are your fresh vegetables, things that you can

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00:15:46,410 --> 00:15:47,570

pick and eat directly.

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00:15:47,570 --> 00:15:48,959

So your salad crops.

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00:15:48,959 --> 00:15:54,070

We work a lot with leafy greens, um, small fruits like tomatoes and peppers, um, maybe

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00:15:54,070 --> 00:15:57,279

some herbs like basil that you could add to the packaged food.

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00:15:57,279 --> 00:16:01,000

Um, maybe even some root crops, like a radish or a carrot.

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00:16:01,000 --> 00:16:05,220

Uh, those are a little harder because, you know, without gravity it gets to be a challenge

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00:16:05,220 --> 00:16:07,149

to-to-to harvest the roots well.

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00:16:07,149 --> 00:16:08,149

>>

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00:16:08,149 --> 00:16:09,230

Host: And you mentioned growing fast and-and flavors.

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00:16:09,230 --> 00:16:12,519

And I know, uh, Ralph, you guys have been testing microgreens.

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00:16:12,519 --> 00:16:16,850

Ralph Fritsche: Uh, advantages of microgreens is it doesn't take much in the way of resources

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00:16:16,850 --> 00:16:22,550

to grow them, and they are very dense in their nutrition, uh, they require less light.

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00:16:22,550 --> 00:16:26,680

So everything with more-- growing microgreens is pretty much a positive so far.

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00:16:26,680 --> 00:16:27,839

They have a lot of flavor.

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00:16:27,839 --> 00:16:31,610

You can add them to the diet as an augmentation to meals, um--

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00:16:31,610 --> 00:16:34,950

Host: And I hear that the astronauts really love things that have a little punch of flavor.

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00:16:34,950 --> 00:16:38,779

Ralph Fritsche: Yeah, and we can-- anything

that you can grow as a typical salad crop

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00:16:38,779 --> 00:16:40,500

can be grown as a microgreen.

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00:16:40,500 --> 00:16:41,889

You just harvest it earlier.

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00:16:41,889 --> 00:16:46,250

Uh, we've been experimenting with wasabi, things that have a real kick to them.

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00:16:46,250 --> 00:16:49,769

There's also some, uh, microgreens that we grow that taste like green apples.

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00:16:49,769 --> 00:16:54,130

So we can add a lot of variety of flavor, as well as the nutrients, into the diet by

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00:16:54,130 --> 00:16:57,650

growing something that's simple, that doesn't take up much space, and doesn't require

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00:16:57,650 --> 00:17:01,161

much of the, uh, consumable resources that we have to bring along.

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00:17:01,161 --> 00:17:02,620

Host: Yeah, I imagine seeds are quite light.

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00:17:02,620 --> 00:17:05,929

Ralph Fritsche: Seeds are light when compared to some of the hardware components that we

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00:17:05,929 --> 00:17:07,010

have to bring up, yeah.

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00:17:07,010 --> 00:17:08,939

And we can pack a lot of 'em in a small space.

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00:17:08,939 --> 00:17:09,939

Host: mm-hmm.

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00:17:09,939 --> 00:17:13,630

Dr. Gioia Massa: So, one of the things we have to figure out is how seeds do over long

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00:17:13,630 --> 00:17:17,620

durations, especially when they're exposed to some of the radiation we may get on the

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00:17:17,620 --> 00:17:18,810

way to-- the way to Mars, so--

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00:17:18,810 --> 00:17:19,810

Ralph Fritsche: Big thing, radiation.

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00:17:19,810 --> 00:17:20,850

Dr. Gioia Massa: Yeah, radiation's big.

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00:17:20,850 --> 00:17:25,290

Ralph Fritsche: Everything we've done, um, in terms of growing plants for food in recent

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00:17:25,290 --> 00:17:28,980

years has all been done in low earth orbit, in the protective environment of the radiation

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00:17:28,980 --> 00:17:31,130

belts that we have here, the Van Allen belts.

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00:17:31,130 --> 00:17:35,330

We don't know what the effect of that radiation environment, the cosmic rays are gonna have

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00:17:35,330 --> 00:17:37,860

long term on the seeds or the plants that we grow.

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00:17:37,860 --> 00:17:42,200

So we're gonna be looking at multi-generational studies to really observe those effects, and

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00:17:42,200 --> 00:17:46,390

that's why we need to start that kinda research as soon as we can and why we're really hoping

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00:17:46,390 --> 00:17:48,670

to get something incorporated onto the Gateway.

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00:17:48,670 --> 00:17:52,580

Host: What would, like, a greenhouse look like on Mars, like, given the radiation concerns?

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00:17:52,580 --> 00:17:53,580

>>

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00:17:53,580 --> 00:17:55,910

Dr. Gioia Massa: Well, you'll probably be underground.

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00:17:55,910 --> 00:17:59,180

Um, you know, i think you'll wanna be protected somehow.

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00:17:59,180 --> 00:18:04,190

So maybe in the early period, you know, when you're just there, you might be in a habitat,

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00:18:04,190 --> 00:18:08,670

something that would launch on a rocket, and maybe you'll have, um, you know, a habitat

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00:18:08,670 --> 00:18:13,480

that's outfitted just for plant growth that could provide those-those crops for the crew.

