



# CONSERVATION *Showcase*

## Seasonal High Tunnel Success Story

June 29, 2012

Mary Finke from Prospect, PA, Butler County has been organic gardening since the 1980s. About 10 years ago she started putting her excess, including perennial flowers, out by the roadside for public sale. That humble beginning has evolved into producing fruits, vegetables, herbs, flowers, and honey to sell at a local cooperative and farm market.

In 2010 Mary was awarded an Agricultural Management Assistance contract for a seasonal high tunnel. Installation presented some challenges and she admits that being clueless about seasonal high tunnel installation had her anxious.



*Late winter 2010 – site for SHT*



*Winter 2011*

Winter 2011, the 30' X 70' structure was up and preparations well under way for the upcoming growing season. Mary had some knowledge of the possibilities that come with having a seasonal high tunnel, but she continues to be pleasantly surprised with the unexpected boom in production. Her growing season has gone from 3 months to 10 months. This along with the quality and quantity of what she is able to produce has enabled her to go after and secure spots in two very lucrative Pittsburgh markets. Mary says her customer base continues to increase with markets seeking her. She still has her roadside market, which by the way, is self-serve.



*Lettuce and vegetable beds - March 2012*



*Heirloom carrots and radishes, strawberries  
May 2012*

“I was ready to downsize.” says Mary. “Between animal damage and being a one person operation, what I was able to actually harvest wasn’t worth it. Having a high tunnel has propelled me beyond what I could have ever expected. Crops are protected from animal damage and weather extremes, labor and water usage is more efficient; what I’m now able to grow is unprecedented. This has turned out to be a great family project with members now participating in all phases of the operation.”

“Working is not affected or stopped by weather.” continues Mary. “The high tunnel has its own micro climate. It can be cold and snowing outside and I’m in the tunnel pulling weeds and enjoying it. I have always been a seed saver but now I can collect and save so many more. Heirloom tomatoes are very popular but can be delicate. With the seasonal high tunnel, my marketable product has gone from 25% to 98%. I’d rather not have to grow anything in the field anymore.”



*Summer 2011*



*Debut at Market Square in Pittsburgh 2012*

This is truly a success story for Mary Finke, for NRCS, for the environment and for the consumer of her products. Mary is very thankful for the financial assistance and remarks how the tunnel has definitely changed the direction of her operation. This is the best possible outcome for all parties involved and for NRCS Farm Bill program dollars.