**Growing Farmers for Growing Markets Tour**

**Mississippi Fruit and Vegetable Growers Association** of Poplarville, MS received $37,600 to conduct workshops and tours for 25 Mississippi farmers to learn about the profit potential of season-extending, high-tunnel production technology. Funds were used to pay for trainings, a bus tour of production areas and to purchase 25 high-tunnel production kits for participants.

**Final Report**

# FMPP Final Report

***Growing Farmers for Growing Markets Tour***
**October 1, 2008 - March 25, 2010**

**Mississippi Fruit and Vegetable Growers Association**
**Agreement # 12-25-G-0728**

## Summary of Issue or Problem

Consumers are becoming more health conscience and aware of the nutritional values and origin of fresh fruits and vegetables thus creating a demand for fresh, locally grown produce. As a result, the number of farmers markets is increasing across the nation and across the state of Mississippi as well. The number of farmers markets that had been identified in Mississippi in 2006 was 23. That number grew to 42 at the time the project was submitted in 2008 and currently totals 52 in 2010.

With the rapid increase in the number of markets comes the need for increased production of fresh fruits and vegetables to be sold at these markets. Over the past four years, the Mississippi Fruit and Vegetable Growers Association (MFVGA), in conjunction with the Mississippi Department of Agriculture and Commerce (MDAC) and the Mississippi State University Extension Service (MSU-ES), has sponsored numerous fruit and vegetable production and marketing workshops. While these workshops provide a foundation for educating growers about farmers markets, these workshops do not allow growers the opportunity to see first-hand the potential that exist and the benefits of selling their goods direct to the public through local farmers markets. The Growing Farmers for Farmers Markets Tour allowed farmers to meet and network with growers in other states that are currently using techniques such as high tunnel production to extend growing seasons to increase volume and sales at farmers markets.

## How the Issue Was Addressed

The objectives that were identified to address the issue are as follows:

- To demonstrate the profit potential of crop growing season extension techniques and operation diversification
- To introduce growers to high tunnel production
- To recruit and retain growers to sell at local farmers markets

These objectives were accomplished by implementing two key activities. Each of the activities individually achieved all three identified objectives. First, a four-day growers' tour took place in North Carolina in which Mississippi growers had the opportunity to visit and tour farms successfully utilizing high tunnels to increase production and boost sales at local farmers markets. Following the tour, growers were given stipends to purchase a high tunnel for their farm and to purchase planting materials necessary for the high tunnels such as plants and fertilizer. The second activity was a High Tunnel Field Day which was held to educate all interested growers, not just those participating in the tour, on high tunnel production for a variety of crops.

## Specific Contributions of Project Partners

The Mississippi Fruit and Vegetable Growers Association played the leading role in coordinating and facilitating the project. The MFVGA was responsible for all aspects of the project. The MFVGA partnered with the Mississippi Department of Agriculture and Commerce and the Mississippi State University Extension Service to implement the project.

The MDAC assisted with coordinating and promoting the Growing Farmers for Growing Markets Tour, assisted with evaluating growers following the tour, assisted with evaluating the progress and benefits of the high tunnels, utilized MDAC staff to inspect the high tunnels at each farm, and assisted with coordinating and promoting the High Tunnel Field Day.

The MSU-ES assisted with coordinating and promoting the Growing Farmers for Growing Markets Tour, assisted with evaluating growers following the tour, assisted with evaluating the progress and benefits of the high tunnels, hosted the High Tunnel Field Day at one of their Research and Experiment Stations, and assisted with coordinating and promoting the High Tunnel Field Day.

The United States Department of Agriculture/Natural Resource Conservation Service assisted with the High Tunnel Field Day by providing a speaker from NRCS to share information about a new cost-share program being offered by NRCS and assisted in promoting the High Tunnel Field Day to clients participating in the high tunnel cost-share program.

Staff from the North Carolina Department of Agriculture and the North Carolina Extension Service was instrumental in planning the agenda for the Growing Farmers for Growing Markets Tour.

## Results, Conclusions, Lessons Learned

The activities implemented as part of the project were very successful in providing farmers with the opportunity to learn more about fruit and vegetable production for local sales at farmers markets. The project also gave farmers the opportunity to learn more about extending the growing season and increasing production through high tunnel production. During the time of the project, interest in high tunnel production and selling at farmers markets has risen across the state.

*Growing Farmers for Growing Markets Tour*

The Mississippi Fruit and Vegetable Growers Association sponsored the "Growing Farmers for Growing Markets Tour." This four-day growers' tour took place in the Chapel Hill, North Carolina area on March 4-7, 2009. A total of 37 participants took part in the trip. Thirty growers representing 23 farms along with 3 staff members from MDAC and 4 staff members of the MSU-ES that work with fruit and vegetable producers across the state participated in the tour. Seven of the growers participating brought either their spouses or young-adult children with them since they were involved in their farming operations.

During the tour, growers visited Maple Springs Farm in Cedar Grove, Perry Winkle Farms in Chapel Hill, Peregrine Farms in Graham, Cottle Farms in Faison, Piedmont Research Station in Salisbury, and the Piedmont Triad Farmers Market. The tour was extremely successful, and the growers were exposed to many facets of high tunnel production and a variety of methods to extend their growing season. Although each farm was similar in their production methods, the farms were very diverse in size and the types of crops grown. The growers at each farm shared different perspectives of their farming operations. At the Piedmont Research Station, growers learned some about some of the latest research being done with high tunnels. At the Piedmont Triad Farmers Market, growers had the opportunity to talk one-on-one with producers that sell at the market year-round and to see the profit potential and benefits of expanding their growing season to allow for selling at farmers markets for a longer period of time throughout the year.

Participating growers were sent an evaluation following the tour to determine their production and marketing intentions for the near future from the knowledge that they gained on the trip. Growers taking part in the tour are planning to put some of the production methods that were presented to them into place on their operations. Results of the evaluation are as follows:

| Because of the knowledge gained on this tour I plan to: | Definitely Will | Probably Will | Maybe | Definitely Not |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Increase the variety of crops I grow. | 43% | 36% | 14% | 7% |
| Select varieties so they mature over a longer harvest period. | 50% | 29% | 14% | 7% |
| Develop a plan to schedule fruit and vegetable crops so they may be harvested year round. | 57% | 21.5% | 21.5% | 0% |
| Plant cool season crops. | 57% | 21.5% | 21.5% | 0% |
| Sell my crop at a Farmers' Market. | 64% | 14% | 22% | 0% |
| Follow organic principles. | 21.5% | 21.5% | 43% | 14% |
| Engage in some type of season extension activity to extend the harvest season. | 86% | 7% | 7% | 0% |

Comments about the tour from participants:

- *I thank you all for such a nice, well planned trip to NC. The trip gave us many new techniques to evaluate. I enjoyed meeting the Extension folks and the time talking on the bus.*
- *Great trip! It was interesting to see what the different farmers were doing. They were doing a good job practicing crop rotation and using cover crops. It seems that they were using their high tunnels more for cool season crops, with good success. The most surprising thing was the success with row covers.*
- *The tour fit our needs greatly as we were already planning to expand the varieties of vegetables we plant and to sell more at the farmers markets.*
- *We would like to thank everyone that made the trip possible. We learned many things that can be done that never occurred to us. We also learned many things that we were doing wrong. Thanks again! Keep up the good work.*
- *I really enjoyed the "Growing Markets for Markets" tour. It was very informative and, I learned a great deal of new concepts and techniques that I can apply to my farm operation. Finally I believe that more underserved farmers such as myself would benefit tremendously from tours like the one I attended.*
- *Thank you all for an enjoyable and enlightening tour.*
- *I really was impressed with the knowledge each farm provided for us to learn instead of trial and error, I could have stayed at several farms for an extended time just to work for the knowledge. Thank you for letting us attend.*

To further meet the objectives of the project and to assist the growers with getting started in high tunnel production, each grower received a stipend of $600 to purchase a high tunnel for their farming operation in addition to a $158 stipend to purchase planting materials necessary for the high tunnel. Fifteen of the producers participating in the growers' tour accepted the high tunnel stipend. As a result, fourteen high tunnels have been erected. Two of the growers combined their high tunnels to have one large tunnel which will be beneficial when determining how tunnel size affects the crops. Upon completion of the high tunnels, MDAC field staff visited each farm to verify the completion of the high tunnels.

Initially, the high tunnels were to be completed by September 30, 2009, but Mississippi received record rainfall in the fall delaying completion. Growers were allowed additional time to complete their high tunnels, and most growers are just now planting their first crops in their high tunnel. The impacts of the high tunnels will be more evident at the conclusion of 2010 when producers have had the opportunity to experience an entire growing season. Although the producers have only recently started producing in high tunnels, some are already experiencing positive results. Growers recently completed evaluations so we could determine what they are currently growing and what they plan to grow in the future and to allow us to begin measuring the impacts the tunnels are having on their operations. Four of the growers produced crops in the high tunnels in 2009 and are currently growing crops in the tunnels.

As a result of incorporating high tunnel production into their operation, of the four growers that are in the midst of their second growing season using their high tunnel:

- All four growers reported that they extended their growing season.
- Three growers produced a greater volume of vegetables.
- Two growers produced and sold a greater volume of vegetables at farmers markets.
- One grower has been able to grow crops that he was not able to grow before.
- Two growers have increased their income.
- Four growers have produced better quality crops in the high tunnel.
- One farmer has increased the number of farmers market where he sells his produce from three to four.
- One grower expects to sell at her local market twice as many days this year than she did in 2008.
- One grower extended his tomato season by one to two months.

