

New Guide to Help Growers Determine Best Options for Increasing Yields

Farmers and other growers seeking to extend the production season, increase yields, or mitigate extreme and “normal” weather conditions can now turn to the Kansas Rural Center’s newest publication, *Growing Under Cover*, for a thorough assessment of which “polytunnel” options may work best for their situation.

Polytunnels are plastic-covered structures, such as high tunnels and low tunnels, that can provide protection and increase productivity for specialty crops, such as fruits, vegetables, herbs, or flowers. However, as *Growing Under Cover* explains, “plastic covered tunnels are no silver-bullet solution. They may require significant financial investment, be labor intensive to manage, and risk damage or destruction from extreme weather such as high winds, heavy snow, or hail.”

Growing Under Cover provides practical information and resources to assist growers in Kansas, or similar climates, aiming to avoid common mistakes and tunnel disaster, and to maximize return on investment from polytunnel purchases. Though the guide highlights several benefits and demonstrates clear potential for polytunnels in areas like Kansas, it gives even more focused attention to the unique challenges these structures face in Kansas’s harsh climate. For every challenge named (high winds, for example), several potential solutions are offered.

Much of the information in *Growing Under Cover* comes directly from farmers themselves. The guide heavily references information gleaned from sixty experienced Kansas high tunnel producers who responded to the Kansas Rural Center’s High Tunnel Survey in 2014. Surveyed growers answered 35 tunnel-related questions, including “What advice would you give to someone interested in purchasing a high tunnel?” and “What, if anything, would you do differently during future high tunnel construction?”

Gems of advice come in the form of numerous quotes from Kansas growers with years of experience integrating polytunnels into their production systems. One farmer advises: “I think that the more research one does before investing in a tunnel the better. I feel my investment has not been fully utilized. The tunnel can become a burden when not properly managed. I think scrupulous guidance would be helpful. Asking the difficult questions would have given me a more realistic look at what it means to own and operate a specialty crop operation with a tunnel.”

Growing Under Cover: A Guide to Polytunnel Options for Kansas Growers is available free for printing or online viewing at Kansas Rural Center webpage:

www.kansasruralcenter.org/growing-under-cover. This guide was produced as part of KRC’s Tunnel to Table Program, made possible through funding from Kansas Department of Agriculture’s Specialty Crop Block Grant and Farm Aid.

The Kansas Rural Center is a non-profit organization that since 1979 has promoted the long-term health of the land and its people through research, education, and advocacy that advances economically viable, ecologically sound, and socially just food and farming systems. More information about the Kansas Rural Center and its work is available at www.kansasruralcenter.org.

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