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00:18:13,480 --> 00:18:18,080

But later on, you'll probably be-- I'd either pile dirt over the top of it, or you'll

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00:18:18,080 --> 00:18:19,080

be in a cave.

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00:18:19,080 --> 00:18:20,179

Ralph Fritsche: Regolith, Gioia, it's regolith.

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00:18:20,179 --> 00:18:21,179

Dr. Gioia Massa: Yeah.

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00:18:21,179 --> 00:18:23,549

Uh, over-- or you'll be in maybe a lava tube cave.

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00:18:23,549 --> 00:18:27,470

So you'd protect the crew and the plants from-from the radiation that's hittin'

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00:18:27,470 --> 00:18:28,470

surface.

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00:18:28,470 --> 00:18:31,250

It would also protect from things like dust, micrometeorite impacts.

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00:18:31,250 --> 00:18:34,720

You know, there's a lot of hazards on-on-on the planet.

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00:18:34,720 --> 00:18:39,760

Um, and then, you know, you'd be using either electric light, like LED's, or maybe you

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00:18:39,760 --> 00:18:45,100

can use some light piping where you have a

concentrating mirror, like a parabolic shaped

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00:18:45,100 --> 00:18:49,300

mirror that will concentrate the sun and pipe
it underground through fiber optics.

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00:18:49,300 --> 00:18:55,480

But, um, you gotta remember the sun on Mars
is-is 43-percent of what it is on Earth, so--

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00:18:55,480 --> 00:18:57,120

and that's even without a dust storm.

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00:18:57,120 --> 00:19:02,020

So you know, you'd have to have a lot of
area that you concentrate to-to get enough

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00:19:02,020 --> 00:19:03,020

sun to grow plants.

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00:19:03,020 --> 00:19:05,730

Host: So, I read "The Martian", I saw
the movie.

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00:19:05,730 --> 00:19:06,880

I'm sure you have, too.

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00:19:06,880 --> 00:19:07,880

Dr. Gioia Massa: Mm-hmm.

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00:19:07,880 --> 00:19:08,880

Host: So mark Watney--

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00:19:08,880 --> 00:19:10,330

Ralph Fritsche: Wait, what was that-- what
was that movie?

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00:19:10,330 --> 00:19:14,350

Host: Uh, Mark Watney, you know, grew potatoes

in that regolith.

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00:19:14,350 --> 00:19:16,270

Um, are potatoes a good option?

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00:19:16,270 --> 00:19:19,890

Ralph Fritsche: So, when it comes to what he did in terms of growing the potatoes on

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00:19:19,890 --> 00:19:23,380

Mars, um, once again, Hollywood takes a lot of liberties.

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00:19:23,380 --> 00:19:27,440

Uh, we appreciate their efforts in showing the potential possibility, but, no, you couldn't

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00:19:27,440 --> 00:19:32,669

grow potatoes or pretty much anything with straight up Martian regolith the way he used

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00:19:32,669 --> 00:19:33,669

it.

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00:19:33,669 --> 00:19:38,620

Uh, regolith contains perchlorates and other things that are not conducive to plant growth

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00:19:38,620 --> 00:19:40,549

or human consumption.

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00:19:40,549 --> 00:19:44,100

So we would have to remediate those things, get those things out of the regolith before

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00:19:44,100 --> 00:19:49,460

you could actually even consider adding nutrients to the regolith that would facilitate plant

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00:19:49,460 --> 00:19:50,460
growth.

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00:19:50,460 --> 00:19:53,020

So the way it's depicted in the movie, not so much.

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00:19:53,020 --> 00:19:56,250

Dr. Gioia Massa: But potatoes are a good candidate crop.

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00:19:56,250 --> 00:19:59,650

They're very nutritious, they're very productive, um, and we've actually worked

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00:19:59,650 --> 00:20:03,600

for a long time here at Kennedy Space Center on potatoes, especially our colleague dr.

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00:20:03,600 --> 00:20:05,510

Ray Wheeler, who's a potato expert.

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00:20:05,510 --> 00:20:08,450

You know, right now on space station, we don't have any way to cook anything.

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00:20:08,450 --> 00:20:10,200

We don't even have a microwave.

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00:20:10,200 --> 00:20:13,789

So we're really just focusing on things you can pick and eat fresh, but as soon as

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00:20:13,789 --> 00:20:19,030

we had a microwave or an oven or a way to cook, crops like white potato and sweet potato

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00:20:19,030 --> 00:20:21,420

become a really good source of food.

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00:20:21,420 --> 00:20:24,380

Um, and they're easy to grow and-and they're kinda fun.

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00:20:24,380 --> 00:20:29,140

Host: So, can you speak a little bit about the psychological benefits of growing things.

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00:20:29,140 --> 00:20:33,130

Like, when you're going on a six to nine-month mission to Mars, like, how important is that

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00:20:33,130 --> 00:20:34,370

to see something green growing?

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00:20:34,370 --> 00:20:37,560

Dr. Gioia Massa: Well, I think it would be really important, but I'm a little biased.

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00:20:37,560 --> 00:20:40,200

Um, you know, it-- we don't really know.

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00:20:40,200 --> 00:20:44,660

We don't have great data on that yet, but there are a lot of anecdotal evidence from

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00:20:44,660 --> 00:20:49,179

the astronauts saying how much they like growing the plants, how much they really enjoy seeing

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00:20:49,179 --> 00:20:52,330

them in that environment of the Space Station, which is very synthetic.