*High Tunnel Field Day*

In the fall of 2009, MDAC funded three high tunnel workshops in conjunction with the MFVGA and the MSU-ES. It was apparent that there is a strong interest in high tunnels from the 133 growers that attended the three workshops. It was determined that the remaining funds in the FMPP grant would be best utilized by hosting a Field Day where growers could observe actual high tunnels being used to grow different crops rather than just hearing about it and seeing pictures in a classroom type setting. Therefore, a High Tunnel Field Day was held on March 11, 2010, at the MSU Truck Crops Experiment Station in Crystal Springs, Mississippi. More than 280 growers attended the Field Day. By scheduling the Field Day to take place a day following the Greenhouse Tomato Short Course, an international conference held in Mississippi, the Field Day

drew participants from fourteen states, Canada, and Mexico. The High Tunnel Field Day afforded growers the opportunity to tour four high tunnels currently being used to grow a variety of crops and attend seminars about high tunnel production of fruits, vegetables, and cut-flowers. Featured speakers included Dr. Curt Rom of the University of Arkansas, Dr. Carl Motsenbocker of Louisiana State University, and Dave Dowling of Farmhouse Flowers and Plants in Maryland. Eleven companies displayed information about products and services they offer related to high tunnel crop production. The Mississippi State University Ag Communications Department videoed the speakers' presentations at the Field Day and produced a DVD which will be used as a resource for growers wanting to learn more about high tunnel production.

By implementing this project, we have learned that more individuals than we first imagined are interested in fruit and vegetable production. People are beginning to discover that they do not have to own a large amount of acreage in order to grow their own produce. As farmers markets are becoming more popular across the state, producers, and non-producers alike, are beginning to realize the profit potential of selling at markets and now want to get involved in doing so. A few of the Field Day participants have never even grown produce. A second lesson learned is that growers are looking for ways to improve their operations. Most growers are open to learning about new innovative production and marketing techniques.

## Current or Future Benefits Derived from the Project

The project has been extremely beneficial. Mississippi growers now have a better understanding of high tunnel production and the benefits of selling direct to consumers through farmers markets. Farmers that either participated in the Growing Farmers for Growing Markets Tour or attended the High Tunnel Field Day were exposed to information that will help to reduce their risks, diversify their operation, and increase profit potential. As mentioned earlier, some growers are already experiencing an extended growing season, an increase in income and volume of vegetables produced, and a better quality of crops being grown in the high tunnels.

From this overall project, we are beginning to discover the types of crops that grow the best in the high tunnels in Mississippi's climate, the challenges that growers with high tunnels are facing, and how high tunnels are positively impacting their operations. This is beneficial to researchers and technical assistance providers.

Future benefits will include an increase in the number of farmers producing for farmers markets and an increase in the volume of produce sold at farmers markets. These are the same as the expected outcomes as outlined in the proposal. Since many growers were delayed in erecting their high tunnels due to the excessive rain in the fall of 2009, the first crops being grown in most of the high tunnels are either currently being planted or will be planted in the near future. Therefore, the increase in number of farmers growing produce for farmers markets and the increase in volume of produce sold at farmer markets due to this particular project can

not be quantified to date. The MDAC will survey farmers market managers at the end of the year to capture this data.

## Project Beneficiaries

Beneficiaries of this project include growers, farmers markets, and consumers. Fifteen producers benefited by receiving financial assistance to incorporate high tunnel production into their operations. Over 280 producers have gained knowledge needed to incorporate high tunnel production into their operations.

Mississippi's 52 farmers markets are also beneficiaries of this project. Growers are realizing the profit potential for extending their growing season and planting a variety of produce to be sold as farmers markets, which increases the volume and variety of goods sold at markets across the state. In turn, farmers markets will be able to better satisfy shoppers by having a greater selection of fruits and vegetables available and for longer periods of time rather just through the conventional peak summer growing season.

Consumers benefit from the project by having an increased number of farmers growing for markets. This gives consumers a larger supply of readily available fresh, locally grown produce with numerous health benefits. The additional supply will mean a greater selection of produce available to the 9,300 recipients of WIC and Senior Farmers Market Nutrition Program vouchers. Also, as more farmers sell locally, more money remains in the local economy. Currently, farmers markets in Mississippi are located in various parts of the state making farmers markets accessible to its citizens.

## Contact Person

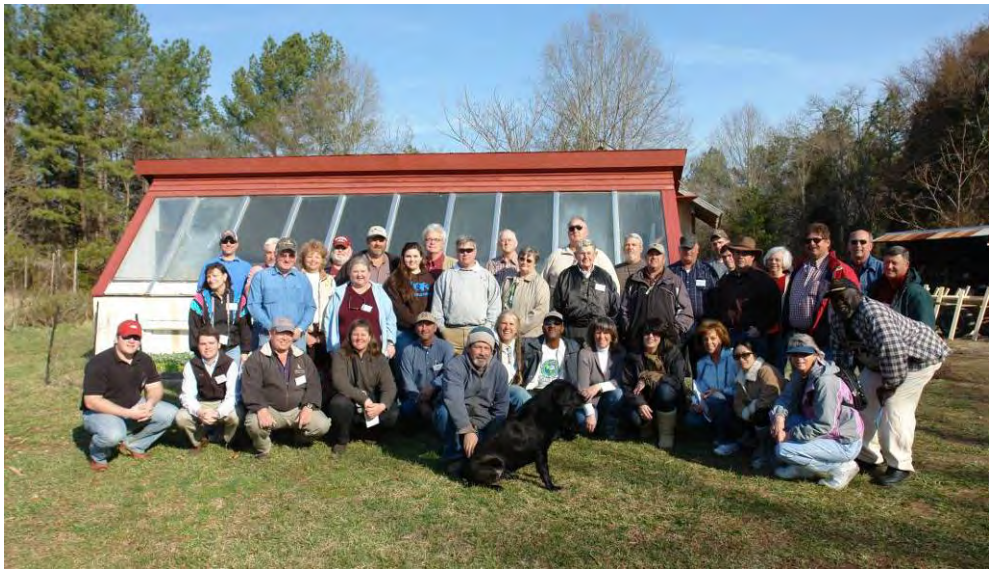
The contacts for the project are:

James Richmond
President, Mississippi Fruit and Vegetable Growers Association
Phone: (601) 792-8056
Email: jprichmond@windstream.net

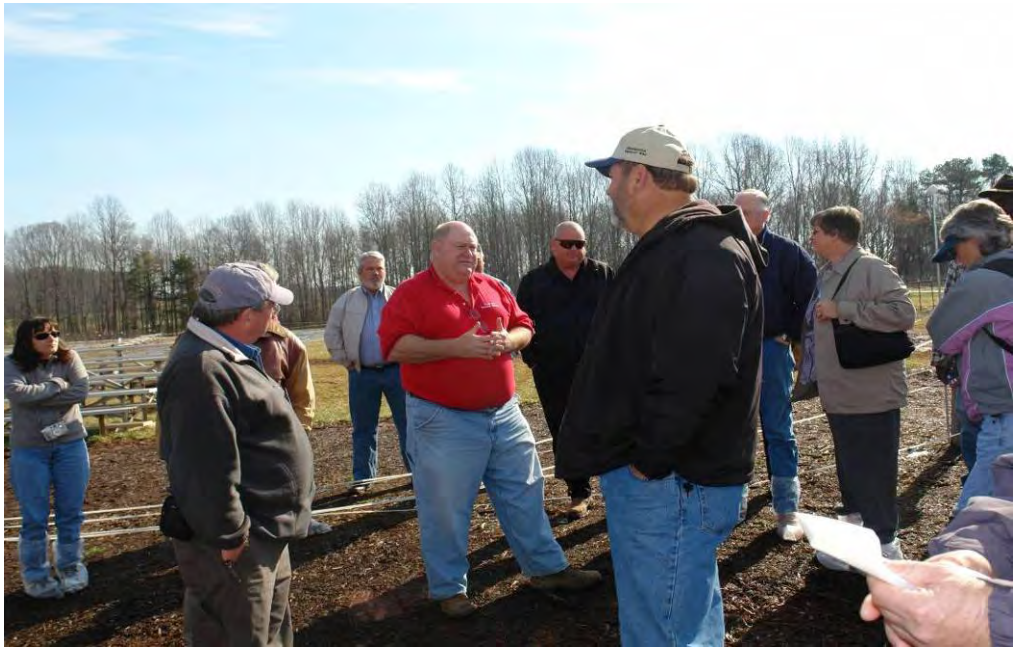
Dr. John Braswell
MSU Extension Service
Phone: (601) 403-8939
Email: braswell@ext.msstate.edu

Paige Manning
MS Department of Agriculture and Commerce
Phone: (601) 359-1163
Email: paige@mdac.state.ms.us

## "Growing Farmers for Growing Markets Tour" Pictures
## March 4-7, 2009



**Thirty growers representing 23 farms along with three staff members from MDAC and four staff members of the MSU-ES that work with fruit and vegetable producers across the state participated in the tour.**

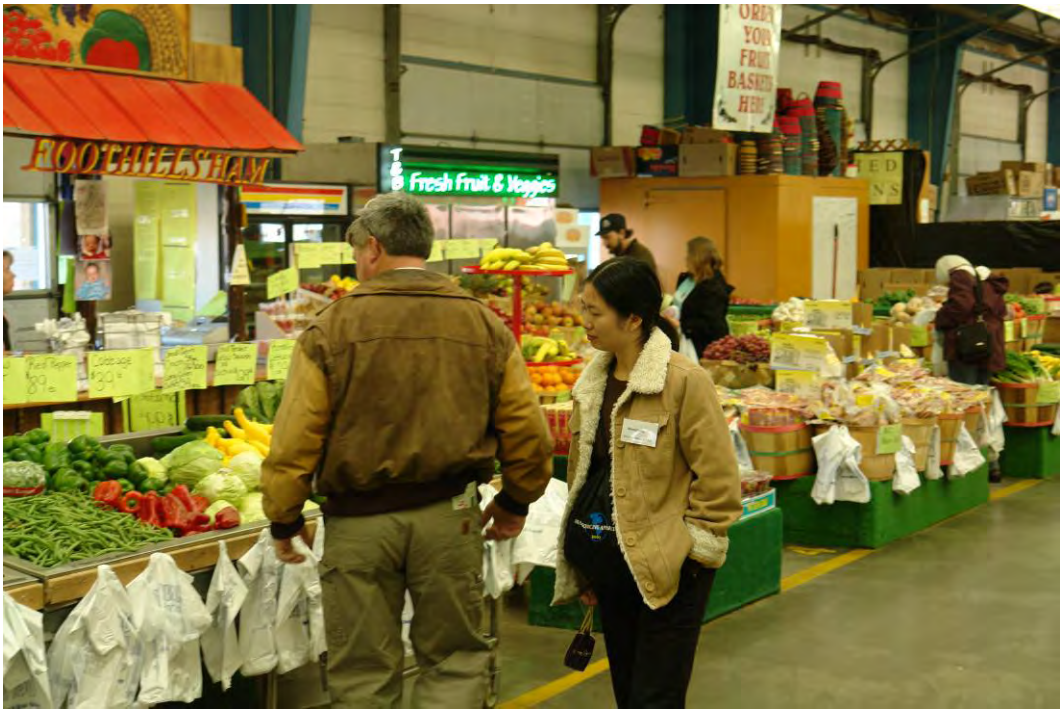


**Joe Hampton (in red shirt), Director, shared some of the latest high tunnel research being completed at the Piedmont Research Station in Salisbury.**

