



# ORGANIC FARMING RESEARCH FOUNDATION

## Final Report: Developing Web Resources for Organic Production in High Tunnels

### 1. Project Summary

An information resource for organic producers who use high tunnels was developed by extending the scope of a leading website for high tunnels information, the widely-accessed [www.hightunnels.org](http://www.hightunnels.org), which is a university-sponsored site. Unique web-based resources as well as compilation of high-quality resources that exist on other websites have been organized in a new ‘Organic’ section of [www.hightunnels.org](http://www.hightunnels.org) designed for both growers and educators. New topic areas include ‘Basics & Certification,’ ‘Organic Production,’ ‘Construction,’ ‘Nutrient Management,’ ‘Insect & Disease Control,’ ‘Marketing Resources,’ and an ‘Organic Supplier Directory.’ The entire website was completely redesigned and updated through this project. The screen shot below highlights the new content. The website, [www.hightunnels.org](http://www.hightunnels.org), also contains a searchable supplier database of 95 commercial vendors related to high tunnels (eg. structure suppliers, IPM, etc.). The database now includes “organic” as a keyword so that organic growers can search for one of the 34 identified vendors that carry organic and OMRI-listed products.



### 2. Introduction to Topic

Organic producers are relying increasingly on high tunnels (unheated poly-covered greenhouse structures) for season extension and crop protection. Organic production in high tunnels is significantly different compared to organic field production in several ways, including soil and pest management. Surveys have suggested that 30 to 40% of high tunnel users are organic producers or use organic practices (Jett et al., 2009), so an easy-to-access and navigate web-based resource was needed that compiled information from many sources. It made sense to use an already-established and well known resource, [www.hightunnels.org](http://www.hightunnels.org), as the basis for the project, and add Organic information to complement what is currently available.

### 3. Objectives Statement

The objectives of this project outlined in the original project proposal were:

1. Develop web-based content that addresses needs of organic producers using high tunnels;
2. Develop web-based content that can be used by undergraduate and extension educators to teach principles of organic production in high tunnels;
3. Disseminate availability of the information by presenting links on appropriate email lists, linking to other organic web resources, and presenting links in the publication *Growing for Market*

These objectives have been met through the creation and maintenance of the 'Organic' section of [www.hightunnels.org](http://www.hightunnels.org) website. Dissemination of the availability of this resource has been made via the High Tunnels Listserv, and the website is routinely cited as a source of high tunnels information.

### 4. Educational Approach

In the Great Plains growing region, the majority of our growers are small-acreage (70% are <5 acres), growing in high tunnels (65%) and many of them (59%) are using organic methods (n=247, data gathered at the 2014 Great Plains Growers Conference). Furthermore, 38% have been farming for 5 years or fewer and 64% range from age 30 to 64. This indicates that using a web-based platform to educate growers on organic methods can be accomplished well through the established [www.hightunnels.org](http://www.hightunnels.org) website, which is a national and international resource. An email list associated with the website for high tunnel discussion has almost 1000 (ranges from 800-1100) subscribers with 12 countries represented. This forum has been generating informative discussion since March 2004. The discussion topics presented on this active listserv generated a basis for selecting topics added to the new 'Organic' section of the [www.hightunnels.org](http://www.hightunnels.org) website.

### 5. Project Results

The educational materials created during this project are freely accessible on the internet at the address [www.hightunnels.org](http://www.hightunnels.org), 'Organic' section. Furthermore, an organic keyword was added to the supplier database at the site and vendor descriptors were updated to include whether they offer products which are OMRI listed.

### 6. Conclusions and Discussion

This project has made information about organic production in high tunnels easily and freely accessible to all users of the internet. In the first year after the revamped [www.hightunnels.org](http://www.hightunnels.org) website was launched (July 1 2013), the site has been accessed 39,793 times. Since this time, web traffic has continued to grow, although it fluctuates seasonally. In November and December of 2014, the site was visited an average of 4900 times per month. Furthermore, the site has been accessed from numerous countries with more than 500 visitors per year from Turkey, Canada, Iran, South Africa, and Australia. During 2014, the 'Organic' section was accessed by 5,253 unique visitors and the most viewed content in the 'Organic' section was related to "basics of organic certification" and "high tunnel construction considerations for organic growers".

### 7. Outreach

Advertisement of this freely available resource continues, and the project continues to be maintained and updated. The OFRF logo has been added to the 'Organic' section of the website to acknowledge funding. The work of the [www.hightunnels.org](http://www.hightunnels.org) team was presented to an academic audience during the 2014 American Society for Horticultural Science Conference held in Orlando, FL, including the addition of the 'Organic' section of the site.

## **8. Financial accounting**

Funds were used in their entirety for web construction and maintenance, with the following exception (as outlined in the original budget):

\$400 was used for high tunnel construction materials for a K-State student organic farm case study on recovering high tunnels; the following time-lapse was created: <http://hightunnels.org/covering-high-tunnel-time-lapse/> and posted to the website.

## **9. Leveraged resources**

OFRF funds were leveraged in that the development and maintenance of the [www.hightunnels.org](http://www.hightunnels.org) website which continues. KSU will continue to expand the resource through the development of future projects. Furthermore, we are planning to add a postharvest module as part of a local/organic postharvest handling project, which is funded by NIFA-AFRI and focuses on reducing food losses for small-scale organic and/or local vegetable growers.

## **10. References**

Jett\*, L., E. Carey, L. Hodges, and K.A. Williams. 2009. A survey of high tunnel crop producers in the Central Great Plains. HortScience 44(4):1076-1077. Abstr.