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00:20:52,330 --> 00:20:55,110

It's all plastic and metal and cables and wires.

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00:20:55,110 --> 00:20:59,679

Um, so I think having that little piece of Earth with you when you're living and working

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00:20:59,679 --> 00:21:04,809

in a stressful environment, especially when you're so far from home on Mars that, you

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00:21:04,809 --> 00:21:09,200

know, it's just a-a dot in the sky, I think that's gonna be really important.

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00:21:09,200 --> 00:21:12,669

But then there's the-the-the downside-- you know, what happens if you get too attached

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00:21:12,669 --> 00:21:14,000

to your plants and they-they die?

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00:21:14,000 --> 00:21:17,340

Or you know, you have an insect or-- not insect, a disease outbreak.

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00:21:17,340 --> 00:21:19,080

Hopefully we won't bring any insects.

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00:21:19,080 --> 00:21:22,220

Then, you know, then that could be psychologically detrimental.

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00:21:22,220 --> 00:21:24,020

So we have to look at all of that.

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00:21:24,020 --> 00:21:28,540

We're gonna be startin' to collect some data on the psychological benefit or not of

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00:21:28,540 --> 00:21:31,270

plants in space in the next couple of years on ISS.

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00:21:31,270 --> 00:21:35,549

We'll be doing questionnaires and surveys of the crew and actually collect some data

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00:21:35,549 --> 00:21:36,549

on this.

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00:21:36,549 --> 00:21:37,549

So hopefully we'll know more.

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00:21:37,549 --> 00:21:38,549

Host: That sounds really cool.

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00:21:38,549 --> 00:21:39,549

>>

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00:21:39,549 --> 00:21:40,610

Ralph Fritsche: But, you know, you can do some extrapolation, and-and this is not scientific

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00:21:40,610 --> 00:21:45,669

at all, but we know from the food technology folks in Houston who we kind of support in

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00:21:45,669 --> 00:21:49,360

terms with our food production activities, they're very concerned about the quality

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00:21:49,360 --> 00:21:51,850

of the diet from a palatability standpoint.

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00:21:51,850 --> 00:21:55,030

Is the crew gonna like whatever we grow so that they would eat it?

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00:21:55,030 --> 00:21:58,720

Uh, and they're very concerned from the perspective that the crew has to give up a

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00:21:58,720 --> 00:22:03,919

lot of the comforts of home just going on
spaceflight, and so the thought of sacrificing

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00:22:03,919 --> 00:22:08,429

the quality and the enjoyment they get from
their diet with that sense of taste is something

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00:22:08,429 --> 00:22:09,650

that they don't wanna have to give up.

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00:22:09,650 --> 00:22:14,480

Dr. Gioia Massa: They found that people eating
the same diets for long times get-get menu

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00:22:14,480 --> 00:22:15,480

fatigue.

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00:22:15,480 --> 00:22:16,480

Ralph Fritsche: Unless it's my son.

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00:22:16,480 --> 00:22:17,500

He likes chicken fingers every day.

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00:22:17,500 --> 00:22:19,380

Host: I think that's everyone's child.

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00:22:19,380 --> 00:22:20,429

Dr. Gioia Massa: Yeah, but--

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00:22:20,429 --> 00:22:21,429

Ralph Fritsche: There's our solution.

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00:22:21,429 --> 00:22:24,560

Dr. Gioia Massa: If we don't have chicken
fingers, um, you know, you might get a little

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00:22:24,560 --> 00:22:29,040

bored eating the same diet year in, year out,
you know, on maybe a two week cycle, even

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00:22:29,040 --> 00:22:30,169

though it's a really good diet.

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00:22:30,169 --> 00:22:35,580

And so having this fresh produce to make it
more interesting to-to give you more options

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00:22:35,580 --> 00:22:37,650

of things that you can make could be really
good, too.

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00:22:37,650 --> 00:22:40,660

Ralph Fritsche: and-and that's another interesting
challenge we have where we're constantly

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00:22:40,660 --> 00:22:46,250

approached by people who have potential food
production solutions, but the product that

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00:22:46,250 --> 00:22:49,610

they're developing is not something that
you would traditionally find appealing, let's

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00:22:49,610 --> 00:22:51,460

say, in a regular diet.

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00:22:51,460 --> 00:22:52,460

Host: Hmm, yeah.

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00:22:52,460 --> 00:22:55,210

Ralph Fritsche: Even though it might be highly
nutritious, uh, we've seen articles in the

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00:22:55,210 --> 00:22:57,110

press recently about cockroach milk.

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00:22:57,110 --> 00:23:01,200

Um, yeah, it might be really good for you,
but how do you provide that to someone and

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00:23:01,200 --> 00:23:02,200

have them eat it?

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00:23:02,200 --> 00:23:05,799

Host: And I understand you're also working
with kids to help you decide the next crops

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00:23:05,799 --> 00:23:06,799

to grow?

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00:23:06,799 --> 00:23:10,030

Dr. Gioia Massa: Yeah, we have a wonderful
program with the Fairchild Tropical Botanic

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00:23:10,030 --> 00:23:15,700

Garden in Miami, and they have about 150 or
more, uh, middle schools and high schools,

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00:23:15,700 --> 00:23:19,990

and those students are involved with testing
new crops for us for space.