**The plastic was removed from the high tunnels to prevent damage from the heavy snow. Row covers were placed over the strawberry plants for protection. Cold temperatures damaged the blooms but the plants survived. The row cover saved the plants, and the crop was delayed 28 days.**

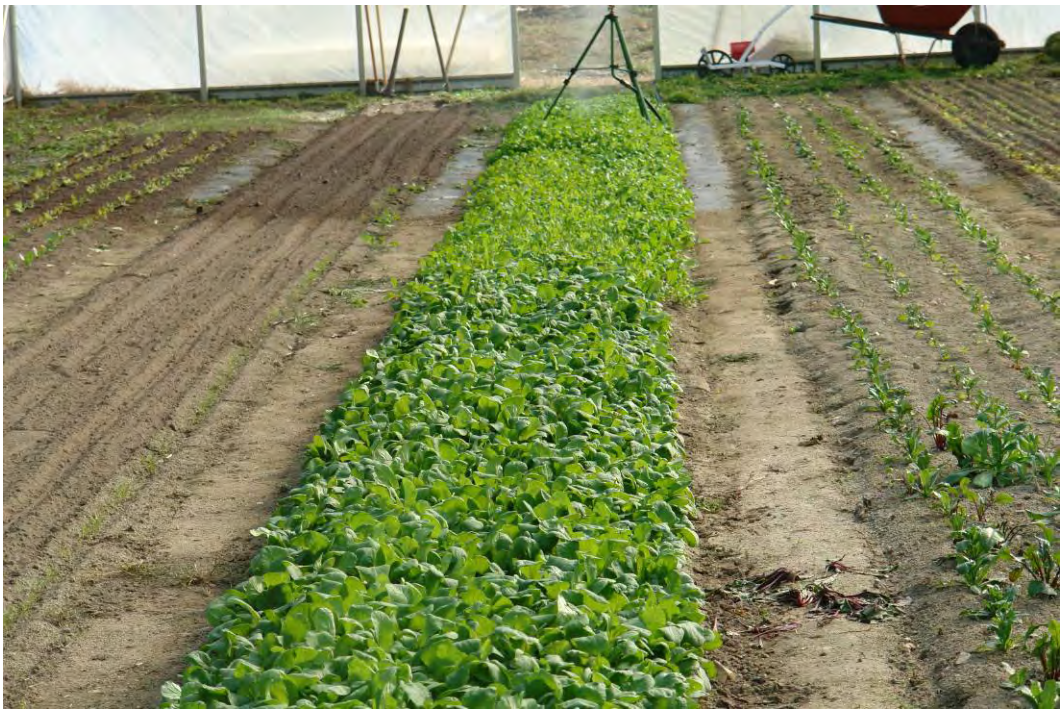
**While at the research station, growers learned the importance of having well-constructed high tunnels during times of inclement weather.**

**Rick Cecil, Farmers Market Manager, told growers about the Piedmont Triad Farmers Market while they have lunch at the market's café.**

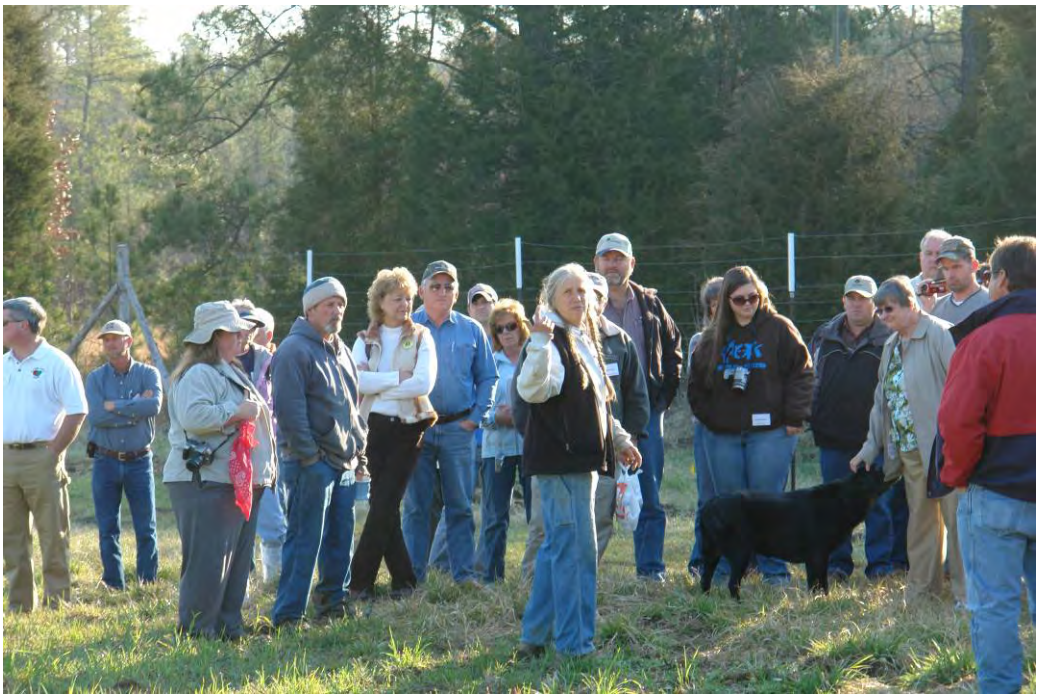



**The Piedmont Triad Farmers Market in Colfax sells a wide variety of fresh fruits and vegetables year-round.**

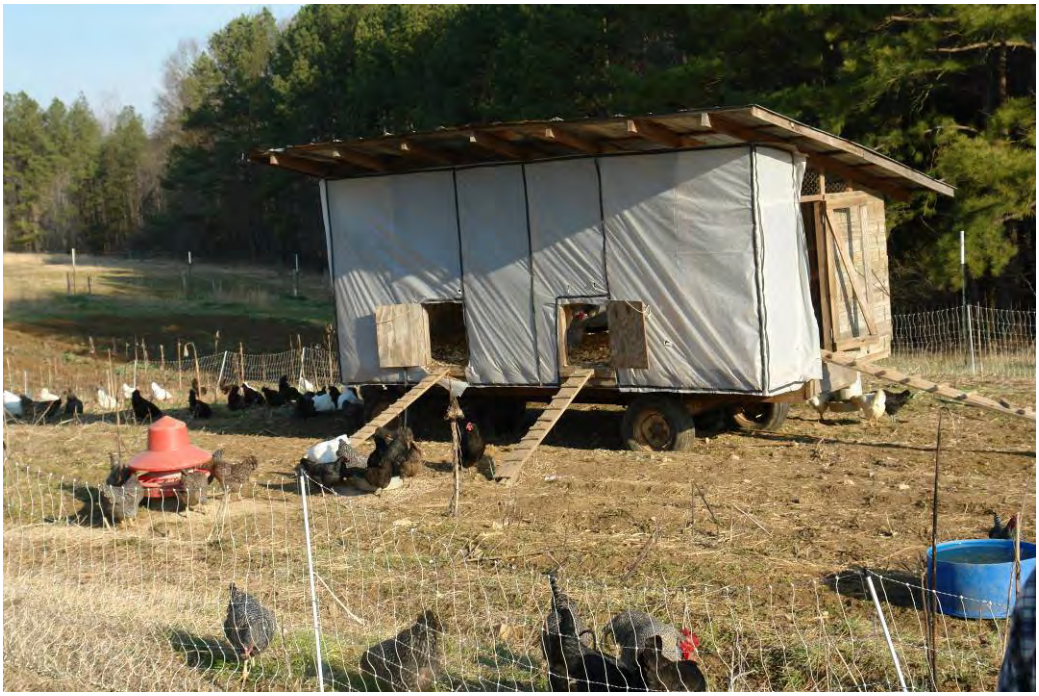
**Ken Dawson, of Maple Springs Farm in Cedar Grove, grows over 80 different varieties of vegetables, cut flowers, and small fruits that he sells at farmers markets. He explained to the growers that he uses greenhouses for starting transplants.**



