

OKLAHOMA DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE, FOOD, AND FORESTRY

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Oklahoma vegetable grower workshop inspires spring plans

Winter weather doesn't stop backyard gardeners and commercial vegetable growers. Although this year's crops have been harvested, they are busy looking forward to what they will plant next.

A dedicated group attended the South Central Oklahoma Vegetable Grower Workshop at the Murray County Expo Center near Sulphur, Oklahoma. Micah Anderson, plasticulture coordinator for the Oklahoma Department of Agriculture, Food and Forestry, provided an outdoor demonstration showing how vegetable growers can make use of small scale farm equipment. He used a small walk-behind tractor to create a raised bed in a grown over area that had not been tilled. Anderson noted that this small tractor and its various implements are used routinely in the educational garden located in front of the agency's Oklahoma City headquarters building and are more effective than a large tractor that would have difficulty turning around and getting over the concrete curbs.

The growers saw that the diminutive tractor could quickly switch from cutting down tall grass to tilling the soil to spreading a continuous sheet of plastic mulch across the newly formed bed. Anderson explained that the black plastic eliminates weeds and warms the soil so plants can grow earlier in the season and return a premium to growers. He also showed the group how to build an inexpensive fertilizer injection system to send soluble fertilizer through drip tape placed under the plastic mulch.

Leon Sloan of Leon's Greenhouses in Kingston brought models of two hoop houses he has designed and pointed out the special ventilation features built into each. His novel clamshell hoop house allows a tractor to drive through the length of the house by raising the curved metal pipes enclosing each end of the house. Steve Upson from the Noble Foundation encouraged creative thinking in using containers to ease back strain for the grower as well as providing a disease free environment for vegetables.

Oklahoma State University contributed expertise in several areas with Dr. Jim Shrefler demonstrating simple but effective row covers to protect tender plants, Dr. George Dreiver sharing information on trials to avoid damage from squash bugs and horticulturist Tracey Payton Miller giving the audience a quiz to test their knowledge of beneficial garden insects. Dr. Lynn Brandenberger explained how the Food Safety Modernization Act will affect produce growers and Dr. John Damicone shared strategies to manage diseases in organic production. Al Sutherland provided information on the Mesonet weather system that provides useful data for growers through a mobile app and its website www.mesonet.org.

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Photo captions:

Micah Anderson shows growers how small tractors with a variety of attachments can be used to create raised beds for vegetable production in Oklahoma.



Leon Sloan steps into the frame of a clamshell hoop house he designed for easy access with a tractor.

