

# Eastern U.P. Farmers Learn To Overcome Challenges of 'Hoop House' Technique

By Michael Ayala

Farmers in the Eastern U.P. are turning to "hoop houses" to lengthen the growing season for produce, and while some are reporting good yields, most also say plastic greenhouses can accelerate planned growth too quickly and that managing temperatures in them can be tricky.

Hoop houses, also referred to as unheated greenhouses, are similar to greenhouses in construction, only plants are grown in the ground instead of in pots, planters, and on benches. The buildings also use plastic sheets instead of glass. The design draws solar heat to warm the earth, creating warmer conditions than outdoors and extending the growing season by protecting against crop-damaging frost.

The hoop houses are more energy efficient than traditional greenhouses in sheltering a garden plot planted in the ground because they don't use fossil fuels as a heating source in addition to solar heat.

Steve and Heidi Hoolsema of Rudyard have been using the hoop houses for several years and have been able to provide produce out of season, but it has been a challenge.

"It's been an ordeal. There's a lot of ups and downs," Mrs. Hoolsema said of the hoop houses.

Plants in the hoop houses grow quickly, she said. Weeds are a constant problem. Farming in a hoop house requires more vigilance and



Hoop houses were provided by the C.S. Mott group as part of a study to determine if using them is financially feasible. Farmers documented what they planted and when, and how much they were able to sell. (Photograph courtesy of David Conner)

weeding than normal.

The Hoolsemas have been able to grow lettuce, spinach, and radishes before their normal season and have also been able to grow green peppers, normally not a successful crop on their EUP farm. The farm is

struck by frost nearly every month, Mrs. Hoolsema said, and the houses have been instrumental in preventing it from damaging crops.

The Hoolsemas were able to harvest a small plot of strawberries in the house on Memorial Day week-

end, while the typical strawberry harvest is during July, Mrs. Hoolsema said.

The strawberries were quickly eaten or made into jam. The family was too attached to them to sell them at market, she admitted.

As they've experimented with planting different crops at different times, the project has become easier over time, Mrs. Hoolsema said, and providing out-of-season produce at farmers markets has been fairly profitable. Most of the money made from her farm last year, Mrs. Hoolsema said, came from the crops grown in the hoop house. Poor growing conditions, notably cool temperatures, reduced the yield of her crops outside of the hoop house.

The Hoolsemas also discovered that training tomatoes to grow up a rope to the rafters makes harvesting more easy than allowing the plants to sprawl on the ground.

Dale Moore of Engadine had similar experiences when he first began working with the hoop houses. Mr. Moore had to experiment with how often to plant crops as well as how to manage the temperature inside. While hoop house temperatures are warmer than the outside environment, they are still affected by temperatures outdoors.

If temperatures become too hot, farmers open vents throughout the hoop house to release pent-up heat. The sides of the houses can be rolled up to release heat, as well.

During the winter, farmers can erect a frame and add another layer of plastic to better insulate the

house.

Produce grown in the hoop house is healthier and in better shape, primarily because the house shields the crops from damaging wind and rain, Mr. Moore said. He intends to continue using the hoop house throughout the year.

Mr. Moore typically plants crops during the late summer and early fall as winter approaches.

Once the crops mature, he harvests them as necessary throughout the winter.

"It's like a giant crisper room," he said.

Despite the winter chill, weeds continue to be an issue.

"Weeds grow really well in the winter, for some reason," he added.

The houses are part of an ongoing study in which farms across Michigan were provided with the \$10,000 houses free in 2006 when the study began. The houses are 96 feet by 30 feet, about 15 feet tall in the center, and are packed in a kit that the farmers erect themselves. The installation is mainly polyethylene plastic with a steel frame, with the hipboards of the building made of wood.

Polyethylene plastic is used as it is relatively inexpensive, allows a great deal of light to pass through,

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**"It's like a giant crisper room."**

— Dale Moore, Engadine farmer

## Games, Contests Planned at Relay for Life Friday

By Michael Ayala

The American Cancer Society Relay for Life will come to the St. Ignace Middle School Friday, July 17, at noon. The relay is free, but donations are accepted to American Cancer Society, said Sherrill Soblaskey of St. Ignace, chairperson of the local Relay for Life. People may attend as part of a team, join the walking laps, or just take part in the day's activities. Many people camp and cook at the site.