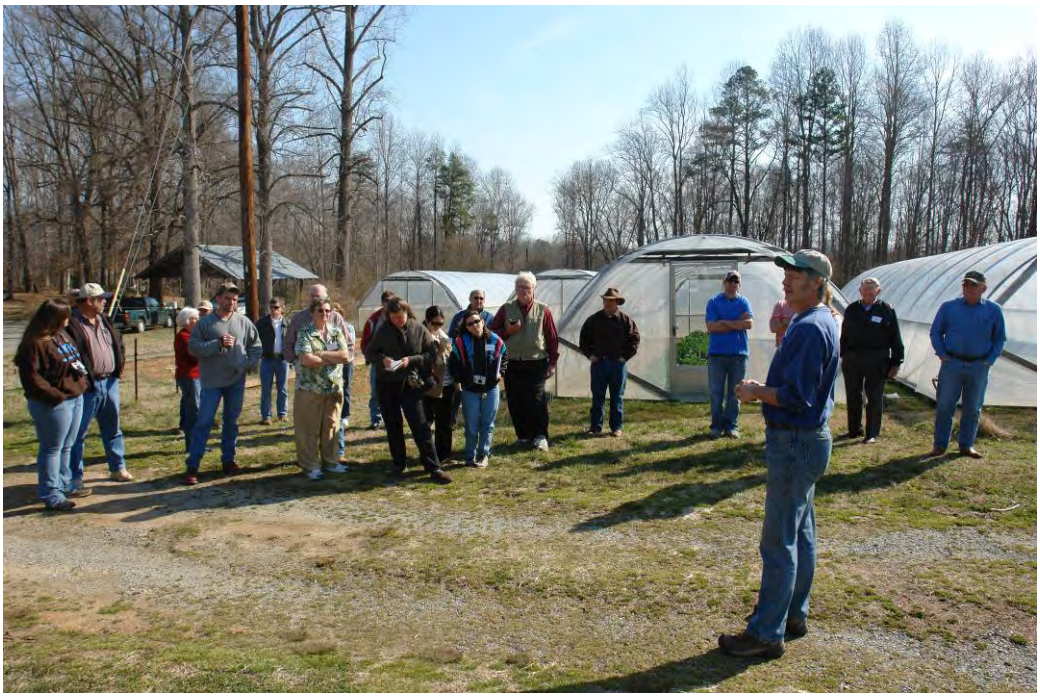
**Ken Dawson often plants transplants grown in his greenhouses in his two high tunnels.**



**Cathy Jones, of Perry Winkle Farms in Chapel Hill, shared some of her organic farming practices and season extension techniques with growers.**

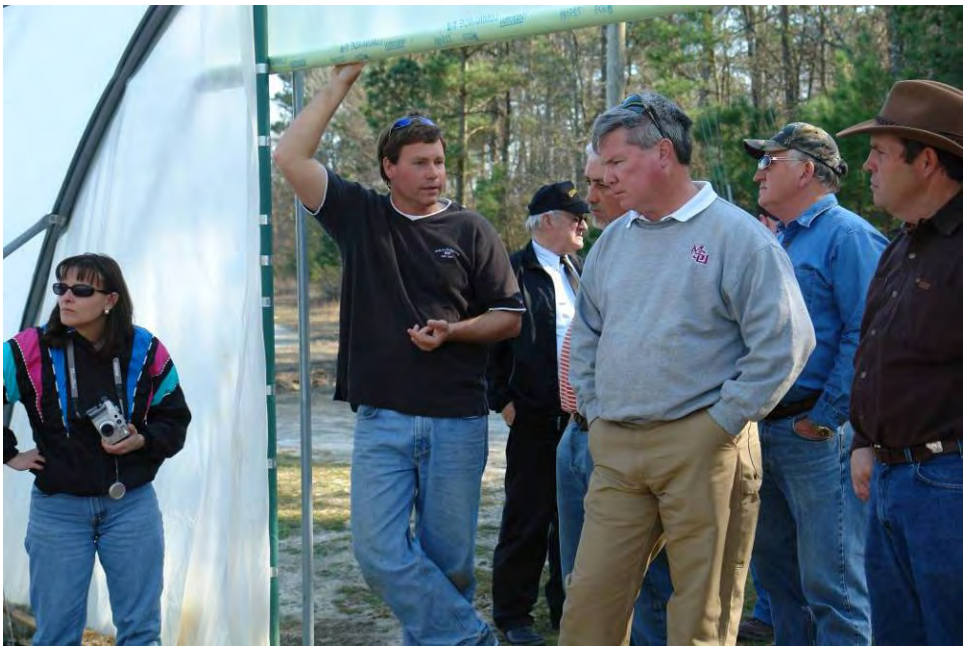


**In addition to raising a variety of vegetables, herbs, and cut flowers, Cathy Jones also raises fresh eggs from pastured hens. She sells her products to two producer-only farmers markets. Shown is Cathy's "egg mobile."**

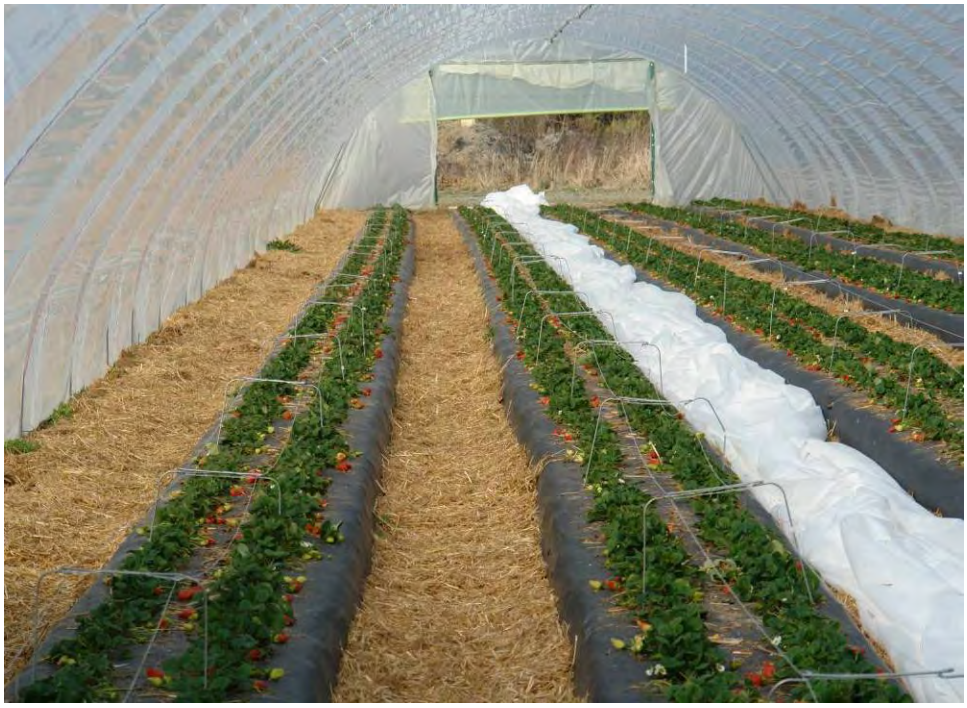


**Alex Hitt, of Peregrine Farms in Graham, shared information about his experiences with high tunnel production.**

**Cut flowers are just one of the many crops that Alex Hitt grows in his six high tunnels. Alex grows 57 varieties of flowers along with numerous vegetables and blueberries.**



**Ron Cottle (left) gave growers a tour of Cottle Farms located in Faison. Cottle Farms utilizes high tunnels in their commercial strawberry farming operation.**



**Organic strawberries growing under a high tunnel at Cottle Farms is shown. Straw is used between the rows to help keep the soil warm.**

**This article about the Growing Farmers for Growing Markets Tour was published in the April 2009 edition of *American Vegetable Grower*.**

Season Extension

# Help With High Tunnels

## Grants give growers access to season-extending technology.

TWENTY-THREE Mississippi fruit and vegetable growers have been awarded cost-share grants from the Mississippi Fruit and Vegetable Growers Association for the use of high tunnels in their operations.

As part of this program, participating growers also received travel grants to take part in the Growing Farmers for Growers Markets Farm Tour, which took place around Chapel Hill, NC, March 4-7.

Photo credit: Mississippi Fruit And Vegetable Growers Association

**Producing strawberries in a high tunnel may help some growers get a jump on the growing season and come in ahead of the competition.**

During the four-day tour, growers visited a research facility, farmers market, and several farms learning innovative techniques for producing fruits and vegetables in high tunnels.This tour showcased ways to extend the growing season and maximize production in small- and medium-sized operations by using high tunnels.

This is the second high tunnel cost-share program supported by the Association. In 2008, the Mississippi Fruit and Vegetable Growers Association supported the efforts of the Mississippi Department of Agriculture and Commerce and the National Center for Appropriate Technology in awarding high tunnel cost-share construction grants to 30 Mississippi fruit and vegetable growers. **AVG**

*Direct comments or questions about this article to avg.edit@meistermedia.com.*

**Article appearing in the April 15, 2009, edition of the *Mississippi Market Bulletin* about the Growers Tour.**

MISSISSIPPI MARKET BULLETIN

*Volume 98 Number 8 Lester Spell, Jr., D.V.M., Commissioner Jackson, Mississippi April 15, 2009*

# Fruit and Vegetable Farmers Tour North Carolina

By James Robertson, MDAC Staff

Recently, on March 4-7, 2009, the Mississippi Fruit and Vegetable Growers Association awarded High Tunnel Cost Share Grants to twenty-two Mississippi fruit and vegetable farmers. In addition to the High Tunnel Cost Share Grant, farmers received travel grants to take part in the "Growing Farmers for Growing Markets Tour," which took place in the Chapel Hill, North Carolina area. The Mississippi Department of Agriculture and Commerce and the Mississippi State Extension Service collaborated with the Mississippi Fruit and Vegetable Growers Association to organize this tour, which was funded through USDA's Farmers Market Promotion Program.

Also, with assistance from the North Carolina Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services (NCDA), several great educational stops were planned along the way such as tours of a research station, a farmers market, and several diverse fruit and vegetable farms. Each of the locations were very beneficial in providing good information and helpful ideas for further implementation in Mississippi.

By taking this tour, Mississippi farmers became more knowledgeable about high tunnels and saw how beneficial they could be on their operations. Tim Cooper, owner of Cooper's Farm and Vineyard in Morton, Mississippi, was one of the farmers who attended the tour. "I was very impressed with how sturdy the growers' high tunnels were, as well as, how efficient they were in maximizing crop production over an extended amount of time for market availability," stated Cooper. " I hope to develop and emulate some of their farming practices on my operation."

High tunnels are unheated greenhouses that can help growers extend their growing season so that they can help improve the profitability of their farms. High tunnels are covered in plastic and are relatively inexpensive, costing less to construct than commercial greenhouses. This structure allows for the protection of fruits, vegetables, and cut flowers with a limited capital investment. They are tall enough to walk in comfortably and allow for growing tall, trellised crops such as tomatoes. Most high tunnels are passively ventilated through roll-up sidewalls and end walls that can be manually opened or removed, and the high tunnel size can be either as big or small as you like.