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00:23:19,990 --> 00:23:25,140

Student: Hi, my name is Giselle and I'm
a 12th grade student at biotech high school.

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00:23:25,140 --> 00:23:26,900

My question is for Ricky.

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00:23:26,900 --> 00:23:29,789

If you could grow any food plant on ISS, what
would it be?

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00:23:29,789 --> 00:23:33,070

Ricky Arnold (astronaut): well, if I had my
choice, it would be a barbeque plant.

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00:23:33,070 --> 00:23:36,890

But, uh, since they don't exist on Earth,
uh, I'll have to go with a, uh, some kinda

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00:23:36,890 --> 00:23:37,890

fresh fruit.

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00:23:37,890 --> 00:23:42,280

Dr. Gioia Massa: so if you can get, you know,
100 schools to grow one type of plant really

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00:23:42,280 --> 00:23:46,600

well, when you have some kids watering not
enough and some overwatering, and some classrooms

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00:23:46,600 --> 00:23:50,670

cold and some hot-- if that plant grows really
well in that many schools, it's probably

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00:23:50,670 --> 00:23:52,390

a really good candidate for space.

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00:23:52,390 --> 00:23:54,130

So we're really excited.

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00:23:54,130 --> 00:23:58,260

They're generating a lot of data, they're
feeding it to us on Google Sheets, they have

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00:23:58,260 --> 00:24:03,890

a statistician involved as well, and so we're
actually going to be flying two of the species

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00:24:03,890 --> 00:24:07,260

that they down-selected on the International
Space Station.

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00:24:07,260 --> 00:24:08,260

Host: That's amazing.

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00:24:08,260 --> 00:24:09,260

Dr. Gioia Massa: Yeah.

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00:24:09,260 --> 00:24:10,260

Host: Where kids get to be part of, you know, NASA.

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00:24:10,260 --> 00:24:11,260

Dr. Gioia Massa: Yeah, they are so valuable.

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00:24:11,260 --> 00:24:12,260

Yeah.

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00:24:12,260 --> 00:24:13,260

Host: That's awesome.

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00:24:13,260 --> 00:24:17,940

That sounds like you guys have so many challenges between oxygen, and water, and radiation,

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00:24:17,940 --> 00:24:19,960

and what kind of soil do you grow it in in space, and-and mass.

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00:24:19,960 --> 00:24:21,789

Ralph Fritsche: We'll have 'em all solved by next week.

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00:24:21,789 --> 00:24:22,820

It's no problem.

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00:24:22,820 --> 00:24:23,820

Host: Excellent.

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00:24:23,820 --> 00:24:26,640

Dr. Gioia Massa: We have a lot of interns, so that helps.

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00:24:26,640 --> 00:24:27,640

Host: I love it.

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00:24:27,640 --> 00:24:31,520

So, my last question, you guys: would you go to Mars and be that crazy botanist on Mars?

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00:24:31,520 --> 00:24:36,600

Dr. Gioia Massa: A few years ago I might've, but now I think I'm pretty earthbound.

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00:24:36,600 --> 00:24:42,330

You know, I would like to go to space at some point, but, um, I'd- I think Mars is a little-little

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00:24:42,330 --> 00:24:43,330

far away for me.

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00:24:43,330 --> 00:24:44,330

Host: Ralph?

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00:24:44,330 --> 00:24:47,809

Ralph Fritsche: I am strangely drawn to Mars, but I'm not a botanist, so I guess I can't

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00:24:47,809 --> 00:24:48,809

go.

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00:24:48,809 --> 00:24:49,809

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00:24:49,809 --> 00:24:50,809

Host: You can still go.

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00:24:50,809 --> 00:24:51,809

We still need project managers.

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00:24:51,809 --> 00:24:57,220

Dr. Gioia Massa: Just don't open the airlock.

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00:24:57,220 --> 00:25:11,480

Rob Mueller: Kennedy Space Center is one of the world's, uh, premier spaceports, but

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00:25:11,480 --> 00:25:17,570

we also envision spaceports on other planetary surfaces-- uh, Mars, uh, the Moon, and even

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00:25:17,570 --> 00:25:18,950

asteroids and beyond.

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00:25:18,950 --> 00:25:22,850

Joshua Santora (Host): All right, so I am here today in the booth with Rob Mueller.

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00:25:22,850 --> 00:25:25,000

Uh, Rob, what's your official title here?

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00:25:25,000 --> 00:25:30,130

Rob Mueller: I am a senior technologist in the NASA Kennedy Space Center Swamp Works

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00:25:30,130 --> 00:25:31,409

innovation environment.

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00:25:31,409 --> 00:25:35,600

Essentially, we're developing the technologies that are required to operate in space-- for

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00:25:35,600 --> 00:25:37,150

humans to operate in space.

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00:25:37,150 --> 00:25:42,700

Speaker: Robert, let me add my congratulations, uh, to Jim Bridenstine as the new administrator

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00:25:42,700 --> 00:25:43,700
of NASA.

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00:25:43,700 --> 00:25:48,450
Jim Bridenstine: The reason we go to the Moon
is because we wanna land Americans on the

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00:25:48,450 --> 00:25:49,850
surface of Mars.

