

AgriLife greenhouse features insect-proof netting

LANE RIGGS
STAFF WRITER

The hot sun didn't deter four workers over the nine days it took to build a greenhouse at the Texas A&M AgriLife Research and Extension Center in Uvalde – the first at the research branch to offer a controlled environment, removable roof, extra ventilation, insect-proof netting, and enough room for a tractor to enter the greenhouse.

The technology employed in the recently constructed greenhouse is relatively new but is something that center director and professor of vegetable physiology Daniel Leskovar said both farmers and AgriLife researchers need.

The building – which measures 30 feet wide by 96 feet long, with walls 8 feet in height and a peak center roof of 14 feet – was constructed in nine days by helpers from KBW Horticultural Supply.

“These greenhouses are a new level of technology that growers can pursue,” Leskovar said. “The walls are insect proof, they offer ventilation in high temperature conditions, tractors can drive through the greenhouse and they offer an extended season for farmers.”

This extended season, KBW Horticultural Supply's John Stites said, is important to farmers. With locations like H-E-B

that want to sell fresh, local foods, farmers need to employ these greenhouses to keep up with demand.

“When you want to get to market first, this is really a key factor. Farmers are changing their whole mindsets about their produce,” Stites said. “The whole market is changing. You don't get to sell at places like H-E-B without first controlling the environment, which is something you can do in these greenhouses.”

By controlling the environment, Leskovar said farmers will be able to grow tomatoes when they are out of season and when the produce will earn more.

“This technology is gaining attention quickly because you can control the environment and the season,” he said. “It really enhances the potential of plants. Any risks posed are worth it because of the volume of quality you get in your crops.”

Similarly, the new greenhouse has other features that are attractive.

“All the sides have screens. They can be rolled up or down to control the environment,” Stites said. “The greenhouse is insect proof, too, and that's really important. White flies are harmful to tomatoes here, and if you can keep insects out, you won't have to use as much pesticide.”

The greenhouse is constructed of an insect screen net inside and a

plastic film outside, which can open the sides for ventilation. There are other openings for ventilation in the upper arch section of the front and back as well.

Another feature is the high tunnel walls that allow farmers and AgriLife researchers to work up right next to the wall. Most greenhouses have posts that prohibit the extra room for crops. Similarly, the posts within the greenhouse can be removed so a tractor can enter the greenhouse.

The greenhouse at the AgriLife research branch has better ventilation than the average greenhouse, Stites said, as a better ventilation is needed in particularly hot areas.

Because of the success rate of such greenhouses, Leskovar hopes to add more.

“They are a very successful technology. My ambition is to have another one and to expand on this one,” he said. “They offer the best options.”

By offering so many positives, Leskovar and Stites hope more farmers employ the technology.

“Farmers really need to see the productivity that they can have with these greenhouses,” Stites said. “Dr. Leskovar and the branch wanted this one to show other farmers, so those farmers wouldn't have to risk their own produce to find out if they work.”



LANE RIGGS/LEADER-NEWS

The newly-constructed greenhouse sits outside of the big gate at the Texas A&M AgriLife Research and Extension Center in Uvalde. The greenhouse was planned by center director and professor of vegetable physiology Daniel Leskovar and KBW Horticultural Supply worker John Stites. Construction of the greenhouse was completed June 29.