**One advantage of growing fruits and vegetables in a high tunnel, such as these strawberries is, they can be harvested at a much earlier date.**

On the first day of the tour the group made three stops. The first stop was the Piedmont Research Station operated by NCDA. The station operates a 22,500 square ft. high tunnel to aid in education and research dedicated solely to horticulture crops. The main crop displayed during this stop were strawberries, and by using the protection of the high tunnel, research showed they were able to get an earlier start and therefore produce strawberries for harvest at a much earlier date.

The other stops included a tour of the Piedmont Triad Farmers Market, operated by NCDA, and Maple Springs Farms located in Cedar Grove, North Carolina. Ken Dawson, owner and farmer of Maple Springs Farms, shared with us his successful production methods for extending his growing seasons and what crops showed the most promise for high tunnel growth. Maple Springs grows approximately 80 different varieties of vegetables and cut flowers, but specialize in tomatoes, blueberries, strawberries, and tuberoses.

The next day three other stops were featured. The first stop was Perry Winkle Farms, operated by Cathy Jones and located in Chapel Hill, North Carolina. Cathy produces organic vegetables, herbs, cut flowers, and fresh eggs on her farm that she sells at local farmers markets ten months of the year. She practices and emphasizes sustainable production methods such as using cover crops and crop rotation, which she credits to her farm's success.

After Perry Winkle Farms, the tour stopped at Peregrine Farms, in Graham, North Carolina, operated by Alex Hitt. Alex, who has farmed for 26 years, grows a variety of vegetables, 57 kinds of flowers, and blueberries. He and his family operate six high tunnels and are able to sell all his products through multiple local farmers markets. He attributes this success of extended grow out times directly to his farm's utilization of the high tunnel system.

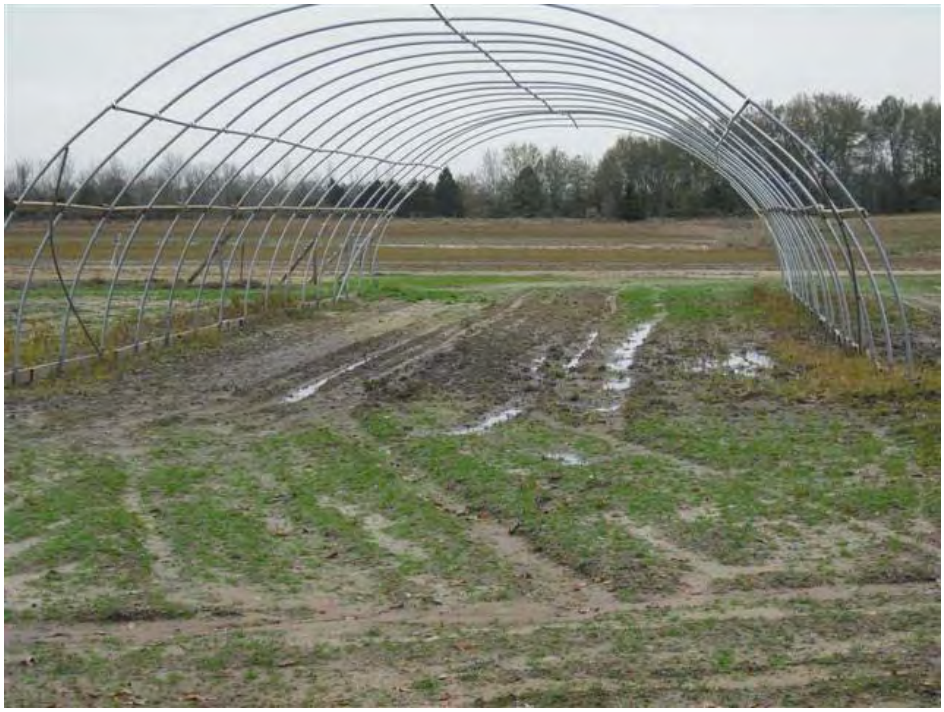
At the conclusion of the tour, the last stop was Cottle Farms in Faison, North Carolina. This was the largest farm the tour visited and is the largest commercial strawberry operation in the Eastern Carolinas. Although this is a much larger operation than that of the growers on the tour, participants got to see high tunnel benefits from both small and large operations in providing ready-for-sale produce earlier than operations utilizing open air fields.

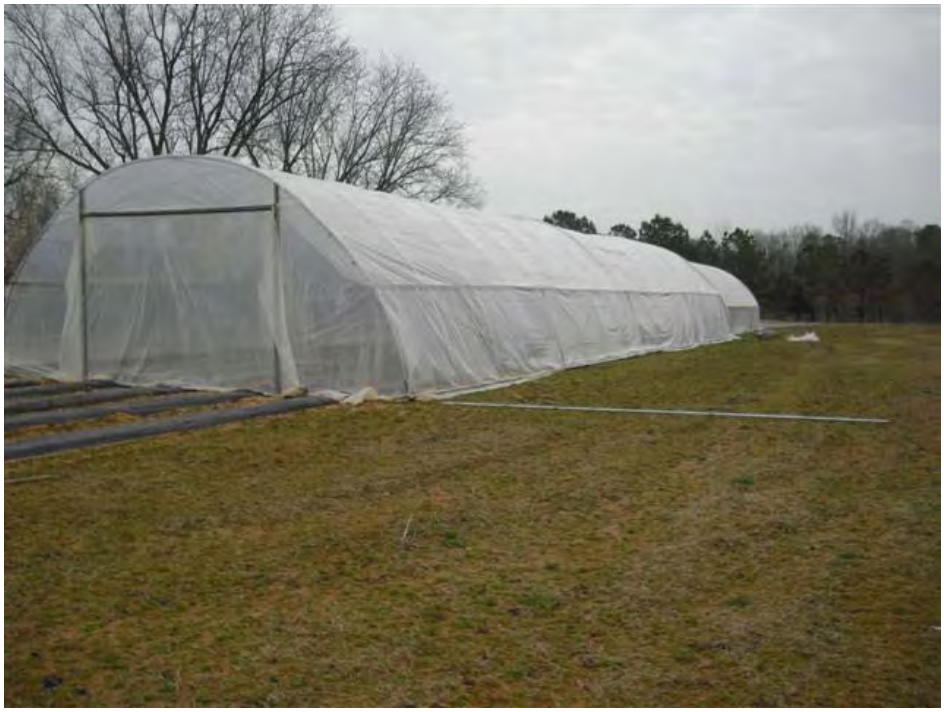
Through the use of high tunnels, there is the potential to grow more fruits and vegetables in the State of Mississippi. Mississippi's farmers market numbers are steadily growing along with the number of farmers that are now growing fruits and vegetables. With farmers starting to utilize high tunnels, consumers will have access to a greater variety of fruits and vegetables that can be purchased for longer time periods.

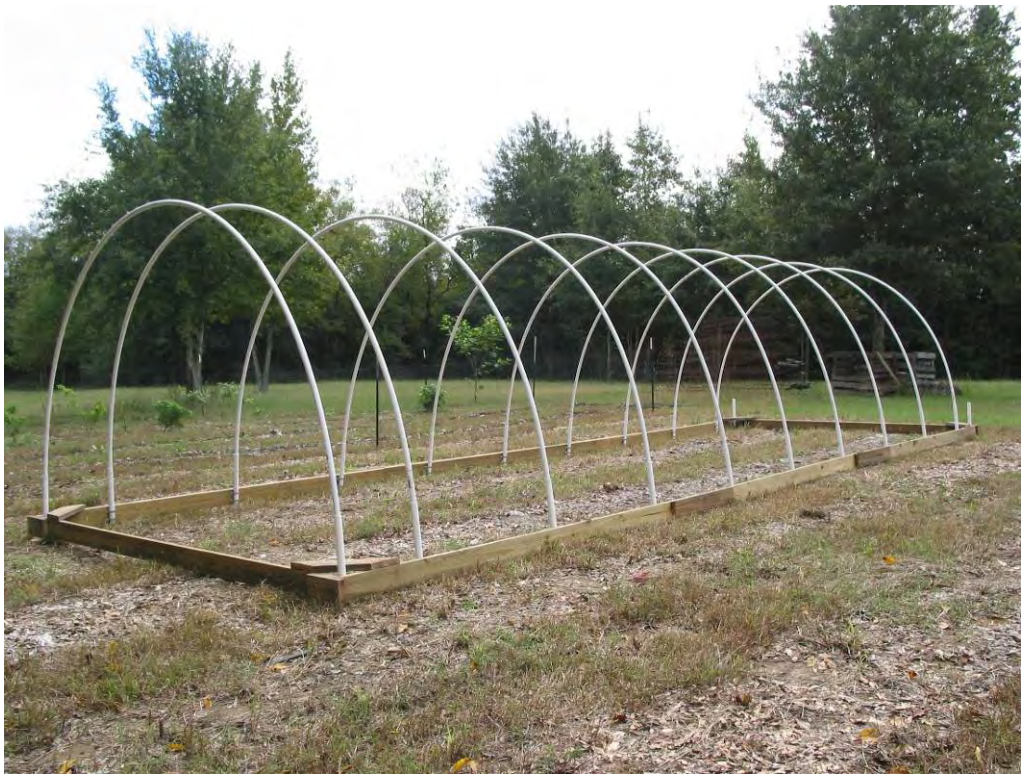
**Participating in the tour were thirty growers representing 23 farms, three staff members from MDAC, and four staff members of the MSU-ES who work with fruit and vegetable producers across the state. Picture taken at Perry-Winkle Farms in Chapel Hill, North Carolina.**

