

# The Greenhouse and Hoophouse Grower's Handbook

Organic Vegetable Production Using Protected Culture

Andrew Mefferd

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175 full-color illustrations throughout

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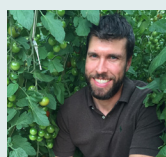


## “Why Is Protected Culture an Important Growing Method?”

**T**he United States is a world leader in agricultural exports. It may surprise you to learn that the Netherlands—a country two-thirds the size of West Virginia—ranks high on the list as well. How can this tiny country compete with the third largest country in the world? The answer is “protected culture.”

In Andrew Mefferd's new book, *The Greenhouse and Hoophouse Grower's Handbook*, he describes protected culture as the practice of growing plants in a structure designed to protect them from environmental stresses and improve the growing environment. As weather patterns continue to change and become increasingly unpredictable, sharing best practices that allow growers to control their own climate—like the system developed by the Dutch—is vital. Here are some of the benefits of using protected culture:

- **Localizing the Food System**—Protected culture growing is one of the most important ways for local food producers to compete with industrial agriculture. For example, each year between 50 and 80 percent of the nation's lettuce comes from a single valley, the Salinas, in California. More local growers using protected culture to extend their season could reduce over-reliance on single regions for our food supply.
- **Resource Efficiency**—Greenhouses are efficient water users. Compared with open-field irrigation methods in arid parts of the country, relatively little water is lost to evaporation, so a high percentage ends up doing its job growing the plant.
- **First to Market**—Being earlier with a vegetable can help you land and keep market and wholesale accounts for the entire season.
- **Predictability**—Greater control over your growing environment provides insurance against unpredictable weather, resulting in more consistent yields.
- **Higher Yields**—Protected environments can be managed to optimize plant growth, as well as result in an increased rate of top-quality, marketable produce.
- **Pest and Disease Control**—While greenhouse growing doesn't make pest and disease problems nonexistent, it does afford you better control and gives growers the ability to keep leaves dry, avoiding all sorts of rain-related problems.
- **Improved Flavor**—Protected culture growers can take advantage of many vegetable varieties, such as cluster tomatoes and seedless, thin-skinned cucumbers, that are difficult to impossible to grow in the field.



**Andrew Mefferd** spent seven years in the research department at Johnny's Selected Seeds, traveling around the world to consult with researchers and farmers on the best practices in greenhouse growing. He put what he learned to use on his own farm in Maine. He is now the editor and publisher of *Growing for Market* magazine. Previously, he worked on farms in six states across the United States before starting his own farm. Andrew also works as a consultant on the topics covered in this book.

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