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00:25:49,850 --> 00:25:55,419
And the technologies, the capabilities, the
in situ resource utilization that we develop

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00:25:55,419 --> 00:25:58,270
for the Moon will ultimately get us to Mars.

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00:25:58,270 --> 00:26:00,720
It's also why the Gateway is so important.

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00:26:00,720 --> 00:26:07,070
Having, uh, an-an orbital outpost around the
Moon gives us more access to more parts of

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00:26:07,070 --> 00:26:09,510
the solar system than ever before.

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00:26:09,510 --> 00:26:14,540
Host: Okay, so we have rockets that can get
people to Mars today.

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00:26:14,540 --> 00:26:19,309
Uh, maybe not a lot of stuff with them, but--
so you strap me in in a rocket, I got a spacesuit

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00:26:19,309 --> 00:26:23,820
on, I got some food and some water-- how successful
of a mission is this to Mars?

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00:26:23,820 --> 00:26:27,549

Rob Mueller: Well, first of all, you have to realize this is not a short trip.

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00:26:27,549 --> 00:26:28,549

Host: Okay.

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00:26:28,549 --> 00:26:33,590

Rob Mueller: And to to compound that, once you get there, you can't come home right

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00:26:33,590 --> 00:26:34,590

away.

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00:26:34,590 --> 00:26:39,270

If you had an emergency, the planets aren't lined up the way the orbits work.

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00:26:39,270 --> 00:26:46,200

And so it's very difficult to come back from Mars, uh, without using a lot of propellant.

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00:26:46,200 --> 00:26:51,860

And so, essentially, in the trajectory that we have planned, you would go there.

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00:26:51,860 --> 00:26:57,409

Uh, it's called a conjunction class trajectory and it would take you six to eight months

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00:26:57,409 --> 00:27:02,330

to travel to Mars, and then, uh, you're committed to being on Mars for one and a half years,

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00:27:02,330 --> 00:27:03,920

and then you can come back.

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00:27:03,920 --> 00:27:08,270

So it's a two and a half year round trip journey, and, uh, that's what you're signing

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00:27:08,270 --> 00:27:09,270

up for.

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00:27:09,270 --> 00:27:12,460

And-and so, that's-that's a big difference between the Moon and Mars.

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00:27:12,460 --> 00:27:14,230

The Moon is three days journey.

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00:27:14,230 --> 00:27:16,190

Uh, we did it during the Apollo missions.

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00:27:16,190 --> 00:27:18,460

If there's an emergency, as like in Apollo 13.

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00:27:18,460 --> 00:27:25,299

Apollo 13 clip: your black team of flight controllers is now in station in mission control

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00:27:25,299 --> 00:27:31,250

center, looking at possible alternate missions, as we have an apparent serious oxygen leak

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00:27:31,250 --> 00:27:34,169

in the cryogenic oxygen in the service module.

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00:27:34,169 --> 00:27:40,929

Rob Mueller: Uh, you can come back home relatively easily as compared to Mars.

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00:27:40,929 --> 00:27:43,940

So those-those are the big differences between the Moon and Mars.

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00:27:43,940 --> 00:27:46,990

Then, when you get to Mars, there's, uh,

an atmosphere.

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00:27:46,990 --> 00:27:53,090

It's about 1% of the Earth's atmosphere in density, and, uh, uh, you would think that

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00:27:53,090 --> 00:27:57,220

that's a good thing, uh, and it's-it's good and bad.

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00:27:57,220 --> 00:28:02,429

When you try to land on Mars and you come into the atmosphere, it helps because it provides

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00:28:02,429 --> 00:28:04,150

friction, which slows you down.

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00:28:04,150 --> 00:28:10,740

However, that friction creates heat, and then that will cause problems for your spacecraft,

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00:28:10,740 --> 00:28:13,590

and so you need heat shields and those kind of things.

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00:28:13,590 --> 00:28:19,210

But the atmosphere isn't dense enough to really slow you down, so you need more time.

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00:28:19,210 --> 00:28:23,299

In fact, there's many places on Mars where we cannot land today because the altitude

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00:28:23,299 --> 00:28:24,299

is too high.

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00:28:24,299 --> 00:28:25,299

You don't have enough time to land.

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00:28:25,299 --> 00:28:28,070

The parachute's open but you're still going too fast.

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00:28:28,070 --> 00:28:32,411

So we land in the valleys on Mars and low areas, and that's just a reality of going

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00:28:34,570 --> 00:28:33,411

to Mars.

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00:28:34,570 --> 00:28:37,010

Host: What kind of things do we have to consider before we go?

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00:28:37,010 --> 00:28:40,460

Rob Mueller: Well, let's start with what we can do today.

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00:28:40,460 --> 00:28:46,920

Today, the largest object we've landed on Mars had had a roughly 1,000 kilograms, a

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00:28:46,920 --> 00:28:49,820

little bit under 1,000 kilograms, the-the Mars Science Lab.

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00:28:49,820 --> 00:28:52,720

That's what we're able to land on Mars today.

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00:28:52,720 --> 00:28:57,140

In the future, the payloads we're going to have to land on Mars for human exploration

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00:28:57,140 --> 00:29:03,990

will be between 20 and 40 metric tons, so 20,000 to 40,000 kilograms per landing, and

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00:29:03,990 --> 00:29:06,080

there will be multiple landings required.