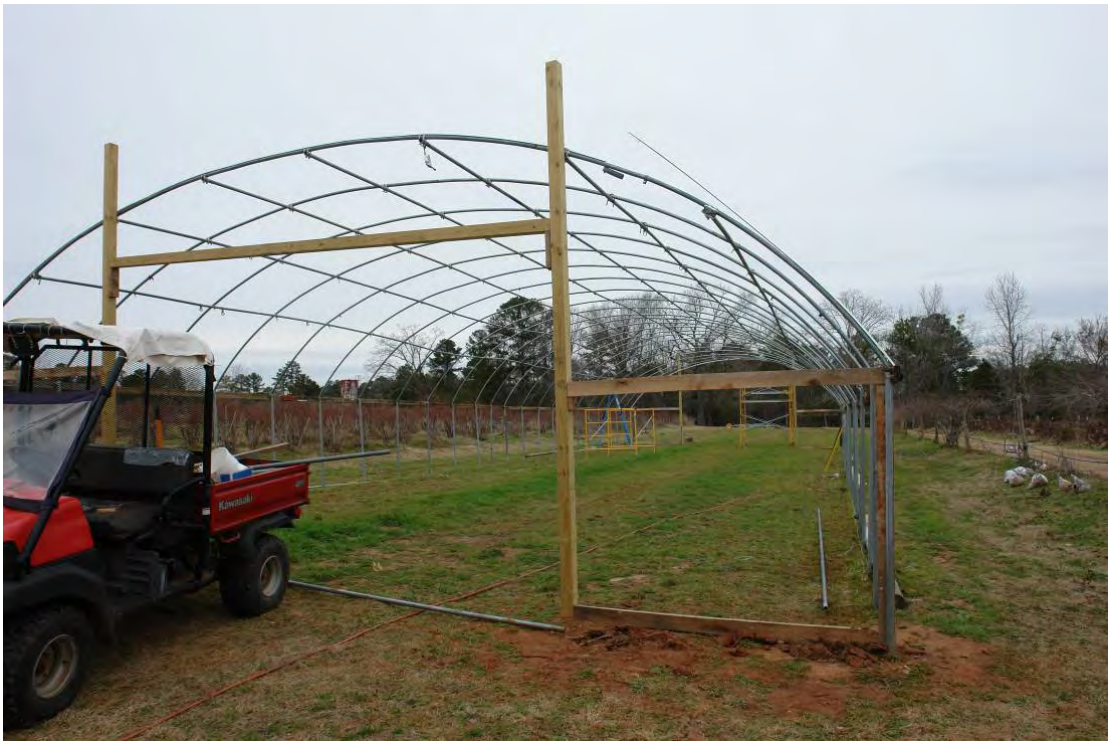
## Pictures of High Tunnels Purchased by Growers

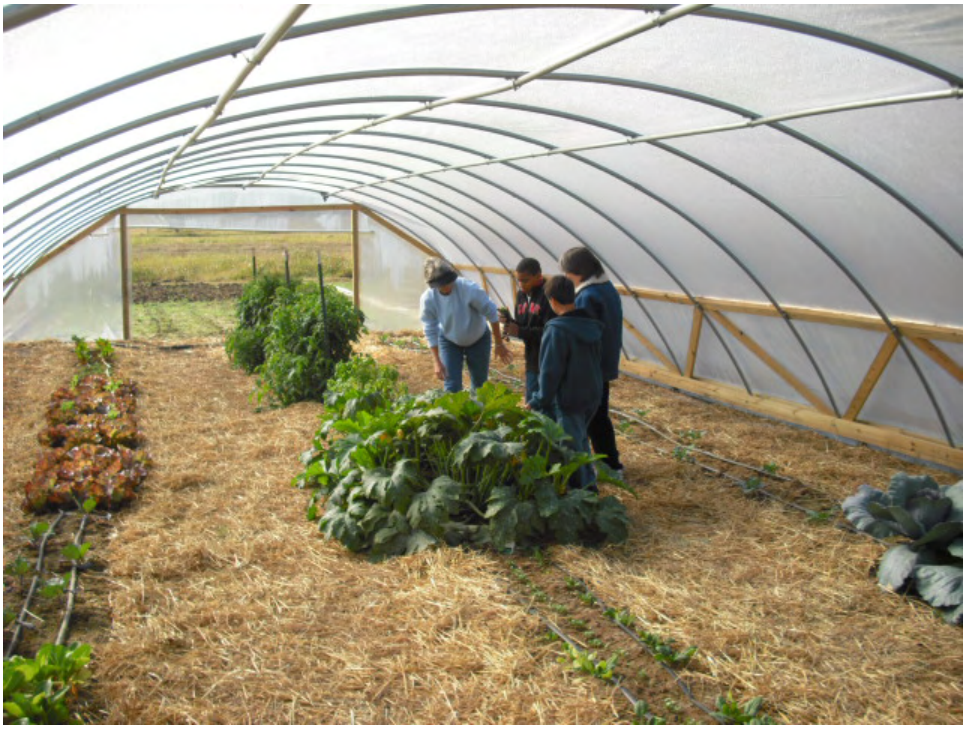
**Below are pictures of the high tunnels that have been erected by growers participating in the Growing Farmers for Growing Markets Tour. Some growers chose to wait until nearing their planting dates to attach the plastic to keep the plastic in good condition.**

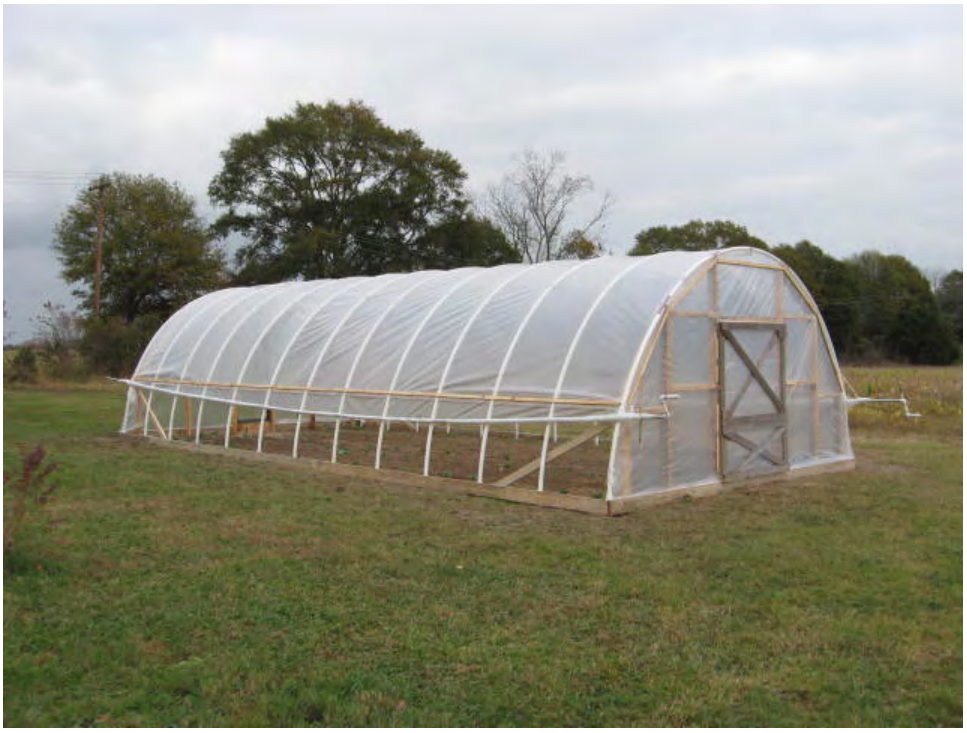




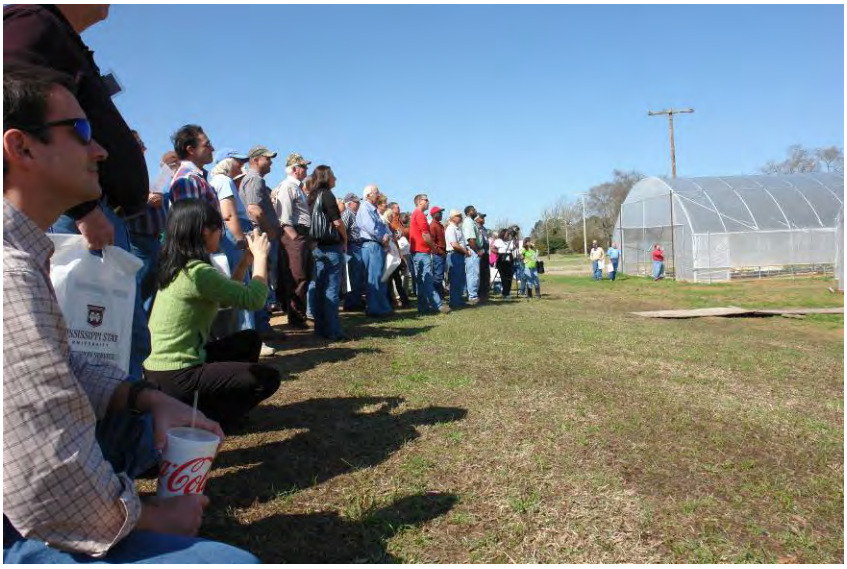






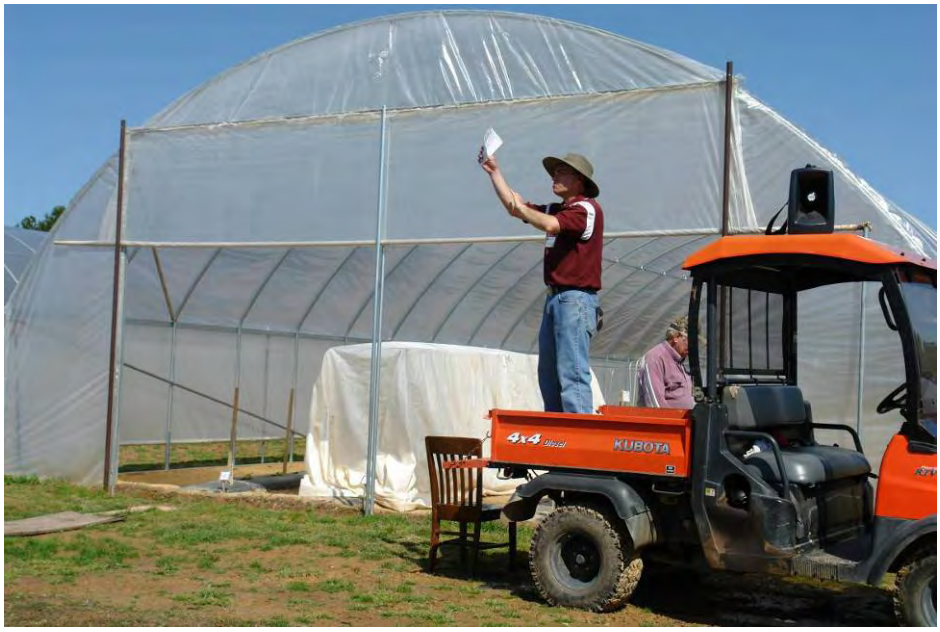


## Pictures of the High Tunnel Field Day
## March 11, 2010
## MSU Truck Crops Experiment Station
## Crystal Springs, Mississippi

