



## High tunnels/hoop houses extend

### Situation:

Wyoming is known for short growing seasons, highly variable and often difficult spring planting conditions, and the all-too-frequent possibilities of early killing frosts. These conditions lead to frustrated producers and their inability to tap into the production potential of much of Wyoming's own food.

High tunnels/hoop houses are passive (no additional energy inputs required) greenhouses that have been in use for years in many parts of the world including the United States. These structures come in a variety of shapes and sizes, can be implemented over almost any crop, and will protect the crop from highly variable weather conditions. The greatest roadblocks to implementation are costs and daunting construction.

The Southeast Area extension educator partnered with an area specialist from New Mexico State University to develop and implement a hands-on workshop to teach participants how to construct high tunnels; remove factors that can be intimidating in the construction process; use local materials when available to cut costs; and utilize simple yet sturdy designs that can survive Wyoming's challenging weather. A grant from the Wyoming Department of Agriculture provided

# Wyoming's growing season for specialty crop production

funding to support eight high tunnel workshops. With funding secured, extension educators were invited to submit requests for workshops and demonstration sites in their areas. Between May and August 2010, 14 workshops were held completing 17 high tunnels in eight Wyoming counties.

## Impacts:

178 people participated in the 14 workshops, and a conservative estimate is an additional 300 people have toured, participated in seminars, and discussed these projects with the project leader and project owners in 2010. Of the 178 participants, 32 indicated they would build their own high tunnels within the next 24 months.

Using a modified Likert 1-5 scale (where 1 = information was of low value and 5 = information was invaluable), the average overall workshop was rated at 4.0.

When asked "What will you do as a result of this workshop?" answers included build another high tunnel, grow more crops longer, get a jump start on next spring.

- "I think the "hoop house project" is a fantastic way to show Wyomingites that we can grow our own food without the outrageous cost of a commercial hoop house."



Figure 1. Schematic representation of High Tunnel workshop locations. Yellow pushpins = completed workshops and high tunnel locations in 2010; red flags = scheduled and proposed workshop sites for 2011.

An economical, easy to construct, and durable high tunnel/hoop house with the potential to increase crop diversity and local food production are top-of-mind areas of interest for food producers in Wyoming. Public participation in the workshops and seminars exceeded expectations. This project encourages hands-on learning and the opportunity to discuss unexplored methods of crop diversity and production. The possibility of building a low-cost high tunnel that provides protection against Wyoming's

variable growing conditions and extends the growing season piques the interest of many frustrated backyard and commercial producers of food.

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