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00:29:06,080 --> 00:29:11,419

So that's 20 to 40 times the capability of the systems we have today for landing on

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00:29:11,419 --> 00:29:12,419

Mars.

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00:29:12,419 --> 00:29:14,160

Then, you have to consider the humans.

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00:29:14,160 --> 00:29:16,930

The humans need to survive.

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00:29:16,930 --> 00:29:18,590

That is, uh, important.

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00:29:18,590 --> 00:29:19,590

Host: Pretty critical.

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00:29:19,590 --> 00:29:24,299

Rob Mueller: And so, we'd like to not only have them survive, but-but really do well

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00:29:24,299 --> 00:29:25,720

in space.

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00:29:25,720 --> 00:29:28,789

But we're still learning about that, and that's one of the reasons we have the International

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00:29:28,789 --> 00:29:30,159

Space Station.

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00:29:30,159 --> 00:29:33,020

When we have a-a journey to Mars, it takes six months.

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00:29:33,020 --> 00:29:37,429

In those six months, when you land, the first thing that could happen is you'll have to

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00:29:37,429 --> 00:29:38,650

do rehab.

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00:29:38,650 --> 00:29:43,419

And so, you'll spend four to six weeks doing rehab before you can ever walk on the surface

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00:29:43,419 --> 00:29:44,610

of Mars.

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00:29:44,610 --> 00:29:49,570

But on the other hand, you have to plug your spacecraft into the power plant right away

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00:29:49,570 --> 00:29:51,390

or your batteries will run down.

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00:29:51,390 --> 00:29:55,831

So now you have this dilemma-- you're too weak to do a spacewalk on Mars because there's

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00:29:55,831 --> 00:30:00,900

a gravity environment because you've turned into, uh, some kind of jellyfish on the way

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00:30:00,900 --> 00:30:04,240

to going to Mars, and you have to do rehab.

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00:30:04,240 --> 00:30:11,600

So first, we have to figure out the biological and physiological, uh, issues with human health,

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00:30:11,600 --> 00:30:16,049

and, uh, that's what we're doing today in the international space station.

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00:30:16,049 --> 00:30:22,840

Uh, once we know a crew can be healthy and arrive at mars, and we have the landing systems,

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00:30:22,840 --> 00:30:29,230

and we have, uh, done all the technology development required to land on the surface of mars reliably--

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00:30:29,230 --> 00:30:33,159

uh, we have to land in the same spot every time.

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00:30:33,159 --> 00:30:34,750

So it's one thing landing on mars.

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00:30:34,750 --> 00:30:39,929

It's another thing landing one spacecraft next to another spacecraft within, let's

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00:30:39,929 --> 00:30:42,169

say, 100 meters of each other.

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00:30:42,169 --> 00:30:45,539

And, uh, and we also need propellant to come home.

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00:30:45,539 --> 00:30:51,390

Uh, one of the things about our mars architecture is we need about 30 tons of propellant to

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00:30:51,390 --> 00:30:52,559

come home.

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00:30:52,559 --> 00:30:58,039

And when-when it takes a-a gear ratio, a ratio of 11 to 1 of the mass in low earth orbit

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00:30:58,039 --> 00:31:02,929

to the mass you land on mars, so it's-it's
not 30 tons anymore, it's 330 tons in low

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00:31:02,929 --> 00:31:03,929

earth orbit.

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00:31:03,929 --> 00:31:06,840

And it's-it's even more on the surface
of the earth on a launch pad.

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00:31:06,840 --> 00:31:11,630

So when you, uh, work out all the numbers,
you really can't afford to bring all that

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00:31:11,630 --> 00:31:16,419

propellant to mars to come home, so you have
to make it on mars.

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00:31:16,419 --> 00:31:21,370

And how we make it is we make it from the
water and the carbon dioxide in the atmosphere.

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00:31:21,370 --> 00:31:26,890

We combine the two using the sabatier process
and we make methane and oxygen, and those

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00:31:26,890 --> 00:31:29,490

are our propellants for coming home from mars.

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00:31:29,490 --> 00:31:34,059

So it's not just a-a pleasure cruise out
there, and it's-it's-it's not for fun.

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00:31:34,059 --> 00:31:37,440

This is really advancing science in the solar
system.

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00:31:37,440 --> 00:31:38,440

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00:31:38,440 --> 00:31:39,860

Host: So you talked about local resources.

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00:31:39,860 --> 00:31:42,820

I assume you mean things we'd find on the Moon or Mars.

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00:31:42,820 --> 00:31:46,750

What I know of Mars, there's no active streams, there's no trees growing.

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00:31:46,750 --> 00:31:50,000

So what does local resources mean, and how useful is that for us?

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00:31:50,000 --> 00:31:53,670

Rob Mueller: Well, it seems like that when you first look at it.

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00:31:53,670 --> 00:31:55,950

Host: So-so are-are there trees on mars?

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00:31:55,950 --> 00:32:00,880

there-there's absolutely everything that's in a tree is on mars.

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00:32:00,880 --> 00:32:01,880

Host: Okay.

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00:32:01,880 --> 00:32:07,580

Rob Mueller: So what you have to do is you have to break everything down into its fundamental

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00:32:07,580 --> 00:32:08,580

elements.

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00:32:08,580 --> 00:32:14,510

Uh, we need far more education and far more science and technology in order to achieve

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00:32:14,510 --> 00:32:18,340

the pioneering goals we have to expand civilization into space.