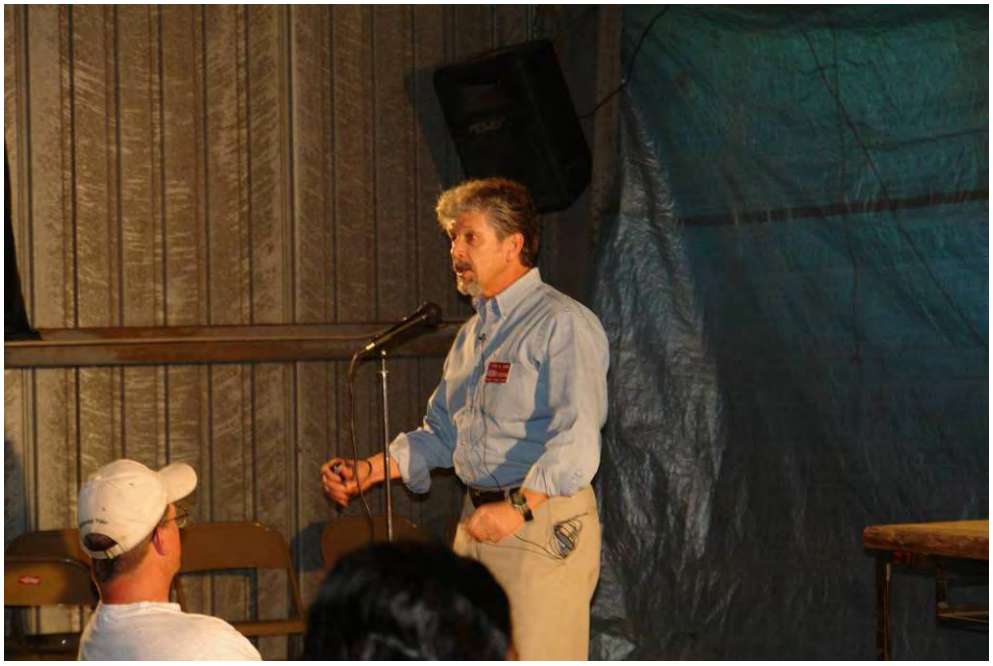


**More than 280 growers from fourteen states, Canada, and Mexico attended the High Tunnel Field Day.**

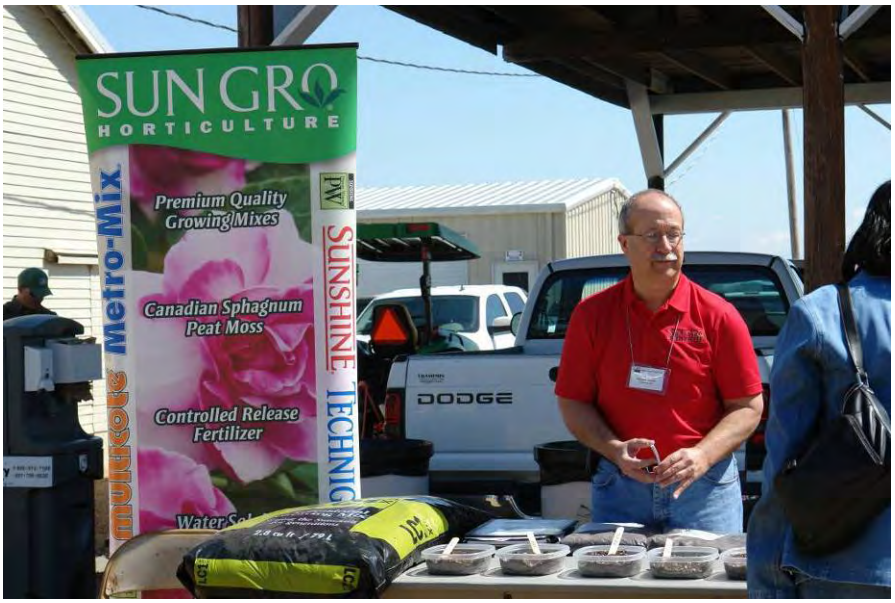
**Field Day participants had the opportunity to get some hands-on experience working with high tunnels.**



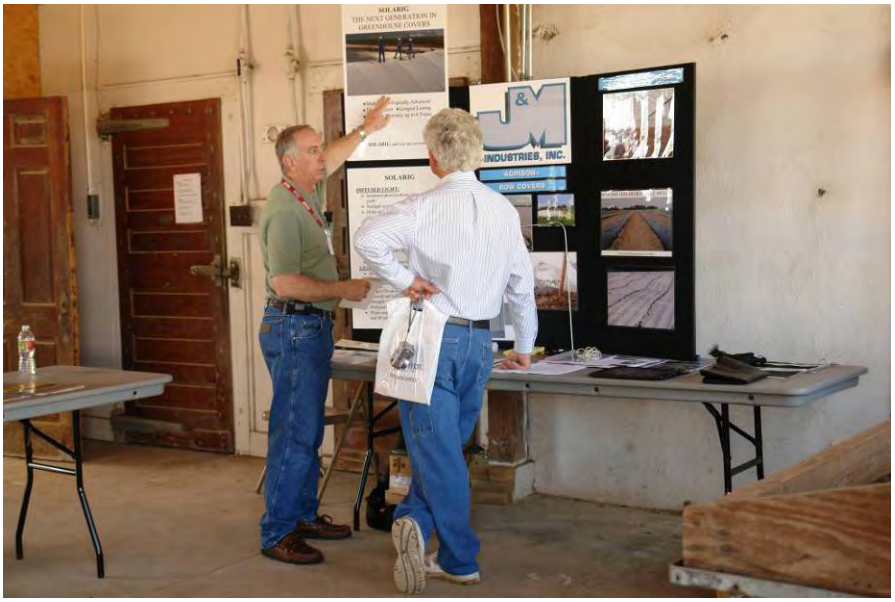

**Dr. Bill Evans of the MSU Truck Crops Experiment Station explained to participants the research that is currently taking place at the Experiment Station.**



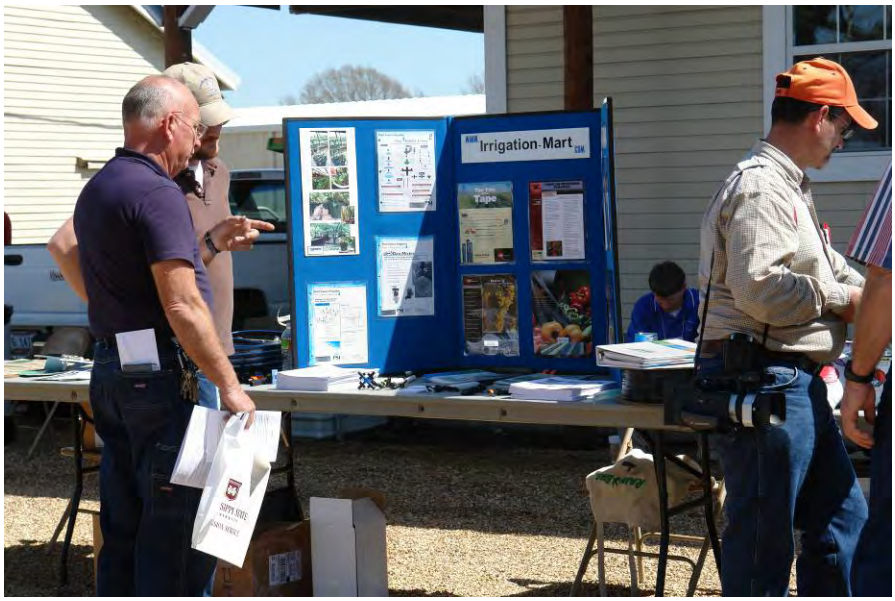
**Dr. Curt Rom with the University of Arkansas spoke to growers about producing fruits in high tunnels.**



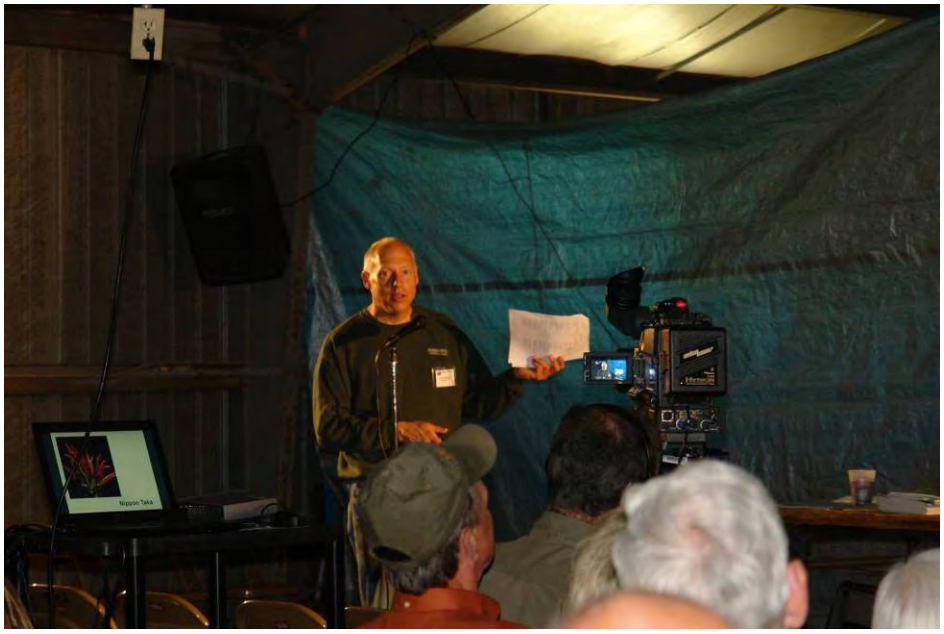

**Exhibitors, like Sun GRO Horticulture pictured above, were on hand at the Field Day making growers aware of the types of products that they have available for high tunnel producers.**



