

Title: Economic Feasibility of Growing Organic Cherry Tomatoes in High Polytunnels for Direct Market Venues

Project coordinator: Ed Stockman
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State(s): MA
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Matching Non-federal funds: \$1937
Project number: FNE01-393
Type: Farmer/Rancher Project
Region: Northeast

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Summary:

The primary objective of this project was to determine if the extra expenses involved in high polytunnel production systems was justified when growing cherry tomatoes that were marketed through direct market venues. If it proved to be a profitable venture, Ed hypothesized that cherry tomatoes, grown in this production system, could provide farmers with another tool to generate income through direct marketing.

Two plantings of three varieties each of cherry tomatoes were planted in high polytunnels. The first planting was planted on May 12th, the second on May 29th. A total of 54 plants of Sweet 100, 42 Gold Nugget, and 36 Sweet Olive cherry tomatoes were grown. The indeterminate Sweet 100's were trellised, the determinate Gold Nuggets and Sweet Olives were staked. Harvest started June 30th and ended October 4th, with the majority of the fruit harvested between July 23rd and September 6th. A total of 590 pints of cherry tomatoes were harvested. Due to an oversupply of cherry tomatoes, not all marketable fruit were harvested.

Ed calculated that 94.5 hours of labor was devoted to growing, harvesting, and packaging the cherry tomatoes. At a labor rate of \$8.00 per hour, labor costs for this project were \$756.00. Supplies cost \$336.00 for a total production cost of \$1092.00. This does not include the price of the high tunnel structure. The 590 harvested pints sold for \$2.50 each for a gross of \$1475.00, leaving a net of \$383 for 588 square feet of growing area.

Ed believes the profitability of this system could be improved upon in two ways. A grower could increase the population density of plants in the tunnel (which does raise potential problems with increased disease pressure and slower harvesting in more crowded conditions) or a grower could improve their marketing of cherry tomatoes, leading to a higher gross income from the same amount of production area.