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00:32:18,340 --> 00:32:23,090

And so what you have to think about is the periodic table of elements.

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00:32:23,090 --> 00:32:24,529

So those are your building blocks.

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00:32:24,529 --> 00:32:26,460

Host: So not trees anymore, not bricks.

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00:32:26,460 --> 00:32:28,470

We're talkin' like, molecular level here.

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00:32:28,470 --> 00:32:29,470

Rob Mueller: That's right.

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00:32:29,470 --> 00:32:35,270

So if-if you think of the elements as being your trees and-and your rocks and-and everything

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00:32:35,270 --> 00:32:41,890

else that they use to-to build things, and so we can look at this at-at a, uh, maybe

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00:32:41,890 --> 00:32:46,590

not molecular level yet, but at-- certainly at an elemental level.

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00:32:46,590 --> 00:32:52,620

And then with the use of chemical engineering and other sciences, we can take these elements,

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00:32:52,620 --> 00:32:57,100

we can use the-the minerals-- so, in space

we have a lot of rocks that have minerals.

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00:32:57,100 --> 00:33:00,950
We can break down the minerals, which are
compounds, break down the compounds into elements,

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00:33:00,950 --> 00:33:05,110
recombine them into new things, and those
are the resources we will use.

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00:33:05,110 --> 00:33:09,160
So what I like to say is we have a lot of
energy in space from the sun.

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00:33:09,160 --> 00:33:14,280
We'll have a lot of resources in space in
all the rocks and minerals that we have out

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00:33:14,280 --> 00:33:15,280
there.

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00:33:15,280 --> 00:33:18,660
What we're missing is the technologies,
so we'll have to be clever.

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00:33:18,660 --> 00:33:20,290
We have to invent new technologies.

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00:33:20,290 --> 00:33:21,970
Host: Where are we in that process?

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00:33:21,970 --> 00:33:23,730
Um, how far-- are we doing this yet?

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00:33:23,730 --> 00:33:25,650
Are we just thinking about it?

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00:33:25,650 --> 00:33:26,650
Where are we?

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00:33:26,650 --> 00:33:30,669

Rob Mueller: Well, at the beginning of the show, you asked me where I work.

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00:33:30,669 --> 00:33:34,350

And I work in a lab dedicated to doing this, to developing these technologies.

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00:33:34,350 --> 00:33:40,320

It's called Swamp Works, and it requires a lot of imagination, a lot of creativity,

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00:33:40,320 --> 00:33:43,510

and so you have to set up an environment which is conducive to that.

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00:33:43,510 --> 00:33:44,950

And, uh, it's-it's difficult.

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00:33:44,950 --> 00:33:48,770

You're really pushing the envelope of what's feasible.

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00:33:48,770 --> 00:33:53,100

Uh, what we're doing is we're looking at ways of using these resources.

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00:33:53,100 --> 00:33:55,669

One good example is, uh, 3D printing.

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00:33:55,669 --> 00:34:00,740

This is a new technology that's, uh, barely 20 years old and, uh, it's-it's really

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00:34:00,740 --> 00:34:02,370

changing the world.

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00:34:02,370 --> 00:34:08,069

And it's, uh, allowing us to look at new ways of manufacturing, uh, objects and structures.

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00:34:08,069 --> 00:34:12,359

And so what we do is we actually use the local regolith, which is the crushed rock covering

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00:34:12,359 --> 00:34:19,000

the surface of planetary bodies, and we use that crushed rock, and we make a concrete

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00:34:19,000 --> 00:34:20,200

material out of it.

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00:34:20,200 --> 00:34:23,529

And, uh, we actually 3D print with concrete.

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00:34:23,529 --> 00:34:28,509

And we also have reinforcements in there which are basalt fiber, basalt glass fiber.

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00:34:28,509 --> 00:34:33,730

So by doing this, suddenly all these things become feasible which before were not feasible.

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00:34:33,730 --> 00:34:35,099

Now, where are we on that?

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00:34:35,099 --> 00:34:36,619

We can't do it yet today.

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00:34:36,619 --> 00:34:40,879

Uh, typically, at NASA we have something called technology readiness level.

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00:34:40,879 --> 00:34:42,399

It goes from 1 to 9.

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00:34:42,399 --> 00:34:47,829

At 1 it's just a-a basic principle that's observed or formulated, and 9 has been in

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00:34:47,829 --> 00:34:48,829
space.

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00:34:48,829 --> 00:34:51,869
So we call this the-the ladder of technology development.

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00:34:51,869 --> 00:34:56,379
And you have to go from one rung of the ladder to the next rung of the ladder, and that's

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00:34:56,379 --> 00:34:58,049
how the technology's developed.

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00:34:58,049 --> 00:35:02,999
And usually, at TRL 6, we're ready for-- to be considered for a flight.

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00:35:02,999 --> 00:35:04,720
That's when it's developed for a flight.

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00:35:04,720 --> 00:35:07,579
So typically, from 1 to 6 you're in the lab.

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00:35:07,579 --> 00:35:11,520
And currently, these technologies like 3D printing with regolith, that's at about

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00:35:11,520 --> 00:35:15,440
TRL 4, I would say, and that's happening in the lab.

