



Western SARE

Phil Rasmussen, Coordinator
 Utah State University
 Agricultural Science Building
 Room 305
 4865 Old Main Hill
 Logan, Utah 84322-4865
 phone: (435) 797-2257
 fax: (435) 797-3344

Professional Development Program

Cinda Williams
 Idaho PDP Coordinator
 Latah Co. Extension Educator
 P.O. Box 8068
 Moscow, Idaho 83843
 (208) 883-2267
 cindaw@uidaho.edu

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ALL-SEASON CROP PRODUCTION

Situation

Moscow, Idaho, sits on the eastern edge of the Palouse prairie at 2,500 feet in USDA climate Zone 5. Shipping costs for this rural area are costly for any product. At the same time, demand is growing for locally grown produce year round.

A handful of small-scale Moscow-area growers have employed hoophouses to extend the growing season for summer crops. But none have attempted winter crops.

In similar northern climates on the East Coast, organic growers have succeeded with



Brad Jaeckel in one of his two hoophouses.

year-round hoophouse production, suggesting potential for success on the Palouse.

Objectives

1. Identify a diversity of winter and summer vegetables that can be grown in unheated, unlighted field hoophouses
2. Develop an efficient organic method of production for those vegetables
3. Promote the results on a farm webpage

Actions

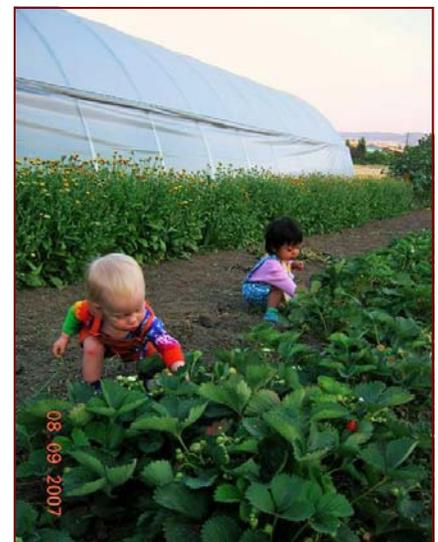
Orchard Farm, on 1.3 acres at Moscow's north edge, is a family farm that raises three dairy goats, 15 layer hens and vegetable, herb and fruit crops on ½ cultivated acre and in two hoophouses. Orchard Farm markets through the Moscow Food Co-op, two local farmers markets and a

small CSA.

Winter Trials

To begin the trial, a 1-inch layer of compost was applied inside the hoophouse, the soil tilled and the area laid out in three 42-inch beds. Twenty-three crops were planted on Nov. 4 in two beds, each crop

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Farmer/Rancher Grant

Title: Winter and Summer Hoophouse Production for Small-Scale Growers

Project Number: FW06-036

Project Coordinator:
 Brad Jaeckel
 Orchard Farm
 2351 Orchard Ave.
 Moscow, ID 83843
 (208) 892-0655
jaeckel@wsu.edu

Technical Advisor:
 Carol Miles
 Washington State University
 Associate Scientist/
 Extension Specialist
 WSU Mount Vernon NW Rec
 Mount Vernon, WA 98273-4768
 (360) 848-6150
milesc@wsu.edu

Cooperators:
 Moscow Food Co-op
 Rural Roots

Amount Funded: \$6,235

*Western SARE, a
USDA organization,
funds grants for re-
search and education
that develop or promote
some aspect of agricul-
tural sustainability,
which embraces*

- *profitable farms
and ranches*
- *a healthy environ-
ment*
- *strong families and
communities.*

*The Western Region,
one of four SARE re-
gions nationwide, is
administered through
Utah State University.*

Western SARE:
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ALL-SEASON CROP PRODUCTION

receiving 4 feet of bed length, including green onions, arugula, cilantro, orach, carrots, parsnip, Asian greens, endive, beets, rutabaga, parsley, tatsoi, dill, turnip, sorrel, kale, fennel, radish, mizuna, bok choy, spinach, lettuce mix and chard

On Dec. 12, another 10 crops were seeded on the remaining bed: Asian green mix, watercress, minutina, radicchio, claytonia, broccoli raab, spinach, beet, lettuce mix and arugula.

Summer Trials

In February, six summer hoophouse crops (peppers, tomatoes, tomatillos, eggplants, cucumbers and melons) were seeded in a lighted, heated greenhouse. Transplants were transferred to the hoophouse on four 42-inch beds prepped with compost, tilled and irrigated with two drip lines in each bed.

Results

Winter Trial

Of the 23 crops seeded Nov. 4, just 10 had germinated by Nov. 26: turnip, radish, green onion, arugula, salad mix, spinach, Asian green mix, mizuna, tatsoi and bok choy. These were the only crops from the first planting that grew to a harvestable size by late winter.

Of the 10 crops seeded on Dec. 12, four had germinated by Jan. 26: watercress, claytonia, spinach and lettuce mix. Again, these were the only crops to continue to harvestable size.

Summer Trial

Peppers, tomatoes, tomatillos, cucumbers and melons were all productive in the hoophouse though some varieties had higher marketability than others. The eggplant varieties tested in this study were not productive in this environment.

- Anaheim peppers: pro-



duced well, biggest seller at farmers markets

- Matchbox pepper: produced well, sales weak
- Celebrity tomato: best all-around variety, producing well season long
- Black Plum paste tomatoes: produced well, sold poorly
- Double Rich tomatoes: problems with splitting
- San Marzo paste tomatoes: high number of splits
- Purple tomatillos: challenge to keep pruned, produced heavily, sold well at farmers markets and food co-op
- Tasty Jade and Shoyu Long cucumbers: both heavy producers; Shoyu Long preferred variety at farmers markets
- Eight Charentaise melon plants – a true cantaloupe from Europe; thin, smooth skin, light green stripes, fine-textured, scented, sweet orange flesh: averaged seven fruits per plant, all devoured by the Orchard Farm family and crew before they made it to market
- Black Beauty and Purple

Long eggplants: grew poorly

Potential Benefits

The project identified crops and varieties suitable for growers to market to the community as well as for personal consumption. It also demonstrated that hoophouses:

- Are easy to operate
- Require no additional heat or lighting to be productive
- Easily extend the growing season for many crops already grown in the area

The project coordinator learned several important lessons:

- To ensure good production of winter crops, seed early in the season
- If hoophouses are planned for spring and summer crops after the winter season, seed no later than November
- Trial the recommended crops at multiple seeding dates
- After seeding, lay fabric row cover over the bed to help retain soil moisture during seed germination

The full project report is posted at: <http://css.wsu.edu/organicfarm/Research.htm>.