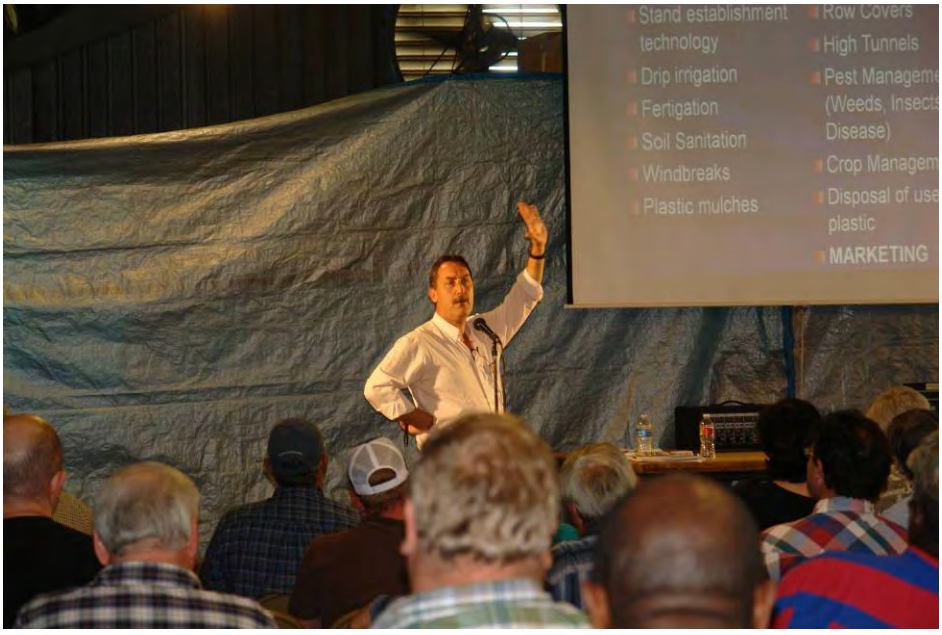

**Growers enjoyed the opportunity to talk with the vendors like J & M Industries to learn more about high tunnel production.**



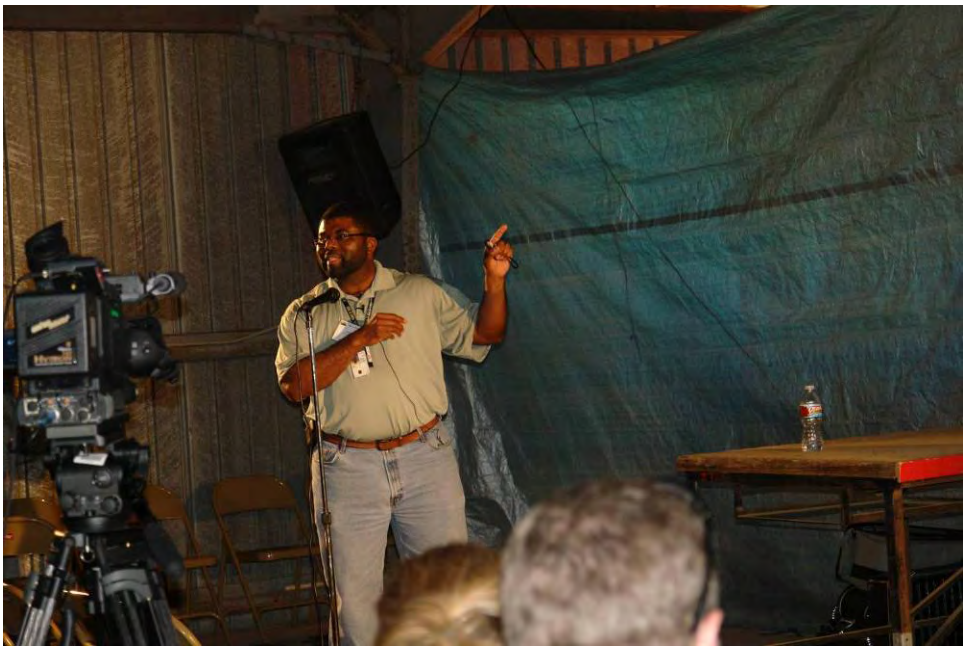

**Exhibitors like Irrigation Mart were able to educate growers on the type of irrigation system that is necessary for high tunnel production.**



**Dave Dowling of Farmhouse Flowers & Plants in Brookeville, Maryland, shared his experiences with producing cut-flowers in high tunnels. He sells many of his flowers at various farmers markers in the Washington D.C. area.**




**Dr. Carl Motsenbocker from the Louisiana State University AgCenter educated growers on the types of vegetables that grow well in high tunnels.**



**John Lee with USDA-NRCS talked about a high tunnel cost-share program offered by the agency. He instructed growers on the program guidelines and how to sign up for the program.**

**Article appearing in the *Crystal Springs Meteor* Newspaper on March 25, 2010.**

# Over 280 attend the Experiment Station's first High Tunnel Field Day

By Retha Mayfield

The High Tunnel Field Day at the Experiment Station Thursday was well attended.

After a few days of rain, the weather cooperated and the day was beautiful for viewing the high tunnels.

At the tunnel site Dr. Bill Evans of the Experiment Station welcomed everyone. He recognized people from other agencies that supported the project. Dr. Stamps with Natural Resources Conservation Service and Lester Spell with the Mississippi Department of Agriculture and Commerce made brief comments.

Spell welcomed those who came from out of state to learn about growing in high tunnels. He encouraged everyone with, "People want to know where their food comes from. The market is out there."

Dr. Guihong Bi of the Experiment Station reported on items being tested in the high tunnels. She said that zinnias were grown in one of the high tunnels last year with 1,000 to 2,000 long stem, good quality blooms being harvested every week to 10 days to September.

Evans explained the high tunnel concept, the different structure styles on site, and answered questions.

In these essentially unheated green houses you can grow plants with or without mulch.

Temperature is monitored closely so that tunnel sides and ends can be rolled up to let out heat.

The four tunnels at the Experiment Station are 30 x 96. Some of them had six-foot sides with the bows on four-foot centers. One was patterned after a true Quonset hut with the dome going all the way to the ground. A drawback to this type is rain can get inside when the sides are rolled up.

Evans told attendees to expect to pay from $2 to $4 per sq. ft. for cost of the tunnels. Then add another $1 for incidentals.

He said that life expectancy of the 6 mil green house plastic covering the tunnel was two to four years and the irrigation drip tape was two to three years.

Some of the tunnels were built in

FIELD DAY *Page 4*

OVER 280 PEOPLE attending High Tunnel Field Day view the tunnels on site and ask questions regarding tunnel construction.

VASILE CERVEN, station employee, explains to one of the participants how to roll up the sides on the high tunnel.

VASILE CERVEN AND MELVIN TOWNSEND, station employees, demonstrate row covering within the high tunnel.

STRAWBERRIES grown in high tunnel already have ripe berries.

COLLARDS in the high tunnel have already been picked several times.

## Field Day

FROM PAGE 1

such a way that they can be moved to another location.

Dr. Curt Rom from the University of Arkansas spoke on growing fruits. His experience was with smaller tunnels–24 x 36. Temperature in the smaller ones are more difficult to manage than the bigger ones. He plans to convert some of these small ones to a larger size.

The air was charged with information and was not restricted to program speakers.

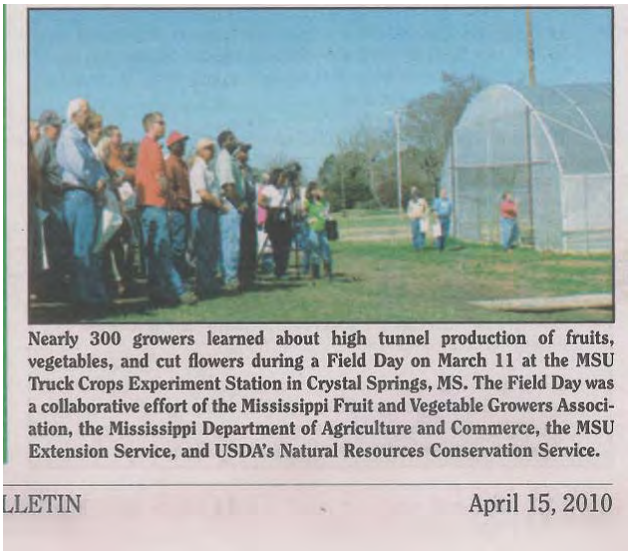
Vendors answered questions about their products of high tunnel construction, organic farming, vermicompost, and nursery grown plants.

Growers talked with one another. One lady explained that greenhouses need to be run from north to south. "The idea is to get the most light. The wind flows through better when they are north to south."

This same lady said, "You can't go anywhere. Greenhouses are like having babies. You have to be there every day."

Total count for the high tunnel field day exceeded 280.

**Picture from the High Tunnel Field Day featured in the April 15 edition of the *Mississippi Market Bulletin*.**



Nearly 300 growers learned about high tunnel production of fruits, vegetables, and cut flowers during a Field Day on March 11 at the MSU Truck Crops Experiment Station in Crystal Springs, MS. The Field Day was a collaborative effort of the Mississippi Fruit and Vegetable Growers Association, the Mississippi Department of Agriculture and Commerce, the MSU Extension Service, and USDA's Natural Resources Conservation Service.

LLETIN April 15, 2010

**Growers participating in the Growing Farms for Growing Markets Tour have extended their growing seasons using high tunnels which have allowed them to have fresh produce available at the Mississippi Farmers Market well into the 2009 fall season.**