



Northern New York Agricultural Development Program News



Left: Northern New York growers at a high tunnel field day event; photo: Amy Ivy, CCE Clinton County. Right: The Northern New York Agricultural Development Program has funded a number of projects evaluating ways to extend the growing season and crop options for high tunnel farmers in Clinton, Essex, Franklin, Jefferson, Lewis and St. Lawrence counties; photo: Michael Davis, Willsboro Agricultural Research Farm.

PRESS RELEASE: August 17, 2015

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Northern NY Research Evaluates Non-Traditional Crops for High Tunnel Growers

Can cucumbers, basil, ginger, green beans and zucchini be more profitable crops for farmers than tomatoes, the king of high tunnel produce? The Northern New York Agricultural Development Program has released the results of a project evaluating the economic potential of the non-traditional tunnel crops.

Tomatoes are the more popular crop grown in the high tunnel structures that allow farmers to plant earlier in the year and harvest later into the fall. To help growers diversify their crop rotation to improve production, income and soil health, the farmer-driven Northern New York Agricultural Development Program funded trials of crops less commonly grown in high tunnels. The trials were planted at the Cornell Willsboro Research Farm in Willsboro, NY.

‘If growers can successfully use high tunnels to grow crops more commonly planted in fields they have the potential to produce food crops that appeal to a broader market audience. Diversifying the types of crops grown also helps increase disease and pest

protection in the tunnel environment,' explains project leader Amy Ivy, a Regional Vegetable and Berry Specialist with Cornell Cooperative Extension.

The project also included a survey of fresh market prices for the non-traditional crops. The gross value per square foot planted of the crops was estimated at:

- . Cucumbers, using two types of trellising practices: \$5.63-\$7.08.
- . Ginger, with a unit price of \$16.00 per pound: \$5.79
- . Basil, with two plantings: \$4.52
- . Green beans, with two plantings: \$4.32
- . Zucchini, with two plantings: \$2.24.

For comparison, the average gross value of tomatoes is \$7.50.

“While it is clear that tomatoes are still the best gross value choice for a summer crop for growers with high tunnels in our Northern NY climate, growers can add the data from this project into the factors they consider for evaluating their options for diversifying their crops and rotation,” says Cornell Willsboro Research Farm Manager Michael Davis.

“For example, ginger may not return as much per square foot as tomatoes, but it has a much lower labor requirement, and it does not share the same diseases as tomatoes so could be a good rotation option,” points out Cornell University NYS Vegetable Extension Specialist Judson Reid. “Green beans may not be feasible as a primary tunnel crop, but because they have such a short season they can be useful for filling a gap between other crops, and basil is an excellent economic option for high tunnels.”

Final harvest date for the cucumbers, basil, green beans and zucchini was October 16; for the ginger November 21.

Ivy notes that the trial results have encouraged growers to consider training cucumbers to grow on a single vertical line in the high tunnel which used less labor and produced a 20 percent higher yield compared with the traditional raised mesh trellising.

Trials underway in 2015 include evaluating opportunities to increase ginger and basil crop yields and exploring summer lettuce production in tunnels.

The complete Advancing Season Extension with Non-Traditional High Tunnel Crops report is in the Local Foods section of the Northern New York Agricultural Development Program website at www.nnyagdev.org.

The Northern New York Agricultural Development Program is a farmer-driven research and technical assistance program serving Clinton, Essex, Franklin, Jefferson, Lewis and St. Lawrence counties. Funding for the Northern New York Agricultural Development Program is supported by the New York State Senate and is administered through the New York State Department of Agriculture and Markets.