More than 40 activities will be available during the 24-hour relay. Silent auctions, trick or treating, and a series of laps around the middle school track will take place every hour. Food is available.

Silent auctions may be of particular interest to participants, Mrs. Soblaskey said. Last year items such as flowers, books, and tickets were available.

Commemorative luminary bags will be placed along the track during the event. Each bag will have the name of a cancer survivor or will be in honor of a cancer patient. Candles will be lit inside the bags at night. Luminary bags will be available for \$10 each.

The bags are often decorated with photographs, messages, and drawings, Mrs. Soblaskey said.

"It's just precious to see the bags decorated by children," she said.

This year's theme for the relay is "colors of hope," with various colors signifying different types of cancer. Each campsite at the relay will decorate an area. Some colored items, such as purple lemonade, will be sold.

A cancer survivor will make a speech about what it is like to have cancer after the survivor walk at 7 p.m. A cancer caretaker will also make a speech concerning what it is like to take care of a cancer patient after the caretaker walk at 7:30 p.m.

Visitors are welcome to bring tents and trailers if they wish to spend the night on the grounds, Mrs. Soblaskey said. Dogs and alcohol are not allowed on site.

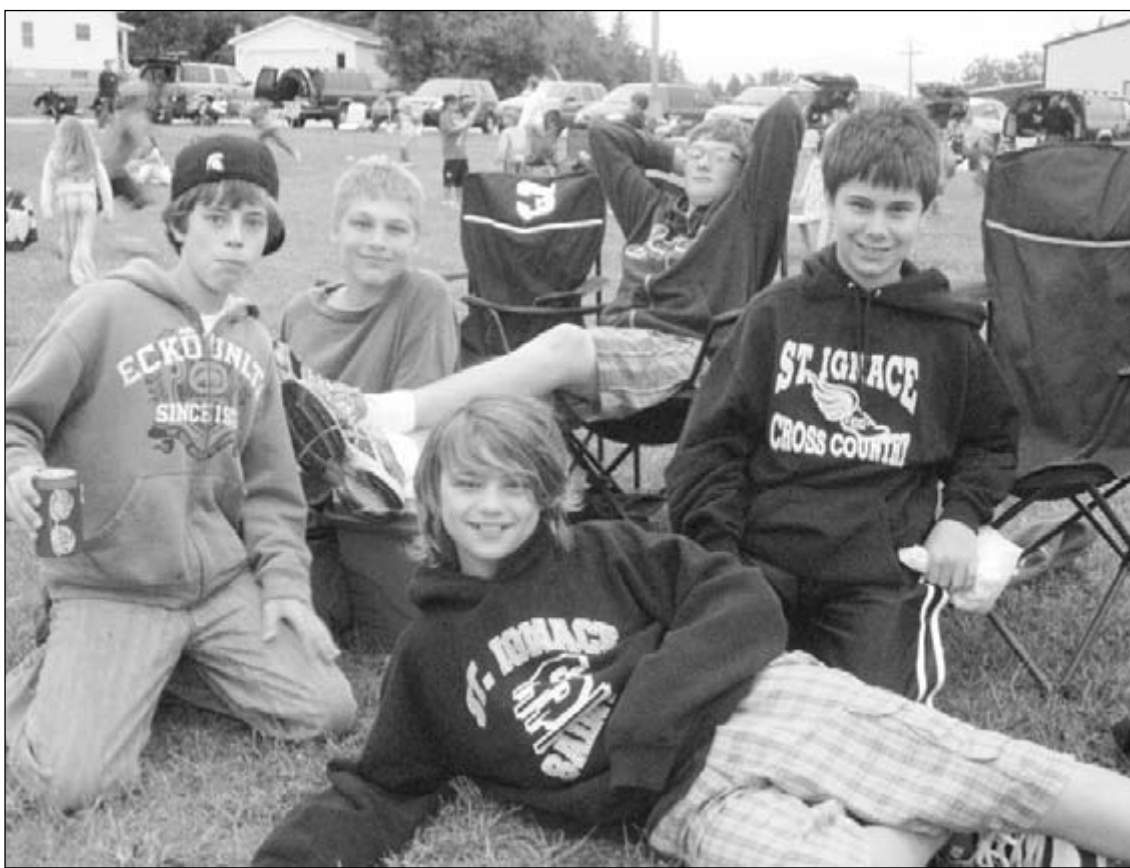
Donations received during the relay will be used to benefit cancer research and awareness. Last year's

local relay raised \$42,000. The relay typically raises \$20,000 to \$30,000.