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00:35:15,440 --> 00:35:19,799
Once we've developed in the lab, we've proven that it works, then we can go and make

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00:35:19,799 --> 00:35:22,899

a real system out of it for space.

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00:35:22,899 --> 00:35:23,899

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00:35:23,899 --> 00:35:27,490

Host: So just takin' that one, for instance--
obviously you can't predict the future,

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00:35:27,490 --> 00:35:31,009

but as-as the pace is going and as things
are developing, when-when do you hope to see

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00:35:31,009 --> 00:35:32,529

that technology in space?

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00:35:32,529 --> 00:35:36,940

Rob Mueller: I would say realistically, it's
five to ten years away.

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00:35:36,940 --> 00:35:41,450

Uh, a lot of it depends on the desire to do
this.

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00:35:41,450 --> 00:35:46,759

If we made it a priority, then we would put
more resources on, more people on it, and,

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00:35:46,759 --> 00:35:48,420

uh, we'd work it harder.

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00:35:48,420 --> 00:35:52,390

So a lot of it just depends on-on how much
of a priority it is.

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00:35:52,390 --> 00:35:54,279

Uh, we'd like to see it happen.

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00:35:54,279 --> 00:35:56,059

Uh, we think it's a game changer.

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00:35:56,059 --> 00:36:01,799

And, uh, so within five to ten years, we could do it, and we would probably test it on Earth

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00:36:01,799 --> 00:36:02,799

first.

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00:36:02,799 --> 00:36:08,869

And as a-a nice side benefit of this, a spinoff, we would be able to build houses on earth

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00:36:08,869 --> 00:36:11,900

quicker and cheaper, and they would be hurricane proof.

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00:36:11,900 --> 00:36:14,920

So these are all very beneficial things on Earth here as well.

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00:36:14,920 --> 00:36:19,690

Host: So this technology not just good for the Moon or Mars, but it can be used here

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00:36:19,690 --> 00:36:20,690

as well?

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00:36:20,690 --> 00:36:21,690

Rob Mueller: Absolutely.

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00:36:21,690 --> 00:36:25,319

It's-it's something where you can use local materials anywhere you are and then

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00:36:25,319 --> 00:36:26,650

make a structure out of it.

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00:36:26,650 --> 00:36:29,170

And it also gives the architects design freedom.

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00:36:29,170 --> 00:36:34,309

So now you can make structures that aren't just shaped like a square or a rectangle.

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00:36:34,309 --> 00:36:37,480

All kinds of new shapes are possible, new combinations.

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00:36:37,480 --> 00:36:38,859

And so it frees the imagination.

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00:36:38,859 --> 00:36:42,420

And, uh, this is what we call design freedom.

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00:36:42,420 --> 00:36:46,009

And once you have that, you can also create structures that are stronger.

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00:36:46,009 --> 00:36:54,809

Uh, so as we know, we have, uh, severe weather events-- uh, tornadoes, hurricanes, earthquakes,

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00:36:54,809 --> 00:36:55,859

floods.

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00:36:55,859 --> 00:37:02,130

These will all require structures that are much stronger and, uh, can bear the brunt

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00:37:02,130 --> 00:37:04,000

of these natural phenomena.

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00:37:04,000 --> 00:37:07,980

And so we-we can do this with new materials and new technologies.

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00:37:07,980 --> 00:37:10,410

And the cost will go down because of automation.

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00:37:10,410 --> 00:37:17,029

So you combine all those three things, and you really have a completely new way of addressing

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00:37:17,029 --> 00:37:19,009

the need for shelter.

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00:37:19,009 --> 00:37:20,619

And everybody needs shelter on Earth.

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00:37:20,619 --> 00:37:21,619

Host: Awesome.

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00:37:21,619 --> 00:37:23,769

Rob, uh, thanks for bein' here today.

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00:37:23,769 --> 00:37:27,190

Excited to see your progress in the coming years, and excited to see this stuff get used

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00:37:27,190 --> 00:37:28,329

on Mars someday.

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00:37:28,329 --> 00:37:33,209

Rob Mueller: Yeah, we hope to use it very soon on Earth and test it here, and then we'll

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00:37:33,209 --> 00:37:36,380

go out into the exciting solar system.

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00:37:36,380 --> 00:37:38,630

Joshua Santora (Host): That's our show.

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00:37:38,630 --> 00:37:40,829

Thanks for stoppin' by the rocket ranch.

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00:37:40,829 --> 00:37:44,940

And special thanks to our guests, our sherpa on our path to mars, Caley Burke, our plant

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00:37:44,940 --> 00:37:50,219

people, Dr. Gioia Massa and Ralph Fritsche, and technology guru Rob Mueller.

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00:37:50,219 --> 00:37:55,329

To learn more about all things Mars, you can head to mars.nasa.gov.

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00:37:55,329 --> 00:37:58,229

There are also several NASA podcasts you can check out to learn more about the science

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00:37:58,229 --> 00:38:00,900

happening all over our centers at nasa.gov/podcasts.

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00:38:00,900 --> 00:38:06,180

And shout-out to my colleague Amanda Griffin, who helped with the interviews, our sound

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00:38:06,180 --> 00:38:12,150

man Lorne Mathre, editor Frankie Martin, and our producer, Jessica Landa.

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00:38:12,150 --> 00:38:14,650

Tune in next month to hear our episode all about traveling to the sun.