2017 Iowa State University High Tunnel Training Impacts

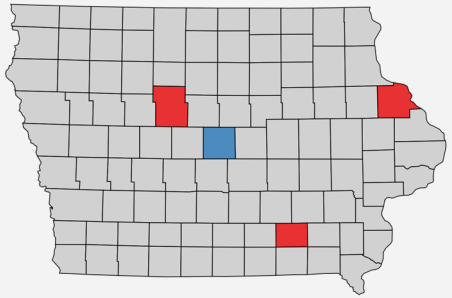
IOWA STATE UNIVERSITY
Extension and Outreach
Agriculture and Natural Resources

Background

High tunnels are an increasingly common method to extend the growing season for vegetable producers.

The Iowa State University (ISU) Department of Horticulture conducts research and provides education on sustainable vegetable production in high tunnels. In 2017, ISU offered four trainings focused exclusively on high tunnel production: three workshops in the spring and one short course in the fall.

2017 High tunnel training locations



Methods

We conducted semi-structured telephone interviews with one farmer and two agricultural service providers.

We conducted a follow-up survey with participants in March 2018. The survey was sent to 116 unique email addresses. We received 57 responses, for a 49 percent response rate.

Results

77% of growers made at least one production change after training.

3 implemented more intentional crop rotations.

"I've had an informal crop rotation plan, but after this workshop I set up a 5 year plan for rotation."

3 implemented or plan to implement cover crops.

"The class helped with my plan to use cover crops in our entire farm."

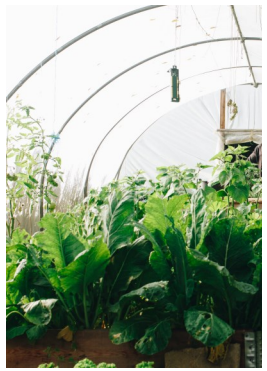
2 chose better cultivars.

"I've narrowed my variety of tomatoes to ones that work better in high tunnels."

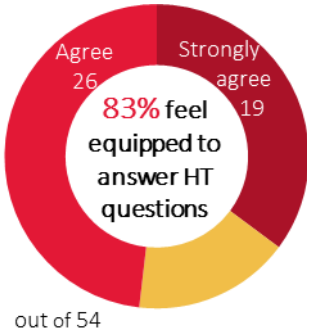
2 installed heat in their high tunnel.

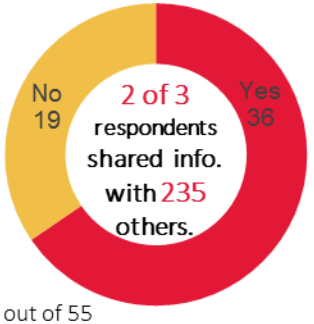
"We like to grow high quality vegetables… The high tunnels are a great improvement over growing vegetables in the field."

Grower



Participants are equipped to shared information with others.





"We've had two folks come into our office recently starting small niche operations. It's important to be able to serve those folks."

Farm service provider
short course participant

Recommendations

1. Create an advanced high tunnel workshop for more experienced growers that shares in-depth information on insect, disease, and weed management.
2. Work with NRCS to cross-promote ISU Extension and Outreach high tunnel programs and EQIP, host high tunnel educational events, and build expertise of NRCS personnel.
3. In future workshops, give greater emphasis to how to interpret the results of a soil analysis.

For more information, visit: www.extension.iastate.edu/vegetablelab/