"The visitors are always very, very generous," Mrs. Soblaskey said.

The following games and activities will take place at the Relay for Life:

- Friday:**  
 12:30 p.m.: Silent Auction Begins, 24-hour Jump House Opens  
 1:00 p.m.: Opening Ceremony Begins, Face Painting Available (1-5 p.m.)  
 1:30 p.m.: Hula Hoop Contest Starts  
 2:00 p.m.: Water Toss  
 2:30 p.m.: Pass the Present  
 3:00 p.m.: Bake Sale, Ice Cream Social  
 3:30 p.m.: Kid's Story Time  
 4:00 p.m.: Bubble Lap  
 4:30 p.m.: Beanbag Toss  
 5:00 p.m.: Boa Lap, Pulled Pork Dinner  
 6:00 p.m.: Red Hat Lap  
 6:30 p.m.: Trick or Treating  
 7:00 p.m.: Survivor's Lap  
 7:30 p.m.: Caregiver's Lap  
 8:00 p.m.: Live Auction  
 8:30 p.m.: Live Auction  
 9:00 p.m.: Team Pride Lap  
 9:30 p.m.: Luminaria Ceremony  
 10:00 p.m.: Campsite Winners Announced, P.J. Lap  
 11:00 p.m.: Glow in the Dark Lap  
 11:30 p.m.: Pizza Party  
 Midnight: Sparkler Lap  
 1:00 a.m.: Raffle Lap  
 2:00 a.m.: Flashlight Lap  
 3:00 a.m.: Red Bull Lap  
 4:00 a.m.: Poker Lap  
 5:00 a.m.: Sports Team Lap  
**Saturday:**  
 6:00 a.m.: Crazy Hat Lap  
 7:00 a.m.: Morning Mane Contest  
 7:30 a.m.: Continental Breakfast  
 8:00 a.m.: Backwards Lap  
 9:00 a.m.: Basketball Lap  
 9:30 a.m.: Kiss a Pig Contest  
 10:00 a.m.: Silent Auction Closes, Book on Head Lap  
 11:00 a.m.: Men Only Lap, Subway Lunch  
 Noon: Women Only Lap  
 12:30 p.m.: Closing Ceremony



Brad Gustafson (from left), John Ellis, Dalton L'Allier (front), Joe Fullerton, and Martin Donajkowski take it easy before the movie begins Thursday night, July 2. At dusk, "Madagascar: Escape 2 Africa" was shown on a large inflatable screen outside Little Bear East Arena. A second movie, "Indiana Jones and the Kingdom of the Crystal Skull," was played at dusk Friday, July 3. The event, "Movies Under the Stars," is in its second year in St. Ignace and was funded by community sponsorships and donations. Attendance was free.



At right: Dylan (left) and Hunter McPhee settle in for a showing of "Madagascar: Escape 2 Africa" outside Little Bear East Arena.



Movies are shown on a giant inflatable screen outside Little Bear East Arena Thursday, July 2, and Friday, July 3. "Madagascar: Escape 2 Africa" and "Indiana Jones and the Kingdom of the Crystal Skull" were shown Thursday and Friday, respectively, and the movies and popcorn were provided free of charge.

## Youth Enjoy Movies Under the Stars

## Guardrail To Be Replaced W. Lant Rd.

The St. Ignace Township Board of Trustees approved a contract with the Mackinac County Road Commission to remove and upgrade the guardrail along West Lant Road at its Thursday, July 9, meeting.

Township Clerk Donna Harju said the township will pay \$5,070 of the total cost of the \$50,705 project to replace 1,600 feet of guardrail. The road commission will match the township's contribution, with the remainder of the project being paid for by the Michigan Department of Transportation

through road safety funding.

The guardrail, which helps to keep cars from going down a hill and converging onto I-75, needs replacing because it is too low to the ground and overgrown with roadside brush and weeds, said Road Commission Manager Dirk Heckman.

The township will pay half of its share now, and the other half when the work is completed. Work on the project is expected to begin in late September and is expected to take up to one week to complete, Mr. Heckman said.