

# Starting A Greenhouse? Consider These Suggestions

**ANDY ANDREWS**

Lancaster Farming Staff  
NEW HOLLAND (Lancaster Co.) — The trick is going wide.

"My suggestion on a freestanding greenhouse will be to go as wide as possible," said Tim Weaver, greenhouse specialist for D&L Growers, on Monday at New Holland Vegetable Day at Summit Valley Elementary School.

"Once you pick your width, you're stuck with it," he said. "You can't go any wider. You can always go longer, but you can't go wider."

Weaver spoke to about 45 farmers who wanted information on building and maintaining greenhouses.

## Plan for expansion

The greenhouse specialist said that farmers should plan their greenhouse for expansion. He said farmers should have an area set aside where greenhouses can be placed and perhaps lengthened.

Farmers should consider two types of greenhouse — gutter-connect and freestanding. Gutter-connect houses use an arch and crossbraces along with bar widths from 18-, 20-, 21-, 24-, and 27-foot 6-inch lengths (across the bottom) and in sizes 48 feet, 96 feet, and 144 feet. Freestanding greenhouses are quanset-type that require gables at the end, made of polycarbonate or fiberglass.

A popular freestanding size is 30-foot width, on 48, 96, or 144-foot length. (The length is measured in 48-foot increments because of the standard 100-foot length of plastic layering, which will be doubled back for extra insulation).

In either case, the types will require either polyethylene (a clear plastic that costs about 7 cents a square foot, the most popular and least expensive type), polycarbonate that offers double-layer insulation, and a corrugated fiberglass (single-layer insulation).

## Poly covering

Weaver recommends the polyethylene covering because it is inexpensive and durable.

"If possible, always position your freestanding greenhouses from east to west," he said, because of the direction of the sun. Especially in gutter-connect greenhouses, the gutter itself will cause shadowing. If the gutter is oriented in the correct north-south direction, according to Weaver, the shadow will "move across your crop to give you an even type of flow," he said.

"You should space your freestanding greenhouse in such a way that there's ample room between them for snow removal," said Weaver. The snow will deposit in the center of two greenhouses, and must be removed. The farther apart the greenhouses are, the better. If the snow isn't removed, the structure could collapse.

The next important consideration is the type of benching to hold the crops.

## Any material

"You can take benches and make them out of any material you want to," he said. "I've seen cinderblock, 2 x 4s, and snow fence. I've seen all the way up to expanded metal benching, which is probably the most expensive you can buy."

Weaver said farmers should consider the "bottom line" when choosing a bench. "Don't skip on the benches," he said. "Remem-

ber, the benches are very important because they allow the maximum amount of square footage you need to grow your crop."

Moving benches are best, according to Weaver, because they provide more space to grow more crop, provide more return for investment, and put "more money in your pocket," he said, than fixed benches.

Weaver offered an example of savings using fixed benches on a 30-foot wide by 96-foot long greenhouse. In the fixed bench example, farmers would be able to grow 2,028 square feet of crops, out of a total of 2,880 square feet of available space. But for moving benches, the total square footage for growing crops is larger — 2,568 square feet.

## More growing area

"So what you've resulted in is about 21 percent more growing area and more bench space in the same greenhouse simply by using rolling benches," said Weaver.

"You're going to get a quicker return and you're going to break even and get ahead much quicker if you can increase production."

Farmers can make their own rolling benches simply by putting uprights on and rollers on a table and running the table back and forth. The entire table area must be level. The legs can be placed every 6 feet and anchored into footers of either gravel or concrete.

Weaver also said that heat requirements depend on the structure. Each individual structure must be taken into consideration, but the structure should be double covered with polyethylene.

"The advantage of the double covering over the single covering is that it saves about 30 percent of the heat right off the bat," he said.

## Heating requirements


There are more gas-fired heating units available than liquid propane or oil heaters. The heating requirements depend on the BTU

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Tim Weaver, greenhouse specialist for D&L Growers, Litz, spoke to farmers who wanted information on building and maintaining greenhouses on Monday at New Holland Vegetable Day.

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